

Chapter 393

"Oh God, we've got another charmer in the family," Loretta laughed. "I'm going to try for another baby. We need more girls to counteract all this male charisma." She gestured for them to enter the house.

"Your father's in his study," she said to Lily as she ushered them inside. "Have you had breakfast? Having a vampire for a mate can be a complete pain in the ass. They forget we need to eat just because they don't."

Mac flushed red and frowned at his mate. He had no idea if she'd eaten and was chagrined to admit he hadn't considered that she would need to. He would need to rectify his way of thinking now he was responsible for taking care of Lily. Loretta's unladylike snort of amusement made him blush harder.*www.moreLwOr.m.có@*

"See, this is what I've had to put up with for years, Lily. Hopefully you can train Mackenzie better than I was ever able to train Andrei. Go ahead and see your father. I'll give your mate a crash course in cookery while you're talking."

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The low growl that rumbled from Mac's chest didn't even faze Loretta as she raised an eyebrow at him. "Trust me; Lily knows how to handle Andrei. Give them time to scream at each other and they'll join us when they're ready."

Mac's expression was comical as Lily watched her mother override his objections. He was obviously trying hard not to offend her but he was clearly unhappy at the thought of not being with her when she saw her father. It was his expression that had her resolve hardening and her lips twitching with a smile.

"Mom's right, Mac," she said, moving to wrap her arms around his waist. He was gathering her close, securing her protectively in his embrace in an instant. "It's better if Dad lets off steam when you're not around. He'll only shout for a little while. Just stay with Mom until he calms down."

"I said we'd do this together, Lily, and I meant it," he argued, anger lacing his tone. "You're my mate and I'm not leaving you to face Andrei alone." His arms tightened around her to emphasise his point.

Loretta gave them some privacy heading into the kitchen but remaining close enough in case Andrei became tired of waiting for his daughter to come to him and reacted negatively to seeing her wrapped around Mac so intimately. Not that she thought he would do anything too stupid but it was always wise to err on the side of caution after he'd been through such a volatile few weeks.

"You agreed to trust my judgement on this," Lily whispered, tilting her head back to look at Mac. She searched his face intently. "Don't repeat your mistake from last night, please. You have to learn the difference between protecting me and taking over my life. My father would never hurt me."

Mac struggled with the conflicting emotions raging through him. He rebelled at the thought of Lily facing Andrei alone and yet if he didn't let her do this then he'd hurt her as he had this morning. He was damned either way whatever he decided. He'd go quietly insane not knowing what was happening in the study if he let her go alone, and she'd hate him if he refused to let her deal with this herself.

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"You call me immediately if you need me," he finally said. There really had been no choice for him. He couldn't do anything that would hurt her so he would just have to suffer through wondering what was happening.

Her big brown eyes sparkled with such joy he knew he'd done the right thing by her. It was the completely wrong thing for him but when she pulled his head down and kissed him so thoroughly he forgot all about where they were, he conceded that he could live with the choice if this was her reaction.

"I love you, Mac." Lily knew how hard it was for him to agree to this. Though he kept his expression as neutral as possible she could feel his emotions through their bond. He was fighting hard to tamp down his protectiveness so he could do the right thing.

"I love you too, sugar," he rumbled quietly, kissing her again before reluctantly letting her go. He stepped back and watched as she squared her shoulders and headed over to a closed door towards the back of the house. He turned and followed Loretta into the kitchen, trusting his mate knew what she was doing.

Lily smoothed down her skirt nervously before she opened the study door and stepped in side. Her father was standing staring out the window with his back to the door and he didn't turn as she entered. She knew he was well aware when they'd arrived and that he'd most likely given her mother time to greet them first.

She closed the door and took a deep breath. "Dad?" She wanted to cringe at how tentative her voice sounded. She was a mated woman now not a child but being around her father always regressed her back to childhood. She hated disappointing him or her mother but she always managed to.

Andrei inhaled the scent of his daughter, reaching out mentally to lightly brush their familial bond. He'd deliberately given Loretta time with Lily, fighting his own urge to go to their child the minute she'd arrived home. His mate hadn't had any contact with her since she'd left the compound. Loretta deserved a moment to ensure herself of her daughter's safety and to meet Mac and form her own opinion of him.

He'd doubted Kal's words the night before. He hadn't thought Lily would be ready to come home so soon after their last discussion, after he'd revealed so much about himself. He'd been frightened she'd think him a monster after his confession and never come home. But she had and she sounded so unsure of herself as she waited for his reaction.*www.W.Nov©1@oRMI.Cóm*

He'd never been one to hide from the difficult things in life but for the first time ever he wanted to stay staring out of a window so he didn't have to turn around and see disappointment in his child's eyes. He'd failed Lily; he knew that now. He'd loved her too much, been possessive and overprotective to the point she had been forced to run away from him. He'd given her his genetic flaw and she'd spent her entire life fighting that inner darkness.

Was this his real punishment for all the wrongs he'd done over his long life? He'd once believed Loretta's abduction had been his punishment but maybe it was more than that. Maybe his entire world of happiness built around his family was the real punishment, where someone somewhere laughed at him as those he loved suffered because of his actions or his physical flaws.

"Dad?" Lily's hesitant voice filled the room again and he forced himself to turn to look at her.

Andrei wanted to look away immediately. He didn't want to see the uncertainty on Lily's face or the gathering moisture in her big brown eyes. It killed him to see her cry, it always had. It killed him knowing that he was responsible for putting those tears there. His heart twisted painfully as he looked for signs of change within his daughter and found them instantly.

She had already mated with Mac which meant she was already leaving his world to embrace the other male's. Losing Lily had always been one of his greatest fears, now it was becoming a reality and it was a blade to his heart knowing their relationship would never be the same again.