

Chapter 394

He could see the telltale signs of strain in her eyes. It was so subtle most people wouldn't notice it but he did because he knew what to look for. He saw it every day in the mirror, the strain of wondering if today would be the day his battle with his nature was lost.

He knew he should say something, reassure her somehow but he couldn't force his mouth to open as he struggled with the conflicting emotions whirling inside him. He didn't know what to say to make it right, to take away the gathering tears and see her smile again.

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Andrei's silence was ripping Lily to pieces inside. He was so still, so unmoving with his neutral expression and cold brown eyes. She had no idea what was going through his head but she knew she'd hurt him badly with her actions. She had to keep swallowing to try and fight the misery inside, knowing he hated it when she cried but feeling the tears coming despite her best efforts.*wWw.©o©elwoRm.Cô©*

She loved her father so much and she'd let him down. She was honest enough with herself to admit that she would have done just about anything to claim Mac as her mate. She couldn't regret loving Mac but she could have tried to do things differently so her family wouldn't have been hurt.

The tears spilled over and her breath hitched in her throat. "I'm sorry I've disappointed you, Daddy," she choked out, dropping her gaze from his because she couldn't bear to look at him and see that disappointment cross his face.

Her father moved then, so fast he was standing in front of her between one breath and the next. She was hauled tightly into his arms, squeezed so hard she thought she might break.

Andrei's heart shattered the moment Lily spoke and her tears began to fall. His baby was hurting and he just couldn't tolerate that for an instant. No one was allowed to hurt his children, not even him. "You could never disappoint me, Lily Rose," he whispered gruffly, releasing control of the tight hold he had on his emotions.

His daughter's tears were his undoing and he let his own fall as he ran his hands over her body to reassure himself she was uninjured in anyway physically.

Yes, she'd made mistakes but only because his had been the greater ones. If he'd been less overbearing she would have been able to talk to him safe in the knowledge he would've listened to her. She wouldn't have had to put herself at risk to claim her mate if he'd been more reasonable and less hot-headed. Loretta was right when she'd said he'd driven his children away. He hadn't meant to but that didn't negate the truth of it.

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"I let you down, Lily," he groaned hoarsely. "I sheltered you too much because I loved you so much. I was warned years ago that I'd pay for my actions but I was so arrogant in believing I knew what was right that I ignored the words and went on doing things my way. It was never my intention to hurt you though. I just needed to keep you safe."

Lily was hugging her father as tightly as he was hugging her. The relief of being home, of knowing he wasn't still angry with her made her tears flow harder. She'd expected angry words, their usual clash of tempers when things became strained between them but she hadn't expected his apology or his tears. It was just so wrong to see her father like this and yet she felt honoured that he was letting her in, treating her as an adult rather than a child.

"I know that, Daddy," she whispered tremulously, running a hand soothingly down his back because she hated seeing him so miserable. "I've always known that, so has Kal. We might not have known all your reasons for doing things but we've always known they were done out of love for us."

She pulled back so she could look up at him and give him a tentative smile. "I guess I'm just too much like you sometimes. I don't always think through the consequences of my actions and then pay the price for them later."

Andrei brushed the tears from her cheeks and stared at his daughter in amazement. She had Loretta's big heart when it came to forgiveness, instantly absolving him of all his wrong doings. He was so proud of the woman Lily had become. It may have taken him a long time to acknowledge that she had grown up but now that he had, he was so full of pride at how wonderful she'd turned out.

"I was afraid of losing you," he admitted, pressing his hand against the side of her face. "I didn't want any other male coming along and stealing your heart from me."

A burst of laughter escaped Lily and she rolled her eyes. "You're so silly sometimes. No one could ever replace you. You're my dad." She said it with such finality as if it was carved in stone for the world to know. "I love you, Dad. I'll probably still have moments when I'm reaching out to you when I feel insecure about something. I know you'll always be there for me no matter what."

"But you have Mac now, Lily. He's your mate and it's his place to take care of you, not just your physical well-being but your emotional well-being too," Andrei pointed out, hating to say the words but knowing they were true. He still had his exceptionally close bond with Alexei but it was Loretta he turned to now when he was troubled which was how it should be with mates.

"Well, I can't very well turn to him when he's pissing me off, can I?" she retorted with another laugh, though her expression softened as she spoke of the man she'd chosen as her mate. "And boy, does he know how to piss me off already. He actually thought he could fight the mating pull. The stupid male even tried to go to Europe to get away from me!"

Her indignant tone eased the last of Andrei's sadness and he burst out laughing at her outraged expression. She looked so much like her mother the way she tilted her chin up and her eyes flashed with indignation. It reminded him of when his mate had caught him with Marcia all those years ago. She'd that same steely determination that nothing and no one would get in her way of claiming her mate.

"I was afraid of losing you," ha admittad, prassing his hand against tha sida of har faca. "I didn't want any othar mala coming along and staaling your haart from ma."

A burst of laughtrar ascapad Lily and sha rollad har ayas. "You'ra so silly somatimas. No ona could avar raplaca you. You'ra my dad." Sha said it with such finality as if it was carvad in stona for tha world to know. "I lova you, Dad. I'll probably still hava momants whan I'm raaching out to you whan I faal insacura about something. I know you'll always ba thara for ma no mattar what."

"But you hava Mac now, Lily. Ha's your mata and it's his placa to taka cara of you, not just your physical wall-baing but your amotional wall-baing too," Andrai pointad out, hating to say tha words but knowing thay wara trua. Ha still had his axcaptionally closa bond with Alaxai but it was Loratta ha turnad to now whan ha was troublad which was how it should ba with matas.

"Wall, I can't vary wall turn to him whan ha's pissing ma off, can I?" sha ratortad with anothar laugh, though har axprassion softanad as sha spoka of tha man sha'd chosan as har mata. "And boy, doas ha know how to piss ma off alraady. Ha actually thought ha could fight tha mating pull. Tha stupid mala avan triad to go to Europa to gat away from ma!"

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Har indignant tona aasad tha last of Andrai's sadnass and ha burst out laughing at har outragad exprassion. Sha lookad so much lika har mothar tha way sha tiltad har chin up and har ayas flashad with indignation. It ramindad him of whan his mata had caught him with Marcia all thosa yaars ago. Sha'd that sama staaly datarmination that nothing and no ona would gat in har way of claiming har mata.

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