

Chapter 409

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"Mallen can take a look at the scarring but it's highly unlikely anything can be done about it," Andrei sighed, closing the study door behind them. He moved to one of the armchairs beside the fire and sat down, Demetri taking a seat across from him.

"The physical scarring is bad enough," Demetri concurred. "It's the emotional scarring I'm more concerned about. Annie's going to head down in a few days. She wanted to give him time to settle into pack life but she wants you to let her know if you think she needs to come sooner."

Andrei nodded. "I think that's a good idea. Let him feel a bit more comfortable before someone starts poking about inside his head. If it becomes apparent he needs more, we can deal with it as and when it crops up."

His eyes suddenly began to bleed to black and fury began to build inside him. "What the fuck is going on in Europe, Demetri? It's bad enough they attacked Pietro but if those fuckers think they're coming anywhere near my family, I'll rip them apart limb from limb."

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Demetri could understand the other man's fury because he shared it. He'd also seen first-hand what the poison could do. But they had to try and keep a level head. Going off half-cocked was not going to do them any good.

"Be calm, Andrei. We all share your fury and are equally as concerned for our families. At the moment, there's only one European vampire on the loose and we're more than capable of taking care of her when she arrives. The rest of them seem to be waiting for something before they act. God only knows what that is but we have allies over there who will give us a heads up should they move."

It felt odd being the one advising caution but then Andrei was as volatile as him, sometimes even more so. Now he was back on home soil, Demetri could afford to engage his brain before acting.

"Anyway, the people in most danger are full vampires," he added, as he watched Andrei start to calm down. "The poison is designed to target us. There's no telling how dangerous it will be to hybrids or any of us mated to Weres."WwWw.(n)ovE(l)wðrm.Čom

"Even if what you say is true...even if it didn't kill Loretta and the children, it could still hurt them." Andrei fought with his feral side, tried to stifle it down. He couldn't countenance any harm coming to his family. The vampire nation had hurt Loretta enough in the past, almost killing her twice. He'd wreak havoc before he allowed them a third chance.

"And Mara is a full vampire. As is Annie," Demetri growled. "You think it's any easier for me to sit here and urge calm? Your family has a chance, Andrei. Mine doesn't. Possibly Annie could survive a poison attack, who knows? But what I do know is that Mara wouldn't and she'd be a prime target because she's a member of the Council. So, if I can keep myself in check, then you sure as hell can too."

Demetri's words were sobering. Andrei sat back and closed his eyes, trying to imagine how hard it was for his friend to appear so calm in the face of the potential threat to not only his wife but their queen, a woman Demetri classed as his sister. If he could control himself then so could Andrei.

"This is just so outrageous," he finally sighed, opening his eyes which had reverted back to normal. "How the hell did this happen? How did we become so complacent that we let the Europeans get so out of hand without doing something about it?"

Demetri arched an eyebrow at him. "Isn't that a question the Council should be answering?" He watched his friend frown. "Caleb was talking about a meeting of some sort. I'm not sure what he has in mind yet but we'll find out soon enough. The Council need to be appraised of the situation. Pietro and I will provide as much information as we can."

Demetri stood up and flexed his shoulders. "I need to go. Cristoph and Stefan are watching my house and Jared sent a few Weres to patrol as backup but I don't like being this far from Mara when this unknown vampire is on her way. For now, get Pietro settled. I don't think anything's going to happen today. One of us will be in touch with Rafe and also the Council officially tomorrow."

Andrei nodded and rose too, feeling only a little less angry. He buried his fury deep and forced himself to think like a Council member. Officially, the ruling vampire body didn't know of the current events. Unofficially, with himself, Alexei and Mara being Council members some of them were aware and would need to address it before too much time passed.WwWw.n(o)(v)(e)©woRm.COm

He walked Demetri out, quickly determining his mate had taken Pietro upstairs to settle him in Lily's old room. Loretta had spent most of the day neutralising the room to be less feminine.

It made sense to use his daughter's room as she was now mated and living permanently at the Praetorian compound. Logically, the idea had been sound when they'd discussed it, but it hadn't made it any easier for him to accept that his little girl no longer lived at home. Letting go was a lot more difficult than he'd imagined it would be. Still it had to be done and he had to accept it or risk losing Lily completely.

With an inward sigh, he said goodbye to his friend and then went back inside just as Loretta was coming downstairs. There was a frown marring her pretty features and he couldn't stop himself from pulling her into a tight embrace and kissing the expression away. He didn't like to see his mate so worried.

"He's so sad, Andrei," Loretta whispered, as she rested her head on his shoulder. "No one has the right to do that to someone, to take the spark from them. I don't know if Pietro will ever recover from what was done to him."

Andrei knew his mate was thinking of her own experiences, that she could relate to the pain his friend was in. "You did, Loretta. You not only recovered you became stronger for it. Pietro will too. Just give him some time."

She sighed and tightened her hold. "I hope so, Andrei."

Demetri woke to an empty bed and frowned in irritation until he heard the subtle sounds of water splashing in the adjoining bathroom. His long body relaxed and he stretched, a satisfied smile crossing his face.

Mara had been very solicitous towards Pietro when they'd arrived back from Europe, tucking him safely into a room when it had become apparent he wanted to be left alone for a while. As soon as the other vampire had locked himself away, she'd turned her critical eye on her husband, and smiled.

That smile had been enough to tell him that she was more than pleased with his efforts in Europe and also that he was about to get some serious loving from his woman, something he was particularly addicted to. He hadn't realised how draining the last few days had been until he woke up to an empty bed and the sounds of his wife luxuriating in the bath next door.

The struggle to hold onto his human side in Europe had been more challenging than he'd expected. Maybe it was because it had been so long since he'd been on a true hunt? He'd become used to having Mara around to counter his feral side. Suddenly being alone with no support network had thrown him off balance.

He made a mental note to never become that complacent again. To remember that at all times the urge to cross over would be lurking in the wings. It was safer for everyone concerned that he never forgot what he was capable of when pushed to his limits. The carnage which could ensue if he ever did was unthinkable.