

Chapter 420

"Who's Sophia?"

Mac stiffened at Liam's words. "Are you reading my mind?" He couldn't keep the accusatory tone from his voice, his expression hardening.

Liam laughed quietly, shaking his head. "Nah, I'm not that good, Mac. You whispered her name just now. You were obviously thinking of her."

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Had he whispered his daughter's name? Mac moved over to a tree and sank down with his back to it, scrutinising Liam intently as he racked his brain trying to work out if he had spoken. He didn't remember doing it but that didn't mean he hadn't.

He was perplexed by his reaction to the redhead. He didn't know Liam, had barely said a handful of sentences to him since he'd arrived at the compound. Why was he having a conversation with him about his relationship and now his daughter?

Was this a skill Liam had? He was Vârcolac after all and Mac was aware that the hybrids had a form of magic and skills that far exceeded anything they'd seen before. Was Liam's skill a variation on his empathy that drew people out and encouraged them to discuss things they wouldn't normally?

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He would have to ask Karn's opinion on that when he returned to the compound. For now, he simply stared at the younger man trying to work out how much, if anything, he wanted to say.

"Sophia was my daughter," he finally admitted, looking down at the moss-covered ground because he didn't need to see sympathy in the other man's eyes.

Liam watched Mac, feeling the tendrils of sorrow beginning to emanate from him. He didn't need to ask any further questions. Mac would've been human to father a child and as there was no Sophia around, it stood to reason that she had died a long time ago and he was still grieving that

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It hurt Liam's heart to try to imagine the suffering a human being would go through at losing a child. It surely had to be the worst pain any parent could go through. That Mac still grieved was a sure sign of just how badly it had affected him.

Liam was beginning to understand Lily's pain now as he watched Mac shore up his inner defences to try and deal with whatever memory he was currently experiencing. A man like Mac didn't suffer loss easily. He would strive to protect himself however he could, and the only way he'd be able to that would be to ensure he never fathered another child.

"Ah, Lily Rose, I'm so sorry." He couldn't stop himself from reaching out to his friend. He heard her mental curse and surmised that Kal had scored a hit because of her distraction.

"Don't, Liam. Please just don't. How did you find out? Mac? Is he okay?" Lily sounded winded which could only mean her sparring match with Kal was particularly aggressive. Her mental tone was muted until anxiety crept in at the end, concern for her mate winning through her distress.

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"He bleeds because he's hurt you. I will do what I can to help but you are what he needs to heal from this." He knew Lily was aware of that and would feel guilty that she wasn't there for her mate, but she needed to know that Mac was suffering as much as she.

Liam sensed Lily withdraw, his heart aching for her pain. He knew she was strong enough to overcome this and be happy, but he wasn't so sure that Mac could live with the guilt he was feeling over hurting his mate. Always he'd had to hide from his empathy because it overwhelmed him. Maybe this time he could do something to help.

"Mackenzie, I know we don't know each other and that talking about something so personal doesn't come naturally to you. I'm not going to ask you anything further about Sophia but I do have something that I think you should know which is important to any life decisions you make."

He waited for Mac to say something but the vampire merely watched him intently. Liam decided to continue.

"The Vârcolac are hybrids, Mac. Our parents, the pack, even the Praetorians all acknowledge that and yet no one really understands what that means. Even with Rayne being part of our pack everyone still looks at us as if we're children to be protected at all costs.

We are not children, Mac. Even when we were younger, there was so much more to us than anyone ever understood."

Liam rose and moved over to the tree line, smiling as he scented AJ close by with Ben. He knew they were too far away to hear the private conversation but just the closeness of other wolves made him feel good. His own wolf was suddenly antsy to go run with them though he had to quieten him down to finish his message to Mac.

He turned back to the vampire who remained seated and silent. "Humans are so fragile, Mac. A Were or Vampire can destroy them so easily. A Vârcolac, on the other hand, is very hard to destroy even from species as formidable as those. When you stop underestimating just who and what we are, what Lily is, then maybe, just maybe you'll be able to dare to dream again."

He shifted to wolf form, streaking towards his pack mates and leaving the vampire to ruminate on his parting words.

Mac watched the wolf vanish into the trees; Liam's parting words lingering on the air. What did Liam mean by his cryptic comments? Had he somehow surmised everything from just hearing that he'd once had a child? No one was that intuitive...were they?

He stared into the trees knowing he couldn't avoid returning to the compound. Liam stressed how resilient Lily was but that still couldn't take away the imagery of Kallum striking her with his staff. He didn't care how strong and fast his mate was, it was still his job to protect her. This time he wouldn't fail to protect someone he loved. Not as he had in the past.

Mac rose and headed back toward the compound.

To be continued...