

## Chapter 425

For once Loretta didn't interject to soothe her mate. She didn't know what was going on but something told her that Mackenzie was the reason her daughter was running scared. She wanted Lily home safely and if Andrei threatening Mac was the only way to achieve that then she wasn't going to get in the way of it.

Mac was standing stunned, lost in the memory of the day Sophia was born. It had been a long hard birth and Maria had been exhausted at the end of it but so proud of their beautiful daughter. It'd been the happiest day of his life and the joy he'd felt that day sprang up inside him.

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Lily was pregnant!?

He could hear Kallum repeating Andrei's threat but wasn't listening to it. Instead he couldn't stop reliving Sophia's birth and how he'd felt that day. Tears sprang to his eyes as he realised that he'd had a memory of his baby girl that didn't involve her death. It was the first such memory in such a long time.

He looked at Liam; saw the big man watching him intently. "You can dare to dream," the Vârcolac said quietly.

Mac shook his head, afraid to believe and yet knowing he had to make a decision. Lily had run from him because she was pregnant. He had told her in no uncertain terms that he never wanted another child. Now she was out there alone, pregnant and afraid to come home and tell him because of what his reaction would be.

Did she think he'd reject her, turn her away because of the baby? He hung his head as a tear slipped free and coursed down his cheek. What else was there for her to think? He'd been so intent on making sure his mate knew what his limits were that he hadn't stopped to consider the full impact of how badly that would hurt her.

Yes, he'd known that she'd be hurt but in his arrogance he'd believed she would adapt willingly because he was her mate. And she would have if they hadn't already had created a child together.

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Another thought came to him and he stifled down a groan. Did Lily think he'd forced her to choose between him and the baby? Did she believe he would do that to her to protect himself?

Mac cursed himself, hating the fucked up mess he'd made that had put his mate and their child in danger. There was only one person who could fix this and that was him.

"Liam, Kallum, return to the compound. I'll go on alone from here."

He expected Kallum to argue but he merely watched him speculatively for a moment before nodding his agreement. "Take care of them, Mackenzie."

Mac was grateful he didn't argue with him. He was holding onto his emotions by a hairsbreadth and didn't have time to argue with anyone. Lily needed him. He'd let her down so badly that he didn't deserve forgiveness but she was his life and he would have to do his damndest to earn it.

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"Tell the others to get back to the compound and to stay close. Just in case this is something untoward rather than me fucking up," he ordered.

Mac turned and searched the area, surprised when he found Lily's scent. Surely she must have shadowed to escape being seen by everyone. He shouldn't be able to pick up her scent. Deciding not to question this new skill, he took off into the trees, following his heart and praying that when he found her she would listen to what he had to say.

"I'm sorry, Lily. Please forgive me."

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Reasa chose to follow the blond, male wolf she'd discovered protecting the vampires' house. It was a calculated risk but one she was willing to take. The wolf had still been protecting the house when she'd returned though the vampires she'd detected in the area had long gone.

There was no way in hell she could go up against an Ancient so she chose the weaker of the two. She had no idea if the wolf belonged to the pack that protected the abominations but he was obviously 'in' with them if he was on guard duty.

It turned out her instincts had served her well. The wolf was too relaxed and not as vigilant as he should have been so she was able to track him back to his lair without being detected. Obviously, his pack was not the one that contained the hybrids but they were clearly linked to them in some way.

He paused beside some trees and shifted from wolf to human form, exposing a well-honed body. He reached behind a tree and pulled out a bundle of clothes, which he quickly donned before moving further into the forest.

Another golden wolf appeared and quickly shifted into human form.

"Brody, Jared expected you back hours ago."

The male stopped and pulled off his T-shirt He tossed it to the young woman standing naked before him.

"Something didn't feel right," he answered as he watched the woman slip the oversized T over her naked form. "I thought I scented something close to Demetri's house but couldn't find what it was. Thought there was no harm in hanging around a bit longer just in case."

The woman scanned the area quickly and looked back at him. "Jared's antsy. He called some of us in for a quick meeting. He's talking about sending a few of us up to Armand-Hanlon pack as an added precaution."

"And why would he call you into a meeting, Willow? You're hardly a Beta, little sister." Brody wrapped an arm around her shoulder to take the sting out of his words. His sister was a bit on the flaky side at the best of times and could become wounded at the simplest of things.

She shrugged and gave him a quick squeeze. "He wanted someone to let you know what was happening and didn't want any of the Betas being side-tracked, I guess. I'm good enough for carrying messages." There was a hint of pique in her tone.

"You're good for lots of things, honey, and don't you forget that." Brody couldn't help feeling the need to reassure her. He adored his little sister and didn't like to see her bouts of insecurity when they rose.

Willow shrugged again and gave him a quick smile before she turned serious. She lowered her voice and glanced round one more before speaking. "Jared wants you to head up to the Praetorian Compound and supplement the wolves up there. It's just up past Freya and Dayton's place. Lacey's there with some of the younger pack members but Rafe asked if Jared could send someone with a bit more experience."

Brody nodded running a hand through his unruly locks. He'd been looking forward to some sleep but if his Alpha needed him then who was he to argue. "Okay, I'll head up there now. Hope they have clothes for me." $ww.v.n\sigma v\mathbb{E} \hat{W} \mathbb{O}r\mathbb{M}.c\delta(n)$

He stripped off his jeans and handed them to his sister. The air shimmered momentarily and the man vanished to become the large golden wolf Reasa had seen before.

"I'll stash your clothes in the usual place," Willow said ruffling the fur at the back of the wolf's neck before turning and heading back into the trees and out of sight.

The wolf watched her go, then turned, and ran off in the opposite direction.

From her perch high in the trees, Reasa waited for the count of ten and then took off after the wolf. They really were such stupid animals, never deigning to look up. Her heart began to beat fast as her quarry took her closer and closer to the place where she would find her targets.