

Chapter 430

Whimpering, she nudged at his chest, using the power of the wolf to try to bring him some comfort. It worked for the rest of the pack and even though Kothi wasn't a wolf maybe it would tease his panther out and help. She didn't know what else to do for him. She just wanted the blood to stop.

Something stirred deep within Kothari, clawing at his insides in a different way than the monster did. It felt weak and ineffectual but the more the wolf rubbed against his body, the stronger the being within grew.

The monster roared in fury at the usurper. Talons grew and closed around the neck of the she-wolf, tightening lethally. The wolf struggled, its whimpers becoming louder even as it continued to rub against him. Suddenly it went completely limp and the inactivity was enough to force some sanity into Kothari's mind.

"Dara?"

Anguish laced the name as the being within burst forth, shattering past both the monster and the human. The black panther erupted into dominance, the shift violent and agonising.

Dara lay where she fell, struggling to regain her breath. She'd decided to change tactic when it became apparent her movements were inciting Kothari rather than quelling his fury. As soon as she had, the change in him had become noticeable, particularly when she'd played dead. It had been difficult to do when every fibre of her being had wanted to struggle for air.

Raising her head, she stared at the panther lying beside her. It was the most beautiful animal she had ever seen, even with its fur streaked with blood. It panted furiously, pain in its bright green eyes. Those eyes were unfocused as if Kothi wasn't used to being in animal form, which she was starting to think was the case.

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"Kothi, are you okay?" Dara's wolf wanted to maintain the dominant part of their nature but she shooed her into the submissive role. She needed to be in control to help her friend.

The panther struggled to its feet, shaking its head and stumbling on four legs trying to get used to change.

"Kothari?"

Dara? What just happened?"

The uncertainty in his voice was surprising. She'd never heard him be anything less than totally confident before. Just when was the last time he'd shifted to animal form?

"I thought you could tell me. After all, you did just bleed all over the place and try to choke the life out of me. What the fuck is wrong with you, Kothi, apart from being a complete ass?"

Kothari turned his head, seeing the sleek fur of his animal and unable to comprehend what he was seeing. He was a child the last time his panther had come to life. He was convinced he'd never see it again after the monster became the most dominant part of him.

Dara's words started to sink in and his head swung around to see her watching him unharmed. Dear God, his worst nightmare had almost come true! He had been seconds away from destroying the most precious thing in his world. Only she had somehow managed to save him. His angel.

She was a vision of beauty in wolf form. He always loved to see her running through the forest, her animal free and uninhibited. He'd lost count of how many times he'd followed her, silently keeping her safe as she frolicked with her friends. Even as she'd grown and her rendezvous had turned into more personal moments, he had still watched over her discreetly.

Keeping control of the monster in those moments had been his toughest challenge until today. Watching Dara sneak out to be with one of the other pack males had ripped him apart. But she was a Were and sensuality was in their nature. He couldn't be what she needed him to be, so instead he protected her and allowed no harm to come to her while she was with her current boyfriend.

Now she knew something of his secret, had witnessed some of it, and he didn't know what to do about it. He wanted to tell her. He had lain awake nights thinking of talking to her, revealing everything in the hopes that she wouldn't look at him like a monster, that she would understand.

Dear God he had almost killed her!

"Kothi, I'm fine." Dara's words whispered in his mind as he mewled softly.

"If you don't want to talk about what happened right now, I understand, but one day you will need to. If you don't want it to be me then talk with Kallum or Rafe. Talk to your parents if you're more comfortable with them. Just talk to someone, Kothari. You're not alone."

He regarded the wolf intently, willing himself to say something, to open the walls around his heart, but he couldn't. The monster was silent for the moment but it was only a short respite. It would be back and the next time...the next time he may find himself cradling the body of his dead mate. He couldn't allow that to happen. He would never survive it.

The panther turned, leaping nimbly from the rock and running into the trees.

"I'm sorry," he sent back to her, before he gave over control to the panther and allowed the animal to speed through the forest, its natural instincts taking over as it clambered up a tree and leapt from branch to branch.

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Dara shifted back, peering into the trees for any sign of Kothari as she scrambled from the rock.

"Dar, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, Cass, I was just out for a run and now I'm headed back to the compound."She knew her sister wouldn't believe her and would most likely quiz her later, but strangely Dara didn't want to tell her about what had happened with Kothi. She knew she should tell someone but for some odd reason it would feel like she was breaking a confidence if she did.

There was the briefest of moments when she'd seen yearning in Kothi's eyes. He had wanted to reach out, she was certain of it. Keeping his secrets, proving to him that he could trust in her, may be all that he needed to work out whatever issues were plaguing him.

"Okay, we can talk when you get back. Elle's heading up to the Praetorian compound. She says Liam is stressing about something and she wants to make sure he's okay."

She felt her sister's mental touch retreat and ran through the trees, wondering why it even mattered to her that Kothi was in so much pain. He'd done nothing but torment her all her life with his barbed comments. Why she would want to help him was beyond her, and yet she did.

Instinct told her Kothi needed an anchor if his parents were going away. Without that, God only knew what the consequences for the pack would be.

~~~~~ Lily groaned as she vomited again and straightened up. She hadn't made it as far as she'd hoped, the sickness and weakness slowing her down considerably. She was vaguely aware that she was leaving an easy trail for anyone to follow even if she was shadowed, but she didn't have the strength to hide her trail.*wWŴ.NOvÉl(w)er.m.C⊙@*

The worst case scenario was it would be one of the Vârcolac or the triumvirate who found her. She knew they were looking for her by now, that they would have sensed her masking their bonds.*wwww.n⊙VE⊙uwOr.m.⊙o(m)*

She had no idea what she was doing, why she was running. Her legs just kept moving forward, taking her further and further away from Mac and the accusation in his eyes. Part of her knew she was being irrational but her flight instincts were strong. She had to keep going and hope the nausea receded enough to allow her to mask her trail.

Stumbling, she fell forward onto her hands and knees, retching once more but this time nothing came up. Her wolf rumbled its distress, trying to soothe the woman who was feeling so wretched, and failing. Lily panted hard and tried to pull herself to her feet but she was too weak to move.

"Liliana."

Mac's low voice startled her, and she scrambled backwards away from the sound.

"No!"

Mackenzie's heart was pounding so hard it was a wonder the sound wasn't echoing through the trees. He'd followed Lily's trail steadily for the last half hour, catching up with her quite easily which had been a surprise. Now that he had, he wasn't sure if it wouldn't have been best to let her go.

His beautiful mate was two seconds away from backing off the mountain and plunging to what could possibly be her death.

Even if she survived the fall, if her Vârcolac nature could survive the drop, he was certain the baby wouldn't, and that would take the last spark of life from his Lily's eyes.

Of that, he had no doubt. She had run to protect the life she was carrying. Her maternal instincts had kicked in to surpass all others. Losing the child would destroy her spirit and no matter how many times he looked into her eyes after that, he knew he would never see his Lily again.

"Lily, stop, please. You're at the cliff edge. Don't move!"

Mac's words penetrated her shock and she froze, trying to orientate herself. Was he telling the truth or just trying to stop her from running? She could hear the fear in his voice and it was so out of character that she remained rooted to the spot, keeping her gaze averted.

"Listen to me, sugar. You know I would never do anything to hurt you. Please, just give me a moment. Hear me out and if you still want to leave then I'll take you anywhere you want to go. Just give me a chance, Lily. Please."