

Chapter 442

It hurt to hear the plea in his voice. Rafe truly thought that he was somehow lacking as an Alpha and that was the furthest thing from the truth. He was the best Alpha she'd ever known, and she knew a few of them. Jared was a good Alpha too, but there was something about Rafe's kind heart that was that bit more special, that earned him love and loyalty, not just because he was Alpha but because of who he was.

Lily took a deep breath, trying to overcome the shock of his words, feeling his disappointment running down their bond. She knew Mac wouldn't hold it against her if she discussed the situation with Rafe. He understood the pack dynamic even if he hadn't come under Rafe's command when they'd mated.

Swallowing hard, determined not to cry and be seen as weak, Lily took another deep breath before fully opening up her bond with Rafe, letting him feel the emotions behind her words. "Mac didn't want children. He'd lost a child when he was human and had never recovered from the grief. I only found out just before I discovered I was pregnant. I panicked, Rafe. I closed down all my bonds automatically without thinking. It wasn't because I was disrespecting you. It was never about that, you have to believe me. I was afraid I'd have to choose between Mac and the baby. I was trying to protect my child."

He turned his head to the side, seeing the slight puffiness of her eyes that wasn't due to being woken up by his presence. He tried to imagine what she'd been through, feeling the tumult of emotions flooding through the Alpha bond. He had known some of it but hadn't realised just how extreme the situation had been. What Lily must have been going through to run from her mate to protect her child? It was an inconceivable position to be in and he wondered what Lacey would do in a similar circumstance.

Not that it would ever come to that, but the protective instincts of a mother was like no other. He knew that and had witnessed it so many times within the pack on a daily basis. And not just from mothers but the fathers too.

Rafe cast his mind out to his mate, feeling Lacey's disquiet and wanting to be with her. He delved deeper, feeling for, and finding, what he was looking for. Twin hearts beat within his mate, a son and a daughter. He felt love blooming within and smiled softly as he lightly touched on the thoughts of his growing babes.

No one knew yet. Lacey had just passed the danger point for shifting, was in her fourth month with barely any change to her body as yet. They had planned on sharing with the pack once she could shift again, but events had overtaken that. Hell, even Annie had been so preoccupied she hadn't noticed yet.

Lacey was an experienced mother but Lily...Lily was still young in so many ways despite her many attributes. With so much happening in her life the past few weeks, no wonder she had acted without thought. The one good part of the experience was it appeared to have tempered her slightly, judging from the expression in her eyes.

"Come here," Rafe said, his voice gruff as he reached out and pulled his pack member into the warmth of his side. "Is Mac now reconciled to being a father?"

Lily looped an arm around his stomach, resting her head against his shoulder. "He is. A lot has happened, Rafe. We both have come to learn a lot about who we are as people and what we need to be as mates. I naively thought that once you found your mate everything just worked out. It never crossed my mind that there was more to it than that. I've been very foolish."

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Rafe chuckled, brushing his lips across the top of her head. "We all are when we're young, Liliana, some more than others. You must understand there has to be some consequences for your actions though. While I understand now the reasons for your actions, you still disobeyed me. I can't let that go and do nothing about it. "

Rafe knew that now was the time for him to become the alpha, to do the hard part, and issue a consequence to one of his pack. It never came easy to him, because he instinctively felt that every member of his band of wolves were good at heart. It was always with great difficulty he meted out his punishments and punishing Lily, of all people, made it that bit harder.

Understanding her circumstances better provided reasons for the insanity that had ensued, however he had to take a hard stance and try not to be swayed unduly by the mitigating factors when setting his consequence. Rafe turned and looked into Lily's eyes, looking deep into her soul and knew what he would do.

Lily watched as Rafe, the man she respected most in her world outside her family, changed from the kind caring man she knew and loved to the Alpha he truly was. Shoulders squared, back stiffened, his sheer size gave little doubt as to why he was her Alpha.wWw.nOVeLwOrM.CoM

"Do you understand what you did wrong, Liliana Romanov?"

"I let you down, and disobeyed your edict."

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"No?" Lily stared up at him in shock, not fully understanding what he meant.

"No. While you disobeyed my directive; that was not what you did wrong."

"I don't understand."

"You let down the pack, child." Rafe watched as the realisation of the full harm she had caused slowly descended on her. "Let me explain to you why you're being punished. While you did disobey me, and that in itself is a huge strike against you, the harm you caused the pack outweighs everything else."

"The pack is a living organism, Lily; it's like a human body. I, as Alpha, am the head of the organism, my betas the organs, the pack makes up the remaining bones, nerves and tissues. Each action has a reaction on the body. Therefore, when a body part is lopped off, it's felt everywhere. If a body becomes pregnant, it's felt everywhere. If a limb stops doing what the brain tells it, it is felt everywhere."

Lily was now starting to see what Rafe was alluding to, and the guilt that she felt for her actions was beginning to increase.

"Child, when you left the first time, we felt it to the core. We, as a whole love you. Your absence had an impact on the entire body of our group. There was fear. Not only for your safety, but fear on your family's behalf and finally fear for ourselves, because if something were to have happened to one of the Vârcoloc then we would be in grave danger. Your absence also stirred up helplessness, anger, and grief. Without you, there was a void in the pack, and each and every member felt it.

"When you fled the second time, it was felt tenfold. You had the pack searching high and low. You had members of the pack who were better served protecting the compound out searching for you. You put the pack at risk and on top of that nearly killed yourself and your child. Each and every time that link is closed the immediate impulse is for us to think that you are dead." Rafe held up his hand to ward off Lily from interrupting, he was not finished.

"You didn't just fail me, Lily, you failed the entire pack." Rafe let his words hang in the air for a several moments so that the severity of what was to come would sink in. "I warned you before that the consequence would be exile, but under the circumstances there are mitigating factors to be taken into consideration. You are pregnant, and I am not inhuman. Your mate is not of my pack, and we both know you will be leaving us anyway, but until that time, you will always have a home with your family and me.

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"As such, I must take into considerations the needs of the pack. The consequence for your actions should not be punishment but rather a repayment to the pack. You have taken accountability for your actions and that does make me proud, Lily. As Alpha, as father to the entire pack, I could not ask for more.