

Chapter 475

As the wolf pup began ripping mindlessly at the vampire's throat, Agony used a talon to slice both ruined arms at the shoulder, removing any chance that the animal's efforts would be hampered. "I live in a wolf pack, vampire, and as such, they are mine to protect whether they belong to my pack or not. I will let you live...after the pup has excised its rage. When you heal, you will leave this place and travel far. You will tell everyone you meet that the wolves are off limits. Blink once if you understand me."

He sat back against a tree, watching blood and flesh pump from the vampire's neck even as the wounded male blinked his understanding. Smiling coldly, Agony sat back to admire the ferocity with which the pup went about its pain. He could understand its bloodlust, craved to do the same to those who had taken his own parents. "Yes, you will tell all that Agony is here. You will warn them all of the coming storm, vampire, and they will quake in their boots."

It was with some regret that he finally had to pull the wolf pup from the torn up vampire an hour later. He needed to continue on his own journey; otherwise, he would have sat there for days watching the agony cross the other male's face. He had thought the wolf was feral by now, but the fact it didn't attack him as an enemy when he pulled it away told him that there was still reason in the animal.

"Come, we must find you a pack, little one."

The pup yelped, growled its displeasure.

"I cannot take you with me. Where I go is not safe for one such as you. However, should you ever find yourself stateside look me up. I will be easy to find. Now we must go."

Agony paused long enough to retrieve the vampire's arms and place them back against the shoulder sockets. He was a pulpy mess as it was and it would take hours for him to heal. It was pointless creating a vessel of enlightenment should he maybe be discovered before he could heal sufficiently to defend himself. "Remember my words, vampire. Make sure all know of my coming."

When he turned back to the pup, he found a little girl standing staring down at the ruined vampire. She was about five years old, her once blonde hair matted with blood and flesh. He was surprised to note the pup was female; he hadn't paid any attention to her gender while in animal form. It took him no effort to conjure up a tiny pair of jogging bottoms and T-shirt with his magic, handing them without a word to the child.

Even before she had taken them, Agony had uttered a short incantation, her small frame losing the blood and gore, so that when she took the clothing from him, it was as if she had dipped into a lake and cleansed herself.

"Magic..."

The sound of her voice brought a curl to his lips. He was oddly relieved to hear rationality in her tone. There was no doubt she would forever be scarred by what had happened this day, but there was an inner core of strength about the girl. She had a chance of making it.

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"Yes, magic," he agreed, holding out his hand, which she took without hesitation.

Scenting the air, he detected a wolf pack a few miles away. Knowing the history of the packs in Europe, it likely wasn't the child's pack but they would take in a young one. That's what packs did. "Would you like to fly, little one?"

"Pippa," she whispered, turning haunted blue eyes up to his face. "Yes please."

"You are a very brave, strong wolf, Pippa. You will be fine," he answered solemnly; as he reached down to pick her up. "Hold onto my neck tightly."

Taking a running jump, Agony soared into the nearest tree, swinging effortlessly from branch to branch, sailing through the treetops until they were within half a mile from the pack he'd scented. The child's grip never loosened, remained tight as he dropped back to the forest floor.

"You know you cannot stay with me, Pippa. I have already explained that to you. If you walk that way for a little while, there are wolves who will take you in, protect you."

"They can't protect me from the vampires. No one but you can protect me from them." Her big blue eyes filled with tears, her arms holding on tightly.

Agony stared at the child, unaccountably moved by the trust she placed in him, but knowing she couldn't remain at his side. His hands were gentle as he removed her arms, turning her in the direction she needed to go. "Run now, Pippa. Run to the safety of the pack. If I can, I will return. I will remember this place and I will return."

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He watched her go, her steps at first hesitant and then moving faster as she scented her own kind. He would keep his word. He would seek out the pack on his return journey to ensure she was safe. He may be many things, but he always kept his word.

As he turned to leave, something caught his attention, a vague scent that teased at his nostrils. His head whipped around sharply, his eyes trying to pierce through the thick foliage surrounding him. The scent vanished as quickly as it came, but it left him feeling edgy, that something was out there...something dangerous to his mission. He didn't have time to investigate it though. He had to stay on track and he'd already been diverted.

It was time to visit a coven...one his parents had visited not too long before. It was time to wreak havoc and bloodshed on those who had taken those he loved from him. Turning away, he headed back the way he came, back towards Louis' coven, and the answers he was seeking.

"He's been here," Dara said quietly, heading out of the trees to where Joshua waited beside his beat-up van.

He ran a hand through his dark blond hair, placing his hat back on his head after he scented the air for the hundredth time. It wasn't that he doubted her, but... "I can't scent anything."

She gave him a small smile, and he was once again transfixed by the way her face lit up with even more beauty from that one small gesture.

"He was masking his scent. I would be astonished if you could. Where did Gard and Rayne go after they visited here?"

"They tracked Michael from here. We parted company." Joshua tried to keep his tone as neutral as possible, but he saw another twitch of her lips and knew she was aware that he was couching his words.

"You know where they went, though, don't you?"

It was pointless lying to her; he'd already seen what she was capable of. Nodding slowly, he opened the door for her to climb in. "They went to Louis' coven. That was the last anyone saw of them here, and from what I've been led to understand, they didn't advertise where they intended to go after there."

Dara hesitated as she climbed in, turned to look him in the eyes to read the truth of his words. "They did leave the coven alive?"

Joshua couldn't hide the genuine shock that rippled across his face. "Of course! While Louis isn't aligned with any of the stateside vampires per se, he does count Freya Eriksson as someone he trusts and respects. He would never do anything to bring her knocking on his door."

Dara saw only truth in his face, nodding as she closed the door and waited for him to climb in beside her. "You appear to know a lot of what goes on in Louis' coven, Joshua, especially considering you're not part of that coven. Let me guess...Dante?"

He shouldn't have laughed at her accuracy but he found himself doing so. "Has anyone ever told you that you're utterly terrifying, Dara Romanov?" His comment appeared to please her, or so he judged by the large smile that crossed her exquisite features.

"You're the first," she admitted. "They usually reserve comments like that for my father and uncle."

Starting the engine, Joshua headed away from the old cottage. "I can't take you all the way to Louis, but I can get you to within a few miles. I have to protect my own coven, Dara. I hope you can understand that."

"It is better that way, Joshua. I don't know how Kothi will react to a strange vampire, so it will be best if I am alone when I track him down. Your help has been immeasurable. I will be sure to relay that to Caleb when I return home."WwW.NoveL(w)@rM.c©M

There was no doubt in her voice that she would return home, and he hoped that would be the case. In the short time he had known Dara Romanov, Joshua had come to like her a lot, and he would hate for anything bad to happen to her on European soil. Perhaps it was time that he and his coven came out of the background. Perhaps he would have a conversation with them once he'd dropped the Vârcolac off at her destination.

Rage...fury...the vampire rose from the forest floor, his eyes whirling crimson red as he kicked the wolf corpses in his wrath. His brother was dead, his blood now drying on the parched ground beneath his body. How the Youngling vampire had managed to best them was still a mystery, but it didn't halt the hatred that bloomed deep within the vampire's soul.

He had allowed the stinking pup to eat at his throat, the filthy animal gnawing and ripping at his flesh in an agony that was endless! All through the ordeal he had been fully alert, aware of every excruciating moment, filing away every word the Youngling spoke to the pup.

Agony he had called himself, and agony he had meted out in the shape of a filthy animal, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses, enjoying the soundless screams of the vampire being eaten alive.

The Youngling had formed a bond with the mangy animal. He had succoured it, had taken it with him to a safe haven of other wolves. While the Youngling would most likely be miles away by now, he could get his vengeance on the wolf pup. He could instil his own agony in the heart of the Youngling by ripping the heart out of his pet and all those protecting it.

WwW.NoveL@rM.coM

He would make the Youngling rue the day he had entered his territory. Blood would flow; only this time it would be wolves' blood, and he would take his time with the little blonde wolf...he would make her scream endlessly for the Youngling who would never come to save her.

Staggering into the trees, the last of his wounds finally healing, the vampire took off towards his coven to gather his men. He could scent the wolf pack; scent the child who had gnawed at his throat. "I'm coming for you, you little bitch," he rasped out. "I'm going to swim in your fucking blood before this day is over!"

To be continued...