

Chapter 489

Kothari ran, his paws flying over the forest floor as if all the shades of hell were after him. He had to run, had to try to escape the enormity of what had almost just happened. How could he? How could Agony have been so blind, so out of control that he hadn't been aware of what was right in front of him? Agony had to have been aware on some sub-conscious level, as he'd reacted in fury when the vampire had struck her, but that moment had vanished in the midst of his other half's insanity bare moments later, and he had almost killed them all.

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He'd almost killed her. Not just the strange girl who had come out of nowhere, but her mother too. It was just like...just like all those years ago when he was born...Agony tried to destroy everything that they loved.

"Stop, Kotheri!"

"Fuck off! I hate you! Leave us alone! You're toxic, Agony. All you can do is lash out and destroy everything we hold dear. We are stronger than you. Together we will excise you forever and you'll never hurt anyone ever again."

His beast let out a loud roar, its large head thrown back into the air, momentarily stunning Kotheri by its sheer power. When had the animal become so strong? He had always considered it to be the weakest of his hybrid nature, but now he could see it was anything but weak. It was as if the animal had been laying dormant, waiting for the right opportunity to show its hand.

Agony appeared unimpressed, derision lacing his mental tone. "You think you can do what they couldn't do, Kotheri? You think you are stronger than the vampire Queen and her King, not to mention our parents? The four oldest, wisest and strongest beings to walk this planet couldn't excise me, boy."

Memories flooded back...moments from his past that he shouldn't be able to remember. Darkness...frantic voices...whispered words with no meaning and the screaming of a new-born baby. He didn't want to remember, he didn't want to know about that time. It wasn't him...it wasn't Kotheri then, it was Agony...trying to destroy everything he loved. The panther roared again in fury and the boy's resolve hardened.

"You failed then, Agony, and you will fail this time too. I will do what I must to save those I love even if it means that I become less than what I am." He didn't shout the words out, his tone was quiet and resolved. Though he was confused about the girl with the pack, confused about Dara and how he could be so wrong, Kotheri knew without a doubt that his future was somewhere in that decimated pack grounds, that his only hope of salvation lay there. He could have a chance at happiness. He could know that feeling of completeness that everyone else had. He would do what he must to have that life, and he wouldn't let anyone stand in his way.

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The steely determination in the words were enough to give Agony some pause. This wasn't the Kothari he knew from before. The girl had changed things and it wasn't the same as his infatuation with Dara. Kothari had a real hope this time, real certainty that something special was waiting for him back at the campground. That hope gave him strength and their animal had that same strength, and this was how they were able to overcome him. Was he the one in the wrong? Should he reassess the situation and listen to them for once? The only way he could know the truth was to be the one to make the decision. He couldn't do that subjugated by his alter egos.

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"You will never find our parents without me, Kotheri. You know that to be true. You need me as much as you need our panther, more so because I can do what is necessary when we find them. I must be in dominance or you are signing their death warrants. You must choose, boy, who do you want more, our parents or the girl? I can give you both. You can have only one. Choose, Kotheri." He played dirty but that was who he was. Kotheri had to know the truth whether he liked it or not.

The panther hissed and screeched to a halt, its huge body shuddering with the sudden cessation of motion. "Nooooooooooo!" Kotheri screamed inside his head, fear for his parents threatening to overwhelm him. He couldn't lose them...he just couldn't, and he couldn't deny the truth of Agony's words either. He needed the killer that lay within his soul. His parents needed that cold, calculated monster to save them.

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"You promise me! You promise me both, Agony." There really was no other way, not if they were to save their parents. The panther hissed again, and the air shimmered around its big body. Kotheri dropped down to the forest floor, his head hanging down in dejection as the animal retreated.

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"You have my word."

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It should have been wrong to trust the monster inside but, until today when he'd lost his reason completely, Agony had always been someone he could count on. He had to do what was right for everyone, even if it meant losing himself again for a little time. "Listen to Dere. If she tells you you're being an idiot, then you are. That should hopefully keep you grounded and less likely to lose control. And don't do anything to hurt the girl, that includes killing her mother. She'll never forgive us if we do that. I want your word on that too."

"I am not some errand child for you to instruct," Agony grumbled, but there was election in his tone too because he knew he had won. He could accept Kotheri's instructions. He could be generous to the vanquished elder ego. "I will do as you ask. Now cede control as we are wasting time. We have to go to Romania. That is where we will find our parents."

It hurt to let go, especially when he had no idea when or even if Agony would let him return. There was a good chance that Kotheri would forever be subjugated, that Agony would finally win the endless war they had been fighting since the moment of their birth. "Don't betray me, Agony. Don't kill us both because that is what will happen if you truly go rogue. I am trusting you..." Kotheri let go, sinking deep within the recesses of his mind, finding his panther and curling up beside it. He hoped he had made the right decision...he thought he had, but only time would truly tell.

"Has there been any word from Dere?" Lily's hand absent-mindedly stroked her abdomen as she asked the question, her gaze concerned.

"She hasn't reported in officially yet, but I heard she called Aeron to ask how to stop a she-wolf going rogue. She didn't explain what was going on but said she would report in soon," her brother answered, the frown marring his brow a clear indicator he was as concerned as she was.

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