

Chapter 538

His first impression was one of danger. The young man before him had dark glasses shading his eyes, his black hair cut short at the back, though it was longer at the front, falling over his brow to partially obscure one the lenses. He sat so still, dressed entirely in black, his surprisingly wide lips neither smiling nor grimacing. There was an aura of waiting around the male, as if he could sit there for hours on end without moving.

There was something disconcerting about being viewed so dispassionately and Pietro sucked in a deep breath, swallowing down the acrid fear that was threatening to overwhelm him again. The woman had stopped screaming and the compound sounded eerily quiet after her shrill cries. Even though it had only been screams he'd heard, Pietro had recognised the voice. It was the vampire from his torture. The woman with soft caramel skin and silky black hair, the one who had invaded his mind and violated him in a way her accomplices never could.

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A shiver ran through him and the younger male shifted slightly on his branch, mirrored lenses secured to the vampire's every expression. Pietro detested the weakness within that showed his fear and he swallowed again to try to combat it. He didn't want the Vârcolac witnessing that weakness. Something about him triggered warning bells deep within Pietro.

"She can't hurt you anymore," the Vârcolac announced in a matter-of-fact tone. There was no judgement in his words, no hint of disgust at witnessing Pietro's fear. He was merely stating a fact. He continued in the same even tone. "Annie stripped her of her immortality. The woman is fully human now. You could snap her neck with one backhand."

Pietro's jaw dropped and he stared at the Vârcolac in disbelief as his words registered. What he was saying couldn't possibly be true...could it? No one was powerful enough to strip a vampire of their immortality and if they were, how could the younger male just sit there serenely announcing it as if he were discussing the weather? His head automatically began shaking in the negative. It couldn't be possible...it just couldn't. He had no idea he was muttering the words until the corners of the Vârcolac's mouth twitched briefly.w@w.nov@lwORm.co(m)

"Oh, it is possible and Annie was quite magnificent as she performed the spell." The younger male cocked his head to the side as if considering something before his cold smile grew wider. "I wonder if she could strip both vampiric and Were sides from one of us. That would be interesting to find out though I think civil war would actually break out if she tried that."

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"Civil war?" Pietro wondered just what he had missed hidden inside the Romanov house. He stared at the Vârcolac, wondering if he was entirely sane. The lack of emotion in the other male's voice was chilling, the cold detachment sending a shiver down his spine. "Which one of the Vârcolac are you?"

"Kothari, the ill-begotten offspring of Rayne and Gard," Kothi laughed without humour, as he examined the vampire before him, his gaze taking in every nuance of his expression. He dropped down to a lower branch, until he was eye level with the other male. "You look concerned. I see that expression often. Most of the pack wonders if I'm entirely sane. The truth of it is...so do I most of the time."

The smile dropped from his face, leaving behind an expression so cold that the air around them appeared to drop a few degrees. "We are alike, Pietro de la Rios. We carry much damage within. Whereas I was born with mine, yours is by creation of the woman in the Eriksson home. I find myself intrigued by this; it creates a connection between us, something I lack with most others."

He watched the vampire trying to work him out and he smiled again, this time some warmth creeping into it. "Come let us talk in your room. I will explain what you're missing so you will be armed with the knowledge that you require to make a decision on whether to flee the pack or stay." Kothi swung gracefully from the branch and landed inside the bedroom, turning to watch Pietro hesitate for a moment before he followed him inside.

"The woman arrived at the Praetorian compound and shot Liam with a poisoned bullet," he began, moving to the corner of the room to sit down in the upholstered black chair he found there. His keen gaze took in how Lily's old room had been redone now that she was mated with Mac and living at the other compound. The Romanovs had redecorated in neutral browns, creams and blacks to give it a more masculine look.

Pietro gasped in shock, sinking to the bottom of the bed as what Kothari said filtered into his mind. "Were we able to save him?" He didn't recognise his own voice, it was so devoid of life.

"The Vârcolac appear to be immune." Kothi smiled once more, fascinated by the myriad of expressions crossing the vampire's face. He didn't think he'd ever seen so many emotions in one person all at the same time. "Liam recovered and claimed the woman as his mate. Caleb wanted her executed and Annie chose to strip her of her immortality. Our King and Queen are at odds with one another. My aunt and father have gone away somewhere alone, but not before Annie tasked Rafe with protecting the woman. Apparently, she has three souls to save, whatever that may mean. I don't think even Annie knows for sure, it's more like she has a vague notion of something important to come."

Pietro jumped up, pacing to the other end of the room. Memories of being in the dungeon in Scotland assaulted him, the excruciating agony of the poison eating him alive, his regenerative powers no match for the evil flowing through him. Liam had been shot with the same poison but had survived with no intervention. He had also claimed the woman as his mate.wŴw.noV@l@o(r)mm.coM

Hatred, black and acrid, vengeful and unrelenting, rushed through the vampire as he thought of the woman entering the dungeon, of her beauty and soft voice, of the way she'd violated his mind. His fangs elongated, his talons springing from his fingertips. He turned toward the door, intent on finding her and ripping her head off. He took one step before his path was blocked by Kothari.

"You cannot do that, Pietro."

The menace in the younger male's voice stopped him in his tracks, his vampiric side close to crossing over at the danger posed. He didn't want to stop but reason told him he needed to think about his course of action before committing to it. He waited for Kothari to speak again while he weighed up his options.

"No harm will I ever allow to come to my brethren, vampire. If you harm the woman, you harm Liam and I cannot allow that. You do not wish it either, otherwise, all you suffered will have been for nothing. You were damaged protecting us, never forget that. In addition, the Queen has amply punished the would-be assassin and tasked the pack with protecting her. Will you go against your Queen's will, Pietro de la Rios?"

'No!' The anguished word echoed in Pietro's mind repeatedly as he fought with his beast. He ached to taste Thereasa's hot blood flowing down his throat as she screamed in agony. Memories of her screaming earlier excited his vampiric side, dragging a long hiss from his throat as his talons clicked against each other.

He had been tasked to protect the Vârcolac and he had failed in many ways. His arrogance had been paramount in his capture and torture, until death was all he had longed for. His weakness had allowed the woman to escape and come here to harm Liam. Now, as his vampiric side craved vengeance on her, if he acted upon it, then Liam would be irrevocably harmed and he would suffer the justice of the vampire queen. He may even be stripped of his own mortality.