

## Chapter 544

"Please, Cassia, don't tell anyone. Kothi didn't hurt me really, and he was as shaken by what happened as I was. He loves the pack and us, you know he does. He saved Lily right after that happened. Whatever his issues are, he's been working through them all his life alone. Now that I know, now that he has someone to talk to, maybe I can help him."*wWw.©Ovellw@.C@m*

"No!" Cassia jumped down from her chair and began pacing the kitchen. Her thoughts were in turmoil, her fear for her sister heightened. Dara always did have a selfless heart but what she was proposing, it was ludicrous. She loved Kothi as much as her sister did but when it came down to it; Dara's safety would always come first. "This is serious, Dara. This isn't like one of our other secrets where no one gets hurt. What if Kothi loses control and does hurt you? We have to tell Rafe about this, Kal too and his parents."

"He won't, Cass, I know he won't!" Dara jumped down from her chair and halted her sister's pacing. "Please, trust that I know what I'm doing. I can help Kothi."*ŴWw.nóv(e)llwoRm.C@m*

"If he lets you!" Cassia shot back, frowning. "You know how isolated he's always been. What makes you think he'll even listen to you?"

Dara ran a weary hand through her hair and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know why but I just feel it, Cass. My wolf isn't afraid of him, she feels the same way. Let me try, just for a little while. If it isn't going to work I'll know soon enough. We can go to Rafe then. Just let me try first, please!"

It went against her better judgement but her sister appeared so certain that Cassia found herself nodding her agreement. Deep down, she didn't truly believe Kothi would harm anyone in the pack, least of all one of the Vârcolac, but there was that one per cent of uncertainty with him that was hard to shake. The conviction in her sister's voice eased some of her foreboding though. Dara was a good judge of character. She had a level head and she trusted her implicitly. If Dara was sure she wouldn't be in any danger, then she had to trust that assessment.

Cassia dialled back her concern and allowed herself to relax, albeit reluctantly. "Okay, but if he does anything like that again, you call me instantly. Do not put yourself in harm's way. Are we clear on that?"

For an answer, Dara threw her arms around her, hugging her tightly. "Thanks, Cass. I promise I'll take care of myself."

She was probably making a huge mistake giving into her sister but Cassia's wolf was unconcerned about what she'd heard so she took that as a sign that there was no imminent danger. Maybe Dara would be good for Kothari. Maybe he would finally find some kind of peace and integrate better with them. She would keep an eye on him none-the-less. If he stepped out of line even remotely, she'd kick his ass so hard he'd wonder what hit him.

Dara was smiling with relief and hopping back into her chair so Cassia followed her, chewing on some more chicken in companionable silence. That was what she treasured most about being with her sister. They didn't have to talk all the time, they were just content to be in each other's company. She wasn't sure if she was ready to talk about what had happened with Pietro earlier but she found her mind constantly going to him and her body positioning itself at an angle so she was half looking towards the front door.

Dara noticed too and shot her a quizzical look. "Okay, you know what's going on with me, so how about you tell me why you look as if you're about to go running out the front door any second now?"

Cassia swallowed and then finished her tea, taking her time before answering. "I went to visit Pietro today to get a hair sample to work on."

Her sister's eyes widened. "You did? What was he like? Is he really scarred like everyone says?"

For some reason Cassia felt herself prickle at the open curiosity on display. She knew Dara wasn't being mean but the talk of Pietro's scars irritated her. Her wolf began to prowl in agitation at the mere mention of them. How anyone could cause such damage to someone so beautiful was criminal, and the woman responsible was in the pack right now. She had the urge to walk over to the Eriksson's and beat the living daylights out of the other woman.

Her errant thoughts brought her up sharply and she blinked slowly as she pushed down at her wolf. She'd never in her life wanted to do anyone physical harm until that moment and it felt so strange to have such negativity flowing through her. Where the hell had that come from? Was this another indicator that the vampire was her mate for real? Her wolf was clearly acting territorial even if her vampiric side was coldly analysing the situation.

"Cass?"

Blinking again, she turned to look at her sister to see concern on her face.

"You're growling."

Dear God, she was and she hadn't even noticed it! Her wolf never took dominance to this extent; her dual nature was always finely balanced. "Stop it!" she remonstrated with the animal, struggling to push it into submissiveness. It fought her for a moment and then finally acquiesced though reluctantly.

"Sorry, Dara. My wolf is anxious right now and acting out of character. She has been since we met Pietro."

Her sister's eyes widened fractionally as she quickly put two and two together. It was a testament to how surprised she was that she instantly switched to their mental bond. "Pietro is your mate???"*W@w.(n)o(ν)êllWO(r)mm.c@Ml*

Sighing Cassia ran her hands wearily over her face and propped her chin up with her hands, elbows on the counter top. "I don't know. My wolf keeps yelling 'mine' and working is the only thing that keeps my mind off him. It just seems too quick, Dara. He's been in the pack for a few days now, his scent is all around. If we do find our mates like pack, as Lily says, then why haven't I noticed this before today?"

Her sister took her time before answering, her expressive face showing her thought process. "He's been close to you in one form or another since you started working on the antidote. Maybe that was enough to soothe your wolf until you met him in the flesh?"

"I was wondering if that was maybe the case, too. I was happy to spend hours on end in the lab and felt antsy being away from it. My frustration levels were creeping up even then. Freya tried to dissuade me from going for the hair sample myself but I just ignored her and went. It was like I was compelled to but haven't realised it until now." Sighing, she scrubbed at her face again. "What am I going to do, Dar?"

Dara could understand her dilemma. Ordinarily, claiming a mate wasn't supposed to be a hard thing, though with Rafe's pack being made up of such interesting personalities, it was proving a bit of a trying time for most of them. Pietro came with a lot of damage, both physical and emotional. Cassia would have to find some way through his barriers to convince him he was a worthy mate. It wasn't going to be easy.

"He's so damaged," Cassia whispered, closing her eyes as she felt moisture begin to gather. Pietro's pain tore at her heart, as did the defeat in his beautifully miss-matched eyes. She knew he would fight any mating pull he experienced. "I'm not sure how to go about reaching him. If today is anything to go by, he's going to fight me every step of the way."

Dara slipped an arm around her sister and rested her head against her shoulder as Cassia automatically hugged her back. "If he belongs to you then you will find a way, Cass. I have faith in you. After all, how could he resist someone as beautiful, smart and funny as you?"

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"I hope you're right, Dar. I have to be the strong one until he is ready to believe in himself again. I'll work on the antidote every hour I can spare. Maybe when I find a cure, Pietro will have a bit more confidence."

"I'm sure he will, Cass. I'll do anything I can to help too. You know that, don't you?"

She did, and the wealth of love and determination she felt down her bond with her sister made her smile. She could always count on Dara. Of that one thing, she was sure in her life. But she would have to go very carefully with the wounded vampire a few doors away. It would take all of her logic and cunning to ensnare that gorgeous male while he was oblivious to the fact. Her smile widening, she hugged Dara a little tighter. Pietro de la Rios had better watch out...because she was coming whether he liked it or not.