

Chapter 557

Caleb glanced up from the book he was leafing through as he waited for Demetri and Mara to come downstairs. A handful of seconds later they walked into their sitting room and one glance at his friend's face told him Demetri was going to be difficult to handle. He dampened down a sigh and mentally ran through what he could do to help Mara. From her sideways glances at her husband, he could see that she was aware of the situation and watching it.

"This had better be urgent, Caleb," Demetri snapped, making no attempt to hide his irritation.

His friend quirked an eyebrow, a hint of hardness entering his eyes. "Are we going to have a pissing contest before we can get down to business? Because I really don't have time for this, so either get your bitching out of the way quickly or shut up and sit down." Caleb turned his gaze to Mara and gave her one of his more endearing smiles. "We have time for some coffee, though."

She snorted and gave him a pointed look, before turning to go to the kitchen. "Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I have to make the coffee all of the time. I'm a Councillor, remember." There was no barb in her tone despite her words. She knew Caleb was getting her out of the room so he could have a talk with Demetri to try to centre him a bit. If she were present during it, then her husband would be less receptive, as his ego would feel the need to prove how dominant he was. Males could be so stupid at times.

Caleb waited until Mara was out of the room before focusing on his friend. "You need to hunt. I thought when you went to Europe that would help, but clearly, you're still on edge."

"What gives you that impression?"

Demetri's quiet tone was more concerning than his earlier open aggression. When he went quiet... Caleb tensed but kept his expression neutral. "Ratchet it down a notch, Demetri. I need you here."

There was long moment of silence, Caleb tensing more as his gaze pinned his friend, until some of the tension eased from Demetri and he ran a hand through his hair again. "You're right; I need something to occupy my time. All the shit going on right now is irritating me."

He moved over to sit down on a large sofa, frowning as he did. "How many times do we have to do this, Caleb? Why can't these idiots get it into their heads that they can't win, so they may as well just live with it? This feels like Richard Graves all over again, except on a larger scale. Someone has to be driving this European shit. They're too fragmented, from what I saw when I was over there. The covens remain smallish and independent."

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Caleb frowned, mulling over his friend's assessment. He'd been thinking something similar but hadn't vocalised it yet. From his talks with Joshua, they'd almost reached the same conclusion. Joshua was trying to uncover as much as he could, but he had his own coven to protect. He couldn't be seen to be too obvious in his investigations or they'd be at risk if there was someone manipulating events.

Sighing, Caleb rubbed at his face. There was too much going on and he was feeling as frustrated as his friend. He needed to get a handle on things before they blew up further in his face. "If that's true, then we don't know how far this unknown's influence may already have reached, and we still need to ensure there isn't any fallout from what happened up at the Praetorian Compound. We also need to deal with the damage to our relationship with the wolves."

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"We do? Don't you mean you do? It wasn't the rest of us who flipped out and almost caused a war with the wolves, Caleb. You lost perspective as you did the night you discovered Rafe was still alive. Remember that? How you nearly started a war over Annie? Well look around you, my friend. You've almost done it again."

Caleb could feel his temper igniting and fought to contain it. Demetri was itching for a fight and giving in to his aggression wasn't going to solve anything. He couldn't really argue with what his friend said anyway. It was old ground and didn't need rehashing. "That is why I'll be dealing with the pack."

"And Annie?"

A long sigh escaped him and he closed his eyes for a moment before looking back at his friend. "Annie is fine; we spoke before I came over. She'll be coming home soon, so I need you and Mara to do damage control with the Council. Find out what, if anything has slipped out and come up with some plan to contain it if necessary. Can you do this for me?"

Another dark scowl shot in his direction. Demetri wasn't in a very forgiving mood. "For Annie, I will. When you fix your mess, I'll think about helping you out."

"Fine, for Annie," Caleb sighed again. "Just make sure she's protected, Demetri. Be pissed at me if you want, just make sure there isn't the faintest hint of any knowledge of what happened up at the Praetorian Compound." Entering the room with a tray in her hands, Mara's reappearance cut short anything else he may have said.

Demetri immediately took the tray from her, setting it down on the coffee table and pulling her down beside him so he could ground himself in her scent. He was mad at Caleb and had been so before, but the level of his aggression was surprising even himself. Usually he worked with his friend, but today he was so off-centre he wanted to pummel his face. To hell with the consequences! He knew Caleb was one of the few people alive who could kick his ass, but wiping that smug look off his face might just be worth it. The chance to get a few good shots in would suit his mood just fine. His aggression levels were off the scale, the need to strike out overwhelming.

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His mate wrapped a hand in his hair, tugging it until he looked at her. He could see the concern in her eyes and he knew he was the cause. He needed to get some control; he didn't want to ever see that expression on her face. He struggled to push down his feral side, finally managing to calm his fury down to a simmering rage. When he felt he had a modicum of control, he turned back to his friend.

"So, anything in particular you want us to do or are your requests just broad strokes?"

Caleb took his coffee, sipping at it as he sat down on the sofa facing his friends. "Annie and I never did get a chance to talk to the Council about the poison. They need to be updated on that. Mara how's the current split in Council?"

She sipped her coffee as she thought. "Well, you have me, the twins, Stefan and Emily. Most likely Cristoph too as he's still favouring Andrei at the moment. That's six of the twelve. Of the rest, William tends to side with us, though I don't know him that well. I think Corinne has the hots for him because she's always in agreement with him. The others tend to be more traditional in their way of thinking."

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