

## Chapter 558

Caleb was silently counting, working out their position. He didn't know this William or Corinne and maybe that was a mistake on his part. Once he'd set up the Council, he'd stepped back and let them manage themselves. Maybe he should have paid a bit more attention, given past history...but he'd trusted the core members to let him know if anything was wrong. "So five definite votes and three maybes. Can you sway those three around to our way of thinking?"

"They will be or they'll have me to deal with," Demetri growled.

Mara refrained from rolling her eyes, but barely. Ignoring her husband, she nodded at Caleb. "I don't see that as being too hard a task. We should be able to swing a Council vote our way and even if we hit a deadlock, the Ancient Council has the deciding vote."

Caleb sat back, relaxing for the first time. "Good. We're going to have to inform them about the poison only we need to keep Reasa's identity out of it. Just tell them the vampire was taken care of on the spot. No need to elaborate on how that was done. Let them know we're working on a cure for the poison with the Weres' help as they're more knowledgeable about science and the healing arts. If you can put forward the idea of Gard and Rayne going over to Europe on a covert mission that will help. Try to make it seem like it's their idea. That should generate fewer objections."

"What about the vampires that were injured during Liam's outburst?" Demetri asked, his tone less aggressive and his body language loosening up at bit.

"I'll find out from Mac what the extent of the damage is. We will have to make a decision once we know more. Right now, I don't know how bad it is." Caleb eyed his friend intently, a frown marring his face. "We may have to do damage control there too."

Demetri didn't need to ask what he meant, his expression said it all. If the injured Praetorians were beyond help and they posed any risk to Rhianna's safety, they would need to be disposed of, no matter how untenable the prospect appeared to some. He could tell from the way Mara stiffened that she'd worked it out too and wasn't happy.

"You know it makes sense, Mara," he said, turning to gather her close. "If their minds are damaged beyond repair then they aren't really living anyway. Add to that, if anything gets out about what happened up there, it's not just Annie's safety that's at risk. It will be Liam's too, and the rest of the Vârcolac. This abomination madness could spread from Europe and all of the Vârcolac be perceived as some kind of threat. We need to be prepared to do what is necessary to protect our own."

Mara shuddered, knowing what he said was true, but her heart ached for the unfortunate vampires who had been caught up in the mess. They had trained to protect the Vârcolac and would ultimately pay with their lives.*w(w)(w).fl(o)vel@orm.c0m*

"Yes, beautiful, they trained and were willing to risk their lives. They did their duty and would want to be granted the respect of a decent end, rather than live as vegetables forever." Demetri's words whispered in her mind and she realise she'd mumbled some of her thoughts out aloud.

"Mara, none of us would take any pleasure from ending their existence even if there is no hope for them," Caleb followed up, rising to come to stand before them. "They are casualties of a war we didn't start and find ourselves having to try to end without knowing who or what we're really fighting."

Sighing, she nodded, though she still didn't like it. She could understand what they were saying though. Sometimes the toughest decisions had to be made, regardless of the price.

"I'm heading up there now," Caleb continued, making his way to the front door. "I'll keep you posted on any news. Let me know what's happening with the Council, and call in Freya and Nors for more muscle if you need it. Do what you need to do to keep this buttoned down tight with the exception of starting an outright civil war."

Demetri snorted a laugh without humour. "Isn't that your party trick these days, Caleb?"

His friend paused with his hand on the doorknob, turning his head to look back over his shoulder. When he spoke, his voice was a cold as ice. "Demetri, it's only out of respect for the fact that you're trying to protect Annie that I haven't kicked your ass yet. You've had your opportunity to say your piece. The topic is now closed." Without waiting for a response, Caleb walked out the door, closing it gently behind him.

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Mara looked at her husband and tightened her arms around him. "Let it go, love. I know you're angry with Caleb, but don't you think this division is playing right into the hands of our enemies?"

His surprised expression was almost comical. "Think about it, Demetri. For so many centuries now it's been a well-known fact that if anyone went up against one of you, they took on both. You are strong as individuals, but formidable together. What would be the most perfect way to weaken you? You're mad at him for creating division with the pack and yet your anger is weakening you as a team. I heard you refuse to help him, only doing it for Annie. I don't think you even understood the impact of what you were saying, but I'm sure Caleb did."*@ww.m.v©⓪ŴoRm.com*

Demetri blinked slowly, staring at Mara as he tried to digest what she was saying. Clearly, she'd misinterpreted what was going on, because he hadn't done anything to cause any divisions. Caleb was the one acting like an ass, hurting Rhianna, causing friction with everyone. He was just calling him on his behaviour as he'd done before in the past, when required.

The expression on Caleb's face when he'd mentioned helping Annie but not him suddenly came to his mind, and he frowned. His friend's face had remained neutral but there had been a brief flicker of emotion in his eyes before he'd covered it up. Did Caleb believe he wouldn't have his back anymore? He was helping him with the Council shit, so he had to know he would do anything in his power to help. Didn't he?

"Fuck!" Demetri groaned running a hand through his hair. "Caleb knows I'm with him one hundred percent. I always have been and I always will be. I may have been a bit pissed at him but I'd never let him down; I never have."

"I know that, love, but things are so erratic at the moment that I think we're all feeling as if we're on shaky ground right now. We need to be working together, Demetri. We need to know without a doubt that we are one strong unit, all doing our part. That way we are invincible."

Demetri buried his head in her neck, holding his woman tightly as he uttered another groan. He'd talk to Caleb later and make sure he knew that he hadn't deserted him. Mara's words made so much sense and he was thankful to have her by his side, helping to keep him reined in. "Thank you, beautiful."

"You're welcome, love," she whispered, running her hands through his hair. "Council business won't convene for a couple of hours. Didn't you have something you wanted to discuss with me?"

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