

Chapter 566

Memories of that day started to surface, and his eyes narrowed as he began to remember the sense of panic in the room. Reasa had been shouting a warning, terror in her voice. Something awful was happening, something that threatened everyone in the compound. He heard, again, Annie's calm words as she ordered Reasa to help him. The next thing he remembered was the euphoria of having his mate's mind linked with his, as she showed him how to weave a defence so strong he'd been more whole than he could ever remember being.

"The Praetorians..." He couldn't stop the words from tumbling out. He had to know...

Kothi leapt agilely from the tree, catching a neighbouring branch to find himself another perch. "Are your defences really that strong, Liam? Think before you speak. Take it from someone who knows the necessity of strong defences. If you are not one hundred percent sure of that answer, then don't ask questions you shouldn't right now. You nearly lost it when she rejected you." He jerked his head in the direction of Reasa. "Deal with one thing at a time."

It was hard to argue with him, but the unanswered question remained at the back of his mind. Someone would have to tell him one day soon. Maybe he would just head up to the Praetorian compound and find out himself. Kothi may doubt his mental shields, but testing the weave Reasa had taught him, they felt stronger than they had in a long time.

All his life everyone had protected him. How could he protect his mate if he couldn't do the most basic things for himself? Turning his gaze back to Reasa, he watched her sit at the dining table, her movements hesitant as she took her first bite of food prepared by her own hand. If she could start to adapt to the changes in her life, then it was time he did too.

"Don't even think about it, Liam. I swear I will shadow you everywhere, and at the first hint of you leaving the pack, I will either stop you myself or make sure Rafe does."

"When did you turn into a babysitter, Kothi?" Liam's tone was cooler than he'd ever used on one of his pack mates before. "First Pietro and now me? Better watch that, people will think you're going soft."

His jibe didn't instil the response he'd expected from the most unpredictable of them all. Instead of reacting aggressively, Kothari actually laughed, though it was devoid of humour. "There are things more dangerous than your mind games, Liam. Take care that your prodding doesn't awaken something which should be left undisturbed."

Liam regarded him calmly, his moment of pique over. He smiled at his friend before glancing back at Reasa, his eyes warm as they travelled over her face. "Such grandiose words. You enjoy your reputation don't you, Kothi? You cultivate it to the point that no one can see what's real and what's a façade. Sometimes I think you underestimate me more than everyone else does. You forget that I'm an empath, that I know everyone's emotional makeup in this compound."

His gaze once more fell on his friend, his eyes piercing the hidden darkness behind the glasses. For a moment, Liam's brown eyes blazed with a deep burnt-orange glow that brought a scowl to Kothari's face, before they softened back to their usual deep brown. "Despite your ways, and your isolation, there isn't a person in this pack who would do more to protect it than you, Kothari. You would harm yourself before you would let harm come to our pack. I know it and you know it. You can't hide from me."

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Kothi dropped down a few branches, his breath coming out on a loud hiss. "Don't let overconfidence be your downfall, Liam. Don't believe you know even a tenth of what goes on in my mind. If you knew the truth of it, you wouldn't be spewing the current bullshit coming out of your mouth."

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He reached the ground, his head tilting up to survey his friend. "Stay out of my head, Liam. You don't ever want to be in there. Mark my words on that." Spinning on his heel, he headed away from the compound in a blur of supernatural speed.

Liam watched him leave, his expression thoughtful. There was no doubt in his mind that Kothari was damaged. They were all damaged in their own way, some more so than others. It was an affliction brought on by having too much power, of being so different that no one could really understand them, not unless they too, were Vârcolac. Rayne had tried her best, but she hadn't been able to divide herself equally among all the children who were born so closely together. Then along came Kothari, and her attention had been diverted.

Something had happened during his birth that they weren't privy to. Rafe probably knew, and most likely Annie and Caleb too. He'd been too young to really remember what had happened, but he remembered enough that Rayne and Gard had been absent from the pack for a few weeks and the emotional mood from the adults had been sombre and full of concern. It hadn't been apparent to most people, but he had known, and kept his silence. When Rayne and Gard had returned with their son, everyone had been all smiles and the concern had dampened down to a manageable level.

Whatever had happened must have been serious, but there was no mistaking the love Kothi's parents had for him. His friend thought he hid his issues so well, and maybe he did for the most part by his isolationism, but he was never truly as alone as he thought he was. Liam always kept a loose track on him when he disappeared. He couldn't focus too tightly because Kothi's emotions went off the scale at times and caused too much pain, but he tried his best to monitor his friend in case he needed help.

For the moment, Kothi was doing okay, so despite his cryptic statements, Liam wasn't concerned. His gaze was fixated on his mate and his aunt as they sat together at the dining table, his senses being teased by the sound of approaching footsteps. Sighing, he reluctantly dragged his gaze away from Reasa, turning his head to watch Dayton and Elina walking home. Dayton's arm was thrown casually across his daughter's shoulders and he was laughing as he murmured something to her.

Liam smiled as he always did when his beautiful cousin was near. It was a smile tinged with sadness as he watched her expressionless face. All of her life Elina had given everything to him until she was so closed down emotionally that even her father, whom she adored, couldn't raise a smile to her lips. Whatever he was saying did amuse her though, because her body language was relaxed against his side. While her facial expressions remained unchanged, someone who knew Elina well could tell her responses by how she reacted on an instinctual level.

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Her attention suddenly shifted as she glanced up at him and raised an eyebrow. Sighing again, Liam dropped down from the tree to greet them, a rueful smile on his face.

"There's a word for that, Liam. Voyeurism I believe it is. Are you spying on my mate?" Dayton's tone was full of mischief; his eyes twinkling with laughter, letting him know that he wasn't serious.

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