

## Chapter 579

"Andrei and Alexei are Ancients too. They could perform that function if the remainder of the Council granted them leave in that capacity." Stephan's counterpoint was accurate, but Demetri's expression remained unchanged.

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"I'm staying." His tone brooked no argument and caused a murmur of sound from most of the other council members.

"Demetri, no one will harm your wife here." Stephan tried once more to be the voice of reason, but to no avail.

"I'm staying." This time there was a hint of threat in Demetri's voice, enough that Mara raised an eyebrow at him.

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"Fine, sit over there and try not to interfere," she laughed softly, deliberately couching her tone into that of a long-suffering female that often indulged her overprotective husband. The few who knew her well also knew that wasn't the case, but those vampires who still embraced the old ways would see a Youngling having to deal with her Ancient mate. They could relate to that, and would therefore be less inclined to object too strenuously.

Giving her a pointed look, Demetri strode over to the special seating area reserved for the Ancients, his gaze meeting Alexei and Andrei's briefly. They knew with that simple glance that he was placing Mara's safety firmly in their hands. He was a fraction of a second away from his wife, but they were closer and would be her first line of defence, if required. There were few he would cede that kind of control to; the twins ranked as two of those chosen few. Not that he expected any harm to come to Mara, but what was about to be revealed could ignite a spark no one might anticipate.

Mara stepped up to the dais and shook her head as Alexei and Andrei seated her between them. Alexei sat closest to Demetri with Andrei on her other side. Beside Andrei, Emily sat down, her brown hair pulled up into a ponytail. She shot Mara a quick smile, her green eyes laced with humour because she could relate to her frustration at being overprotected. Stephan sat down beside Emily, as was his usual place during Council meetings. She was as boxed in as Mara was by the males. It bordered on the ridiculous, yet both of them found it comforting, none-the less.

Cristoph took his seat next to Stephan and then there was a notable pause, as those still standing appeared unsure about how they wished to proceed. The more traditional Council members still clung to the old ways, where seating arrangements always set precedence and was a show of importance. Those who sat closely to the pack-aligned vampires could be viewed as declaring their allegiance to the Were treaty and Caleb.

Not all of them agreed with the treaty, but abided by it simply because it was now law. Demetri's stubborn refusal to leave insinuated that the current topic of discussion would likely, once again, centre around one of the packs. Those who adamantly opposed the treaty didn't wish to be close to the other side of the table.

As the pause lengthened, one of the males snorted loudly, casting a dirty look at the others. "Just sit down."©Ŵw.n0rεLwó(r)Ml.cóm

William snorted again, his muddy green eyes hard as he sat down beside Cristoph. Mara tried to keep her lips from twitching. She liked William, even though he didn't go out of his way to be particularly nice to her in any fashion. He was one of the younger Council members, though not the youngest. That honour fell to her, with Emily running a close second.

William was an Elder, around the two hundred years old mark. He was a bit of an enigma, with dark hair cut short in an approximation of a human Marine's style. He wasn't tall like the other males either, standing around about five foot ten; however, his lack of height did nothing to diminish the aura of danger that surrounded him. The only males Mara had seen with wider shoulders and thicker arms were Nors and Liam. William was built for power, pure and simple, and yet, there was an overt sexiness about him that most females noticed instantly.

As if on cue, Corinne sat beside William as Mara had expected. One couldn't help but notice her curves; her body was exquisitely rounded and womanly, as opposed to the slenderness of the other females sitting at the table. The buxom brunette was another mystery on the Council; she was clearly older than William, but chose always to follow his lead. It wasn't that she was weak or easily malleable, because she could be vicious when riled, but there was something about William that appeared to attract the other woman. Where he went, she followed and, he didn't seem to mind her presence. What man wouldn't love to have such a beautiful woman, small in height, with luxurious reddish-brown hair and light blue eyes as a companion?

That left only the final four more conventional vampires to take their places. Sasha sat next, her prematurely white hair a stark contrast against the bronze of her skin. It was plaited down her back, though loose strands had managed to escape and frame her face; a face that was austere in its beauty, with dark blue eyes that appeared almost black in some lights. Mara wasn't sure how old Sasha was, but she suspected the other woman had to be past her fifth century at least.

Piers moved to take his place beside Sasha, his tall frame making him seem even larger beside the smaller woman. His blond hair was just shy of being called light brown; his grey eyes were sharp as they scanned the room taking everything in. He was another Elder who was over the five century mark; rumour had it he was closer to seven hundred years old.

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Lenore took her seat next, disapproval etched on her exquisite face as she tossed her blue-black hair over her shoulder with a flick of her wrist. She was another of the younger members of the Council, similar in age to William; however, it was surprising, given her age, that she chose to adopt such an orthodox stance. Cold blue eyes stared straight ahead, her body rigid with displeasure.

Finally, Claude completed the Council, sliding in beside Lenore with more grace than some of the females present. Mara liked Claude, despite the fact he was often on the opposing end of any issue requiring a vote. He was beautiful and elegant, harking back to days of old when males wanted their good looks to rival the beauty of females. His reddish-blond hair was always immaculate, his green eyes clear and sparkling, with perfect long thick lashes that a woman would die to have. Away from the Council chambers, Claude was fun and full of laughter; he was an outrageous flirt with both men and women. In chambers, he was one of the most dogmatic members, fierce in his opinions that any deviation from their time-honoured traditions was wrong and should be avoided

"Half an hour to sit down? It's a wonder the Council ever gets around to making any decisions." Demetri grumbled from the sidelines.

"Demetri..." Mara's tone was threaded with rebuke, but also held the tiniest of pleas, which only her husband and the twins would pick up.

"I'm just saying we don't have all day here."