

Chapter 580

"As you're not supposed to be here at all, please feel free to leave at any time you wish," Stephan countered in a neutral tone, drawing a pointed look from the Ancient. When Demetri held his peace, the Elder turned to Mara. "You called the meeting, Mara. Can you please enlighten the rest of us as to why we needed an emergency meeting? I presume the twins are already aware?" There was more than a hint at a dig in his tone, and a soft warning growl escaped Andrei's lips.

Feigning innocence, Stephan gave a small shrug of his shoulders. "Am I incorrect, Andrei?"

"No, Stephan, you are not, but there is no need to be an ass about it. This matter was initially pack related, however as it affects vampires too, it is being brought to the Council. I am more than certain that should important information come to certain members of the Council's attention, they would not be in a hurry to inform the pack unless they had no other option."

The other man conceded the point, knowing he couldn't deny the truth of his friend's words. "Mara, please continue."

"Is it Stephan's turn to be chairperson? He's sure doing all the leading here." Demetri grumbled, as Mara rose from her seat and moved over to him.

"Actually yes, we do alternate which vampire directs the meetings in an attempt retain some semblance of order, and you're not helping things with your little asides. Be quiet or I'll have you removed. The Council is in session, Demetri." She winked at him as she berated him, her stance preventing the others from seeing.

Demetri had agreed beforehand to help strengthen her personal position on the Council. Too many of them saw her only as the Youngling wife of a very powerful Ancient. A quarter of century hadn't changed that perception much, so they had agreed upon a strategy to amend that. Allowing the Council to witness Mara put Demetri in his place was the option they had chosen and now seemed as good a time as any.

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Her husband played his part well, growling at her words, appearing as if to argue back before subsiding with his arms crossed and a scowl on his face. Trying not to laugh at his petulant expression, Mara schooled her features into a neutral expression and turned to face the Council.

"We are on the brink of a Civil War."

For a moment, there was stunned silence; then everyone started talking at once, with the exception of the twins who remained quiet, carefully monitoring everyone's reactions with their keen senses.

"Nonsense," Claude responded, frowning darkly at her.

"Preposterous," Sasha agreed, waving a hand in disdain. "The new Council has done away with any attempt at civil war. We have the Ancient Council now to assist, should we become deadlocked. You are in error, Youngling."

There were more words of disagreement, upset voices tumbling over one another until Stephan held up a hand for silence. It took a moment for everyone to become quiet but eventually the room calmed down. "Explain, Mara."

She nodded her head to him in thanks and looked slowly at each Council member in turn, before speaking again. "Yes, Caleb set in place the tools to keep peace here in Northern America, but at the time we were so busy looking inward, we did not consider what was out there." She waved her hand in the air, indicating a distant horizon.*www.novelworld.com*

"The threat is not from our side of the pond, my colleagues. The threat is from Europe."

Again, the room erupted, William standing up and leaning on the table. "The Europeans are less than animals. What threat can they hold against us? We could march in there and take them out without even blinking." Thick muscles bulged in his upper arms, a slow build-up of rage in the depths of his eyes. His harsh words quieted the remaining vampires, as they waited for her response.

Mara wanted to reach out and shake them all. In their arrogance, they believed nothing could touch them. They really thought all they needed to do was march over to Europe in force, and everyone would capitulate to their superiority. She fervently hoped she never turned into them. "Those animals have a toxin, William, something so deadly that it breaks down the regenerative properties in our D.N.A. This poison can not only be ingested, it can be placed in projectiles such as bullets. It's fast acting and nothing short of a full bloodletting and transfusion will save the infected vampire's life."

"Impossible," Lenore breathed out into the stunned silence following Mara's words.

"No," Demetri said quietly, rising to come and stand beside his wife. "You all wanted to know why I insisted on being present. Well, this is the reason why; I have witnessed this toxin at work."

It was a testament to just how shocked the Council were that they remained silent, their pensive expressions locked with the Ancient.

"We will hear your witness," Stephan said formally and Mara moved back to her place at the dais.

"A quarter of a century ago there was an attack on the Armand-Hanlon pack by a handful of European vampires who, apparently, disagreed with the matings between vampires and Weres. It was averted; however, Caleb was concerned by the amount of open aggression on display so he sent one of our own vampires over to see what intelligence could be gathered about the attack and who might be behind it." Demetri paused and let his gaze slowly roam over each Council member to ensure he had their complete attention.

"We sent Pietro de la Rios, one we trusted above others, and he spent the last twenty-five years trying to determine the threat. He succeeded, but in doing so, he placed himself in direct danger, and his cover was blown. By the time I arrived, he had already been poisoned and tortured. I found him dying in a putrid mess of blackened, rotten skin. The only way to save his life was to remove all his blood and use humans to replenish him, along with Elder and my own Ancient blood. If I had been but a few minutes later..."

"Outrageous," Corrine whispered, fury dancing in her eyes.

"Yes, it is outrageous, Corrine," Demetri agreed, his eyes glacial. "It's outrageous that our European brethren would develop a poison that can kill us. It's outrageous that they have such little fear of us that they would try to murder one of our own. It's outrageous that they seek to harm those under our protection."*www.novelworld.com*

William's head swung to the left to look at the twins and Mara. The Romanovs expressions were hard and unyielding; Mara's expression echoed theirs. His keen mind rapidly filled in the blanks even as his head swung back to the Ancient. "They are targeting the offspring of the mixed matings?"

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