

Chapter 581

"They can fucking try," Andrei ground out. Fury blazed from his eyes as he rose and stalked around the dais. "Pietro is currently recovering in my home on pack lands. His skin is scarred, his regenerative abilities so compromised, they need additional time to strengthen. Even when saved from this powerful toxin, we are still vulnerable for a time afterwards. Any of our enemies could take us out easily."

"There has already been a further attempt on the Vârcolac," Mara added in a quiet voice. "A European vampire slipped through our defences and shot one of them with a bullet laced with the toxin. That's how we know it can be used in a projectile. The Vârcolac appear to be immune to the poison, as are the Weres."

Stephan rose slowly, glaring at Andrei and Demetri in front of him. "Let me get this straight. There has been an attack on one of our own, and an attack on the pack and this is the first we are hearing about it? This poison is directly targeted to vampire D.N.A and you have kept this from us until now?" His voice was cold and deadly, his body rigid with fury. The other Council members had a similar posture, though it was clear they were leaving it up to their elected chairperson to voice their thoughts.

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Demetri sighed loudly, his eyes narrowing in displeasure. "All this has happened in the last week, Stephan. We were not deliberately keeping the Council in the dark. Caleb intended to brief the Council after we got Pietro safely home; however, we hadn't anticipated the attack on Liam and having to deal with the fallout from that. This is the first opportunity we've had to brief the Council. If you recall correctly, it's taken us all day just to get this emergency meeting set up, because the rest of you had more important things to do than attend. If we could have briefed you earlier, we would have."

"Squabbling over timing doesn't help us," Mara interjected, seeing the signs of her husband's impending explosion and knowing it wouldn't help matters if he did lost his temper. "The point is the Council now knows of the threat and we need to come up with a strategy on how to combat it."

"Take them all out," William growled.

"How do we do that? Are you thinking of going over there to do it personally, William? You must be forgetting you're a vampire and this toxin will kill you." Corinne's tone dripped derision and he turned to glare at her.

"And you may be forgetting who you're speaking to," he countered in an icy tone.

"Hardly, but sometimes you react first and think later. If the poison is deadly to us, then it's ridiculous to even consider sending vampires over to Europe, least of all one or more of the Council. If the Weres are immune, then perhaps consideration should be given to sending them over to deal with the problem." Corrine wasn't as biased against the wolves as some of the other Council members.

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"Seriously?" Alexei drawled the word out in a deceptively mild tone. "You think the wolves are going to descend on Europe en mass to take care of our problem because we ask them nicely?" He stood up, frowning at the rest of the seated vampires. "Most of you have been trying to wiggle out of our alliance with the wolves for decades, but now, when we're under threat, you want to use them as cannon fodder against the European vamps? Our venom is still toxic to any Were not mated to a vampire. They'd be massacred."

"Fine, Alexei's point is noted," Stephan sighed, holding up a hand to ward off any further discussion to do with the wolves. It would only end up in an argument they didn't have time to get into. "I presume you have some kind of solution in mind?" His question was directed at Demetri.

"Send the hybrids," Cristoph suggested which immediately drew another hiss from Alexei and a slow smile from Andrei.

Mara stifled a groan, as did Demetri. The shit was about to hit the fan as it always did when Andrei smiled one of his smiles.

"Your solution is to send one of my children into danger, Cristoph? One of Alexei's girls? How do you think that suggestion is going to work out?" Andrei's voice was so cold, his tone belying the smile still gracing his lips.

"No, that wasn't what I meant, Andrei. I was merely pointing out that a hybrid would be the better choice..." Cristoph trailed off and gave an audible gulp as the more volatile Romanov twin continued to stare him down.

"What about Rayne and Gard?" There was a long hush in the room as Emily spoke for the first time. All eyes swivelled to look at her and she blinked in surprise, before stiffening her back and wiping her expression clear.

When there had been doubts raised after the children were born, Rayne had decided it was time to let the Council know that she was the first Vârcolac. The Council had expressed concerns about the hybrids and had wanted them to be taken into vampire custody. For the first time, there had been a landslide vote against the pack-aligned Council members, pushing the Council to invoke the constitutional guidelines the Vampire Nation was governed by. If Caleb had vetoed it, there would have been a chance of civil war again and if he had agreed to it, the packs would have gone to war.
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The plausible solution at the time was for Rayne to disclose her Vârcolac heritage to the Council. Gard also chose to reveal his presence, and to offer up the tiniest hint of his background. Until then, the most the Council knew about him was that he was another Ancient, albeit a very old one. The knowledge that Rayne was Vârcolac and was a well-balanced individual made it all the more difficult to find issue with the hybrids. The fact that there was a mature adult who could offer assistance to the little ones was another benefit. After that, it had become easier to turn the Council back from the path it had been headed down.

Now, they were once more focused on Gard and Rayne, but this time as a tool, which would directly benefit the vampires. When no one spoke up immediately following Emily's suggestion, Stephan raised an eyebrow in Demetri's direction. "Would they be willing to go to Europe?"

Rei snorted and walked back to his chair, sharing a glance with his brother who also retook his seat. "So, now you're asking instead of telling us what you want."

"Clearly Cristoph's choice of wording wasn't ideal, Andrei, but the Council is fully aware that none of the children will be permitted to go to Europe," Mara interjected in a reasonable tone. "Gard and Rayne are another matter though. I'm sure if we approach them with our concerns they will consider being our eyes and ears over there. They have Kothari's safety, along with everyone else's to think about."

"So, you will ask them, and update us on their decision?" Stephan pressed, trying not to show his relief that some of the tension was easing in the room.