

Chapter 587

"You know me too well," Cassia admitted with another grin. "I was looking for a breakfast basket." The speculative glance Lily gave her made her want to groan, but she managed to keep her features neutral.

"You know me too well," Cessie admitted with another grin. "I was looking for a breakfast basket." The speculative glance Lily gave her made her want to groan, but she managed to keep her features neutral.

"Oh? Is there a special occasion?"

"None that I went to share right now," she countered, her gentle tone alleviating any possible sting from her words. Cessie was grateful that her cousin was so understanding; always treating lightly when it was clear she was a bit reluctant to share.

Although brimming with curiosity, Lily headed over to the main cooking area and began to make up a thermos of tea, placing it with two mugs into a wicker picnic basket. She added in a sampling of croissants and pastries, and took care to include all the necessary condiments, serving utensils, and some napkins. There was enough food for two, and Cessie didn't bother to correct the assumption that she wouldn't be alone to enjoy the picnic breakfast.

"Thanks, Lily." Cessie knew her cousin would know that she was equally thanking her for her discretion.

"You're welcome, Cess. You know I'm here if you need to talk about anything."

A brief smile flashed across her face as Cessie took the basket and gave Lily another hug. "You're a great cousin, and an even better friend," she whispered as she turned and headed out of the community hall.

Her gaze immediately turned to the house that currently contained the subject of her chaotic thoughts. Predictably, her pulse began to speed up, and she had to take a few deep breaths to contain it. Pietro would be able to hear her accelerated heartbeat, and she didn't want him to question why she was so nervous.

The curtains were open to Pietro's room, and her breath caught as she realized he was standing behind the glass looking down at her. Their eyes locked for a moment, and then she walked slowly past the house and set the basket down beside the tree that led to his window. He made her wait for an entire half hour, but eventually the window opened and she heard him slip down the tree.

"I told you to make an appointment the next time you wanted to see me."

It wasn't a promising start, but Cessie wasn't about to let his gruffness chase her away. "I waited thirty minutes, so I consider that making one."

He greeted her words with silence, so she turned to catch a glimpse of his expression. God, his eyes seemed to bore right into her with their intensity and it took all her self-control to keep her pulse steady. "I've decided to have my breakfast alongside the lake this morning. Seeing as it is technically outside of the compound's boundaries, I shall require an escort."

He growled low, as a trace of emotion crept across his face before his features smoothed out. "Ask one of the wolves."

"Most of them are asleep and those that aren't have tasks to perform. I'm hungry." Not giving him a chance to respond, Cessie headed into the trees with her basket in hand. It took him a fraction of a second to make up his mind, and then he fell into step beside her. She had known he would. Although he knew she didn't really need his protection, it was a moot point; he was a protector through and through, and therefore would always need to ensure her safety.

Appealing to his baser side had been a risk, but one she judged worth the risk. It could have reinforced his sense of failure over what had happened in Europe but Cessie had counted on him having an inner strength that he wasn't currently capable of recognizing. His easy capitulation pleased her wolf too, who appeared happy to have him by their side.

"Do you consider me to be foolish, Cessie?"

"Hardly, Pietro," she laughed, the melodic tone carefree and light-hearted. "You are very much like my father and my uncle Andrei, and I don't mean that in a bad way. It just makes it a bit easier for me to know how to get the desired reaction from you. Trust me, it certainly isn't indicative of your level of intelligence; you came with me because you wanted to, not because I manipulated you into it."

www.NoVELWor@cOM

"I told you to make an appointment the next time you wanted to see me."

It wasn't a promising start, but Cossio wasn't about to let his gruffness chase her away. "I waited thirty minutes, so I consider that making one."

He greeted her words with silence, so she turned to catch a glimpse of his expression. God, his eyes seemed to bore right into her with their intensity and it took all her self-control to keep her pulse steady. "I've decided to have my breakfast alongside the lake this morning. Seeing as it is technically outside of the compound's boundaries, I shall require an escort."

He growled low, as a trace of emotion crept across his face before his features smoothed out. "Ask one of the wolves."

wwW.NoVELWorm.cómm

"Most of them are asleep and those that aren't have tasks to perform. I'm hungry." Not giving him a chance to respond, Cossio headed into the trees with her basket in hand. It took him a fraction of a second to make up his mind, and then he fell into step beside her. She had known he would. Although he knew she didn't really need his protection, it was a moot point; he was a protector through and through, and therefore would always need to ensure her safety.

Appealing to his baser side had been a risk, but one she judged worth the risk. It could have reinforced his sense of failure over what had happened in Europe but Cossio had counted on him having an inner strength that he wasn't currently capable of recognizing. His easy capitulation pleased her wolf too, who appeared happy to have him by their side.

www.NoVELWORM.com

"Do you consider me to be foolish, Cossio?"

"Hardly, Pietro," she laughed, the melodic tone carefree and light-hearted. "You are very much like my father and my uncle Andrei, and I don't mean that in a bad way. It just makes it a bit easier for me to know how to get the desired reaction from you. Trust me, it certainly isn't indicative of your level of intelligence; you came with me because you wanted to, not because I manipulated you into it."

"I told you to make an appointment the next time you wanted to see me."

They walked in companionable silence for a while, Pietro appearing to be deep in thought. Cassia wondered what was running through his head. She could see his alert gaze sweeping the area. She knew he was listening to all the sounds around them as keenly as she was. What she didn't know was what was going through that complicated mind of his.

They walked in companionable silence for a while, Pietro appearing to be deep in thought. Cossio wondered what was running through his head. She could see his alert gaze sweeping the area. She knew he was listening to all the sounds around them as keenly as she was. What she didn't know was what was going through that complicated mind of his.

"Was it Loretto or Andrei?"

His question was so unexpected that she nearly jumped out of her skin when he broke the silence. There was no need to ask what he meant. "Loretto. She's concerned about your seclusion within the house. It isn't healthy, Pietro, and you know it too; otherwise you wouldn't have indulged me with your company."

Again, he chose not to reply and the silence lengthened until they reached the lake. Cossio had taken one of the less frequently used trails, knowing that the lake was a favorite haunt of quite a few of the Várcolac when they had something on their mind. She didn't want to choose a location where one of her friends might show up uninvited.

The stone path they had chosen led them to a flattened outcropping that suspended over the water's edge. The rocky ledge could seat four people rather comfortably and was one of her favorite places to relax. The large willow trees that were scattered around the bank's edge were so old that their sinewy limbs rose nearly eighty feet into the air. Their magnificent foliage created a peaceful canopy over the stony shelf. In the pale morning light, the play of shadows over the different textures, and the sound of the slight breeze rustling the leaves made it feel as if she were stepping into paradise.

"Beautiful," Pietro murmured. She glanced to the side to see him staring at her and not the breathtaking surroundings. Her heart fluttered and she felt her cheeks begin to redden and quickly looked away again to hide her reaction. It would be embarrassing if he thought she presumed he meant her, when it was really the surrounding area he was admiring.

WwW.NoVELWorm.com

They walked in companionable silence for a while, Pietro appearing to be deep in thought. Cassia wondered what was running through his head. She could see his alert gaze sweeping the area. She knew he was listening to all the sounds around them as keenly as she was. What she didn't know was what was going through that complicated mind of his.