

## Chapter 615

Demetri strode into the laboratory at the pack compound, easily carrying a small refrigerator in his hands. A young female wolf gaped at him with an open mouth, a flicker of fear on her face as he walked through the door. She was the only person in the lab and she looked like she was ready to run screaming out the room. He had to fight down the urge to growl in irritation.

"Where is Cassia or Mallen?"

The girl gaped at him, a shiver of fear running through her that was so strong, he could actually see her quake. Demetri took a deep breath and tried again. "This refrigerator has been without power for over an hour. The contents will spoil soon if they haven't already. It's imperative I get it to Cassia or Mallen as soon as possible."

"Plug it in over there, Demetri," Cassia said from behind him, and he turned his head to see her just arriving, pointing to a clear workspace at the back of the room. She gave him a wide smile, not the least intimidated by him, but then she was used to seeing him around her house when he visited with Alexei.

"Trish, why don't you take a break for a little while, go and get yourself some lunch. I can help Demetri." The young girl almost ran from the room, relief etched on her face as Cassia freed her from having to have any further dealings with the vampire.

The Vârcolac waited for her to leave before she quirked an eyebrow at her adopted uncle. "You could make a little more of an effort. You scared the poor girl witless and she's one of Mallen's more promising students. We really can't afford to lose her skills if she becomes too afraid to come to the lab. She has a strong maternal streak and needs a lot of support right now."

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The vampire had deposited the refrigerator where he was told and looked back at her as he plugged it in. "What? All I did was ask where either you or Mallen where."

"Demetri, you know fine well you scare the crap out of most people just by walking into a room," Cassia laughed, fondness in her tone. "What are you, six foot two? Factor in the whole big scary vampire thing you've got going on and you're likely to have half the teenagers running scared with one glance in their direction. It doesn't help that Pietro was here earlier looking like something out of a Dracula movie. He almost scared poor Trish to death."

Her droll tone had Demetri smiling and he crossed the room to give her a quick hug. "Speaking of Pietro, I'd have another shower before you head home, Cass. Unless you actually want Alexei to go ballistic?"

She flushed a deep shade of red, hugging him back for a moment before stepping away. "Thanks for the heads up." It was disconcerting to know the vampire was aware of her tryst with his friend so she quickly changed the subject before he could comment further. "Rafe said this is a viable sample of the toxin."

"I checked and it appears to still be good but what would I know for sure, I'm not a scientist. The door hasn't been opened since I unplugged it, so with luck, the temperature will have remained cold enough to keep it safe. I'd give it an hour or so to chill down again before having a look."

"I agree. Do you want to come over to the house for some lunch?" Cassia was taping a sign to the small unit warning against it being opened in case anyone came in while she was gone.

"Vampire here. I don't eat." The Ancient's laugh was a warm rich sound that only a very few ever got to hear. "However, I do want to know how Pietro is getting on so I'll accompany you while you eat. Will Cedar and Alexei be there?"

Cassia shook her head, preceding him out of the lab. "Mom's over at the Hanlon pack today keeping Jared abreast of everything that's been happening and taking a little time to catch up with family. Dad's out on some Council business. I think he was supposed to be meeting with Andrei and Mara." There was a questioning inflection in her voice as she spoke.

The vampire at her side smiled, and it was one of his more natural smiles, which usually graced his handsome face whenever his wife was around or mentioned. "Yeah, they're meeting with Stefan to keep an eye on how things are with the Council. At the last meeting everything appeared to be moving in the direction we want, however, it's not unknown for one or two of them to suddenly change their mind."

He followed her into her kitchen and watched as she began making coffee for him as well as a sandwich and some tea for herself. "So, what's going on with you and Pietro?"

"It's private, Demetri," Cassia choked out, startled by his bluntness.

"He's been through a lot, Cass. Playing around with a wolf might not be the best thing for him right now. I know for a fact Alexei going ape-shit at him sure as hell isn't a good thing."

She turned around to regard him, her expression surprised for a moment before a wide smile crossed her face. "And here was me thinking you were lecturing me about it for my protection. It's a pleasant surprise to find it the other way around."

Demetri's own serious expression lightened a bit, his lips twitching in a smile. "Yeah, it must be a bit of shock finding someone who has actually realised the Vârcolac are more than capable of taking care of themselves," he conceded, taking the proffered cup of coffee she handed him.Ww.n(◊)Ͻ©lw◊Rm.côm

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Cassia sat down at the table with her lunch, chewing thoughtfully before she spoke. "I'm not playing, Demetri. Pietro is safe with me. He may not know it yet, and apart from Dara, you're the only other person who does know, but he's mine."

She didn't know what she expected his reaction to be but the smile that crossed the Ancient vampire's face made Cassia suck in a deep breath and feel slightly envious of Mara that she got to witness that expression all the time. Not that she would trade Pietro in for anyone else but she was woman enough to acknowledge a handsome male when she saw one.

"He's your mate?" he asked, though they both knew it was a moot question so he didn't wait for her to answer. "If anything can help Pietro heal, it will be finally finding his mate after all these centuries. I couldn't have chosen a better match for him either. You are perfect for him."

For some reason Demetri's warm approval brought a lump to Cassia's throat and she had to swallow hard to clear it and return his smile with one that held a hint of sadness. "He's so angry, Demetri. Yes, he's going through the motions of moving on but the rage he's bottling up inside is destructive. I'm afraid of what he may do to Thereasa if he ever comes into contact with her."

The vampire's eyes darkened and a frown creased his forehead. "Do you think he'll hurt her?" While he had no love for the former vampire, he was astute enough to know the potential damage it could cause to the pack, not to mention the personal harm it could cause to both Liam and now Cassia, if his friend was to act out any thoughts of vengeance. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

"I think there is a very strong probability that he may," she whispered, fear in her eyes as she met his. "As long as he doesn't actually see her, he's able to keep in his mind that she's Liam's mate and as such, to protect Liam he has to leave her alone. If he were to see her though, I'm not so sure that he'd be able to hold onto that rationale."www.n(◊)Ͻ©lwórm.c0@

Demetri sat back in his chair, imagining the chaos that would ensue if Pietro lost it and hurt the woman. The chances of something similar to what happened up at the Praetorian compound occurring would be a high probability. Maybe it would be wiser to move Pietro from the Armand-Hanlon pack. He was sure Mara wouldn't mind if he suggested the vampire move in with them for a while.

"Have you talked to Rafe about it?" he eventually asked, all the while thinking about possible solutions to the problem.