

## Chapter 622

They managed to secure most of what they needed in a relatively short period of time. As the items weren't perishable, Cassia steered them towards one of the many cafés in the area. "Why don't we have a coffee before we head for the final few things?"

"Sounds good," Pietro answered, and they chose a table outside in the warm afternoon sunshine.

Sipping at a cool drink, Cassia let her gaze wander over the people passing them by as she listened to Pietro chatting with Trish. He was asking her about her studies and pack schedule, subtly giving praise and reinforcing the younger woman's self-esteem, as she recounted her daily schedule. The more she listened, the more content Cassia felt. It was almost as if they were a family. She could just see Pietro being this patient as he taught a child of theirs how to grow into an amazing, confident adult. It set a deep yearning inside her soul to know this sense of family, to make a child with this wonderful vampire who was her soul mate.

A scent teased her nostrils and her head turned in the direction of a group of five males who had just turned into the street. Barely a second after she moved her head, Pietro and Trish both turned as well.

"Do you know them, Cass?" There was a tremor in Trish's voice as she stared at the wolves walking towards them and the Vârcolac touched her hand lightly to soothe her. Pietro repositioned his chair at an angle to safely cover the girl as they drew nearer.

"No, but it's okay, Trish. We're in the centre of the city with thousands of humans surrounding us. Nothing's going to happen." Cassia spared a moment to glance at Pietro. "Do you recognise any of them?"

His expression was neutral, his eyes never leaving the wolves. "I'm sure I've seen one of them before," he answered; quietly enough they could hear him but not loud enough any nearby humans could. His gaze was fixated on the tallest of the five males.

Close-cropped dark-blond hair left the male's face wide open to perusal. It was a strong face, from the high sweep of his chiselled cheekbones to the hard line of his granite-like jaw. His skin was tanned a deep bronze, his aristocratic nose slightly crooked as if he'd been in a fight and the bone hadn't set quite properly. His jawline was peppered with a light stubble that, surprisingly, was a few shades darker than his natural hair colour.

Glacial pale green eyes swept over the milling people as he walked, intelligence blazing from deep within. As his gaze travelled over Cassia, the male paused for a moment, clearly recognising the group at the table for what they were. His companions appeared to sense his scrutiny and all eyes turned to the table. Their body language tensed as they recognised the vampire in the group, immediately turning defensive.

"Stay here," Cassia said, rising slowly.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" The words hissed out of Pietro's lips as he rose too and the strange wolves tense further.

"Sit down!" There was no mistaking the order in Cassia's voice, though her gaze never left the men who were now only a few feet away. "Keep close to Trish and be prepared to get her out of here if needed." Without waiting for his answer, she took the handful of steps to reach the strangers.

"Can we help you with anything?" Cassia addressed her question to the blond male. His bearing placed him as the leader of the group.

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He regarded her silently for a long moment before shaking his head. "Not that I'm aware know of."

His voice was deep and husky, and made her wolf sit up and pay attention. She was startled at the wolf's response, confusion roiling through her in an instant. Yes, the male was most definitely a dominant, and sexy as sin, but she had chosen her mate in Pietro. She shouldn't be having this kind of interested reaction to another male.

"You're far from home," she managed to respond coolly, acknowledging his clipped, British accent. "Are you visiting friends in the area?" Her words were couched in such a way that he would be aware she was letting him know that she knew they had no pack affiliations locally.

He acknowledged her point with a slight incrimination of his head, which showed off the tightly corded muscles in his neck. His T-shirt pulled at the movement, and she caught a glimpse of a tattoo that appeared to depict wolf fur flowing over his shoulders. His muscles and physique screamed soldier, and ratcheted up her defensive instincts.

"We're just passing through," he drawled, his gaze flickering to Pietro. "Is there a problem with that? I would have thought a city this size would be counted as neutral territory."

"Ordinarily it would be, however it is proper etiquette for visitors to check in with the locals," Cassia countered, unconsciously moving to place herself between her mate and the wolves. The strangers weren't immune to the vampire's venom however Pietro was still recovering his strength from Europe, and she had no idea if these males carried the Amort poison on them.*www.novelworm.com*

"We don't like the company the locals keep," the soldier answered, his gaze narrowed on Pietro.

She bristled further at his tone. "Then you'd better get used to it or go home," Cassia bit back, her blue eyes turning wintry as her stance turned more aggressive. "Things are done differently here. You know the old saying...when in Rome..."

"Cassia." Pietro moved a step forward and she held up her hand as the men took fighting stances.

"I strongly suggest you speak to your friends before things get out of hand here," she said in a low tone. She inclined her head in Pietro's direction. "His friends have an elite agency to deal with anything that may threaten the status quo. If that isn't concerning enough for you, I will add that my friends are just as capable of dealing with any exuberance too."

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There was no mistaking the implied threat. The five of them were there with no backup or pack support. If they were to do anything foolish, they would have not only the local packs but also the vampires to deal with.

"Fox?" For the first time one of the other wolves spoke, a shorter, squatter man with peppered brown hair. He was clearly older than the one named Fox and as much of a soldier, however his scent was less dominant. He was rewarded with a low growl and murderous stare from his leader.

Cassia quirked an eyebrow, a slow smile crossing her face. "Kind of makes my point for me, doesn't it...Fox."

"If you say so, Cassia."

She laughed then, she couldn't help it. There was just something about the wolf that made hers respond on a personal level. Yes, he was a stranger and as such, a potential threat to her pack, and yet, something told her that he wasn't a genuine threat. She couldn't say the same for the others with him, but as he was in charge, that nullified some of that concern.

"I'm not trying to hide who or what I am," she smiled, raising a hand in greeting as she caught sight of Jared Hanlon heading in their direction with her uncle and aunt, Brody and Willow Alexander at his side.

Fox glanced in that direction before snapping his fingers and motioning for his men to move on. He nodded in Cassia's direction. "Might see you around, Cassia." There was a hint of a promise in his words, which caused Pietro to hiss out an angry breath. He ignored the vampire, a half smile quirking his lips as he walked away.

"If you're going to stay in town, touch base with the locals, Fox, or they will come looking for you," she called after his retreating back. Without a backward glance, he melted into the crowd with his men, before Jared reached them.

"Everything okay?" The Hanlon Alpha asked, staring into the crowd.

Cassia gave her aunt and uncle a hug, smiling. "I think so. The one leading them appears to have his head screwed on right," she informed the Alpha. "They're uncertain because of who we ally ourselves with. I have told them to check in with either you or Rafe if they intend to stay in town for any length of time."

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