

## Chapter 623

Whatever Jared was thinking, he didn't appear to want to share it with them. His cobalt eyes scanned the crowd for a moment longer before he turned back to them. "If you've finished with your shopping, I'd suggest you head back to the pack, Cass. Can you let Rafe know I'll be in touch a bit later?"

Frowning at the open concern she could see on her family's faces, she nodded her agreement. The Hanlon pack had been around for more years than most people could remember, much longer than her own pack. For the three elder wolves to look so concerned made her feel suddenly antsy to get Trish and Pietro back to the safety of the pack.

"I can get someone else to pick up the last of our supplies. We'll head back now."

Saying their goodbyes, they grabbed their shopping bags and headed back towards the car park. Neither Trish nor Pietro spoke, and Cassia had to work to hold in a sigh. It was understandable for Trish, as the strange wolves would have frightened her. Pietro, on the other hand, was brimming with barely concealed rage that he was clearly trying to hide from the younger woman.

The incensed looks he kept shooting in Cassia's direction let her know that he wasn't pleased with her actions and would be having a word with her about it when they were alone. He was used to being the most dominant person and being the one to call all the shots. That hadn't been the case today and that must have been hard for him to take. She could understand his position if his anger was because of that, but it appeared to be directed personally against her.

She had no what she'd done to make him so angry with her but she was sure she would find out soon enough. Sighing, she climbed into the Jeep after stowing their purchases on the back seat. Starting the engine, she began the journey back to pack. Was she about to have her first fight with her mate? Strangely enough, her wolf was quite looking forward to the impending confrontation. It was still energised from the meeting with Fox and was looking forward to whatever her vampire was about to rein down on them...'

"Cassia..."

She knew it was too good to be true when she made it five steps away from the Jeep before Pietro called her name. For the fleetest of moments she thought she'd get away without having to talk to him until later, but he quickly put a dampener on that idea. Sighing, Cassia smiled at Trish and passed her bags to the girl.

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"Take them over to the lab. Tell Mallen I'll be there shortly." She watched the younger woman walk away before turning to face her mate. His expression wasn't very promising.

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"Pietro, I need to report in to Rafe or Aaron and then I need to get back to the lab. Some of my experiments will be completing soon. Can our talk wait until later?"

His scowl deepened and she sucked in a deep breath. How was it possible a male could look so sexy when he was in such a foul mood? Her wolf was practically prowling in anticipation watching the glorious vampire before them. It wanted to throw him down and bite him all over. It was also hoping he would do the same to them. It was downright criminal that her intelligence went flying out the window whenever Pietro was close.

"You want to leave me festering until later? That's your call, Niña."

The words were practically a growl and they sent a shiver down her spine. "Pietro, I'm not deliberately avoiding you. I have to report to my Alpha. Pack safety has to be the utmost priority to me. Surely you can understand that? I have to protect Trish and all the other vulnerable members of my pack."

For a long moment he regarded her with an intent stare, and then there was a slight loosening of the tension in his shoulders and he gave the barest of nods. "How long do you need?"

"Two hours maximum. I'll meet you at the lake."

When he nodded once more, she took that as a sign to leave and turned to resume her way over to Rafe's house. She really did have to report what she'd seen in town and pass on Jared's message. She'd made a couple of attempts to tease some conversation out of Pietro on the way home but he wouldn't be drawn. In the end she'd given up and decided waiting until they were alone was better. Trish was already shook up by the strange Weres in town as it was.

Heading inside the large house that was home to the Alpha and his family, as well as Aaron and his, she paused at Rafe's study door. She could scent that he wasn't alone and debated whether to interrupt him or not. Her experiments were due to complete though, so she didn't have time to hang around. Taking a deep breath she knocked on the door.

"Come in, Cassia," her Alpha called out loud enough so she could hear.

Turning the doorknob she entered to find Gard and Rayne sitting on the large sofa beneath the window with Rafe standing at the fireplace. WwW.n@reLwOr.M.c@

"How was the trip into town?" Rafe asked, giving her a smile. "Aaron said you took Trish and Pietro with you. Did it go okay?" It was clear he had no objections to her discussing events in front of the other senior pack members.

"We encountered a group of five strange wolves," she answered, moving to take a seat when her Alpha waved in the direction of one of the office chairs in front of his large desk. "They were clearly fighting men from the way they carried themselves. They spotted us practically straight away so I decided to approach them to try to find out why they hadn't checked in with the local packs."

"Was that wise?" Gard asked, a small frown crossing his face.

"I was stronger than any of them and I had Pietro with me to take care of Trish. They were highly unlikely to start anything with so many humans around." The Ancient's question gave her an inkling as to why Pietro was being so surly and she filed that away for later.

Turning her gaze to Rafe she saw some concern in his eyes too but he didn't vocalise it. He wasn't one to repeat a question that one of his senior pack members had already highlighted. "Did you find out anything?" he asked, his tone authoritative as it always was when dealing with pack matters.

Cassia shook her head. "Not really. The one who did the main talking is called Fox. They're clearly European by their accents and the level of distrust they have towards vampires. He intimated that they hadn't checked in with the packs because of who are friends are."

"What are European wolves doing over here?" Rayne asked, her expression concerned. "Could this be something to do with the threat from the European vampires or are they checking us out to see if we can be of some assistance to them? From what we know, the animosity between the two groups over there is pretty extreme."

"Extreme sounds such a tame word compared to what we've heard about the way the vampires react to all Weres over there," her mate commented. "It's downright genocide."

"Whatever is going on, maybe you can gather some intelligence about it while you're over there?" Rafe asked, his brow drawing down into a deep scowl. "I don't like having so many strange wolves in our neck of the woods. Proper etiquette is they should check in with the local packs, regardless if they're comfortable with our allies or not. Until I hear otherwise, I'm considering them potentially hostile."