

Chapter 625

Pietro paced restlessly beside the lake, making a conscious effort not to look at his watch. He didn't really need one, his innate ability to tell the time at any given moment was something he had always been able to do. He didn't need to look to know that she was late. Cassia had said two hours maximum and it was already closer to two and a half since they'd last spoken.

His annoyance was barely contained. While a part of him knew there had been no real danger in the meeting in the city, the part of him that was so used to being the dominant male couldn't reconcile the fact someone he cared about had deliberately put herself in danger...and he did care about Cassia...too much than was probably good for him. His heart had almost stopped when she'd walked over to the other males and calmly started telling them off without it appearing she was doing so.

He had been aware he still hadn't recovered enough to be of any real help to her if she'd needed it. All he had been good for was babysitting the younger wolf. Not that he had any real objections to protecting Trish, he would have done that anyway but that wasn't the point. Cassia ordering him to do it had rankled. She'd been letting him know that she considered him too weak to be of any real use and that sparked his temper like nothing else could. If he was so ineffective then why was she with him? Did she see him as some charity case...toss the poor wounded vampire a bone because he almost died?

That thought was the one that had his irritation at boiling point. He had no idea what was going on between them...but he did know he wasn't the kind of man who could ever accept being helpless and inferior to the woman in his life. If that was what Cassia Romanov thought then it would be better to end their dalliance right here and now and he would tell her that when she eventually arrived.

He was so busy scowling and pacing she was almost upon him before he realised she was there. Whirling around furiously, whatever he was about to say fell silent on his lips as his eyes hungrily searched her tired face. Cassia's curls had almost completely escaped the clip she'd tied them back with, and there were signs of fatigue in her pale blue eyes. There was apprehension in her gaze as she watched him warily and that just seemed wrong. He didn't like seeing that expression on her beautiful face. Was he really the cause of it?

Fighting down some of his irritation, Pietro held out a hand, pulling Cassia into a tight embrace when she accepted it with no hesitation. For a long moment he just held her, delighting in how she came to him so easily as if he were the one person in the world she wanted to be with. "You're late," he finally said, his tone rough but not too irritated.

"The experiments took longer than anticipated and then I had to analyse the results. I'm sorry I made you wait."

"Any luck?" He asked the question, hoping for some positive response. If they could find the antidote then the danger would be moot and no one else would have to endure what he had. He didn't wish that on his worst enemy...or maybe he would on his very worst enemy. He wasn't that good a man; the beast did live within him as it did all of his kind. Sometimes its need for justice would result in the cruellest of punishments. It was something he had lived with all his life and couldn't be changed.

Cassia made a strange sound in the back of her throat, which had him leaning back so he could look down into her face. The misery he saw there was like a kick in his gut. Her eyes were moist and he could see she was close to crying.

"I'm so sorry, Pietro. I really thought having some of the poison in liquid form would make detecting the missing ingredient so much easier but every test we've run has come up negative. Until we know what the plant extract is, we can't synthesise an antidote."

A tear escaped, rolling down one perfect cheek and he growled deeply, crushing her against him so tightly he was afraid he might hurt her. She was crying because she couldn't find a cure? When she looked so tired it was a wonder she could stand on her own two feet? It was criminal to hear the recriminations in her voice, as if she'd somehow let everyone down with her inability to make an antidote.

"Don't you dare," he hissed through clenched teeth, feeling her shake against him. His hand stroked down her back in long slow movements, soothing her as best he could. "Don't you ever apologise for working yourself to the point of exhaustion trying to help everyone, Cassia Romanov. No one could work any harder, try any harder than you are. You have nothing to apologise for."

"I want you to feel safe," she whispered in a shaky voice. "Oh Pietro, I need you to feel safe! Every part of me is pushing relentlessly to find this antidote so you'll never be hurt like that again. I forget to eat or sleep I'm trying so hard and nothing I do works. I keep failing!"

Despite the note of anguish in her voice, there was something about her words that tugged at his heart. He didn't want her to feel a failure on his behalf, but hearing that he was the reason she tried so hard, made his heart kick up a beat and his stomach tighten in a hard knot. She was doing this for him, because she cared about him. It was an exhilarating thought but also a concerning one. Only moments before he'd been wondering just what it was they had between them. The strength of her determination told him she felt as strongly about him as he was discovering he was feeling about her.

"You are not a failure, Niña," he sighed against her neck, giving in to the temptation to brush his lips against her delicate skin. Having her so close made him hungry for her. Having her mould herself against him and hold onto to him for comfort brought out his protective instincts. "You are the strongest, most beautiful woman I know. You will succeed in all you do, Cass. It will just take a little longer than you would like."

His words appeared to ground her or perhaps it was the way his lips were flowing against her skin or the way they were sliding sensually down to her collarbone nipping roughly at her fragile flesh. The urge to sink his fangs into her to taste her sweet essence was overpowering, but she was so tired he restrained himself. Pietro tried to remember what it was he'd felt the need to speak to her about earlier but whatever it was had flown right out of his head.

"That feels so good," Cassia sighed, rubbing against his taut muscles. "It feels so good to have someone I can come to, to tell my fears to. I know you're cross with me for earlier. I didn't mean to make you feel concern over my safety. I didn't mean to make you feel powerless, I swear I didn't."

He went to cut her off, realising he didn't want to have this conversation any more but she took a step back, sliding out of his arms to stare at him intently.ⓂⓌ.Ñ(ó)(v)êℓwσTⓂ.C(ó)Ⓜ

"What you perceived as a slight was in fact me placing my trust in you, Pietro. I knew the wolves weren't going to fight. You were aware of that deep in your own heart too. However, even though I knew it, I still erred on the side of caution. I don't think you truly understand what a pack is, what my pack means to me. That's through no fault of yours, this is your first time being closely associated with one. By giving Trish into your protection, that was me placing my trust in you to keep her safe. That was me acknowledging you as a protector of my pack."

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When she phrased it like that, it all made perfect sense to him. No, he didn't fully understand the pack structure he was living in. He'd been so angry for so long that his friends, people he valued so highly, could harbour the woman who'd been one of the architects of his torture within the same pack. As he gazed into Cassia's eyes, he could see the appeal there for him to understand just how important each and every pack member was to this beautiful woman; to all of the pack.

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Reasa was Liam's mate and therefore his very existence depended on the pack accepting her, protecting her. To do otherwise had the potential to devastate the pack as a whole. Now he could start to understand, maybe he would be able to resolve some of the fury that lived within his soul every time he thought of the former vampire. It wouldn't be easy, but he could try, for Cassia.

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