

Chapter 633

Alexei looked to Cedar for the answer, relieved when she shook her head. "I don't think so, Rafe. Let us spend some time with her as a family. If we need you, we'll let you know."

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The Alpha placed a hand on Cassia's head, leaning down to brush his lips against her cheek. "If you need us we are here for you." He said the words aloud and sent them down the Alpha link he shared with each pack member. There was no response from Cassia but he was certain she'd heard him. Straightening up, his concerned gaze met Alexei's and Cedar's. "Lacey will want to check in on her later."

"Lacey is welcome to visit anytime, as are you, Rafe. However, can we keep it to a minimum just now?" Cedar asked. "We don't want to overload Cassia with too many people around; not until she's had a chance to recover from today's events."

"Agreed. I'll have Aaron spread the word not to disturb you." Rafe nodded his head to Alexei, silently communicating that he wanted to speak with Cedar out of Cassia's earshot. The vampire continued on his way with his daughters, leaving his mate to discuss whatever their Alpha wanted to impart.

"Pietro left the pack a quarter of an hour ago," Rafe announced as soon as they disappeared into their family home. "I don't know if that's going to be a good thing or not for Cassia, but I thought it would be best if either you or Alexei broke the news to her."

Cedar's already concerned expression darkened further, her worried eyes turning towards her home. "Do you know where he went? If we can at least tell her that it may take some of the sting from knowing he's left."

"Andrei said Pietro will be staying at the Dive and taking over his responsibilities there from tonight, so he'll still be afforded some level of protection from the vampires that Andrei trusts while he recovers. Hopefully some time apart will show Pietro how much he misses Cassia. He is her mate, I take it?"

Cedar sighed and rubbed her hands across her face wearily. "It's certainly looking that way, though she did tell Dara that her wolf appeared to be undecided on the matter. I'm still reeling over that one, Rafe. I didn't think it was possible for a wolf to be confused."

"Neither did I," the Alpha frowned raking a hand through his hair, before giving his beta a reassuring hug. "I'll talk to Rayne before she leaves and have a word with Annie and Caleb too. Maybe there's something in their books that can explain it. We have to remember that the Vârcolac are not like purebred Weres or Vampires. What applies to the rest of us may not necessarily apply to them."

With another quick squeeze, Rafe released Cedar so she could go to her daughter. As she disappeared from view, he pulled out his cell and dialled Rayne's number. He needed to have a last word with Gard and Rayne before they headed to Europe anyway. They had to decide whether it was wise to leave Kothari on his own with just Dara checking in with him. Given the turn of events with Cassia, Dara may be otherwise distracted.

The Jeep made its way up the mountain, Elina behind the wheel with Liam and Reasa in the back. The second Jeep shadowed them closely, Dayton, Ben and AJ bringing up the rear. Rafe's sons were unaffected by their tussle with the vampire. Pietro hadn't hurt them much and they'd insisted they were fine to continue with the task their father had set them. It had been a proud Alpha who had clapped each son on his shoulder and sent him on his way.

Liam's emotions were mixed, his heart going out to Cassia as he felt her pain as they all did. He was strangely detached when he thought of Pietro and his actions. He felt some level of anger towards the vampire for trying to harm his mate and hurting his friends, but he could also understand what had driven Pietro to act as he had, and that took some of the edge from his anger.

They could all understand and that was probably why, despite what had happened, there wasn't an overabundance of hostility towards the vampire. Liam had heard some mutterings from the younger pack members as they were heading off, but wiser, calmer heads in the pack would work to subdue any antipathy towards Pietro and the vampires in general. Aaron would probably assign some intensive border patrols so the more hot-headed youngsters could blunt their anger. By the time they returned to the pack, the incident would have become just another story to tell on a balmy night sitting around a fire.

That left Liam with only one real emotion to ponder; his fear that his mate would have been hurt, and what he would have been prepared to do to prevent that ever happening. He was ashamed of the thoughts that had flooded his mind as Pietro struck out. All the gentleness that made him who he was evaporated on the spot, and the feral vampiric side of himself had taken dominance.

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He had considered killing Pietro to protect Thereasa. The thought had actually crossed his mind, his vampire urging him to reach out and take the other male's head. How could he even think such a thing? He was aware that Cassia was attached to the vampire, knew now that Pietro was her mate given her reaction to his rejection. His friend had placed his needs and the pack's before her own, and he had considered doing the worst thing a wolf could ever do to another pack member.

What kind of monster did that make him? How could his family, his friends, every single pack member protect him, protect Reasa for him, when he wasn't worth their efforts? This couldn't continue... things couldn't go on as they were. Cassia deserved her happiness with her mate and that would never happen as long as he and Reasa remained at the pack. There really wasn't any other option. They would have to leave the pack once they'd done all they could at the Praetorian Compound. There would never be a place for them there. Recent events proved that.

"We won't allow it." Elina's cool words broke the oppressive silence in the car.

"You won't have a choice." Liam wasn't surprised that his cousin could guess at what he was thinking. She always seemed to know what was going on inside his head; she'd lived in it for long enough.

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"What?" Reasa didn't look at him, her gaze remaining fixed ahead.

"Liam is coming to the conclusion that you will both be leaving the pack. I am just disabusing him of it."

Reasa's gaze turned to the man at her side and for a second she almost smiled at the stubborn expression she saw on his face. Once more she was struck by the strong familial bond between the cousins, and even if she hadn't been aware of their history from walking through Liam's memory, she would still have sensed their strong attachment. ©ww.novélw®©m.C0m