

Chapter 640

"Kothi, are you sure you'll be fine here on your own? Wouldn't you rather stay with someone for some company?"

Kothari searched his mother's face, seeing the tell-tail signs of concern that was never far when she looked at him. She tried to hide it from him, but he was adept at seeing through most subterfuge. That expression infuriated the monster that lived within him, but it also broke the heart of the little boy who craved his mother's love.

This morning it was the boy who held dominance, and the much softer side of his personality came forth, a side that only his parents ever witnessed. Giving his mother a tight hug, he pushed down his inner demon so he could savour the blissful moment. It wouldn't last, it never did, but he would take each precious moment when he could. "I'll be fine, Mother. You don't need to worry about me. Don't go to Europe looking back and worrying. You need all your attention on your task there."

In truth, he was livid that Rafe was sending his parents away. He knew if he asked them not to go, they would stay. However, he also knew he couldn't ask that of them. Somebody had to go to Europe, it was the only way to protect the pack. Logically he understood that but emotionally he wasn't ready for his parents to be thrust into the heart of the enemy. If anything happened to them...he was afraid of what his monster would do.

"We'll be fine, son," Gard said, entering the living room and setting down the packed cases he was carrying. "We haven't reached this age without knowing how to take care of ourselves. The most important thing is you listen to Rafe at all times and do what he says. If my memory serves me correctly, weren't you supposed to be up at the Praetorian Compound as an extra guard?"

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Kothari tried not to bristle at the subtle rebuke in his father's voice. He was supposed to be up at the other compound. He hadn't wanted to leave until he'd had a chance to say goodbye to his parents though. Surely his father understood that? "I'm heading up there shortly. I just wanted to say goodbye." His tone was rebellious and only served to have his mother tightening her hold on him.

"We understand that," Gard answered, a resigned sigh in his words. His son always bristled against any kind of authority, even that of his parents. It was concerning and something they hadn't managed to correct no matter what parenting techniques they'd used over the years. "It would be best if you got yourself up there now. We'll be on our way soon." He took the sting from his words by giving his son a warm hug.

After a long pause, Kothari nodded his head and turned to leave the room. "Be safe."

"I'm worried about leaving him," Rayne said, stepping into Gard's embrace as their son disappeared. It would be the first time Kothari would be alone without his support system and it was hard for her as a mother to leave him.

"He's a grown man, Sarayne. There has to come a day when he needs to discover who he is and fend for himself. He isn't completely alone anyway. He has the pack." Gard's words made sense but she could hear his own concern. Only time would tell just how well Kothari fared left to his own devices.

Shaking off the sensation of doom that threatened to overwhelm her, Rayne smiled up at her mate, leaning in for a long slow kiss to settle her foreboding. "Did Rafe get you?" she asked when Gard let her up for breath. When Rafe had visited earlier to ask about any abnormalities in the Vârcolac mating instincts, her mate had been visiting Rhianna and Caleb to get any last minute instructions they might have had.

"He did though I probably couldn't tell him anymore than you could."

Rayne had been quite flummoxed by the question of whether the animal part of a Vârcolac could be indecisive over the mating pull. She had known that Gard was her mate quite soon into their relationship though it had frightened and confused her a bit at the start. However, that had been the woman's dilemma...not her panther. She could give no clear reason of why Cassia was experiencing indecision from her wolf, though from the girl's reaction to Pietro's rejection, it appeared the wolf had made up its mind.

"It is an interesting development," Gard continued, releasing her from his arms, though looping one around her shoulders. "But not one that we can influence in any way. Caleb had arranged for his friend Joshua to meet us in Scotland. He thought it would be best if we start where Pietro was found and see if we can track backwards to the source of the poison. He has also set another friend travelling to Romania to see if they can turn up any folklore about plants with unusual properties. He didn't say much about that friend but did say they would know how to contact us should they unearth something."www.novelworm.com

Rayne cuddled closer to his warmth for another moment before she straightened and moved to pick up her case. "I guess we should get this show on the road then."

Gard followed her, retrieving his case and casting one final glance around their home. He was worried for Kothi and equally worried about what they might find when they reached Europe. One thing he was certain of though, nothing would happen to Rayne while he was alive. He'd let her down once before, many centuries ago, and he would never allow that to happen again. Looping his arm around his mate once more, they set off for their car and the trip to the airport.

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"Cassia?" The sound of her father's voice seeped through her sleepy mind, pulling her from the endless nightmare of Pietro's harsh words. She didn't want to wake up, and yet, staying asleep wasn't doing her any good either so she forced her swollen eyes to open. Her father was sitting on the edge of her bed, his brown eyes so full of concern that for a moment she thought she'd start weeping again.

She could remember bits and pieces of the preceding day after Pietro had gone, enough to know that she hadn't been alone all through the night. If Dara hadn't been lying beside her, then her mother had, and laterally her father. They had held her as she wept, surrounding her with so much love both physically and mentally that she'd finally fallen into a sleep full of nightmares.

Cassia was exhausted but she hadn't gone rogue. Perhaps the Alexander family had a deep layer of strength that protected them when they lost their mates? Her Uncle Dayton had survived the loss of his first mate. Perhaps Cassia would be able to endure her loss too, because Pietro had been certain in his convictions. He wouldn't forgive what he saw as her betrayal.

More tears came unbidden and she felt her father's arms wrap around her as he rocked her gently. "Let it out, sweetheart. I know it hurts but let it out so it doesn't fester inside you. We are here and always will be. We will love and protect you, my beautiful daughter."

The deep love in his words, the hidden tenderness that lived within her father's hard exterior, was so overwhelming her sobs became louder as she clung on for dear life. She was floundering, drowning; she didn't know how to stop of the tears. Her heart ached so badly she was sure it was going to burst and there was nothing she could do to prevent it.

"Daddy..."Cassia couldn't get any more words out, just that one word so full of anguish she could feel his tears against her neck as he continued to rock her.

"I know, sweetheart. I know."www.Novelworm.com

Cassia cried herself into another restless slumber, waking once more to find her father still beside her bed only this time he was sitting in a chair, his head resting on the cover as he slept. He looked so exhausted that for the first time since Pietro had left she felt an emotion other than misery. She felt ashamed.

Her entire family were suffering because of her weakness. They were probably terrified that they would lose her and she was doing nothing to dissuade them of that. Self-loathing rose up deep inside her and her shame escalated as she imagined what they must be feeling. How could she subject them to that fear? How could she be so weak?

"I'm sorry," she whispered, reaching out to touch her father's golden hair with a shaky hand. His eyes opened instantly, and he blinked sleepily for a moment before his vision cleared and he took her hand in his.

"Never be sorry for needing us, Cass. We are family and we will always be here," he whispered back, gently squeezing her hand to reassure her of that.