

## Chapter 641

She didn't deserve them, not after what she must have put them through in the last twenty four hours. She would show them how strong she was. She would take that awful expression of fear from her father's eyes. "I guess I needed a timeout there," she managed with a shaky half-smile.

"I guess you did," he smiled back stroking a hand tenderly against her tangled curls. His expression turned grave and a dark scowl crossed his face. "Do I need to be having a chat with Pietro?"

Instant fear suffused her at his words. She could imagine just what kind of chat her father was talking about and that was something she didn't want to see happen. Pietro had his reasons for how he was feeling. He had suffered enough without being punished for being justifiably angry about things. "No, please don't, Dad. This is between us. We need to work things out ourselves."

Cassia expected him to argue more but instead his expression cleared and he shot her a rueful smile. "Your mother's been telling me the same thing for hours. Only she hasn't been as polite about it." The open amusement in his eyes was a good indicator of just how vocal her mother had been on the topic. Her father always got that expression of love and admiration when his mate put her foot down about things.

"She's right, Dad. Pietro has no idea that my wolf is claiming him. I didn't tell him because at first my wolf was undecided and also I wanted to give him some time to heal. It's not his fault my stupid animal has decided to overreact to his leaving." Cassia was beginning to feel stronger the more she rationalised things in her mind. Saying the words out aloud appeared to settle her wolf down a lot, its anxiety levels decreasing sharply.

Alexei pondered her words for a moment and then acquiesced. He had to concede that his daughter was the best person to know what was happening and how best to resolve things. It didn't stop him wishing he could take some of her burden as his own, but he knew he had to leave it up to Cassia. "So, your wolf is certain that he's your mate now? Dara told us that it was undecided before."

Forcing herself into a sitting position, Cassia nodded. "I think this little episode has hammered the point home," she sighed, scrubbing a hand tiredly over her face. She could do with some restful sleep but that didn't appear an option at the moment.

"What are you going to do? You did hear your mother when she explained last night that Pietro has left the pack?"

Cassia nodded again, muffling the half sob that threatened to escape. "Yes, he's gone to The Dive for now," she sighed, working to build her defences as she thought through the issue. "For now, I'm going to get up and have a shower and some breakfast. I'll decide what I'm going to do after that. Maybe all he needs is a little time to feel the effects of the mating pull. I'm not really sure, Dad. I just know that I need to get out of this bed and stop feeling sorry for myself."

Alexei couldn't have felt any prouder of his beautiful child. He was proud of all his girls; they were each amazing in their own ways. He loved Cedar so deeply only death would ever separate their link. His daughters...he cherished them as an extension of his and Cedar's souls. Balancing his own feral nature when one of them was hurting wasn't easy but he tried his damndest to be the kind of man they could love and respect.

It was frightening to realise his girls had grown up so quickly. Oh, he was aware they followed their mother and the demands of their animal halves. He wasn't that naive that he wasn't aware of their dalliances within the pack. Still, mating was something so very different...and mating to one of his oldest friends? It took him a moment to process that thought before he burst out laughing, startling Cassia.

"What?" Her quizzical expression made him laugh louder.

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"I was just remembering the hard time I gave your Uncle Andrei over his reaction to Lily mating with one of our oldest friends. I'm only now realising the boot is on the other foot. He's going to have a field day getting payback."

The subtle way her father gave his approval of her choice of mate wasn't lost on Cassia. Her eyes sparkled as she giggled at his words and she couldn't resist the urge to throw herself into his arms in a tight embrace. "Thank you, Dad." She didn't need to tell him what she was thanking him for.

"You're welcome, sweetheart. Just be happy. That's all I've ever wanted for my girls."