

Chapter 648

"Demetri and I swept the area before we entered the building," Joshua supplied, not making any effort to get out. It was more than obvious that Gard viewed him as little more than a glorified chauffeur. It rankled considering they were on his patch but Caleb had asked him to give them what they wanted so he would overlook the slight.

"Knowing Demetri I'm sure you did an excellent job taking into consideration the time constraints you had," Rayne answered, giving him a brief smile before narrowing her eyes at her mate. "With Pietro's life no longer hanging in the balance we'll be able to perform a longer, more leisurely sweep."

Gard returned her gaze, unconcerned, though she could see in his eyes that he'd detected the subtle rebuke she was giving him. It was just like her mate to ignore the pleasantries when he was in full Guardian mode. In his mind, he wasn't here to make friends. He was here to find out who was a threat to his family and friends. Still, a little bit of common courtesy wouldn't go amiss.
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Joshua, for the most part, didn't appear to be offended by Gard's abruptness so that was a mark in his favour. Rayne found herself liking the vampire the more time they spent in his company. She gave him another smile as she climbed out of the van. "If you see anything untoward, let us know immediately. Even if you think it's something innocuous. We have no idea of whom or what we're dealing with here so it's better to err on the side of caution."

"I had planned to," Joshua grinned back, his laconic demeanour filling Rayne with confidence. There was something infinitely trustworthy about him and it took her a moment to realise what it was. Her eyes widened a fraction as she nodded her head at him. "Nicely played, Joshua."

Gard was immediately alert, crossing back to her side and shooting a hard look at the vampire. "What?"

"He shares Liam and Reasa's talent. He's an empath."

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It was Joshua's turn to look startled, his body language shifting imperceptibly. His shrewd gaze met Rayne's for a slow heartbeat and then he relaxed once more, a rueful smile crossing his handsome face. "How did you know?"

"I'm not that trusting, for one," she answered, still smiling. "And Demetri would spit you out faster than trust an outsider. I always did wonder how he worked so easily with you when he was here. Now I know."

Gard's eyes were still hard as he stared the other man down. "Whatever you're doing, stop now." His glare turned to his mate. "And just how was he able to breach your defences? You know what's at stake here, Sarayne. You can't be this complacent."

It was her turn to be rebuked and she took her chastisement in the spirit it was given, her mate being concerned for her welfare. "You're right, Gard. I wasn't shielding as strongly because I was relying on Caleb's judgement of his friend. In my defence, he is very strong, probably on a par with Thereasa. I do find it curious that our European counterparts appear to have retained stronger mental skills than we have."

"Self-preservation can be very focusing," Joshua replied with a small shrug. "If I had known Reasa shared my gift, she wouldn't have gotten past me so easily." He shrugged again. "But then, I had donated a substantial amount of blood to Pietro at the time so my reserves were weakened."

He smiled again and then rested back against his seat. "Trust no one here...not even me. No one is quite what they seem and believe me, I have come across a few others who have some skill level in empathy. Let's just consider this as a lesson well learned."

For a moment it appeared Gard was about to press the issue but Rayne placed a hand on his arm. "Joshua is right. Now we have fair warning we will know what to expect. Let's see if we can find anything that could help track down our adversary." She shifted into her panther form, pressing her inky black body against his legs and emitting a low purr when he automatically reached down to stroke a hand down her back.

"I've placed a safeguard at the front of my mental defences," Rayne communication telepathically."I suggest you do the same, something only we would know. That way we will be able to detect if anyone tries to tamper with our minds."

"Hmmm I knew there was a reason I chose you for my mate," Gard's voice rumbled through her mind, approval lacing every word as he continued to stroke her. He searched and found her safeguard instantly, a smile crossing his face as he did. It was a tall tree standing innocuously in front of a barred wooden door; the very same tree they had played in all those years ago. He mirrored her safeguard in his own mind and then stood up straight.

"Remember, Joshua. No mind games, and alert us if you see anything out of the ordinary." He turned and began a slow walk to the left of the burnt-out building, leaving his panther to begin her sweep of the right.

Dante pulled out his phone and checked his messages. It had vibrated in his pocket while he'd been talking with another other vampire in Louis coven, signalling he had a text. it had taken him a moment to extricate himself and slip outside but now he was reading the message, his lips tightening...'They're here.'

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'Update when you can,' he tapped, and then shoved the phone back into his pocket. The pieces were all beginning to fall into place. There was still too much he was in the dark about, however the things he did know were enfolding just as he expected. With a quick glance at his watch he knew he had a little time in hand to make a quick side trip before Louis noticed his absence.

Dante took off at supernatural speed, running the relatively short distance to the hidden cave tucked away behind a thick copse of brambles. He ignored the scrapes he received as he made his way inside. The cave burrowed into the hillside with a narrow entrance that branched into a more cavernous area. Rock walls neatly divided it into three separate chambers.

The main chamber had a hot rock pool for bathing in and a rug on the floor, with cushions thrown down for seating. It was currently empty though the sound of his arrival brought its inhabitant from the left hand chamber.

"Hey, beautiful," Dante smiled, moving forward to engulf the petite woman in a tight bear hug. Long ebony waves tumbled down her back as she returned his embrace, her silver eyes unfocused as she rested her head against his chest.
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"You shouldn't be here," Mila sighed, though it was evident from her tone that she was glad he was.

"I know, but I wanted to check in to make sure you were okay," Dante had been irrevocably drawn to the woman in his arms since the first moment he had met her. His friend Abraham had introduced them, a bare month before he had met his death at the hands of a rival coven. It was as if providence had conspired to place a new protector in her path before she lost the old one. It was a calling Dante had never chafed at being assigned.