

Chapter 653

"Well that was unexpected." Rhianna grinned up at Caleb, who returned her rapt gaze though there was a hint of thoughtfulness in his golden brown eyes.

They were gathered downstairs in Andrei's office at the Dive, the Romanov twins lounging on the sofa with speculative expressions on their faces. Rhianna had told Caleb of the earlier altercation when he'd arrived to pick her up. He had immediately summoned the twins to the club and ordered Pietro to have someone tend the bar and meet them downstairs.

Pietro wasn't looking too happy at being scrutinised so closely, his body language tense and a deep scowl pulling at the scar on his cheek.

"Yes, it is a very interesting development," Caleb agreed, his gaze peering off into the distance for a moment as he considered the implications of what had happened.

"If you're going to discuss me don't you think you should clue me in," Pietro grumbled, his irritation ratcheting up a notch. He didn't want to be the centre of attention and he especially didn't like some of the glances Alexei was shooting in his direction. His friend was clearly unhappy with what had happened between him and his daughter. Pietro was sure Alexei would have something to say about that very soon.

It came sooner than he anticipated though, as it was the blond vampire who answered him. "You've taken my daughter's blood," Alexei growled, an undefined emotion in his eyes. "There has been some speculation that Vârcolac blood could heal your scars, however that doesn't appear to be the case."

"Alexei..." Pietro wasn't quite sure what he was going to say to his friend, he just knew he would have to come up with something good. He was surprised when he was cut off.

"That conversation is for another place and time." Alexei's tone held a note of finality that his friend was wise enough not to challenge. He was right anyway. They would have that conversation at a later date.

Pietro turned back to Rhianna and Caleb, raising an eyebrow in query.

"It would appear that while Vârcolac blood can't heal your scars, it has significantly boosted your recovery time from the aftereffects of your ordeal," Rhianna explained. "From that little display, I would hazard a guess that you're back to full strength."

As her words sank in, Pietro replayed the fight, remembering the table where the vampire had landed. He'd thrown the other male clear across the room and with such force it had shattered the thick wood into splinters! No wonder the room had responded instantly when he had warned them. Before Europe, he had been strong but now...he was stronger than he had once been.

He had wondered at why he had felt so strong...if it could have had something to do with Cassia's blood, but the realisation still stunned him. He could feel the raw power of his increased strength flowing through his veins. It made his heart pound hard and a feeling of dizziness assault him, but he dampened the weakness down, his beast preening at the enhanced abilities he now had.

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Cassia's blood had not only nourished him, it had made him stronger. He was staggered at the knowledge and didn't know what it could mean for him. He just knew that right now, he didn't feel half the failure he once had. He would analyse what else he was feeling later.

"I'm stronger." It didn't cross his mind to withhold the information. These were his oldest friends; this was his Queen and King. They had a right to know because it could help combat the threat from Europe.

"Did Cassia bite you?"

"Caleb!" Alexei's growl was fierce.

"I'm sorry, Alexei, we're not trying to make this more difficult for you than it already is, but we need to know." Annie's expression was sympathetic as she reached across and placed a hand gently on the Ancient's arm. "Caleb's question is a good one though possibly could have been broached with a little more tact."

Her mate grinned, his expression unrepentant, and it was hard not to laugh at his smugness. He was enjoying watching Alexei's discomfort, as was Andrei.

"Karma's a bitch, isn't it?" Andrei laughed, mischief dancing in his eyes as he teased his twin. [www.noveworm.com](#)

"Keep it up," his brother answered, cold, hard menace in each word.

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"No she didn't," Pietro interjected, before the Romanov twins could devolve into one of their rare, but vicious fights. It was bad enough dealing with Andrei after his dalliance with Cassia, but Alexei too? He could understand his friend's need to protect his daughter. Alexei didn't need his nose rubbed in the fact his best friend had slept with her. [www.noveworm.com](#)

"So the infected vampire just needs to drink Vârcolac blood to enhance healing," Caleb said, tapping a long finger against his lips. "Do you think there would be some merit in testing their blood against the live sample of the toxin? Possibly we could discover the antidote or an inoculation that would protect vampires from being infected?"

Andrei and Alexei both bristled, disbelief crossing their faces. "You want to experiment with our children's blood?" Andrei drawled softly, the small smile playing at his lips a blatant warning sign.

Rhianna placed a hand on her mate's arm when he went to speak, her gaze firmly fixed on Andrei. It halted whatever response he was about to give, his eyes searching her expression for a moment before he inclined his head.

She gave him a warm smile, glancing quickly at him before turning back to the others. "Andrei, you know in your heart that the Vârcolac, Rayne included, would be the first to offer samples of their blood to try to protect those they love. It would be no imposition to them and they would come to no harm from it. We would never allow any harm to come to them."

"It still doesn't mean we have to be happy about our children being used as guinea pigs, Annie." Alexei retorted, making it clear he shared his brother's views. "Pietro's recovery occurred naturally. Cassia chose to nourish him with her blood. This...this...experimentation isn't natural."

Lavender eyes flared brightly, the air around them burning hot for the briefest of moments before it cooled down again. The male vampires mopped at their brows with the exception of Caleb, who stood behind his mate with his hands resting on her shoulders.

"We use the tools that fit the job," Anaktrine, Queen of Vampires, announced, leaning into the strong body behind her. "We have not suffered for countless millennia to get to this point just to have petty egos and overprotective fathers get in the way. Your love for your families do you credit, however our people are in danger. Your children are our future. No harm will come to them from any actions we may take this day."

"I hate it when she does that," Alexei grumbled, his anger waning as he watched Rhianna blink slowly once, and then turn her head to look up at Caleb.

"It is rather disconcerting when you're not expecting it," she smiled ruefully.

"This is something we need to talk to Rafe and Mallen about, possibly Cassia too," Caleb announced, his hard stare focusing on the Romanov twins ensuring they weren't going to continue to be stupid. When he saw they were thinking with their heads as opposed to their hearts, he relaxed his tense stance, gathering Rhianna close. "We'll head over there right now. Rayne and Gard are due to check in soon too if they haven't already. It might be best if you two stay here."

"Fuck that, it's my daughter that's involved. Andrei can keep an eye on things here. I'm heading back to the pack with you." Alexei didn't wait for approval from them, he spun on his heel and headed out the office, using the back entrance to leave the club.

"Can I watch when you and my brother have your chat?" Andrei laughed, merriment dancing in his eyes as Pietro watched his friend depart.

"Bite me!" the bartender growled, nodding to Caleb and Annie, and heading back upstairs to his bar. He'd had enough of talk about healing and Cassia. He was roiling inside, a fury so dark that he hoped that no one decided to test him again until he had it firmly under control.

Something about the thought of Cassia's blood being given to others infuriated him. It made no sense, seeing as he'd cut off all ties with the wolf. It didn't stop his loathing though or dampen the need to rip something or someone apart with his bare hands...