

## Chapter 669

"I know there are issues we need to overcome, Pietro, believe me, I completely understand that. What I don't understand is why you're not willing to try. You are so convinced that you will fail at any attempt to compromise that you just don't appear to want to even contemplate it. Don't you feel the mating pull? Am I not worth the attempt?"

If ever there was a woman who was worth just that and so much more, it was definitely Cassia Romanov, but still he hesitated, still he wasn't sure he could be the man that she believed him to be.

"This isn't about you," he argued, rising from the bed to pace in agitation. "This is about me, Niña. I am not the forgiving kind. I have spent centuries alone, dealing out justice as and when required. Even before Europe I was this man and I don't know how to be anything else." He stopped to look at her, his expression haunted. "I am flawed, Cassia and it has nothing to do with these scars I wear now. I can't forgive, Reasa, not even for you."

Cassia stared at him, hearing the subtle plea in his words. He truly believed everything he said and it was hurting him as much as the feelings of continued rejection were hurting her. She wasn't willing to give up trying, though. She wasn't willing to concede that he couldn't learn to compromise for the good of the pack. He wanted her as much as she wanted him, of that she was certain. Well, she would fight for him; she would be his strength even as he doubted himself.

"I'm not willing to accept that," she finally replied, rising slowly from the bed, her hands placed on her hips. An idea was slowly forming in her mind, something so outside the box it would probably call to the vampire within him.

"I challenge you..."

Pietro frowned, confusion dancing across his face at her sudden change in tactics. "To what?"

"A sparring match, the best of three. If you win, we mate and I live here with you outside the pack. If I win, we mate and you live with me at the compound."

His expression turned incredulous. "I'm not fighting you."

Cassia's head cocked to the side, a small smile teasing her lips. "Scared I will beat you?"

"You're Vârcolac...of course you'll beat me."

She hadn't considered that and her brow puckered as she thought it through. "Okay, that's a valid point. I will promise only to use one part of me, the vampiric side. That way we will be evenly matched; vampire to vampire."

This had his expression turning thoughtful, and she could see that him wavering. He had never seen her vampiric side. That surely had to tempt his own vampire...the urge to see just what she was when she embraced the other half of her nature.

"Your wolf is your stronger side," he pointed out.

"Exactly, this way it will be fairer to you and I give you my word not to use any magical abilities as well. We will be an even match, Pietro."

His eyes flashed with excitement and for a moment she thought she had him, and then he shook his head. "I'm still not fighting you. I can't, Cassia. It goes against everything I believe in. I'm supposed to protect you whether or not you actually need my protection."

Lord, he was stubborn and utterly frustrating at times. It was all she could do not to let her irritation show. "You're not fighting me. We're sparring. I spar all the time when we're training at the pack. You'll be honing my self-preservation skills."**www.novE(i)WoQM.com**

Cassia could see he was going to continue being stubborn so she opted to take the decision out of his hands. Without waiting for his response, she coaxed her wolf down within herself and slowly gave over more control to her vampire. It was an odd sensation given she didn't typically interact with that half of her psyche on a conscious level. She was surprised to find that doing so was actually quite exciting.

"Cassia, I..." Whatever Pietro was going to say cut off when she leapt towards his, talons extended. He reacted instinctually, spinning out of her way by dropping low and pivoting to the right.

Wow, he was so fast, faster than she had anticipated he would be. This sparring match may not be as simple as she had first imagined. Still, she would keep to her word. If he won...she would leave the pack, however she didn't have any intention of losing so she would have to beat him fair and square.

"Fine," Pietro growled, anticipation crossing his face, as he watched her closely. "If you're intent on playing, then let's play, Niña." He was countering her attack even before he finished speaking, landing a glancing blow to her arm that she didn't have time to fully deflect. It hurt a bit but didn't inflict any real damage.

She countered with a kick to his side, dancing out of reach before he could counter-strike. He was moving so fast he blurred out of her line of sight before she realised what he intended, and she uttered a shriek of dismay as her legs were kicked from under her and she landed with a dull thud on the carpet.

Pietro landed on her chest, one hand encompassing her throat, pinning her in a submissive position. "One - nil," he laughed, delight shining in his eyes.

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He looked so gorgeous as he held her immobile she was almost ready to give up and concede defeat, but her pride wouldn't let her. It wasn't even just about her pride either. Pietro needed the pack more than he knew. He would never completely heal until he had confronted and defeated all his demons from his time in Europe. That meant finding some way to come to terms with Reasa. That meant she couldn't afford to lose to him.

"Best of three remember," she answered, trying to ignore the feel of his hard body pressing so intimately with hers. She wanted to wrap her arms and legs around him until there wasn't even a fraction of an inch between them.

"Yes you did say that," he grinned, jumping up and holding out his hand to help her to her feet.

He looked so confident, so completely sure of himself that she was tempted to smack his hand away but she didn't. Instead, she accepted his hand and made sure to accidentally rub her body against his. The way his eyes dilated and the sharp intake of breath was all that she needed to tell her he was sufficiently distracted.

Cassia spun to the left, twisting Pietro's arm up his back as she kicked him behind his right knee causing it to buckle from the hard blow. As he gasped and sank to his knees, she brought her right hand around his neck. "One all," she whispered, laughing at his outraged snort.

"I was helping you up! We hadn't started the second round..."

"An enemy does not wait for you to be prepared for his or her attack. They strike in a moment of weakness."

For a moment she thought he would continue to protest and then a wicked smile crossed his face as she stepped back to allow him up. His expression sent a chill down her spine when he turned to face her. "Touché, Niña. I will not make that mistake again."**www.NoVElwOr®.com**

Oh Lord, she was in for a world of hurt. His eyes told her that she pricked his male ego and any reluctance he'd had about fighting her was a thing of the past. Whoever won the next fight decided their fate. Pietro was determined that he was going to win this one, as determined as she was.

Pietro came straight towards her, so fast that she barely had time to move out of the way. The slight tensing of his right leg was all she needed to tell her he was going to leap, so she dropped low, diving forward into a roll as she did. He jumped and she rolled under through his legs, coming back to her feet facing him at the same time he turned.

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Only he didn't pause as he turned, he was flowing back at her in the same movement, and the only thing that saved her was the small armchair to her left that she hit him with.

"Fuck!" Pietro yelled as he took the chair full on to his face, but she didn't stop to see what his reaction was. Cassia sailed over the bed in one leap, grabbing the bedside cabinet and cracking him again as he followed her movement.

"Oh, Niña, you are so going to pay for that." This time Pietro took a moment to pause, scrubbing blood from his forehead to clear his vision.