

## Chapter 718

Her quiet words sent a shiver of dread down Joshua's spine, his hands clenching on the steering wheel. Where had he been that day? Who had he met with, what had they discussed? Just the thought of possibly having a psychotic ghost tailing his every move was enough to make him want to backtrack his earlier movements to ensure that everyone was safe.

"He could still be here?" he finally asked, once he could modulate his tone to hide his unease.

"No, he's hours ahead of me by now," Dara answered, another sigh escaping. "The Vârcolac can't shadow themselves from each other. That is why it had to be one of us that came to try to find Kothi. He would be invisible to most others, except the Triumvirate, his parents, or our Alphas. He cannot hide from me."

There was some relief in knowing that the Justice Seeker had passed him by, if he had in fact come looking for him in the first place. Still, Joshua made a mental note to change the safe house locations he'd visited earlier as he started the engine and retraced his steps once again, heading towards the ill-fated cottage that had been the start of the current chain of events.

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Mila halted all movement, her senses alerted to a barest of sounds off to her left. Perched in the highest point of a large oak tree, she turned her sightless eyes in the direction she had heard the sound, hoping for some movement to give her extraordinary vision an opportunity to determine who else was out in the depths of the forest.

The briefest flash of movement, and then her lips tilted into a small smile. A handful of seconds later Dante appeared at her side, his breath warm against the side of her face. "You startled me. I thought we weren't meeting up until tomorrow. " Not that she wasn't pleased to see him, she always felt a sense of contentment whenever her friend was near.

"I didn't think you'd want me calling you while you were tracking, and I needed to speak to you right away," he replied, affection in his voice making her smile widen further. "Are you any closer to finding the wolf pack?"

Mila had been roaming further and further away from her base of the cave trying to find a specific wolf pack, though pack was a loose term for the shifter community in Europe. With the chance of being attacked by the vampire covens, packs were usually small, sometimes as small as a handful of people, never normally more than thirty in any group. Finding any one group wasn't an easy task at the best of times. Finding this particular pack was proving problematic.

All Mila's vision had given her was an image of a young human girl. She had seen the girl clearly and sensed wolves surrounded her, but the actual location or any clear defining imagery of the pack was missing. It made her task particularly hard, its urgency screaming at her to succeed as quickly as possible. The Justice Seeker was coming and if her vision rang true, then finding this girl was the only thing that would temper the bloodletting that was coming their way.

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That Dante slipped so quickly into business talk sent a small shiver down her spine. Mila hadn't had any further visions since she'd had the one about the Justice Seeker, but sometimes a vision wasn't required to know events were moving faster than they'd anticipated. "He's here, isn't he?"

"Yes and we now know who he is too," Dante replied, a grim note to his voice. "His name is Kothari, and he is searching for his parents, Gard and Rayne. He's a Vârcolac, Mila."

At the sound of the boy's name, an image flared to life in her inner sight...short, dark hair, eyes hidden behind lenses so black that no light could be distinguished. Streaks of red slashed across the image, jagged cuts scoring across pale white skin. The tears healed the instant they occurred, being re-opened time and again in an endless loop. Rage...grief...the emotions threatened to consume her, bringing tears to her eyes.

"Oh Dante," Mila whispered, tears spilling slowly down her cheeks. "Such all-consuming pain. I don't know how any one person can live with it. We have to help him. We have to!"

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Strong arms wrapped around her, pulling her head to rest against the hard wall of his chest. "I thought we had to save our people from him, Mila. Now you say we need to help him?"

"Helping him is what will save our people. We need to help him find his parents; show him that he is not alone. The time for isolation is over, my friend. We must declare our hand in this silent war." She felt him stiffen at her words, knew he would fight her on this point. "Dante, you must listen to me..."

Framing her face gently in his hands, he brushed a kiss against her forehead to take the sting from his words. "No, Mila. Your safety cannot be risked, and by default, that means my part in this must be kept secret. Only Joshua knows the whole truth and he will take that knowledge to his grave. It has to be this way, sweet one. It is all I can allow. Please do not challenge me on this. I don't want us to be at odds with one another. I couldn't bear that."

She hadn't expected anything less, but she'd had to try once more. They'd had this conversation numerous times, more so the last few years than before. Always it came down to the same answer, Dante's complete rejection at even discussing it. While she understood why he reacted as he did, Mila knew it wasn't a position they could maintain much longer. Things were quickly escalating into a war that would rock the vampire nation to its very core. Manipulating events from the side-lines couldn't continue.

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She would have to force his hand; there would be no other option. He would be angry with her, and while she didn't relish that prospect, she was willing to endure his wrath to get him to see sense. However, this moment in time was not the ideal point to do that, so she acceded to him, nodding her agreement, and turning her thoughts back to the task at hand.

"You asked if I was any closer to finding the pack with the human girl. I thought I had a couple of days ago but it turned out to be just one small family group travelling through the area. I will keep looking."w@w.n@v©lɹ©ℜ(m).c0@

Dante sighed against her temple, his arms wrapping around her once again. "We're running out of time, Mila. Joshua is sure that Kothari will come looking for Louis as his parents did. If he doesn't like the answers he finds there...we could lose the strongest coven we have who may actually be on our side when this war you've prophesised comes down on us. We need to find the girl you saw in your vision."

"I know, Dante, I know. We will find her." She moved out of his embrace, reaching up a hand to brush his cheek gently. "If he comes to Louis, you must keep yourself safe. Do what you must to gain the boy's trust. Buy me some more time to find the girl."

"Anything you ask of me, you know it is yours, sweet one."

Her raised eyebrow brought a rueful chuckle from him. "Apart from an open declaration," he added.

He wanted to give her everything she desired, but his heart told him that the moment their part in events was revealed, his Mila's life would be in jeopardy. Despite wanting to save as many of their people as he could, that was just untenable to him. Nothing could ever endanger this beautiful woman who held his heart. He would do what was required to ensure her safety, even if it meant she was cross with him.