

Chapter 734

She quickly processed the information she'd received and reached a hand out tentatively to touch the girl's shoulder. "Your mother was human when you were younger, sweetheart. This time it is different because she is a wolf as well as human, and it is the wolf part of her that is grieving the loss of her mate. I am sure you understand what that means for a wolf, how primal that instinct is, how it can overcome everything. It isn't that your mother doesn't love you or want to stay here with you, honey. It is her wolf that is in control now and it is to the wolf that we must speak and connect with. She needs a wolf pup, and there is only one here that I know of."

Her words appeared to penetrate the girl's misery, understanding registering in the depth of her eyes. "Pippa is only about five and she's already lost her parents today. It would be cruel to submit her to any further anguish and death. Mama wouldn't want her to be put through a further ordeal; she would rather die than see a child be hurt."

"Pippa is a wolf, honey, and adaptable and strong," Dara countered, knowing that despite living in a pack her entire life, the human girl would still presume human feelings to the situation. "No, it won't be pleasant for her to witness the aftermath of this attack, but her wolf will automatically seek to comfort your mother, and with luck, your mother's wolf will seek to do the same. They could help each other, and save each other, but I need you to talk to the child, as I will likely be seen as a threat to her. It's your mother's only chance. We have to give her this chance, sweetheart, as the alternative is untenable."

She watched the myriad of emotions that crossed the younger woman's face, praying that she would come to the correct decision and quickly. Time was running out for the she-wolf, and for Dara too.

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Natalia could see the logic to Dara's words, but it was hard to ignore her protective instincts towards Pippa. All her life her mother and the pack had shown her what it meant to be pack, how the adults had to protect the young at all costs. Even though Pippa wasn't a part of her pack, she was just a child and therefore fell into the category of juvenile to be taken care of. If she allowed the experiment to go ahead, Pippa could be scarred for life, however if she didn't, her mother would surely die. It was an impossible position to be in and yet, she was really the only one left who could make the decision.

Natalia tried to think logically, tried to work out the pros and cons of the situation, but in the end, it was a child desperate to save her mother that won the internal debate of right and wrong. Papa was already lost to her, and she would need to deal with the grief of his death at some point, but for now, she had to do what she could to save her mother. If she lost her too...Natalia didn't know how she would survive the double blow. It did cross her mind that Pippa had suffered the same heart-wrenching scenario only a handful of hours ago too. If what Dara said had any merit, that this course of action could help Pippa too, then surely it wasn't so selfish to see what happened?

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"Pippa, honey. You can come out of the tent now," Natalia called softly, moving to the opening to protect the child from as much of the gore in the campsite as she could. "Try not to look around you when you come out, sweetie. Just look at me."Ww©.N©vêlwô(r)M.COm

There was a moment's silence and then the tent flap opened and the little blonde girl peeked outside. "Tali, I'm scared..."

"I know, sweetie, but try to be as brave as you can." Natalia held out her arms and sighed with relief when the child cuddled into her, hiding her face in the crook of her neck. She held her tightly, stroking a hand down Pippa's back in a soothing motion. "You know a bad thing has happened, don't you, honey?"

When she felt Pippa nod and heard her whispered "Yes" Natalia continued, "We lost most of the adults of the pack to a vampire attack. The only one who has survived is my mama, but she has lost her mate and is close to turning rogue. Do you understand what that means, Pippa?"

"You lost your papa and your mama is going to die too."

Natalia stifled a sob at the quiet words, the stark truth of them threatening to shatter her heart completely. "That's right, sweetie. Mama is very sick right now, and this nice lady here thinks that you could help her. Do you think you could be brave and strong enough to try?"

Pippa looked up at Natalia, her eyes round with surprise but also fearful. "I can?" The words came out on a trembled, whispered breath. "What would I need to do?"

Dara knelt down beside them, smiling reassuringly at the young child before turning to look at Natalia. "What is your mother's name?"

"Ava."

The Vârcolac nodded and then turned back to the child. "Hi Pippa, I'm Dara. I know you're very frightened right now, and I am so proud of how brave you've been so far. I am from a wolf pack too and I know if you were part of my pack, my alpha would tell me that you are going to grow up to be a fine, strong beta." Her words brought forth a hesitant smile, and she kept her tone soothing as she continued. "Ava is very sick, Pippa. She's lost her mate and she is going rogue. Do you know what that means for a wolf?"w.w.w.m(c)v(e)lwormt.©Om

The child nodded, her haunted gaze turning sadder if possible. "My uncle went rogue a little while ago. Papa had to put him to sleep forever so he didn't hurt anyone. I don't want Ava to go rogue. She looks like Mama a little, and she was nice to me."

The little girl's admission broke Dara's heart and she had to swallow hard to keep in a muffled sob. The poor child had been through so much in her very short life, she hated having to ask this monumental task of her, one they had no idea if it would even succeed. "We want to try to help Ava, honey, so she doesn't need to go to sleep forever like your uncle. We think if you let her cuddle your wolf for a little while, that she will remember what it means to be part of a pack and she will want to look after you. Do you think you could try to do that, Pippa?"

Big blue eyes stared at her, doubt mirrored in their depths. It was clear this was too much to ask of the little one, and the last of Dara's hope of saving Ava started to wane.

Then, Pippa nodded her head slowly, turning to look at Natalia. "Don't cry, Tali. I'll let your Mama cuddle me as much as she wants." She shifted into wolf form the moment she stopped speaking, and rubbed herself against the crying she-wolf, yapping for attention.

Dara and Natalia both held their breaths for a long time, watching the pup yap and nip at Ava for what seemed like forever, and then a miracle occurred...the she-wolf gathered up the pup in her arms and began rocking back and forth.

"Shhhhh, little one," Ava crooned, her voice hoarse from crying. "Mama's here. You're safe. The bad vampires won't hurt you."

Natalia let out a strangled sob and Dara gathered the girl close, her pack instincts kicking in, her need to soothe the younger woman's distress driving her. "Let her believe for this moment, Tali," she whispered softly. "Let her find an anchor to keep her with us until she is once more herself. It isn't that she doesn't love you. She will remember you; she just needs a little time."

Dara's words brought some comfort, as did the tight embrace she had wrapped around her. Natalia wanted to be stronger, she wanted to be as brave as Pippa, but she'd just lost her father and now she was a stranger to her mother too. Everything was gone now. The pack was mostly dead, and her family destroyed. The monster had come and the danger she had sensed so strongly had come to fruition. Nothing would ever be the same again, and she didn't know what she was going to do now. Natalia gave into the grief that was overwhelming her, sobbing into Dara's embrace.