

## Chapter 759

How was it possible to be so enraged at someone and yet simultaneously want to hug and soothe them? Natalia's heart broke for Agony, but another part of her wanted to stomp on his shins. She surprised me with how strong her feelings were. She would have said she didn't care what he did before she saw him cut himself beside the lake. When she first noticed his bleeding, that was when it changed.

How was it possible to be so enraged at someone and yet simultaneously want to hug and soothe them? Netele's heart broke for Agony, but another part of her wanted to stomp on his shins. She surprised me with how strong her feelings were. She would have said she didn't care what he did before she saw him cut himself beside the lake. When she first noticed his bleeding, that was when it changed.

Something deep inside had broken free. Some part of her had felt pulled towards the volatile Vârcolac. She didn't understand what it was, but something had connected between them in that moment. Now she was just confused and hurt at him opening up and then turning on her. She wished her mother was here so she could speak to her about it. She knew it was forlorn to wish. Her mother wouldn't even know who she was if she were here. Still, she needed someone to talk to and she didn't know who to turn to.

"Is everything okay, Tali?" Dere asked, coming to sit beside her.

The stunning blonde had an understanding smile, and she exuded trust. With a sigh Netele took her glasses off and rubbed her eyes before putting them back on.

"Why didn't anyone help him, Dere?" She could tell from the other women's expression that she didn't need to elaborate on who she meant.

"We have all tried over the years," Dere finally answered, a flash of pain clouding her expression. "I guess I was the closest to him, he would let me in a little more than he did everyone else. He always maintained a distance though, no matter what I tried. Just when I would think he was finally opening up he would build his walls again and it was like starting from the very beginning. I kept trying to break down that wall though, as did we all." She gave a small shrug, regret crossing her face that she had never been what he needed.

"He told me things just now, personal things I don't think he's shared with others," Netele admitted. She didn't go into detail about what was said. That was between them and no one else. She had to talk to someone about her feelings though, and the other women knew Agony the best.

"He carries so much pain inside, Dere," she whispered, a feeling of helplessness coming over her. "When we were together, I could almost touch it, and something happened...something connected between us. I feel like I have to help him even if he fights me on it. I did try my hardest to get through to him, but he turned on me, becoming hard and unapproachable like he was when my pack was attacked. He went out of his way to scare me and even as he did, I found myself furious with him and yelled at him. Usually I have a much better sense of self preservation."

Dere chuckled, nodding her head. "Yes, I know that feeling. I've had it a few times myself with Kothari."

It made her feel a bit better to hear that. Her thoughts were still in turmoil though. With a frustrated sigh Netele gathered her hair up and dug a hair tie out of her pocket and secured it in place "I am so confused, Dere. I don't understand this strange sensation I have inside me that seems to connect me to Agony. Do you know what it is?"

She should have guessed that she wasn't going like what the other women was going to say just from the startled, and then, apologetic expression that crossed her stunning features.

"I can't really say, Tali. Be yourself and understanding will eventually come. What I can tell you is the thing to understand about Kothari is that his actions are all a defence mechanism. No matter what he does or says, it is all designed to protect everyone from the monster he believes himself to be. He isn't a monster and has never been one. One day I believe he will see that. Just don't be afraid of him. Believe me when I say that he would never hurt you, no matter how much posturing he does."

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It appeared Natalia wasn't going to get the answers that she was hoping for, but at least she didn't feel as alone as she had after her argument with Agony. There was also something comforting about the way Dara continually referred to him as Kothari. Clearly the blonde Vârcolac knew the truth as she did, Kothari and Agony were the same person, no matter what foolish thoughts were going on in the silly male's head. She guessed it was just a matter of time for Agony to get on the same page as them.

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The object of their discussions entered the clearing at that point and all eyes turned to him. Dara stood, inclining her head for him to have a private word with her and the pair moved off together. Natalia sighed and made her way back over to Mila and Dante. She sat quietly beside them watching the two Vârcolac speaking without words passing their lips. To others watching it may have appeared that they were just standing close to each other, but she was fairly certain that they were communicating telepathically. Whatever was being discussed, Agony didn't like something that was said at one point as she watched his entire body stiffen. A moment later he released the tension and then motioned for her to join them.

"You are certain the blonde female of Louis' group has a changed shadow surrounding her?" he asked quietly.

Natalia ran her eyes over the group as nonchalantly as she could before answering. "It's still black."

Agony's tension ratcheted up again though it was so subtle most of the group wouldn't have noticed. He turned to Dara. "Can you get into her head?"

Dara nodded. "Yes, and I'm fairly certain I can keep myself protected against an intrusion. I can build a defence check which will have to be dismantled by anyone trying to get inside my mind. That way if anyone tries to tamper with it I'll know. What we need to discuss is what do we do if what we suspect is correct?"

For a moment Agony stared off to the distance before he seemed to reach a decision. "I hadn't considered there may be some danger involved, however, if anyone can protect themselves it is you," he conceded. "As to what we will do if our suspicions are correct, I think that is pretty obvious. We eliminate the threat."

Natalia didn't like the direction their conversation was taking, a shiver slowly starting to spread down her spine. She didn't feel the usual sensation of nausea that came over her when there was an imminent threat, but there was something there that was telling her that what was about to happen wasn't going to be good.

"What exactly is it that you suspect?" she asked keeping her voice lowered. "What is it that you think I am seeing?"

"You should go and stay close to Dante and Mila," Agony answered, with barely a glance in her direction. "They are tasked with ensuring your safety while we deal with this."

If he had still been looking at her he would have seen her mouth drop open before swiftly closing and an expression of fury cross her face. Dara, who was looking at her, swiftly raised her hand to cover her mouth. Natalia was sure the other woman was stifling a smile, but she was too angry with the infuriating male who had just tried to shoo her away as if she was some fragile little girl.

"Oh, I don't think so, Agony," she hissed out as quietly as she could. "I don't know where you've gotten the idea that I somehow answer to you, but I can assure you that isn't the case. I already have an Alpha, and it sure as hell isn't you. You will not be dismissed by you, not now and not ever so the sooner you get that through your thick skull the better it'll be. Now what is it you suspect? If you are going to do something based on something I see then I am entitled to know."

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For a moment no one moved or said anything and then the Vârcolac slowly turned his head to give her an unfathomable stare, his gaze hidden behind his standard dark glasses. "You are a pain in the ass, little girl," he growled softly but there was no menace in his tone, instead she thought she detected a faint trace of amusement.

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"We suspect that you may be able to see when someone's mind has been taken over by whoever our enemy is. The only way to determine if this is true is for Dere to search the blonde vampire's mind. She should be able to find any intrusion. If the enemy is among us then we will need to take care of it without alerting them that we're on to them."

He sighed deeply. "Naturally we don't want our nemesis to determine how we can track the incursions therefore we need you to be as far from any action as possible. Now will you please stay with Dante and Mila until we deal with this?"

Shock didn't begin to cover the riot of emotions that threatened to overwhelm Natalia. She wasn't sure what shocked her most, the fact that she may be able to tell when someone has been compromised or the fact that Agony had actually answered and said please. She knew what dealing with it would entail, and while she didn't want to be responsible for anyone's destruction, she was Peck and understood the need to protect the group.

"Okay," she finally said. "Just be careful. Louis isn't likely to react well to one of his coven being dealt with when he doesn't know the reason for it. He might be a little annoyed and react accordingly. Please don't hurt him. It isn't his fault he's been left out of the loop." With that she turned and walked over to Dante and Mila, leaving the two Vârcolac to do what they needed to keep everyone safe.

Dara let her smile show as Agony watched Natalia walk away with a frustrated expression. "I think you've met your match there, my friend," she said. "I like her...a lot."

He didn't deign to answer, turning his attention to the issue at hand. "Can you do your thing from here?"

Dara viewed the distance to the vampire in question. "I need to be closer," she said. "I'll head over to Louis, that way if he reacts I can be close. You go in the other direction and get behind her. If we're right I'll let you know. If we come at her from behind there's a good chance whoever has taken over her mind won't see us coming."

Agony headed off back in the direction he had come from making it appear as if he was heading in the opposite direction. He shadowed and slipped around to the back of Louis and his coven, standing silently in the trees as he watched Dara settle beside the European coven leader. Louis gave her a side glance but didn't say anything though his body language indicated that he was alert and his eyes quickly swept over the group trying to catalogue where everyone was.

Dere didn't appear to be doing anything but Agony knew she was concentrating hard. He felt a whisper touch his mind and tensed, but relaxed when he heard her voice. "I've had to go deeper than expected, but I can sense another presence underneath the female's persona. It's really faint and I can't get any closer without alerting them that I'm there. She's definitely been compromised. Agony. We need to contain the situation immediately."

He was moving before she even stopped speaking, appearing behind the female vampire and detaching her head before she had a chance to realise that she was under threat.

"What the fuck!" yelled Louis, leaping from the log he was sitting on. Fury filled his features, quickly transforming him into his feral state.

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