

Chapter 767

She was still breathing hard, and he could see that she had been crying, but when her eyes met his he didn't see any fear in them. "I was surrounded by a coven of feral vampires and two Vârcolac about to kick the shit out of each other. It was the sudden escalation towards violence that terrified me not any one person involved. What happened back there, Agony? Why did you lose control?"

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"We're in the middle of hostile territory and it appeared someone had hurt you. I reacted to your distress in the only way I know how, Natalia," he growled, wondering why she was surprised at his actions. It wasn't as if she didn't know who he was, what he was capable of.

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Natalia stared off into the trees, and he could almost see the thoughts in her mind whirling around her pretty head. It was as if she was considering what she was going to tell him, and for some reason that threw fuel onto the slow burning fire that was simmering in his gut. He didn't want half truths or lies by omission. He would only ever tolerate the whole truth from his mate.

"Why were you upset, Natalia? I can see you've been crying, and then you had a panic attack. Do not hold anything back from me. It will only irritate me, and I think we can both agree that it isn't wise to irritate me right now."

"Everything got on top of me," she whispered, dropping her gaze to the ground. "Mila and I were talking and as we talked the magnitude of everything that's happens reared up and I couldn't push the emotions back down." She looked back at him, her big brown eyes glistening with fresh tears.

"I know you see emotions as a weakness, and I've tried so hard to keep mine at bay, but I am only human, Agony. There is only so much strength I can show to the world that has murdered my father and my pack, destroyed my mother's life probably irreparably, and left me stuck up the mountains with a volatile male who I barely know but have just discovered is my mate. It's overwhelming. I don't know if I'm coming or going anymore."

As her head lowered and quiet sobs started to rack her small frame, Agony sank down to the ground before her, at a loss for what to do. He wasn't used to dealing with fragile humans and had even less experience dealing with emotions. Inside he felt fury for the vampires who had destroyed her world, and remorse for any of his own actions that may have attributed to her being so sad.

Instincts took over and he gathered Natalia into his arms, cradling her small body gently as if she was fragile china. "You are the bravest person I have ever known," he whispered, stroking his hand slowly through her long brown hair. "It's okay to need a moment, to grieve for what you have lost. It is not weakness to do this, Tali. It is human and that is what you are."

She cried for a while longer, and he held her close, feeling every ounce of her pain as her tears soaked his shirt. It was the hardest thing he had ever done, sitting there allowing her to shed her tears, but it was what she needed, and he would give her whatever she needed. It was all he could do. He couldn't bring back the dead, and he'd already killed everyone involved in causing her pain.

Deep within he could feel the panther roaring its pain, and Kothari lending his strength to help him deal with their weeping mate. For the first time ever, Agony acknowledged to himself sometimes there was a need for all three parts of his persona to work together to achieve a common goal. Dealing with their mate appeared to be one of them.

"How long have you known?" Natalia finally asked.

She had stopped crying but hadn't tried to move out of his embrace. He knew immediately what she was asking him. It hadn't escaped his notice when she mentioned being stuck up a mountain with her mate. She had put the pieces together and worked out that they were mates. He had asked her for the truth, so it was only fair that he return that truth.

"My panther and Kothari admitted the truth the moment we met you," he answered. "I wasn't willing to admit it was possible, so I denied the connection until just recently. Before you ask, it wasn't a case of me wanting to deny you. My focus had to be with finding my parents. Everything had to come second to that."ıŵŴıŵ.N⊗vEI(w)órM.⊙om

His response had her sitting up and moving away from him, and he didn't want to admit that he felt a bit bereft as she left the safety of his arms. It had been soothing holding her close even with her tears. He was concerned his rage would get out of hand again now that she wasn't there to anchor him. Natalia sat back on the boulder, and gave him a level stare, a small frown marring her perfect brow.

"How can this ever work when you can't admit that you're one person?" she asked softly. "I can't keep wondering who it is I am with, which part of you is in control. I won't do this any longer. I won't contribute to your belief that you have multiple personalities. You are Kothari and that's how I am going to address you from now on. If that causes you a problem then you're going to have to deal with it because it's your problem, not mine."

A handful of days earlier Agony would have been furious at her words. Today, his lips twitched in a small smile as he saw the heat and determination in her deep brown eyes. Anything that took away that awful sadness from her expression was fine with him. She could call him whatever she wanted if it made her happy.

"I don't disagree that we have a lot to work on," he replied. "I don't deny that being a part of my life will be challenging at best. After we rescue my parents, we will have time to make whatever decisions we need to make. Until then, it will be best if we keep the knowledge of our being mates away from the rest of the group. Dara, Dante and Mila are aware, I know, but everyone else should remain in the dark. I won't give anyone the potential to try to use you to get to me."

After a moment Natalia nodded, rubbing her eyes tiredly before replacing her glasses.

"Come on," Agony said, standing and pulling her up beside him. "I'll fill you in on what was said at the meeting as we walk back. Hopefully Dara has managed to calm everyone else down by the time we get there."

The last thing he expected was for his mate to burst out laughing. He shot her a perplexed glance, wondering what on Earth was so humorous.

"You certainly have a way with people, Kothari," she laughed, shaking her head. "It's a wonder Dara's hair hasn't gone grey fixing up your outbursts."

He had to admit that she had a valid point. He really did need to talk with Dara when they got back, maybe even apologise for his volatile behaviour. He stopped walking for a moment, surprised at the direction of his thoughts. He started walking again when Natalia gave him a quizzical look, raising an eyebrow much as Dara would have. "You've got me thinking I need to apologise to Dara," he grumbled. "I'm not sure I like how you're starting to rub off on me."

His admission brought a smile to her face though she didn't comment. If his admission was the cause of that smile, then he wasn't too unhappy that he'd made it. It was better than her tears and grief filled expression. Natalia would be the only one for whom he could do that. He walked on while sighing, telling his partner about his conversation with his parents but leaving out the wolf. He knew hiding that information from Dara would make her angry, but after Natalia's breakdown, he didn't want to raise her expectations just yet. If or when they reached that bridge, they would cross it.

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