

Chapter 113

We all froze as Auri was smiling at the group of us. Logan slinked behind her like a sad puppy, his hands shoved in his pocket. Behind him, Felix was holding Lucy around the waist. However, everyone waited as Vale struggled to get out of her grip.

"Auri!" Jax was the first one to move and he stepped forward.

She let go of Vale's wrist as he hugged her. His face fell to her shoulder and from where I was standing, I could see his hands grab her shirt tightly. Leaning her head against his, Auri rubbed his back and hushed him quietly.

"It's alright, Jax. I'm okay. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me. I'm here now though. I've got you."

I couldn't help the smile on face as I watched my Beta's shoulders shake. It was easy to see the pain and the tear that Auri's leaving had on Bryan, Hector, and Vale. But AJ and Jax were as much affected because they had called her mom as much as any of her biological kids. AJ joined the hug and Auri laughed, moving to stroke the back of his head.

"You two have done so well. I know your parents would be proud of you because I know I am. The two of you have helped immensely and I know the uphill battle it was dealing with those two."

Humor sparkled in her eyes as she looked at me and then up at Vale. His jaw was set though and his hands were balled up into fists. Her smile fell just a bit but she moved her gaze to Týr. His posture was rigid as he struggled on what to do or say. AJ and Jax let Auri go and she walked up to Týr, putting her hand on his cheek.

"It's okay, Týr"

"I'm sorry, Mom. I was so stupid. I know that now. I never should have...it never should have gotten that far."

Auri nodded and sighed. "I know, sweetheart. I'm just glad you've been working together again. That's what is important. Making sure we don't make the same mistakes."

He nodded and tried to crack a smile but he was struggling. Her eyes fell to me and she held out her arms. I stepped forward but Vale grabbed my arm, holding me back.

"Who are you?" A variation of shock wove through us as Vale spoke.

Her chest rose and fell as she looked away from me and up at Vale. "I guess some explanations are in order."

Hector ran his hand through his hair. "I told them we could be able to talk tomorrow at the pack house."

Vale snorted. "I don't think so. So you can up and run off again? Just dip when you have to answer for your crimes. For your actions!"

There was a slight smirk on her face. "So am I your mother or aren't I? If you don't know who I am, wouldn't that make me not the person you're looking for?"

Vale growled and the crowd around us shifted. We had been so consumed in this bubble of shock that the crowd seemed to disappear. Now though, they shifted and moved away from us more.

"We should move. Maybe...we can talk a little bit tonight. Then be able to meet in the morning?" I suggested, hoping Vale would calm down a little.

"I can agree to that." Auri spun around, taking Hector's hand in hers. "How about we go to Stefano's? They might not have opened the 2nd floor for tonight. So we speak there."

"Vale?" I looked up at him. "Is that okay?"

He only nodded once before Auri and Hector started to move through the crowd. Our whole group followed after them but Vale hung back, his grip still on my arm.

"How...how do I handle this?"

I cocked my head to the side. "Like you finally got your Mom back. Ask her what she's been through...what happened..."

"Not her. You." His eyes met mine. "I trusted you. You're my mate."

The lump in my throat got worse and I tried to swallow but it

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was no use. I could feel the emotions coming from him. Betrayal, anger, frustration, sadness; all of them filtering through me as stared into his eyes.

"For now, ask your questions. When we get back, you can decide what you want to do." I wasn't going to plead or beg. I'd made my choice and now I was going to handle to consequences.

Vale nodded and then pulled me with him through the crowd after our family. We wove our way through the crowd that gathered to listen to the music but the streets were still filled with people mulling around for the festival. Some people spilled out into the streets that were drinking at the bars and restaurants. Others were taking in the sights and the stands that were step up with local goods that decided to sell during the festival.

We caught up to AJ and Jax who were bringing up the rear. We came to a corner and I looked up to see the sign 'Stefano's' written in cursive above a white and red awning. Everyone was filing in the door even though it seemed to be at max capacity much like the other restaurants in the area. There was a pause before I saw Auri speaking candidly with a man dressed in a button-up and slacks. He was smiling and nodding to her before he pulled the block away from the stairs going up to what I assumed was another seating area.

After Vale and I stepped onto the stairs, he replaced the block and gave us a quick nod before disappearing into the

kitchen. Vale was following me and he had let go of my arm but I still felt like he was holding me to him. Taking a deep breath, I focused on the stairs and the conversation that was about to happen.

As we walked into the upstairs, Auri was opening up the doors that lead out to a balcony. It definitely looked like they weren't planning on having anyone up here. There was one large table in the center of the room, easily fitting about fourteen people around it with elbow room. AJ and Felix were pulling the chairs off the table that were flipped upside down. The sound was dulled being this high up from the crowds below but you could still hear the laughter and talking. Auri was smiling as she turned back and put her hands on her hips.

"This should be good for a little bit. I asked Alfredo to bring up some drinks and appetizers. I didn't want to do a whole food spread with how busy it is downstairs. I hope that's alright."

"That's fine, Mom. I don't think we need much right now." Jax replied, putting the last chair down on the floor.

Someone cleared their throat behind us. Vale and I moved aside as two waitresses stepped up off the stairs. They were carrying beers, wines, and what looked like a bottle of whiskey. The second girl was carrying a tray of garlic bread and bruschetta. They set up the drinks on a small side table that was against the wall and the food on the center table.

They also pulled out glasses from inside the storage of the small side table.

"Ti porteremo il resto del cibo a breve." [We will bring you the rest of the food shortly.] One of the waitresses said with a nod before headed down the stairs.

"Grazie, Stella e Francesca." [Thank you, Stella and Francesca.] Auri called back before grabbing a beer from the table and sitting down in one of the chairs.

Everyone moved around and grabbed a glass of wine or a bottle of beer. For the moment, no one touched the amber liquid. I had a feeling, depending on what Auri had in store for us this evening, that would change. Sitting down next to Vale, who was across from Auri, I was the last to be seated. Hector was across from me, leaning back with a bottle in hand.

"So, where do we start?"

"How about you tell us everything and we can go from there?" Vale snipped after Hector asked the question.

Hector's lean straightened and his face turned serious as he glared at Vale. "You need to calm down. That's not..."

Auri put her hand on Hector's shoulder and squeezed, cutting him off before speaking her self. "We don't have time to go into everything right now. It's going to take more than a few hours and a couple beers to get us through everything. I'm happy to answer any questions that you have off the top

of your heads. We can go from there. Is that okay, Vale?"
Her tone was soft and her eyes were locked with Vale's.


For the first time, I felt his nerves as he looked at his mom. "Yes, that's fine."

She smiled and nodded. "So, who's first?"

There was a moment of silence before AJ finally pipped up. "Where have you been?"

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