

Chapter 286

"Did Rafe say what they were doing about it?" she finally asked looking back at Demetri. She saw him wipe an annoyed scowl from his face before he ran a hand through his long black hair.

"He's getting organised and then we'll meet up and discuss it. He'll let us know whether it'll be a formal meeting or just family. I'm sure he'll call you soon." He gave her hand another squeeze before he stood up. "You okay, Red?"

He didn't trust the smile she latched on her face or the quick nod she gave him. Her smile didn't reach her eyes as normal but he didn't say any more about it. He had a pressing need to be somewhere else at the moment, hammering some common sense into his best friend.

Hugging Rhianna tightly he said his goodbyes and headed over to his car. He didn't head for home though. He had another destination in mind and God help Caleb when he got there.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

Caleb's head shot up from the report he was reading, surprise on his face at the aggressive body language coming off his best friend as well as the tone of his voice. He stayed silent as Demetri entered the office and closed the door loudly behind him.

Demetri had been manning the office for the last few weeks so Caleb had taken over to give him a break and because he'd felt guilty about leaving his friend to do all the work. Despite the lives they led, they still had businesses to run and he was aware that he'd been shirking his responsibilities lately.

"I'm assuming you're going to qualify that statement and not expect me to have suddenly turned into a mind reader?" His words were droll as he watched the other man throw himself down in the leather chair in front of his desk.

"Annie," Demetri shot back, his green eyes burning with irritation.

Caleb stiffened immediately, concern crossing his face. "What's wrong?" He couldn't keep the trace of fear from his voice as he searched down their mate bond and found it suspiciously muted, as if she was masking it somehow. Come to think of it, he'd been barely able to sense anything from it for days now.

"What the fuck do you think is wrong?" Demetri growled. "I thought I was supposed to be the screw up out of the two of us but when you fuck up you do it spectacularly."www.N0v3l(1)w(o)r(m).com

Caleb felt his temper rise, a low growl issuing from his throat as his eyes flashed amber, concern warring with his temper. "If you have something pertinent to say regarding my mate then I suggest you spit it out before I beat it the fuck out of you." Not being able to fully sense Annie was sending a spark of unease through him, his friend's anger ratcheting that unease up to a higher degree.

Demetri growled back at him, his own anger escalating as he stood up and leaned on the desk. "How could you do that to her, Caleb? How could you tell her to pull back when it comes to those she loves? You must have known you were crippling her. Even I'm smart enough to know that and she isn't even my mate! Annie is who she is because of the people she loves. If you take that from her you're slowly killing her inside."

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Fury blazed deep inside Caleb and he rose too, his growl turning feral. "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, Demetri, but I suggest you keep your nose out of our business. You take care of your mate your own way and leave me to take care of mine."

"Oh, like you're taking care of her now?" Demetri spat furiously. "You're doing such a grand job of that, Caleb. So good a job there was an attack on the pack today and your mate called me to go and investigate what had happened. She was sitting at home tied up in knots waiting for me to come back with my report and she was still sitting there full of misery when I left her. And all because you told her she was getting too involved in other people's lives to the detriment of yours."

His finger came out, a long talon brandishing in the air in his displeasure. "You are a fucking asshole of the highest proportions and you don't deserve to have a mate like Annie. Fucking fix it or I'll really lose my temper with you!"

Caleb sat down heavily in his chair, shock rippling through his body. Annie had needed someone and she'd called Demetri? Not him. He stared down at the desk reaching out to their mate bond again and finding it just as fuzzy as before. She was closing him out, hiding her feelings from him. She only ever did that when she was hurting and didn't want him to know.

Fuck! There'd been an attack on the compound and he was one of the last people to hear about it because Annie didn't want him to know she was getting involved in pack business? He hadn't meant it that way, not when he'd spoken to her about her reaction to Gard's pain. What he'd meant was...

He couldn't lie to himself. He may have been avoiding admitting it but now it was out in the open he had to be truthful about it. He'd been in a meltdown ever since the truth had come out and Gard had come back into their lives. His fear of losing his woman had dug deep inside him and he'd started reacting instinctively.

Clearing the bullshit out of his head, he looked back on the last five years, examining his actions in detail. He'd wanted to be alone with her all the time, so much so that he'd even delayed their trip to Shanghai recently because he knew the moment his Annie had been there she would have wanted to come home. And he'd wanted their time alone together to last longer.

His actions had made her miss the birth of her nephews. Her anger at that he'd skilfully handled by turning the conversation around to Gard and the secret she was keeping from Rafe. Caleb groaned and lowered his head in his hands, guilt washing through him. In trying to hold onto her he was slowly pushing her away. Demetri was right, he was a fucking asshole and he didn't deserve his Annie in his life.wW(w).@lV3Lw0R.m.@m

Taking a deep breath, Caleb looked up at his friend. "I take it the compound is secure seeing as you're here?" He didn't wait for an answer, standing up and grabbing his suit jacket. He slipped it on aware of Demetri's eyes on him though his friend didn't speak.

He finally met his eyes again, his expression turning hard. "Thank you for being there for her. But the next time...you fucking call me straight away, Demetri. And don't bother starting a pissing contest over this. Just think how you'd feel if Mara came to me instead of you and I kept my mouth shut about it."

Demetri stared at him for a long moment, trying to imagine Mara ever choosing someone else to confide in over him. He knew he'd overreact if it happened and his friend kept him in the dark.

"Understood," he finally said. "Just don't put her in that position again, Caleb. I'm sure it's hurt her just as much as it's hurt you that she couldn't come to you with this. And I don't like her hurting any more than you do."

Caleb sighed and ran his hand through his hair, conceding his friend's point. Then he turned and headed out the office to fix the damage he'd unwittingly caused. The only reason he wasn't going completely insane was his Annie had one of the sweetest souls in the whole world. She would forgive him his stupidity but it would take a while for him to forgive himself for hurting her.

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