

## Chapter 187

The love that shone so iridescently between her and the Armand-Hanlon Alpha ripped at his gut. He knew it was irrational, that he should be thanking the huge brown haired man who had taken care of his Anakatrine during this incarnation but he still felt the clawing talons of jealousy deep within him. The other man had had precious years with his sister that he'd never had. It hurt.

None of the Weres had ever been aware of his presence. He always used his shadowing abilities when he walked in the compound but she knew he was there and that was all that mattered to him. She could look right through the deception and see him.

So could Caleb when he was present. Golden brown eyes always turned hard with anger when he followed the other vampire couple. It often brought a smile to his face that he could rattle the other man so easily. Caleb took it as a sign that Gard didn't trust him to protect his mate.

It was nothing of the sort but he didn't disabuse the other man. To do so would be to admit to him that he was vulnerable in his need to be with Anakatrine. He had already shown that vulnerability once five years ago and he was still angry with himself for doing so. The male posturing between himself and Callain had always been a bone of contention.

Gard smiled as he remembered the past, some of the fights they'd had when vying for the right to protect Anakatrine. It was the one thing designed to bring her wrath down on both of them and yet they had continued to do so despite that. He always had to yield though because Callain was his King and the mate of his Queen. Maybe that was why this time around he very seldom thought of Caleb as Callain.

He struggled to separate his sister from her new incarnation. He still thought of her as Anakatrine despite her admonishment to address her as Annie. But with Caleb it was easier to disassociate himself from the past, probably because he had Sired Caleb all those millennia ago. He'd had no idea at the time he was Siring Callain. Anakatrine had not been reincarnated for another two thousand years so Callain had remained hidden, dormant until the time was right for him to emerge to protect his mate and their people.

This time around everything was different and Gard felt that change like a blow to his heart. His sister didn't need him as she had in the past. He had to admit that to himself so he could work through the conflicted emotions that brought him.

Despite knowing that she didn't need him he found himself unable to give up his role of Guardian. It was ingrained deep within him but it was twisting in a new direction as he slowly let go of the past.

He found himself returning to the Pack even when his sister was absent, watching them as they built their compound. He felt a particular attachment to the young hybrid children being born. They were enchanting, something new, something that had been destined for so long but cruelly snuffed out in its infancy.

His thoughts went to wander in a direction he didn't want them to and he quickly stifled them down and glanced back down at the woman at his side. She was still out, still flawlessly perfect as she lay on the dark green moss.

Seeing her scale the tree towards Lily's room had brought a deep protective rage to the surface. He'd had no idea of what her intent was and he hadn't stopped to ask. Liliana Rose was his favourite of all the little ones. She reminded him so much of Anakatrine when she was little, headstrong, curious to a fault, a natural born leader. She would be glorious when she grew up. He pitied the poor man who would be called on to mate with her for she would lead him a merry dance.

His lips twitched at the thought, his gaze still on the face of the woman at his side. This one appeared to be just as much of a handful from what he'd witnessed so far. The burning question was would she live long enough to find her mate? Nothing and no one could be allowed to harm the children. He had failed once before in that respect and he had vowed then that he would never again fail to protect a helpless child.

He reached out and touched a strand of hair, letting it fall through his fingers slowly. Would he be able to neutralise the threat of this woman if that's what she turned out to be? He could take her life in so many ways it was quite shocking. Would he be able to do it though?

It wasn't a question he usually asked himself when he was called on to do what was required but he found himself asking it now as he stared into her exquisite face. He was perturbed to realise he didn't have a ready answer.

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Rayne came back to consciousness and tensed immediately. She expected to feel the agonising pain of having connected with the hard forest floor but instead there was nothing, which surprised the hell out of her. Her healing abilities were far advanced of any other Were but even still, she should have been in considerable pain.

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Slowly opening her eyes she looked up to find a pair of lavender ones staring intently into hers. They belonged to a large male vampire, the sheer size of the man looming over her overpowering. It took a lot to intimidate her but this male was certainly managing to achieve that and he hadn't even opened his mouth yet.

She stared up at the excruciatingly beautiful male face and bit back a little sigh as her cat purred quietly within her. Why did vampires always have to take a woman's breath away? They were the coldest, most arrogant, unfeeling beings to walk the planet and yet they were the most stunning individuals, truly glorious in their appearance.

She didn't think she'd ever seen an ugly vampire before and the enormous man above her wasn't a disappointment. His face was shaped in hard angles and planes with a sculpted brow and perfect cheekbones. His lips were drawn tight and he had a dark scowl on his face but he was still the most beautiful creature she had ever seen.

His thick auburn hair was secured in a long single plait which had fallen over his shoulder and rested against his chest. That chest was so wide and powerfully built that she had the urge to reach up and touch it just to see if it was real. She didn't make any sudden moves though. He would most likely kill her instantly if she did. **$(\omega)\mathbf{w}\mathbf{W}.n\mathcal{O}\sigma\epsilon\ell\mathbf{W}\mathcal{O}r\mathcal{M}.\mathbb{C}\acute{o}m$**

She had no doubt this was the vampire she had fought with. The one who had broken her ribs so easily and then thrown her from the top of a tall oak tree. He wouldn't hesitate to finish the job and end her life if the mood took him. She was oddly surprised to find that she didn't feel any fear towards him. She should. It was highly likely she was looking at the face of her executioner. **$\acute{W}_{\mathcal{W}}\acute{W}.\mathbb{M}.\epsilon\ve\ell\mathbf{W}\sigma^{\mathbb{M}}r\mathbb{M}.\mathbb{C}\sigma\mathbb{M}$**

A long moment passed when neither of them spoke and then the dark expression on the vampire's face smoothed out. "Leopard or jaguar?" His voice was a low deep rumble, a touch of curiosity in the question.