

## Chapter 232

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His heart melting, he cradled her face tenderly wiping at the wetness starting to run down her cheeks. Her eyes were both ancient and young at the same time, the knowledge and strength of a vampire queen battling against the fears and insecurities of a young woman who was terrified of losing the only blood relation she had left in her world.

"I'm with you, Annie," he said soothingly. "I will always be with you. And so will Rafe. Trust in him, sweet one, as you always have. Use some of that wisdom to always do the right thing, the wisdom you've given to everyone else so selflessly. You know you mean the world to Rafe. You know he is strong enough to accept this."

Her arms tightened around his neck and she buried her head on his shoulder, emotions running rampant through her. She wanted to believe Caleb so badly, wanted to believe that everything would be okay but the fear lingered, though it did lessen a bit.

"I love you, Caleb," she finally sniffed, kissing his neck lightly before sitting back up.

"As I love you," he breathed softly kissing her trembling lips tenderly until he felt her gain some control over her emotions. "So, are we going to meet our nephews or what?" he teased against her lips, shivering in pleasure as her soft laughter filled the car and she climbed off his lap and settled herself back into her seat.

"Drive on, James!" she laughed with a haughty tone to her voice and he rolled his eyes in mock exasperation as he put the car back into gear and headed towards the  
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She hadn't agreed to talk to Rafe but at least she wasn't fixating on her concerns anymore. Her excitement at meeting her nephews was the only thing on her mind and that was what he'd wanted to achieve. They could talk about the other matter again later. He'd convince her the time was right to talk to her Were brother so her Vampire brother didn't have to suffer anymore.

Caleb's relationship with Gard was complicated in the extreme. In his first incarnation as Callain, he had been King to Anakatrine's Queen and his brother-in-law had been The Guardian. It had been clearer cut then, though still a volatile mix.

Gard had protected Anakatrine as a child, had been ready to lay down his life for her. He was her brother and her Guardian and he took his role very seriously. Then she had matured and fallen in love with Callain and Gard's role had changed subtly as he'd had to take a backward step to his new King. They had clashed in their joint goal to protect Anakatrine but Gard had always had to concede in the end because Callain outranked him.

Their roles were technically reversed this time around and confusion reined between himself and Gard. The oldest living vampire had survived his sister and her mate, walking the planet endlessly waiting for Anakatrine to be reborn as he knew she would. The complications came in the timeline involved, and the change in the whole Vampire hierarchy now.

Caleb had been born almost two thousand five hundred years ago. Everyone believed he was the most Ancient vampire still alive. They were wrong. Gard was over six thousand years old and by today's standards should have been the most revered, most powerful vampire in creation. But no one knew about him except for him and Rhianna, even Demetri had no knowledge he was still alive. Gard had kept himself hidden over the years, tirelessly waiting for his sister to be reborn.

In that time he had found Caleb and chosen to Sire him, not realising that he was Siring Callain, his long lost King. That was another added complication because modern day Vampires were supposed to yield to their Sires. Technically Caleb should yield to Gard in all things but he was Callain too, a hundred times more powerful than his Sire and mated to Rhianna, the living embodiment of Anakatrine's soul.

Caleb would yield to no one with the exception of the exquisite woman at his side and even then he would fight her if it was required, if it meant the difference between her life and death. He could bend for her and did often because it gave him unimaginable pleasure to see her smile but he could stand against her too when she was being unreasonable or irrational even though it tore him apart to have her at odds with him.

The modern world didn't need a King and Queen, not overtly anyway. The Vampire Council ruled over their kind and the new structure he'd set in place five years ago appeared to working much better than the old one had. So far there had been no need to ask the Ancient Council to intervene. To his mind that was the true indicator it was working.

Mara kept them abreast on anything they needed to know about what was happening in The Council. Everything appeared to be running smoothly so Caleb had taken the opportunity of spending some much needed time alone with his mate. It wasn't his fault Rafe had decided to finally get Lacey pregnant at the same time, though he conceded that they could have come home a little sooner only he hadn't wanted their alone time to end.

He knew they would be coming home to the thorny topic of Gard and the decision his Annie appeared incapable of making. It was so unlike her to procrastinate like this and a clear indicator of just how much distress it was causing her.

She was so intent on her own distress that she was missing the signs of Gard's though. Not that his brother-in-law didn't conceal it from her ruthlessly. Gard was used to protecting her even if that meant protecting her from signs of his own unhappiness.

But Caleb could see it every time he looked into lavender eyes that mirrored his mate's so perfectly. Despite all the complicated shit, the male jockeying for position in Rhianna's affections, he loved Gard and counted him as a member of his family as well as respected him for his unwavering loyalty towards his mate and his position of being his Sire. Granted, he would never tell him that but that didn't mean he didn't feel it. Or didn't see his suffering and could stand idly by and watch it.

He pulled up outside Rafe's home and stifled down a laugh at how quickly Rhianna was out of the car and tearing up the steps. His gaze drifted left, met the eyes of the silent invisible man leaning against the side of the house.

"About time you brought her home," Gard's voice rumbled deep inside his mind and he had to work hard not to smile at the petulant note that crept into his tone.wvW.rL@vE1WcRm.cô@

"I suppose it's pointless asking you to let us get settled back home before you descend on us?" he asked as he got out the car and headed towards the house.

"I'll follow you home."

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Caleb sighed and entered the house, smiling as he saw his mate wrapped in her brother's arms laughing and crying at the same time as they both talked over each other, saying hello, talking about the babies, reaffirming the tight bond they shared with each other. Rafe's eyes connected with his over his sister's head and he smiled a greeting.

"Good to have you home, Caleb."

"It's good to be home," Caleb answered realising that he had missed this a lot. Rhianna claimed they were pack members but it was an honorary membership rather than a true bond. They were in no way tied to Rafe by his Alpha bond but they were tied to him by something more precious, the heart of the little redhead currently in the Alpha's arms. It was a bond as strong, if not stronger than a mere Alpha bond. It was indestructible. His Annie just needed to believe in that.