

Chapter 240

Caleb stood in the kitchen of the Alpha's house, expertly throwing together a meal for Lacey. Cooking was a skill he'd acquired years ago when he'd first met his Annie, when she was still human and required food to ease her hunger. She no longer needed food but his passion for cooking had remained and he used his visits to the compound to indulge in his not so guilty pleasure.

Lacey was hungry so he wanted to feed her. He also wanted private time with Rafe and had urged the other man to join him. He wanted to know who the woman was on the first floor earlier and he sensed there were other things he needed to know about too.

Rafe was watching him silently from his seat at the dining table, sipping at a cup of coffee.

"Who's the wildcat?" Caleb finally asked, letting the full weight of his gaze fall on Rafe as he spoke. He wanted to see his initial reaction to the question.

Apart from a slight tightening of his lips, Rafe managed to keep his expression neutral. "The newest member of my pack." His reply was slightly guarded, as if he was deciding how much information to impart.

Caleb could understand that. If Rafe had formed an Alpha bond with the woman then he would instinctively want to protect her at all costs. It was a surprising announcement. Wolves and cats didn't usually form bonds outside their own animal group, though he supposed Rafe's pack was anything but normal.

"Why was she hiding on the first floor landing when we arrived?"

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Rafe's eyes widened then a frown started to furrow his brow. "I didn't see her," he admitted after a long pause. "She must have been using her abilities. I'm surprised you saw her if she was."

That sparked Caleb's interest and he turned the gas down on the stove and sat down beside his brother-in-law. "Spill it, Rafe. What's been going on here?" It was a demand not a question and one that only served to make the other man frown more.

"Damn for a moment there it sounded like you thought you had a right to control my pack, Caleb. I obviously misunderstood you because I know you wouldn't try that shit on me."

Caleb stifled down a deep sigh and met Rafe's gaze intently. He'd forgotten how prickly Alphas were not having been around for a while. It was bad enough when he'd just had Jared to contend with but now Rafe had become an Alpha it was doubly as irritating having to watch what he said.

"Annie's heart would break if any harm were to befall this pack," he said wearily. "I'm not stepping on your toes, Rafe. I'm trying to make sure her family is protected. You know that so can we please dispense with the pissing contest and you just tell me what's going on? This affects us too."

Rafe sighed deeply and lowered his aggressive stance. He couldn't really argue with his brother-in-law, not where his sister was concerned. "Rayne has abilities that no Were has exhibited before. The children are exhibiting the same abilities." He didn't need to elaborate which children he was referring to.

Caleb tensed immediately, his expression hardening. "How did she come to the pack?" The words were bit out tersely. An unknown Were with unheard of abilities was not something to be taken lightly.

"Dayton Alexander brought her and before you go off on one, he's known her over fifty years. She's no threat to the children and no spy sent from some new, unknown enemy. Her arrival is purely coincidental."

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Caleb didn't believe in coincidences but if what Rafe said was true then there was no way someone could have known decades ago that vampires and Weres would mate one day and produce offspring. He relaxed slightly, his thoughts turning in another direction.

"Dayton Alexander? He's returned to the pack?" It was another interesting turn of events.

Rafe nodded. "The Alpha bond shifted from Jared to myself. Ashleigh and Freya went to see him a while back and something must have kicked in because he came home. Not that he's here at the moment but he's met with Cedar and Aaron. He's slowly reconnecting with his family. There's hope it might be a permanent homecoming."

Two virtual strangers within the pack and Freya somewhere in the mix? Not something that Caleb liked the sound of at all. There had been something in Rafe's tone when he mentioned Freya and that filled him concern.*(ẉẉẉ.Ṇọ@̣ệḷ(ẉ)@̣Ṛ@̣.c̣ọṃ*

His antipathy towards Nors' sister hadn't really changed much over the years. He knew she was a crisis waiting to happen and when it did his friend was going to end up hurt because of her. "What's Freya got to do with this?"*ẈẈẉ.̣@̣ọṾệḷẉọ(̣ị)ṃ.̣ộộṃ*

A low growl erupted from Rafe and his eyes turned hard. "Freya's pack. Our business. Don't get involved, Caleb."

It was the last thing he'd expected to hear so he couldn't help show his surprise. "When the fuck did Freya become pack?" he demanded. "Has she mated with a wolf?"

"She's pack by association with Nors and Ashleigh," Rafe insisted, his expression irresolute. "That's all you need to know."

Caleb could see that they were going to come to blows pretty quickly so he stepped away from the table and returned to the stove, stirring the soup which was simmering gently. Rafe's aggressive stance was concerning on many levels. He didn't want to lose his temper with his brother-in-law. Annie would give him hell if he did and he was particularly fond of the other man too.

Freya had obviously done something that Rafe was worried about. Which meant it was something against the Weres. Caleb was smart enough to know that Rafe would only claim the volatile woman as pack in a bid to stop her coming under threat from her own people.

He suddenly cursed loudly and swung his gaze back to the table. "Did she harm a Were?" It hurt to ask the question. Not because of any love for Freya but because of what would be required if the answer was affirmative. He had made his thoughts on the subject perfectly clear five years ago. There could be no exceptions.

If Freya Eriksson had attacked a Were in anyway he would take her head no matter what the fallout of doing so would be. He would break Nors' heart if it was necessary to ensure the safety of every Were that walked the planet. And he would weep for doing so.

"What's wrong?" Rhianna's urgent mental query sounded deep inside his mind and he swallowed hard to try and dampen down his emotions. Their mate bond could be very inconvenient at times.

"Alpha stuff," he answered gruffly. "I'll tell you about it later."

"Caleb..."

I said later, Rhianna!"

Their connection broke off instantly and he cursed loudly again feeling her retreat in both surprise and hurt. He'd been curt with her because of his own conflicted emotions about what he may be called on to do. He hated hurting her. It was a wound to his own soul every time he saw a look of pain on her face or felt the mental tremor through their bond.

Rafe was watching him carefully, his tough stance softening as if he could tell what his brother-in-law was struggling with. "Caleb, you've helped both the Hanlon Pack and this one selflessly over the years. Most of us are alive only because of your help. I know you've had to make tough decisions to ensure that happened. Let me return the favour this once. Let me take on the burden of Freya so you don't have to be put in an untenable position."

Caleb considered his words carefully and then turned off the stove. He nodded once and then let out a long deep breath. "If she's crossed the line there is no saving her, Rafe. Not for Nors' sake or anyone else's. You need to be prepared for that." He knew the other man hated the more violent aspects of pack life even if it was necessary from time to time.

Rafe rose and collected two bowls from a cupboard and laid them on the counter beside the stove so Caleb could dish up the food. "She's not irredeemable," he answered in a quiet voice. "Nors and Ashleigh couldn't love her as they do if she was. And Liam is exhibiting signs of being able to read emotions in other people. He told his parents that she's hurting inside all the time. She's not evil, Caleb, she's one of us. Someone who has been suffering a world of hurt for God knows how long and needs a safe place to belong to. That makes her pack in my eyes."