

Chapter 243

He struggled for control of his emotions, surprised to find it was easier to control them around the wolf than it was the man. He took deep breaths, slowly cooling his temper, fighting down the urge to kill and be the only man Anakatrine called brother. It was hard but he managed it, the sound of her sobs never leaving him. She hurt because she craved this wolf's love.

It was a shock to concede that the wolf hurt because he was losing something he held so dear to his heart. The woman called Rhianna Armand. Gard sat up, abruptly moving away from Rafe to lean his back against a thick tree trunk. He forced himself to think rationally, to subjugate his own feelings and see those around him.

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He had protected this pack because his sister loved every member of it. They were her family, the big Alpha even more than most. What he had never stopped to consider was how the pack felt about Rhianna. He had just accepted that they loved her because he loved her. He'd never considered just how much they loved her, how precious she was to them.

In a long, slow heartbeat he suddenly understood the wealth of pain Rafe Hanlon must be feeling at having his sister suddenly wrenched away from him. He could relate to that because he had spent three thousand years feeling that same pain while he waited for Anakatrine to be reborn.

"I can't describe to you how precious she is to me, Rafe," he finally said in a low voice not looking at the wolf. "To feel her die was an agony I've never fully recovered from. To find her again, a miracle I prayed for nightly. I know the pain of losing her and I know the joy of finding her again."

He turned to the wolf and found the man looking back at him, his expression full of pain and distrust but he was at least listening. "I understand your pain. You love her as fiercely as I do. You feel you have lost her because she is more than your Annie now, something different. She will always be your Annie and she will always love you."

"She isn't Annie any more," Rafe ground out hoarsely. "I don't recognise the woman she's becoming." His denial was absolute and Gard growled loudly.*Www.NovELworm.cOm*

"Anakatrine has been awake for five years now," he countered in a hard tone. "Has your sister been missing those five years? You will only lose her if you choose to walk away from her. She is still Annie."

Rafe fought against the agony he was feeling. He forced himself to think back on the last five years, all the times spent with his sister, her demeanour, their laughter, their runs together in the forest. There hasn't been a hint of Anakatrine in those moments, just his Annie. He groaned loudly and lowered his head into his hands, weeping silently.

The vampire was right and it ripped him apart to admit it to himself. Rhianna had never changed towards him and the pack. She had always been there for him. Yes, she had kept a secret of life changing importance to herself but from his reaction to finding out about it, she had good cause to. She had feared his rejection and he hadn't disappointed her. He'd run from her, broken her heart because he didn't want to face up to something so monumental it would take him years to wrap his head around it.

His sister carried the soul of a reincarnated vampire queen. Caleb was undoubtedly Callain and Gard...he had as much claim to call Rhianna his sister as he did. It was so overwhelming the weight of it crushed down on top of him. He didn't know how the vampires would react to finding this out. He didn't know what it meant for his pack. At the moment all he knew was his Annie thought he didn't want anything more to do with her and that would be breaking her heart.*@WW.NOV(e)EW(RM.cOm*

"Everything okay?" Caleb's quiet words drew both their eyes. He stood tensely, ready to intervene if required but his expression clearly said he'd prefer not to.

"Who's with Annie?" Rafe asked standing up and drying his eyes quickly. He straightened his spine and pushed down his conflicted emotions. He was Alpha to a pack. He couldn't go to pieces because he'd heard something he didn't like.

"Lacey is with her." Caleb's gaze was intent, searching his face keenly. "If you can't deal with this yet, say so, Rafe. I can't have her hurting any more than she already is. We can meet again when you've had some time to digest the news and reach some accord with it."

"You think I want her hurting any more than you do?" Anger flashed in Rafe's eyes but it was mainly directed towards himself. "I can handle this, Caleb. It just came as a shock. Surely all three of you can understand that? It's not every day you find out your sister is someone other than the woman you've loved her entire life."

Caleb relaxed and his lips twitched slightly at the aggressive tone in Rafe's voice. It was a good sign that he could cope with the news. Now he had to work on ensuring that their secret remained hidden.

"You need to keep this to yourself for now. It's not something we wish to become common knowledge. Lacey must know of course and Jared and Millie can be informed but the packs don't need to know anything at this time."

Rafe strode past his brother-in-law, heading back to the house. "As long as it presents no danger to the pack then I'll agree to this. For Annie's sake. But if this impacts on Weres in anyway I will not keep quiet, Caleb." His tone brooked no argument and Caleb let it go at that, following behind with Gard at his side.

Rafe pulled on a new pair of sweats and turned to the library. Lacey's eyes sought his desperately as she cradled Rhianna against her. His sister was still crying but it was silently now, her eyes red, her cheeks stained with her tears.

"Rafe? Honey, are you okay?" Lacey's worried voice soothed down his emotions a bit more.*www.W.NOVelworm(M.com*

He knelt on the floor beside them. "I'm fine, baby. Let me fix this." He was pulling Rhianna into his lap, dropping soft kisses on her wet cheeks.

"I'm sorry, Annie," he whispered gently. "It was just such a shock. I didn't mean to turn away from you."

"Rafe," she sobbed clinging onto him so tightly he knew she would mark him but his healing abilities would take care of that. "I don't want to lose you. I can't ever lose you again."

His heart twisted in his chest and he suddenly understood why she had been so afraid to tell him the truth. Once she had thought he was dead and it had almost broken her completely. That pain had never fully left her and was what drove her relentlessly to ensure he was always safe along with the pack. She would never do anything to endanger him or his people.

"You couldn't ever lose me," he groaned softly rocking her gently as he kissed the top of her head. "You'll always be my Annie, my baby girl. Nothing and no one will ever be able to take that away. I swear it."

His gaze connected with Gard's, his eyes hardening as he gave his sister all the reassurance she needed. For a moment they glared at each other and then the vampire slowly nodded his head, conceding they both had a valid claim to call this woman their sister.

To be continued...