

Chapter 279

"The pack is running sweeps," Rafe continued, looking off into the trees before looking back at them. "I see you two have mated." His eyes met Gard's and he stared at him pensively for a moment.

"Just so you know. This is my pack. I don't care how old you are; how shit hot you think you are. There's only one Alpha here and that's me. Vampires and hybrids don't get the option to challenge for succession, only Weres."

Gard considered that. He didn't want to run the pack but he knew he would struggle to take orders from someone as young as Rafe. Mating with Rayne had put him in the unenviable position of now being considered pack. His sister would probably find that highly amusing.

The Were right of succession was a smart move. The vampires and hybrids could overpower the wolves in an instant, therefore not lending to a 'fair' fight if they wanted to challenge to become Alpha of the pack. Not that they would probably want to but it made sense having rules in place just in case.

So, he was now pack, answerable to the man who had shared his sister life when he'd had no knowledge she was alive again. He'd hated Rafe for that, still felt some ambivalence because of it. But to keep Anakatrine happy he'd tempered his annoyance and made the effort to accept the big man. Rayne's tenseness at his side told him she was waiting to see how he would react to her Alpha's words.

For her, he'd walk through fire and do it again, as many times as she needed it of him.

"I don't bark when ordered," he finally said dryly, "but I do know how to follow the chain of command when it's required. Just don't try your command shit on me and we'll be fine, Rafe. I wouldn't want to upset Annie by kicking the living daylights out of you." It was the best he could do. Now it was up to the other man to see if he was willing to accept it.

Rafe rolled his eyes but his lips twitched in a small smile. "Just as well I don't like the sound of barking then. All I ask of anyone in my pack is they protect it, Gard. From what I understand you've been doing that the last five years anyway. That shouldn't pose any problems for you."

There was a brief silence as the two men worked on coming to terms with their new relationship and then Rafe turned away and looked at the dead vampires. "Suppose we should clean up this mess and then head back to the compound. Need to debrief Freya and Dayton and try and work out what the fuck this is about." He waved his hand at the dead vampires as he spoke.

"You want me to call Annie?" Gard asked. It wasn't a secret he could communicate instantly with his sister no matter where she was.

"She's a bit busy at the moment," a deep, male voice said from the tree line. "She sent me along to find out what was happening." A tall dark haired vampire strode nonchalantly out of the trees, deep green eyes twinkling at the groan that issued from Rafe.

"How the hell did she know?" the Alpha asked trying hard not to groan again as he watched the other man approach. Someone seriously was having a lot of fun at his expense at the moment.

"Mara does sit on The Council, Rafe. You think Andrei and Alexei could just take off out of a meeting and not give away that something was wrong with the pack?"

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Demetri Bozic stopped in front of him and raised a perfect eyebrow as he quickly took in the scene. His amused expressed hardened instantly, his eyes going cold.

"Unacceptable." The menace in his voice was chilling. Even though Demetri continually professed that he had no time for the pack, everyone knew that he'd be one of the first to rip apart anyone who tried to hurt them. He claimed kinship with Annie and therefore Rafe. The hybrid children were his to protect as if they were his own.

Rafe nodded in agreement. "We need to find out who and why. Stupid question but I don't suppose Mara's heard anything?"

Demetri's gaze turned back to the Alpha and his expression quickly answered that question. If there was even the tiniest hint that there was some kind of move against the pack, not only would the twins have been aware but so would Mara. And that meant they all would be aware.**W***ww.Nóve1Wo*(*r*)*m.cômm*

"This wasn't coordinated centrally," he answered. "Vampires have long memories and most of them are too smart to go up against Caleb or The Ancient Council. This is some kind of splinter group, a test of some kind."

Demetri checked out the scene again, his expression thoughtful. "We need to get together, discuss options. The pack is pretty well protected." His gaze slipped to Gard's, his agile mind leaping and making connections both Annie and Caleb had neglected to clue him in on. He would have to have a word with them about that later.

"I thought you were dead," he remarked coolly. "You've been off the radar for a long time."

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"Sorry to disappoint you," Gard answered with a small smile teasing his lips. He hadn't seen Demetri in a long time, over a thousand years. He liked the other vampire, respected him even. They'd need to find some time to catch up when the current issue was taken care of.

Demetri laughed softly clasping Gard's upper arm in greeting as his friend returned the gesture. "Disappointed wasn't the emotion that came to mind, though Annie and Caleb neglected to enlighten me on the identity of The Guardian. I should have figured it out with your colouring," he smiled.

He turned to look back at Rafe feeling a slight undercurrent of tension between the two men who claimed Rhianna as their sister. "The pack's security is increased immeasurably with Gard to enhance its protection."

Rafe nodded in his direction. Despite his constant teasing of the vampire, he trusted Demetri's judgement as much as he trusted Caleb and Annie's. If he vouched for the big red haired vampire then he would work on the last remaining issues between himself and Gard until they were both fully at ease in each other's company.