

## Chapter 285

Demetri sprang up the steps leading to the large white mansion's front door. Without knocking, he opened it and paused for a fraction of a second before turning to the right and heading into the kitchen. The smell of coffee permeated the air as did the noise of the coffee machine.

He couldn't help smiling as he watched Rhianna fuss over the ornate coffee machine, studiously preparing coffee. It was such a normal sight, was what he was used to despite everything that had transpired over the last five years.*www.W.noveLw@Rm.(c)om*

When Caleb and Rhianna had revealed themselves to him and Mara, his heart had almost stopped at the sheer enormity of their revelation. His instant concern had been for his adopted sister. She was so new to being a vampire and suddenly she had the memories of a long dead queen inside her as well as a powerful magic that came with them. She'd appeared to be too fragile to cope with it all.

But underestimating Rhianna Armand had always been one of his faults. He'd done so when they'd first met and she'd proven him wrong. She'd done so again as she'd worked to integrate the two separate parts of her personality and remain as close to herself as she possibly could.

*www.n0(v)Etw@Rm.com*

She had her moments when it wasn't always easy for her but for the most part, she remained Annie to her very core. He was proud of her. Hell, after Mara she was his favourite woman, someone he would give his life for without ever being asked too.

They'd kept Gard's existence and involvement in things a secret but he supposed they had their reasons for doing so. He assumed it was because of Rafe and the little redhead had been worried about how her brother would react to his presence. They should have known he would never have let it slip to Rafe and he was slightly put out that they hadn't confided in him. Still, what was done was done he supposed.

"Coffee's ready," Rhianna smiled, turning to face him.

He should have been surprised that she'd known he was there but he wasn't. His smile widened and he fully entered the kitchen, moving to the large wooden dining table closest to the door as she carried the coffees over.

"One of these days I'm going to succeed in creeping up on you, Red," he laughed softly, wrapping an arm around her shoulder and dropping a kiss on the top of her head before he sat down and reached for his coffee. She slid into the chair beside him.

"Not going to happen and you know it," she countered with a smile which didn't make her eyes sparkle the way they usually did.

It was a sign of her concern even though she was trying to appear at ease. He reached out and rubbed his cheek against her hair, wanting to soothe her worry. He didn't like to see her upset any more than her mate did.

"And stop rubbing your scent all over me. You know it only pisses Caleb off."*www.nov(e)lw@Rm.cm*

Demetri laughed loudly, deliberately brushing his cheek against her again before he sat back and concentrated on his drink. He knew how hard it had been for her not to go running to the pack when Mara had reported that the twins had taken off like there was a fire in progress.

He was surprised when she'd called him and asked him to check out the wolves rather than going herself. His expression must have conveyed his unasked question because she sighed deeply.

"Caleb says I need to take a step back." Her tone was miserable, her brow drawing down in a small frown. It was clear she was unhappy about not going to the compound. He wondered if Caleb's edict was the reason why she hadn't called her mate to investigate the problem.

"They're fine, Annie," he soothed automatically reaching for her free hand to give it a little squeeze. "Some vampires did try to breach the compound but Rafe has it all in hand."

"What?!" Rhianna's horrified expression ripped at him and he abandoned his coffee to give her another hug. To hell with Caleb being pissed at his scent being on her, she needed the comfort.*www.(n)ov@lw@Rm.(c)(m)*

"They're safe, Red, calm down. The vampires were dead and although I scented Freya's blood there were no casualties on the wolves' side and Rafe didn't report Freya's injuries as being fatal. They have it under control and Gard was there too. That's the only reason I left them."

Rhianna pulled away from him staring down at her mocha as if it was suddenly the most disgusting thing on the planet. Her heart was pounding hard in her chest and she had to fight back tears. She trusted Demetri. If he said the pack was safe then they were. Knowing Gard was there too helped soothe her anxiety a lot but she still wanted to be with them.

"I should be there," she whispered, taking a deep breath to try and get a grip on her spiralling emotions. "What will Rafe think of me, Demetri? I tell him about Anakatrine and then the first time the pack needs help I'm nowhere to be found."

"Caleb needs his ass kicking," the man at her side bit out, anger lacing his tone. He hated seeing her so distressed, couldn't understand why his friend was being such an idiot. He had to know that keeping Rhianna away from those she cared about would crush her spirit.

When she didn't automatically jump to her mate's defence his frown deepened. Usually Rhianna wouldn't hear a bad word said against Caleb, even in jest, but she was thinking so hard it was as if she hadn't heard him.

"Annie, is everything okay with you and Caleb?"

Lavender eyes met his and she blinked slowly at him before her lips curved slightly. "Yes, we're fine. Caleb just feels that I get so involved in everything that's going on around us that I lose sight of my own life, our life together."

"Fucking idiot!" The words came out on a harsh growl her expression went from surprised to irritated.

"Demetri!"

He relaxed slightly at the automatic censure in her words. She'd obviously missed his first dig at Caleb due to being lost in her own thoughts. Now he saw the Annie he knew so well, the one who would defend her mate against anyone and everyone.

He bit back the other curses he wanted to issue and touched her cheek gently. "That's who you are, Annie. You live to be there for others, to love them and protect them. If Caleb takes that from you then you won't be you any more. I know he thinks he's protecting you but he's being an ass, whether you want to admit it or not."

She didn't answer him, merely looked away and sipped at the coffee she no longer wanted. But it was something to do other than look at the anger in Demetri's eyes. She didn't want him angry with Caleb, not because of her. She needed to get a grip on her emotions. Demetri's over protectiveness was almost as bad as Caleb's at times.

He said the pack was fine, that they'd been able to defend themselves. That proved they didn't need her and Caleb was right. She didn't have to be involved in everything that went on. They could manage just fine without her. And yet, she wanted to be at the compound to make sure everyone was safe and well. Just to check with her own eyes.