

Chapter 287

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Rhianna wanted to call Rafe but figured he was probably too busy at the moment. Demetri said her brother would be in touch when he could so she headed upstairs and took a long soak in the tub to try and alleviate her concern.

She felt Caleb push at their mate bond and worked hard to keep it masked without dulling it completely. She didn't want him picking up her distress level. It would only set him on edge and then he'd become annoyed with her again for getting involved in things.

Would he be angry she'd sent Demetri to check on the pack? She hadn't gone herself and the pack was under their protection. Surely he would understand that she'd had to just check everything was okay?

Sighing miserably she lay down on their bed snuggling deep into Caleb's robe which she'd pulled on rather than her own. She inhaled his scent as she curled up on her side and closed her eyes. Being wrapped within Caleb's scent was home to her. He didn't ask much from her and she would try her hardest to give him what he needed even if it did wrench her heart to stay away from Rafe.

She felt so vulnerable, so unsure of what was the right thing to do. She understood Caleb's fear, his need to protect her. He gave off the impression he was handling the thoughts and memories of Callain but she knew he wasn't. Always in the back of his mind was the memory of how he'd failed Anakatrine, how she had died because of that failure.

Caleb was terrified of failing her again, of losing her.

"Annie." His voice whispered to her and she almost shrieked in surprise, not having sensed him coming into the bedroom. It was a testament to how wrapped up she'd been in her own thoughts that she hadn't felt him come home.

She smiled, her eyes opening slowly to see him standing beside the bed looking down at her with a withdrawn, pensive expression on his face. He was mentally castigating himself for something, punishing himself for some wrong he felt he'd done to her.

She could read him like a book and it tugged at her heart that she was once more responsible for his unhappiness. Demetri must have told him what had happened. Lord only knew what else their friend had said to him. Demetri had been pissed when he'd left even though he'd tried to hide it.

Rhianna stared up at her mate feeling her heart kick up a beat as it always did around him. Her smile softened and she reached out a hand unable to bear seeing him so upset with himself. He was so strong, so vibrant and powerful. He exuded a hard male sensuality that took her breath away every time she looked at him. She didn't like to see him so uncertain and off balance.

Caleb took her outstretched hand, watching her small fingers rest against his large palm so trustingly. He felt a rush of love and warmth seep through their mate bond and he was ashamed to his very core.

She always forgave him no matter how idiotic he was being. She always trusted him, loved him, and filled him with compassion and gentleness. Seeing his Annie lying curled on their bed in his robe, her beautiful red curls still damp from her bath...she was the essence of everything that was good in the world; in his world.

She was purity and fire all rolled into one. She was delicate and strong, sweetness and judgement. She was his Annie but she was also Anakatrine and he had no right to try and take that from her. "Forgive me," he whispered, slowly sinking down to the bed, brushing his lips tenderly against the pulse in her wrist.*wWw.noVëOwOr.m.co(m)*

"I'm afraid that's impossible, Caleb," she sighed softly causing his eyes to fly to hers in shock. The gentle curve of her lips soothed his instant concern; the love shining in her eyes bathing him with joy.

"I cannot forgive you for loving me, silly man," she laughed softly. "Even if you do it in such strange ways at times." Rhianna sat up slowly moving closer to him until she could brush his long hair from his face and stroke his cheek tenderly.

"You have to forgive yourself for the past, love. It cannot be changed. Be with me here and now, in this life, sharing this love. I need you with me always. Nothing will ever change that. Our hearts beat as one, our breath moves as one. You are my soul as I am yours."

"Annie." Caleb whispered her name, shame battling with an overwhelming rush of love as he looked into her eyes and saw both Rhianna and Anakatrine looking back at him. She had reached peace with her duality, far easier than he had done despite him thinking it was the other way around.

"I'm supposed to be the Ancient here," he finally said ruefully. He knew he had to let her fly free. It was who she was, the woman he had fallen in love with so very long ago. Caging his Annie was the cruellest thing he could ever do. She embraced life, reached inside people and pulled the very best out of them, even if it meant sometimes it would cause her pain and suffering. And he would always be at her side because there was nowhere else he would rather be.

Soft tinkling laughter lit him up with joy as she reached up and kissed him gently against the corner of his mouth. "But I'm the queen," she teased lightly.

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Caleb couldn't stop the laughter which filled his soul as he gathered her completely into his arms and cradled her close so he could kiss her gently with all the love he had in his heart. "You're a witch," he countered huskily deepening his kiss because he couldn't get enough of her.

When he raised his head and stared down into her exquisite face he knew everything would be all right. As long as his Annie loved him everything would always be all right.

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"So, what do you want to do about this attack on the pack?" he asked with a rueful smile, his heart racing as he watched her expressive face. He knew he was giving her what she needed, what she craved so badly. The freedom to be who she was and to protect those she loved.