

Chapter 289

Rafe released Rhianna into Caleb's waiting embrace and rolled his eyes at Gard and Rayne. "Now you understand why I don't want that man as a member of my pack. I would resign as Alpha five minutes after he joined."

The warmth and easy banter between these powerful people was unmistakable and spellbinding to Rayne. They teased each other confidently; secure that the bonds that tied them together were unbreakable. They were family and their relaxed demeanour in front of her was showing her she was family too, even though she didn't know them very well.

"He protests too much," Demetri laughed with a wink in her direction. "He loves me really."

"Ignore my husband, Rayne," Mara sighed with mock exasperation. "Everyone else does. I, unfortunately, do not have that luxury as I married the fool." She squeaked loudly as Demetri patted her backside teasingly, his laughter filling the room.

Rhianna laughed too, leaving Caleb's arms to cross the room to them. "You've met Demetri already. You should listen to Mara. She's the only one of us who has any control over that troublemaker."

Her alert gaze flickered over the couple and then she smiled slowly. "You've mated," she sighed softly. "I thought you had but wasn't sure because Gard is hiding you within his bond. You are welcome to our family, Rayne."

Rayne didn't know what to say, a little in awe of the tiny woman who meant the world to her mate, who also clearly meant everything to the other people in the room. Despite the fact only Rafe and Gard had a clear bloodline link to Rhianna Armand, the others seemed to surround the other woman, enclosing her within a strong protective barrier.

She was the heart of these people. It was the only way to interpret the intertwining relationships in the room. She was a queen even though she studiously avoided picking up that mantel in this incarnation.

Rayne felt an overpowering urge to sink to her feet before Rhianna and pledge her last breath to her. Without Anakatrine she would be dead. She owed her life to the soul that lived within the woman before her. Lavender eyes flashed with power for a moment and Rayne saw a queen come to life within Rhianna Armand.

"Will you rise for me, Sarayne?"

Gard blinked in surprise shooting his sister a slightly concerned look even as he rose at the same time his mate did. His arm slipped securely around Rayne's waist, his posture protective.

"Brother mine, would you believe I would harm that which you hold in your heart?" Anakatrine asked softly, her gaze turning to him.

The feeling of power within the room was high, everyone suddenly still and watchful. Unlike before, this was not a brief glimpse of the former queen. Anakatrine was completely in control and her power literally vibrated within the room. Caleb moved quietly, coming to stand at her back, his hands moving to rest of her shoulders as everyone held their breath.

"My Queen has always held my heart in her hands and been generous with her love and devotion of it. I have no fear she would do any less this time," Gard answered formally, slipping easily into the ways of the past.

Anakatrine smiled softly, reaching up her hand as her brother lowered his head to her. She traced his cheek lovingly her lavender eyes pulsing with power.

"Never has a queen had a more perfect Guardian," she sighed softly. "Always have you been the most loving of brothers. I have been blessed to have you protect me, my Guardian, but know now that task has ended.

Beside you stands your mate. She is love and compassion, a healer of souls. She has walked through fire, alone and afraid, searching endlessly for the other half of her soul. She has brought joy to your heart and for that she will forever have my love and protection. She thinks to kneel at my feet when in truth I should kneel at hers in gratitude for all she has given you."

Anakatrine turned to Rayne, her hand coming to lie gently against her cheek as her power continued to pulse within the room.

"I looked upon you as a babe and I knew in that instant you were our future, Sarayne," she continued. "I knew the consequences of my choices; I knew what I was sacrificing to ensure you lived. While I regret the pain those choices caused I do not regret the outcome. Because you live, our children will have someone to guide them and help them grow. My brother will have his life's mate and the joy of his own family."

Her eyes twinkled suddenly as she looked at Gard for a moment before returning her gaze to Rayne. "I see he has already blessed you with child," she mock whispered, suddenly looking less of a royal queen and more of a teasing sister.

"What?" Rayne squeaked, shocked eyes turning to her mate who looked equally as stunned. The memory of the heated magic shuddering through her body suddenly came to mind and her hand dropped to her stomach protectively. She searched deep within herself and felt the tiniest of flickers of life.©WW.novEIWÓrM.©om

Tears filled her eyes as she looked back at Gard who was slowly dropping to his knees beside her, his hand reaching tentatively forward to press on top of hers. He closed his eyes and reached out, feeling the same flicker of life.

His child was within her body! It was astounding, miraculous, so completely terrifying. He turned stunned eyes to his sister, accusation in them even as joy filled his soul. "Did you do this?" He knew he hadn't used his magic on Rayne that day but magic had flowed between them.

"I know you think me all powerful, brother mine, but even I am unable to create life," Anakatrine sighed softly, leaning into Caleb's embrace with a faint wistful note in her tone. "There are only two people who were capable of creating this child within and I certainly was not one of them."ww.novEIWÓrM.©om

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She turned suddenly and glared up at her mate. "And don't you think for one moment you're whisking me off across the globe in the near future. I will be present for this birth, Caleb Cullen or so help me, you will rue the day I ever came back into your life. I hope we are totally clear on that."

"As my lady commands," Caleb laughed softly, hugging her tightly to his chest as her joy flooded through their mate bond. He felt sorry for Rayne and Gard. His woman was going to be in their shadows until the poor child was finally born, determined not to miss another birth.

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