

Chapter 290

Gard rose cradling Rayne close to him, unable to believe how his life had changed so much. From being alone for so many long centuries, now he had his sister, his new pack, his mate and a child on the way. The wealth of emotions within him was hard to contain.

"Thank you, Sarayne," he whispered inside her head, all his love in the depth of his words. He couldn't speak any further, was too overcome by his emotions. He could tell she felt the same way as her own emotions travelled down their mate bond and her eyes shone with tears of happiness.

"We're having a baby, Gard," her stunned voice echoed in his head.

"That we are, Kitty," he laughed, smug satisfaction lacing his tone as well as pride and deep love. He pulled her down beside him on the sofa, peace in his heart as the others all moved to sit too, their teasing voices in the background as he concentrated fully on his wildcat. He could feel her tension leaving her as she accepted that she was now part of his family, that she had received the blessing of his sister and his friends.

Gard looked around the room and knew that all within were linked to him, despite the lack of blood ties between them. His gaze settled on Rafe and the sibling rivalry he'd felt was suddenly no longer there.

The huge Alpha turned his head as if compelled to do so and met his gaze. Rafe smiled as their eyes met, a silent acknowledgement that he too was ready to share the love of their sister with no further animosity between them.

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A sudden thought occurred to him and he stifled a gasp of surprise. If he had died along with Anakatrine and Callain all those years ago, his soul would have reincarnated into the body of the man before him. He would have been honoured to share that connection.

Anakatrine was no longer present in the room and Gard wondered when he would next see his queen. He knew she would come forth when needed but had the feeling it would be a long time before she was called on again. Rhianna was perched on Caleb's lap, leaning against her mate's chest as his arms circled her protectively. This was her time, her life and family to love and protect. And it was only right that Annie was the one to live in this time.

"So, now the pleasantries are out of the way we should get down to business," Caleb announced, his tone turning serious. "We've decided to keep this to family only for reasons we will explain later. Rafe, you can decide who you want to tell once you know everything. We trust your judgement."

Rafe nodded, ceding the floor to the vampires. His ego didn't require him to be in control just because the attack had been against his pack. He trusted everyone in the room and knew they would give their lives to protect his people.

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Mara sat up from her lounging position in Demetri's arms. "We've investigated quietly among our people and can confirm the attack was not centrally planned as we'd already suspected. No one appears to know who orchestrated the attack but the feeling is it's definitely targeted from Europe and beyond. If there is an individual directing some splinter groups we have no idea. It could just as easily be a group effort.

The only thing we could glean is that surprisingly the attack has been taken seriously among our people. Some of them are ambivalent and don't care, but the majority have taken it as a direct attack against both the Ancient Council and the ruling Council. They may not be willing to open arms and embrace Weres but they do object to our laws being violated."

The news was surprising to Rafe but also very welcome. It lessened the risk of a concerted attack by the vampires and also meant his current defensive plan was on the right track.

"Do we have any idea what they hoped to achieve with the attack?" he asked. "They came with some semi-automatic weapons so they obviously wanted to try and incapacitate the vampire element of the pack. They knew they were facing Ancients but appear to have no concept of just how powerful an Ancient is. The impression I got was they were looking to slip past the vampires and get to us directly."

Mara frowned. "They could have been trying to get to the hybrid children or they could simply have wanted to try and reach a high ranking wolf in the pack. We hold the Vampire/Were Council meetings in secret locations. If they wanted to target The Council it would be easier to reach us during one of those meetings than at the Council chambers. A high ranking wolf would know the locations and could be tortured to give up the information."

Rafe stiffened, not having considered that possibility. His eyes turned to Rhianna who was also sitting up, her body tense.

"Call Jared immediately," she said quietly. "We assumed the attack was something to do with the children. If it wasn't then the next attack could happen at the Hanlon compound. They are part of the Were Council."www.NovelWorld.com

"Connor is still here," Rafe said tersely, falling silent for a moment and then turning back to his sister. "I've alerted Aaron to inform him so he can let Jared know instantly. Chances are the attack is more about the children but it's better to be safe than sorry. Jared and Millie will need to know about what we're discussing here."www.NovelWorld.com

Caleb agreed. "Doesn't Dayton need to take Freya to meet the rest of his family? Now might be a good time for them to do so. There is no harm in having an Ancient visit the Hanlon pack for a few days."

Despite the seriousness of the situation Rafe found himself smiling. His brother-in-law never ceased to amaze him the way he quickly took in a situation and came up with an instant solution. "We'll need to inform Dayton and Freya as well then," he said. "They've already suffered at the hands of these vampires. I won't send them in blind, Caleb."

"Of course you won't," the vampire answered swiftly even though he was still rather perplexed about just how Freya Eriksson had suddenly become a vital member of the Armand-Hanlon pack. She was the last person he had ever expected to change her ways but it gave him hope that she had. If Freya could come to love the wolves then just about any vampire could.

Rhianna's warm approval suddenly flared through their bond, her love shining brightly. She always seemed to know when he was battling with a problem and coming to a conclusion which she agreed with. His woman was truly remarkable and he thanked everything that was holy that he was blessed to have her in his life. His arms tightened around her and he bent to brush his lips against her hair.

"We wanted this group kept small because of what I'm about to propose next, Rafe," Rhianna said quietly. "It's not because we don't trust our friends. It's just the way it was in the past and it worked well that way."

Gard's interest was immediately piqued and his attention focused fully on his sister, trying to work out what she was about to say. His mind drifted to the past and he suddenly smiled a very slow smile, pride for his sister coursing through him.

"The Praetorians," he breathed softly, earning a soft smile from Rhianna as the words escaped him.

"Yes, Gard, it is time to call The Praetorians back into service."

Rhianna turned to Rafe, rising to coming and stand before him. "Long ago when there was only The Guardian to protect Anakatrine, a group of protectors were formed to assist with his task. Their identity was kept a secret and they lived in the shadows. They were the most deadly fighters of our kind, silent assassins of all who would threaten the royal hierarchy. They were The Praetorians and they served me well until I disbanded them in my wisdom, turning our people over to the first vampire Council."

She took a deep breath wondering if things would have been different if she hadn't made that decision. She shook the thought from her head acknowledging the past couldn't be changed. She could change the future though; she could protect their most precious treasures.