

## Chapter 427

The air in the Alpha's library was thick with tension. Rafe had kept the meeting small, opting to inform the necessary people who needed to know once any decisions were reached.

He stood with his back to the open fire, silently watching his sister and brother-in-law share some private communication. He could tell they were talking telepathically by their body language and the sparkle in Rhianna's eyes. There was no mistaking the love that shone between them, and it made him smile despite the worrying circumstances that had brought them all together.

Gard was perched on the side of his desk looking bored as they waited for the last invitee to arrive. His eyes kept lingering on the window, his body language tense. Rafe's lips quirked as he watched him. Once a Guardian, always a Guardian. He doubted the six thousand year old vampire would ever be able to break that habit even though his life had changed so much in the last quarter of a century.

Rafe shifted his stance slightly wanting the meeting to start but lacking the final person to get things underway. He sighed when he heard the sound of Jared Hanlon pulling up outside, relieved his former Alpha was finally here. Gard appeared to be of the same mind.

"Finally," the auburn-haired vampire rumbled with a snort of irritation. It was clear to see that he wanted to be outside searching for Lily. His mate, Rayne, was out in the forest helping in the search and he didn't like being apart from her.

It wasn't that she couldn't take care of herself because she was more than capable of that. It was the fact she had vampire DNA just like the rest of the Vârcolac that concerned her mate so much. That put her at risk like the children but, as usual, she didn't see it that way.

They'd had one of their rare fights over it and she'd promptly put Gard in his place. Rafe had stood silently as they worked out their difference of opinion. Despite Guard's irritation at not being able to dissuade his mate from her course of action, the large male had been fighting a smile threatening to tug at his lips.

He'd had to concede defeat and let Rayne do what she felt she had to, but he made sure everyone knew he wasn't happy about it. The sooner the meeting was over and Gard could get on with doing what he was best at, the better. Rafe would feel happier with him out there looking for Lily too. Now that Jared had finally arrived, they could get down to business.

The study door opened and the Hanlon Alpha entered, his expression concerned as he crossed the room and embraced Rafe, before turning to hug Rhianna and nod his head in greeting to both Caleb and Gard.

"Sorry I'm late. I wanted to get everyone organized. Brody is on his way up to the Praetorian Compound. I've brought a few of the pack with me and told them to check with Aaron where he wants them."

"Thanks, Jared," Rafe answered with a brief smile. "We've got some of the pack out trying to ensure Lily's protected. She's in the area somewhere but no one knows where. With other pack members up at the Praetorian Compound it will be an added boost to have some more wolves around here just in case."

He couldn't keep his concern out of his tone. For the second time, one of his pack was missing and he didn't like it one bit.

"Lily will be fine."

Rafe turned to his sister as she rose from the sofa and slipped into his arms to hug him tightly. She smiled up at him, giving him one of her reassuring grins, which always helped to ease some of his concerns. "Mackenzie will take care of her."

Rafe sighed and gave her a gentle squeeze in thanks. He didn't have Lacey to turn to and he certainly needed some soothing. His wolf was prowling restlessly, wanting to strike out at something in its need to protect everyone.

"I told her the next time she muted my bond I would throw her out of the pack, Annie. I meant it at the time but I never believed she'd put me in the position of having to carry out that threat. What the hell am I supposed to do now?"

His sister gazed up at him with eyes so young and yet so old. Her smile was one of confidence. "You will do what is right for Lily, as you always have done, Rafe. Just because you say something doesn't mean you can't change your mind."

He grunted in response and filed that particular issue away for the moment. He knew he'd have to come to a decision about what to do with Lily, and while it weighed heavy on his mind, they had other things to discuss. So much had happened recently and this was the first time they'd been able to get together as a group to discuss everything.

"How's Pietro?" Caleb asked, crossing the room to pour a cup of coffee. He deftly reacquired his mate's attention, appearing nonchalant as he retrieved her from her brother's embrace. Settling her back on the sofa at his side, he handed her the coffee and turned back to Rafe.

"Mallen looked him over not too long ago," Rafe sighed. "The scarring is permanent as we all believed. Whilst there is still some spark of the old Pietro there, he has been affected emotionally by his experience. He's withdrawn and agoraphobic, preferring not to have any visitors bar a few. It took the threat of having you come see him to get him to agree to the physical from Mallen."

Caleb's expression darkened, his eyes narrowing at the news. It was clear there was a deep anger bubbling under the surface but he was making a concerted effort to keep it at bay. He frowned and ran a hand through his hair, looking down at his mate.

"I'll see if he wants to talk before we head home. It could just be time he needs though." Rhianna's expression was thoughtful and she didn't appear to be overly concerned at the news.

"The Europeans?" Gard interjected; keen to get the meeting onto the main topic they were all here about. It wasn't that he unsympathetic to Pietro's issues and not furious at what had happened because he was. He was just anxious to get back to Rayne as soon as possible.