Chapter 437

Mackenzie couldn't decide what to do. He wanted to spend time with Lily, to make sure she and their child were okay, and yet, his duty pulled him to the compound, to find out what happened and how to make sure it didn't happen again. His indecision was plain for everyone to see.

"The vampire's still alive at the compound," Gard told him. "She's in the holding cells but it's not deemed safe to take Lily back there yet, not in her current condition. The likelihood of the vampire being able to hurt either Lily or the child is small but there's no harm in taking precautions. Freya has offered the use of her cabin. I trust you don't want to be separated from your mate right now?" He arched an eyebrow, his lips quirking in a small smile at the deep frown on Mac's face.

"I swear Kothi gets his teasing from his father," Rayne sighed, shooting a reproving look at her mate. "Go spend some time with your mate, Mac. Sometimes family has to come first. We're heading up to the compound and will assist Karn. Caleb and Annie were on their way to brief the Council but have decided to put it off considering what's happened. It's going to take a bit of time for everyone who needs to be there to get up to the compound. There's time for you to be with your mate." She was concerned at how pale Lily looked and nodded her head in her direction.

Mac's grey eyes took in Lily's pallor and there was no decision to make. "Call us if you need anything." He collected his mate in his arms and cradled her tenderly. Ignoring everyone, he took off towards the secluded retreat so he could spend some much-needed time with his woman.

As soon as they had left, Kallum turned cold eyes on Gard. "Why does she still live?" Like Mackenzie, he was furious that someone had breached their defences and tried to harm Liam. Death was the only punishment for that crime.

"Liam had Elina save her." It was Rayne who answered.

"Why the hell would he do that?"

A sad smile crossed Rayne's face, concern in her deep green eyes. "The vampire is his mate."

"Oh, fuck!" Kallum groaned as Kothari's loud laughter filled the valley.

Halfway up the steps into the Council building, Caleb and Rhianna stopped at the same time, their eyes turning to the mountains in the distance. Long slow moments passed as scenes played out, fear and anguish, pain and suffering, and finally relief flowing through them.@wW.Ň@VE*Lw*or@.com

Caleb turned narrowed eyes to his mate, watching her expressive face as she continued to stare off into the distance. He could feel her reaching out to the others, surrounding them with her love, as she was inclined to do. As he watched her, he felt a rage begin deep within at the events that had just played out.

Someone had come into his territory and hurt one of his own. A quarter of a century ago, he had issued an edict in this very same council building, letting everyone know in no uncertain terms, what the penalty would be for any attempt to harm those under his protection. Today, someone had done just that, and he would not countenance it. Ever!

"Liam's fine," Rhianna breathed quietly, relaxing as the danger passed. Her gaze turned to her mate's and she swallowed hard at the expression on his face. "Caleb." She placed a steadying hand on his arm but his expression didn't waver.

He gripped her upper arm and moved back down the steps towards his waiting car. "You said this wouldn't happen, Annie. You said there was no harm in allowing the female to come into my territory." His grip tightened painfully as he fought with the myriad of emotions crashing through him. He was livid on more than one level, not just at the woman who had hurt Liam, but also at his mate.

"Caleb." Rhianna tugged at her arm until he released her abruptly and she had to check herself from stumbling. Lavender eyes watched him warily. He very seldom lost his temper with her; it had been years since the last time. Looking into his face it was clear that he was angrier than he'd ever been with her before. She could understand that to a certain extent, but it still hurt deeply that he could look at her with such lack of faith. "No, I said she would heal three souls. I had no idea this would happen. I don't see the future, Caleb. I just sometimes know what needs to happen, and Thereasa coming here needed to happen." $W\hat{W}w.n_{e} \odot e\ell w Orm.c \odot m$

He rounded on her, his eyes flashing amber in his fury. "She hurt Liam. She dies, end of subject. And don't argue semantics with me, Rhianna. I don't believe you didn't know the harm she would do. If she is supposed to heal three souls then she would have to have caused the harm in the first place. This is something Anakatrine would do. Not my Annie."

She felt her own anger rise, hurt at his condemnation and the fact he was calling her an outright liar to her face. She had never lied to him, not once in all their years together. He was allowing his rage to colour his judgement and failing to see the bigger picture. "You say that as if we are separate beings, Caleb. Anakatrine is part of me as Annie is part of her. I've managed to find a balance as best I can. I think your own lack of balance with Callain is what's prompting this rage within you."

Her eyes blazed with fire, hurt and anger dominating her emotions. "I have never lied to you, Caleb. Not once and I never will. I had no idea Thereasa would hurt Liam. I'm as angry about that happening as you are, but she cannot die. She still has three souls to save. That hasn't changed."

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His expression turned thunderous. "This has nothing to do with Callain and everything to do with Anakatrine. Remember I know her well and know what she's capable of for the greater good. I know my Annie and she would never have allowed this to happen. She may never lie to me, but I'm not so certain Anakatrine wouldn't. If you're so balanced with her then what am I supposed to think?"

He moved closer to the car, pulling the door open and waiting until she got in. It was an effort not to slam the door shut and for a moment, he drifted back to a night so many years ago, the night of his very first argument with a petite redhead who was to become his world. So much had changed since then, so much good and some not so good. Somewhere along the way, both he and his Annie had changed until they stood now at a precipice and he didn't know what was going to happen.

That was what frightened him the most, what lurked behind the rage. As each event unfolded, he sensed Anakatrine take more of a hold on his Annie. While Callain had loved Anakatrine in a past life, he was more prominently Caleb now, and it was Annie who was his soul, not the vampire

queen. She was slowly taking over until one day he would wake and his precious Annie would be gone forever.

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