

## Chapter 453

Then Mallen had appeared, pushing through the group. "Let me through," he ordered, as he pulled open his medical bag. "If Liam says she's there then I'm not going to argue with him, not after he just brought six seemingly dead vampires back to life. So, I'll work on the physical side and you can do your mental shit. Come on, people, we don't have a lot of time here." His stoic pragmatism seemed to shake off some of the stunned grief they were experiencing and the group parted to give them room...

As events moved around them, the barest change in posture was enough to tell Caleb that his Annie had ceded control to the inner soul the resided within her - to the vampire Queen Anakatrine, and he automatically slipped into his role of protector, guarding the three crucial elements to Thereasa's possible survival.

He'd had no idea if they could pull the woman back from the brink of death, but he would give them every opportunity to do so. He had learned long ago not to doubt Anakatrine's resolve when she wished something to happen. If she had decided today was not Reasa's day to die, then he expected that would be the case.

The fighting had been over by the time Rhianna had slumped tiredly into his waiting arms, the vampire queen once more withdrawn, a healthy pallor beginning to suffuse Reasa's pale cheeks.

"Thank you! Thank you!" Liam's grateful words gushed forth as he cradled his mate carefully, watching the wounds heal miraculously on her body.

Rhianna had yawned, snuggling against his chest as Liam dragged his gaze from his mate to look at them. "Thereasa saved her three souls. Her penance is over." Her lavender gaze connected with the Vârcolac, a happy smile gracing her face. "Anakatrine returned Reasa's immortality, Liam. She will heal herself in good time now, though it would probably be more comfortable if she wasn't left lying on the forest floor while she did."

A hush had fallen over the clearing, all eyes staring at them. "Do you mean it, Annie?" Liam whispered, hope in his voice. "Reasa is a vampire once more?"

Her smile had widened if that was possible as she rose to her feet with Caleb at her side. "She is a vampire once more," she agreed placing a hand on his shoulder. "Take her home now, Liam. Cassia, take Pietro home too. There has been enough drama this night. Let's care for those we can and find a way to help those we can't."

Caleb had gathered her to his side, knowing her thoughts were travelling back to Europe and to what could have happened to her brother and his mate. The rest of the pack wasn't aware of that turn of events as yet, and it appeared they would try to limit that knowledge to those who needed to know for the time being.

"Back to Rafe's?" he'd asked, but she'd shaken her head as she looked at her brother. The Alpha's attention was on his pack at the moment, and the ones he could do something to help.

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"Tomorrow," she'd answered, her heart heavy as her eyes turned to stare off into the distance. "Be safe," she whispered for only Caleb to hear. "Be safe, brother of my heart. Your work here is not yet done."

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Now they were almost home and Caleb wanted to curse out loud. Now that the adrenaline had receded, it gave Rhianna time to digest the news they'd learned just prior to the attack, and her reaction was what he had both expected and dreaded.

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Caleb cast another sideways glance at Rhianna, his concern increasing as he searched her blank expression. He knew what was going through her mind, and he wanted to do something, say something that would alleviate the morbid thoughts she was no doubt thinking. He opened his mouth and then closed it again, taking a deep breath as he tried to find some words of comfort. "Annie, they will be okay."

Haunted lavender eyes turned to meet his and then she looked away again, staring vacantly out the windscreen as he pulled into the driveway of their home. "I can't feel him, Caleb. I should be able to sense him but there is just a blank area where Gard has always been."

He knew what she meant; he could detect no sign of her brother down their Triumvirate bond. Always before the three of them had been linked, they carried the souls of the vampire Queen and King, and Gard was their third, the Queen's Guardian. Caleb had tested that link and found only Rhianna on the other end, but that didn't mean that the worst had happened. It couldn't, because he didn't think Rhianna could cope with the loss of her brother from another time.

He could remember every moment of when he had first met his beautiful mate. She had been human then, and grieving for the loss of her brother Rafe whom she had believed was dead. She'd had no knowledge then of a world where vampire and Weres existed. She had believed she had lost Rafe forever and her grief had been absolute.

However, fate had stepped in showing her a world where her brother now lived as a Were shifter and her lover was an Ancient vampire. She had accepted these things in her stride, her love for the two most important men in her life making acceptance a simple matter for her. Then fate had stepped in once more, awakening the spirit of a long-dead vampire queen within Rhianna, and reuniting her with her beloved brother and Guardian, Gard. The same brother who was now missing somewhere in Europe along with his mate Sarayne.

Caleb knew that his Annie loved Gard with the same passion that she loved Rafe. There was no distinction between the two of them in her mind, no matter that Gard had lived over six thousand years and his blood kin was the vampire queen residing in her soul. If she lost Gard...if the unspeakable had happened and he no longer walked the planet...Caleb didn't know how she would react to that loss. All he knew was she needed him to be strong for her, and he would do his utmost to be there for her.

He parked the car close to the front door, walking around it to open her door when she didn't move. "Come on, Annie." Holding out his hand he waited for her to acknowledge him, waiting a full five minutes before he reached in and took her hand. "Let's go inside, love."**WwW.NorëL(w)©m.Ĉ0m**

She appeared to shake herself from her reverie, her troubled gaze searching his face for a moment before she allowed him to help her out of the car. "She's so silent too. It's eerie how absent she feels as well, Caleb."

He knew who she was referring to, and he took a moment to turn his thoughts inward, to the soul that nestled inside his head. "Callain?"

There was a brief pause and then the deep voice of the vampire King whispered through his mind and sent a shiver down his spine. "Leave her, Caleb. Let her come to terms with what she's heard. If she reacts out of emotion...well, let's just say we don't want her to do that. Comfort Annie as best you can. If Anakatrine reacts negatively, be prepared to cede control to me so I might temper her rage. She can be formidable when she is hurting. I don't want anyone to be hurt because she is lashing out in grief. Take respite that she is thinking this turn of events through."

The other presence vanished as quickly as he appeared, and Caleb sighed as he pulled Rhianna into his embrace, his need to protect his mate paramount. "Callain says it's best to allow Anakatrine to come to terms with things and we shouldn't prod her until she is ready to speak to us. For now, we are on our own and it is our actions that we need to determine."

She nodded against his wide chest, pressing her small frame into his arms as if she was trying to climb into his very skin. "Do you think...do you think they're...?"

Caleb cursed as her voice broke, and a loud sob wracked her body, shock and grief finally breaking through the fragile control she'd held on her emotions. His beautiful mate gave her heart unreservedly, and that meant when things went wrong, it shattered so very easily.

Sweeping Rhianna into his arms, he strode into the house, and headed straight upstairs to their room. She needed to feel safe and there was no safer place she felt than in their room. She also needed to rest, because no doubt there would a lot asked of her in the days to come. "No I don't believe that, and I won't until I see evidence to the contrary," he growled, lowering his mate onto their bed and curling his big body around hers protectively.