

Chapter 529

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"She has three souls to heal, Rafe. Guard her well and find forgiveness in your heart. I know you can do it, I have faith in you. I have always had faith in you."

The big man moved, coming to stand before his sister, concern on his face. "Where will you go? Will you be okay? You can come to the pack any time you need to, Annie. You know that, don't you?" He was afraid for her, his natural protective instincts kicking in even though he feared the repercussions of the day's events.

The smile she gave him was a little stronger than the last one as she moved to give him a hug. His arms pinned her tightly to him in a crushing embrace. "I know, brother mine," she whispered. "Don't worry, I'll be in touch soon. Just guard her, Rafe. Please, do that for me or all of this will have been for nothing and hearts will have been broken needlessly."

There was so much emotion in her words, so much pain leaking through her tough mask. Rafe tightened his hold, feeling every ounce of misery she was experiencing. His Annie was trying so hard to remain strong but underneath she was crying, her heart breaking at Caleb's coldness. "I will, Annie, I promise I will." He couldn't deny her some solace, even as he wondered just how he was going to keep his word to her. So many wanted Thereasa's death for her actions. Keeping her safe within the pack would not be an easy thing.

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Rhianna moved away from him, once more turning to Gard for support. He was there in an instant, flanking her small frame, keeping a barrier between her body and the vampires.

"If you do this..."

"Don't, Caleb." Rhianna's quiet words halted the Ancient vampire as he began to speak, though she didn't turn to look at him. "Don't say anything now that can't be unsaid." She held her breath, afraid he would continue and say the words that would surely break them forever.

He was silent for a long moment, his amber eyes boring into her back. Finally, he swallowed hard and his cold eyes met Gard's. "If any harm comes to her I will personally rip you limb from limb and to hell with the consequences."

Cool lavender eyes met his, a sardonic expression crossing the Guardian's face. "Really, Caleb? You feel the need to say that? I failed my sister once when I left her in your care. Remember? I will never fail her again, which is why she comes with me now. You've already killed her once, Callain. You will never have the opportunity to kill her again." He watched the barb hit home and the smile he gave the Ancient held no warmth. Caleb was intent on destroying what Gard loved and his allegiance was firmly with his sister. He would do everything within his power to protect her.

Without another word, Gard ushered Rhianna from the now silent room, ignoring all he passed on the way out. He could tell how distraught she was by the fact she didn't protest, merely let him lead until they were outside. The front yard was full of Praetorians, Karn looking up from a fallen male lying on the grass. His pale blue eyes tracked them as they headed towards one of the waiting Jeeps.

"No, Gard, I need to be outside," Rhianna whispered, pulling away and glancing back towards the house. Large tears welled up in her eyes as she stared forlornly at the place where her heart lay. Her defences were crumbling and she needed to get away quickly. Turning on her heel, she took off running as if all the shades of hell were behind her, racing into the waiting tree line.

Her brother followed her, long auburn hair flying in the wind as he raced beside Rhianna, matching her pace silently as she tried to work through her emotions. Any tears that may have fallen evaporated in an instant, but he could feel her heartbreak through their bond and his own pain reached out to join hers.

She took the most difficult path, weaving into the most densely populated trees. He had to react fast to stop the branches whipping and tearing into her skin. Rhianna appeared oblivious, or maybe she wanted the branches to flail the skin from her bones, as if somehow this was to be her penance for her actions. He couldn't allow that to happen, though, so he shielded her as they

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She never faltered, never stopped until she reached the border. Only then did she halt her forward movement, staring across the wide Lake Huron, her frantic eyes darting in all directions.

"Annie, where are we going?" He stood close but not touching her. He was afraid if he touched her again she would hare off in another direction. It took everything in him to stand quietly at her side and wait for her response.

"I don't know, Gard," she finally whispered. "I don't know anything anymore except that I need to get away as far as I can." Tortured eyes turned to his and he felt his heart break that little bit more at the agony he read on her face. He reached out, pulling her tightly into his arms, trying to ease some of the misery he saw.

"My Annie doesn't run away, no matter what," he breathed into her hair. "So, we are going to take a few days out, just to gather your thoughts and then we're going to address this and work out how to fix this. Okay?" He injected as much confidence as he could into his words, knowing they had a mountain to climb to fix things.

"What did I do, Gard? How could I let Anakatrine do that to Thereasa, knowing what it would do to Caleb and me? He warned me. We argued before we got to the compound. He was already showing discontent with Anakatrine's influence, and I still gave over control to her knowing it could be the end of us. How could I hurt him like that?" Rhianna's voice broke, the weight of what she'd done beating down on her. A loud sob escaped, followed by another and then another as her legs buckled and he was all that was holding her up.

Gard held his sister close as her emotions overwhelmed her, the sobs turning into broken cries as if shards of glass were tearing at her. His own tears fell unhindered, his helplessness to do anything to help her frustrating him and breaking his heart. He hated to see her like this, to hear her pain filling the air around them and floating over the calm waters of the lake. If he could have done something, he would have, but all he could do was hold her as she wept brokenly.wvW.noVèlw©r@.c@m