

## Chapter 530

They stood together by the water until Rhianna finally quietened, a few hiccups echoing around them as she slowly calmed. When he was sure the worst of this moment of grief was over, he began to speak, telling her of a time long past that he had never shared before.

"You are not the first to perform that spell, Annie. When you were but a babe in arms, our mother was put in a similar position when one of her own broke a law so taboo it could not be left unpunished." He paused, his mind sliding into the past. "The funny thing is, I couldn't tell you what that law was, but I can remember the punishment clearly. I knew what you planned to do at the compound and felt the same sense of foreboding as I did when our mother exacted her justice."

His words captured her attention and Rhianna pulled herself up a bit straighter. Her heart felt as if it was in a million pieces and she missed Caleb's touch so much. Their bond was still closed to her, though it was open on her side. It was he who didn't want to be with her and that was hard to take. She could feel another wave of melancholy threatening and she forced it away to listen to her brother's words. "What happened? Why did I never know of this?"

Gard shot her a rueful smile, moving to find a spot on the grass to sit down and waiting for her to do the same. "Mother forbade me from telling you. She didn't want you practising the spell. The vampire's name was Elijah and he was one of Mother's closest confidants. I think they may have been lovers but I was too young to be certain of that. Elijah did something and the punishment was to strip him of his immortality."

Gard frowned, relieving the memory as he spoke. It had been worse than what had happened at the compound, and most likely, what led later to the newly formed first Vampire Council rising up and murdering Anakatrine and Callain three millennia ago. The display in power that day, the knowledge the vampire queen exhibited, it had been too much for the rest of them to accept.

"It was different to what you did, Annie." His frowned deepened. "I think maybe something went wrong when Mother did it, because he didn't show signs of the same distress Thereasa did. Maybe that was down to gender, I don't know. Something tells me there was a difference though, having seen the spell performed a second time. Elijah did smell human after the event, I remember that."

Rhianna's curiosity was piqued and she listened avidly. It had been so long since she had heard tales of her Mother. Gard hadn't spoken of her since he'd come back into her life. "How did Mother deal with it?"

A shadow crossed her brother's face and he turned grim. "She was pretty much like you at first, consumed with guilt for her actions. Elijah was led away from our nation, and cast off to fend for himself for however long he had left to live. Whatever happened to him, no one knows, as he was never seen again. Mother, on the other hand, became withdrawn after the event, distrusting most of her previous advisors. It was as if she couldn't get over the fact she had been betrayed by someone she loved so much."

Rhianna frowned, wrapping her arms around herself as she stared across the water. She knew what came next; he had explained it to her when she was a little girl. "Is that why she did what she did, Gard?"

Her brother reached across, pulling her tightly to his side as his own memories threatened to overwhelm him. "I believe so, Annie. I think she just couldn't accept what happened and that was why she built a pyre in secret and chose to leave the world forever."

She was slightly divorced from the pain of their mother's suicide, Anakatrine feeling the impact that bit more and she wasn't in attendance. However, it didn't stop more tears gathering in her eyes as she mourned a woman she barely had any memories of, but whose death left a scar on her heart. She had been three when her mother died and Gard had taken over her upbringing. It was ironic that in this incarnation, a similar incident had occurred to leave her in Rafe's care, only this time her parents' death had been an accident.

How events mirrored each other, the web of the past crossing millennia to influence the future. Rhianna wept for a mother she never knew, knowing that she hadn't loved her children enough to live. It was the major reason she had never spoken to Caleb about the secret knowledge she now harboured deep within. Keeping secrets from her mate hadn't sat well with her and for the last week she'd been mulling over when she would tell him. It would appear it was a moot point now anyway. Caleb had made it plain he did not want to be with her again.

Scrubbing at her face, Rhianna stood, turning to look down at Gard. He was watching her intently and she gave him a brief smile. "Thank you for telling me. It will make processing this a bit easier. I've decided where I want to go." She pointed to the left.

"Toronto?" Gard quirked an eyebrow at her in surprise.

"Lots of people. It will be easy to get lost in the mix until I've worked out a plan."

He shrugged and nodded his head in agreement. If she wanted to go to Toronto then that was where they were going. "You intend to run there or can we buy a car?"

"A car will be fine." She looked over the lake once more, wondering what had happened to her mother's lover, Elijah. In that time, death was around every corner, which was why so many chose the life as a vampire to survive. At least Thereasa was not alone and had others to protect her. Liam and Rafe would keep her safe. She took comfort in that.

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As they turned to head back towards civilisation, Rhianna sighed as another memory crossed her mind, one of Anakatrine's. "Do you think we made the wrong choice coming to the new country, Gard? If we had stayed in Europe centuries ago, do you think events would have been different?"

He echoed her sigh, walking closely at her side. "Northern America is so powerful now. Having an enemy here at our backs may have been a worse position to be in than we are now. Europe is fragmented, therefore easier to deal with. As soon as you've decided what you're going to do and I'm confident in your safety, Rayne and I will go over to Europe and find out what the hell is going on."