

## Chapter 560

"Necessity," Mac answered, his expression now serious. "We fucked up and disaster hit us. When the shit went down, everyone bailed on us, intent on their own personal dramas. None of the Ancients were available so we've had to sort things out for ourselves. Thankfully, Lily prevailed on Rafe for some medical assistance, as we vampires know shit about that kind of thing. Both he and Jared have kindly allowed some of their medical personnel to show us how to take care of our own. We're adapting but it's a slow process. I've had to assign some of my people to learn how to be caregivers."

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He walked over to the bed nearest to them, staring down at the male lying so still on his back. His dark hair spilled over the white pillow and he looked as if he were asleep, not a mark on his handsome face. There was a book beside the bedside table and an overstuffed armchair with a light blanket draped over the arm. Mac reached out and straightened the cover over the vampire, a frown marring his face.

"Brandon," he finally said, not looking at Caleb. "Lily sits beside his bed at night, reading to him, refusing to believe that he's gone. When she first came to the compound and there was trouble afoot, he was at her side every single time. The two of them were inseparable. He's her best friend, Caleb."

His gaze finally swung to the Ancient and his eyes were bleak. "I know why you're here, what you're probably already thinking. Don't ask me to break her heart because I won't do it. She has to keep believing there is some hope because she can't face the alternative. "

Caleb took a deep breath, his gaze running over Brandon's face before looking at the other five occupied beds. Everything Mac and the Weres had achieved was staggering, hell, the Praetorian had done a better job than he would have had he been present. Mac hadn't so much been blaming him for being absent, more pointing out a fact. His gaze came back to Brandon, his youth apparent as he lay there. "What do the Weres say? Is there any hope? Have we tried delving their minds?"

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Mac sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. "Their machines show no visible brainwave activity and a few of us have tried to get inside their heads. Their minds work on some level as they are breathing on their own but that's about it. Lily tries with Brandon all the time, but senses nothing. She thinks if maybe Liam came up here, there would be something he could do, but Rafe doesn't want him to know the extent of his mental backlash. He feels it would be too much for him to cope with, given his already volatile control."

Caleb was nodding, his thoughts in turmoil. He had to think about practicalities, but there were so many people affected by what had happened. Lily would be hurt if she lost her friend. Liam would be hurt if he discovered just what he'd triggered. Ultimately, it all came to rest on his doorstep, though. If he'd listened to Annie then there was a high probability none of this would have transpired. What the fuck had he been thinking? No wonder Annie had left with Gard. No wonder Demetri was so pissed at him. How in hell was he going to fix this mess?

"You seem to have a handle on this at the moment, Mac. I came to see if I was needed here and clearly, I'm not. Keep doing what you can to keep them comfortable. We won't make any decisions until we've exhausted all possibilities. I know I don't need to ask that this is being kept under wraps."

His friend's indignant expression said it all and Caleb sighed and reached out to squeeze his shoulder. "If there is any way to fix this I'll do it, Mackenzie, I promise. I'll do my level best to see that Lily isn't hurt. She's been through enough and I know she would cope just fine if the worst happened but we'll find some way to make sure it doesn't come to that."

He was giving reassurances that he had no idea if he'd be able to follow through with. If Rafe was intent on keeping Liam safe then there could be no hope for the injured vampires. Maybe Annie could do something, or Anakatrine? He'd ask when his mate finally came home. For now, all they could do was wait, and he had to get to the pack.

Leaving Mackenzie to take care of things, he climbed back into his car and headed over to the pack compound. Apart from Demetri, things were going a lot smoother with his people than he'd anticipated. The pack, on the other hand, was another matter. They were fiercely protective of their own and despite the mixed species element of the Armand-Hanlon pack, there was still a chance Rafe would close ranks with Jared to protect the Weres. He hoped that wasn't the case, that the damage caused wasn't irreversible.

His appearance in the large circular meeting area of the compound didn't appear to raise too many eyebrows though, so that was hopeful. A few of the lesser Weres he didn't know personally glanced in his direction a little longer than normal but they carried on their business as he parked his car outside Rafe's house. Lacey was on her way out as he opened the car door. She hesitated for a moment before coming forward to greet him.

"Caleb." It was a testament to her compassionate nature that she didn't think twice about flowing into his arms to give him a welcoming hug. He could feel some tension in her body, though it didn't appear directed towards him.

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"Wasn't sure if I would be welcome," he admitted ruefully, giving her a gentle squeeze before letting go.

Her smile turned her already beautiful face into something spellbinding. Rafe really had chosen a mate whose beauty shone with a radiance that made most men stop for a second. "You know overprotective males better than most, Caleb," she laughed softly. "They like to huff and puff a lot, and run multiple perimeters to make sure everyone is safe, even when it's not required. It gives them something to do."

Though her tone was light, he could see some anxiety in her pale green eyes. He frowned down at her wondering if she was trying to be reassuring and there was more to be worried about than she was letting on. "What's wrong, Lacey?"

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She appeared to think about it, as if she was choosing her words carefully. "Have you heard from Annie? Do you know if she'll be home soon?"

Her question wasn't what he was expecting and it made him more concerned. "Lace, how bad are things here? I know I fucked up. That's why I'm here, but I need to know just how much work I have to do to start making things right."

She bit her bottom lip, appearing to come to some decision as she took his hand and pulled him up the steps into the house. "Rafe will be fine once he knows Annie's okay. This is a...personal matter. We were hoping Annie could help, but maybe you could too."