

"They're not dead, Annie. I refuse to believe that. Gard and Rayne have lived far too long to be easily subdued. Something has happened, and while I don't know what that something is, I am certain they are still alive somewhere in Europe. When we return to the pack tomorrow we will formulate a plan to find them. Until then, try to sleep, love. I know it will be difficult but we need to be rested and prepared for whatever tomorrow will bring."

Caleb expected her to fight him, but instead she cuddled close and closed her eyes, as if she wanted the oblivion of sleep to claim her so she wasn't imagining all kinds of nightmares of what may have happened in Europe. The shivering of her body was the only indication that she still wept silent tears for Gard and Rayne, and he held her close until those tremors finally stilled and she fell into a fitful sleep.

When he was certain she was truly asleep, he rose from the bed and tucked the covers around her body. Then he left the room, pulling his cell phone from his jeans pocket and hitting the first speed dial number.

"What's wrong?" a male voice growled down the phone as it was answered. "I presume it's something of biblical proportions seeing as you're waking me at this ungodly hour."

The irritated response brought a half smile to Caleb's lips. If there was one thing he could always count on, no matter what shit was hitting the fan Demetri Bozic would never change. "I need you over here right now," he answered. "We've lost contact with Gard and Rayne, and there was a vampire attack on the Armand-Hanlon pack tonight."

"I'll be there in ten," Demetri answered, hanging up as soon as he'd finished speaking.

Caleb hadn't expected any less from his closest friend. When things went to hell, Demetri was the vampire you wanted to have at your back, and Caleb knew he would always come at a moment's call. Before Rhianna, Demetri had been the only constant in his life. They had remained close despite finding their mates and Caleb coming to terms with the fact he carried the vampire King's soul within his mind.

Now he began making some coffee, changing his mind and grabbing a bottle of red wine and two glasses. He was sitting in the near dark in his living room when his front door opened, the light from the hallway illuminating the other male even though Caleb didn't need it to see his friend.

It was obvious Demetri had been sleeping when he'd called him, his thick, black hair was rumpled as if he'd just run his fingers through it rather than a brush. It was loose around his shoulders, his back T-shirt and jeans making him look every inch the lethal predator that he was. Green eyes searched and found Caleb sitting in the dark, and Demetri entered the room to take the armchair across from his friend, his hand reaching for the waiting glass of wine on the table at the side.

He didn't speak as he took a drink from his glass, his beautiful face devoid of all expression as he waited for Caleb to speak.

"I'm glad you came alone," Caleb finally said, sipping from his own glass. "I hope Mara wasn't too annoyed at me calling you away."

Demetri's expression softened, as it always did when his wife was mentioned. Gone was the deadly predator and in its place was a husband very much in love with his mate. He only relaxed this way when surrounded by those he truly trusted, and it made him even more devastating to look at when his eyes glowed with such love for Mara. "She said to tell you that if this is something that impacts on the Council then you'd better let her know because there were enough grumbings from the other members that you keep them out of the loop the last time."

Caleb wasn't surprised at that and nodded his agreement. The vampire council had only just learned that there was a poison out there that could kill vampires by destroying their regenerative abilities. They had still to update them about finding an antidote and discussing a way forward that all vampires could receive an inoculation to mute the threat from Europe. Too much had happened in too short a period of time. It was hard keeping up with events.

Caleb's thoughts were on Gard and Rayne though. A slow burning fury was bubbling up inside that someone had dared laid hands on the emissaries he'd sent to Europe to find out what the fuck was going on over there. He had yet to make a call to Joshua for an update. He wanted to have something concrete in place to tell Rhianna when she woke, so that his mate would know events were in motion to find them and bring them home.*wŴw.n©Vεℓ⊙oRm.©om*

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"Tell me about the attack," Demetri said when his friend remained silent. "Was anyone hurt? Is Pietro okay?"

"Reasa was badly injured but is recovering. Pietro was involved but apparently Reasa threw herself in front of a poisoned bullet to save his life. I don't think it even crossed her mind that as he was mated with Cassia now and had been taking her blood that he was most probably already immune to the poison. She just reacted and in that reaction almost died. Anakatrine returned her immortality back to her."

Demetri's expression turned surprised as he listened to the news, a trace of unease in his eyes. "Caleb, don't take this the wrong way but that freaks me the fuck out the way Anakatrine just takes and gives back vampire immortality as if it's a common day occurrence. We need to make sure this knowledge never comes to the Council's attention, our friends excluded of course. If the others found out...well I don't want to think how they would react to Annie if they knew what she was capable of."

The low growl from his friend was expected. "If they come anywhere near her I will rip the lot of them to pieces!"

His fierce expression brought a half smile to Demetri's face. "I would be right there with you, my friend, as would Alexei, Andrei, Mara and Stephan to name but a few. No one will ever lay one finger on our Annie. This is not like the past when Anakatrine and Callain stood alone against the first Council. Events will not play out as they did then. You have my word on that."

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His friend's reassurance appeared to mollify Caleb for the moment, and he sighed and ran a hand through his tousled hair. "The attack was from the European vampires. They were all killed with the exception of the leader, Michael, who appears to have gotten away. We need a search of the city and eyes and ears on all ways out of the country. I want him...and preferably alive. I have questions only he can answer."

Demetri nodded his agreement. "I will get on that as soon as we're finished here. What about Gard and Rayne? How the hell could someone catch them unawares, Caleb? They're two of the oldest living beings to walk this planet. Did you speak with Joshua?" He was partial to the blond European vampire who had helped him save Pietro's life a few months ago. If anyone could help ferret out what had happened to the missing couple then Joshua should be able to.

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