

Chapter 743

Rhianna wore a sad look as she realized she had kept her family and friends in the dark for so long about her brother from another time. She said, "Maybe things would have been different if I had gone with Caleb. However, there is nothing I can do to alter that, and perhaps events were destined to unfold in this particular manner.

She was silent for a long time, staring past him as if reliving an old memory, then she gave herself a mental shake and met Rafe's intent gaze. "Caleb should be here for this. There are things he needs to know and we have knowledge we can provide to help Dara and Kothi find our old home more easily."

Rafe raised an eyebrow, his expression sardonic. "I believe I said something similar a little earlier..."

Rhianna rolled her eyes, a half smile teasing her lips as she conceded her brother's point. "Yes, you did, and you were right. Now do you feel better?" $\text{w}\mathbf{W}.\text{\textcircled{w}}\mathbf{W}.\text{\textcircled{ov}}\mathcal{E}\text{\textcircled{w}}_{\times}(r)\text{\text{\tiny{mm}}}.\text{\text{\textit{C}}}\alpha\text{\text{\textit{M}}}$

As an answer, he reached out and pulled Rhianna into a tight bear hug, a chuckle escaping him. "You never did like it when I was right," he laughed, ruffling her auburn curls affectionately, before he quickly sobered. "You're not your usual self, baby girl. Oh, I know things have gone to hell recently in just about every way imaginable, but there's something else on your mind. I can feel it."

She stepped back, a fleeting hint of concern in her eyes, but she quickly masked it, adopting a clearly fake innocent expression. "As you pointed out, I have a lot on my mind at the moment. I don't think any of us will be our usual selves until we know everyone is home safely."

"Annie..." Whatever else he was about to say was cut off by the sound of Caleb's voice at the study door, a brief second before it opened and the tall vampire strode into the room.

His eyes immediately went to Rhianna, his expression concerned. "What's wrong? What happened?" he rumbled, his gaze quickly sweeping the study to ensure there was no danger in the room. The moment he'd felt his mate's distress through their mate bond, he'd taken off for the Armand-Hanlon pack at supernatural speed even though he knew she was well protected within pack lands.

Caleb didn't think he'd ever be able to leave his woman's safety in the hands of others easily, but then he knew he was overprotective to a fault. He was always honest with himself. When no one answered immediately, he crossed the room coming to stand before Rhianna, searching her face intently.

His movement seemed to shake her out of introspective thoughts and she gave him a small, rueful smile. "I just overreacted to some news I heard. I'm sorry I concerned you." Rhianna slipped into his arms to lead credence to her words, but also to seek some comfort herself. "We know where Gard and Rayne went. They returned to Romania following whatever lead they came up with."

She could feel him stiffen in her arms and knew exactly what he was thinking of, but he relaxed almost as soon as he had tensed up, a rueful sigh escaping him. "We should have thought of that. One of us should have considered that possibility as it's so obvious."

Pulling back, he glanced down at his mate with a concerned expression. "Why do I feel as if there is something clouding our judgement right now, something skewing us away from the direction we need to go in? Everything that's happened recently has led to us either being divided or not thinking clearly. I thought that after the fiasco of my reaction to Anakatrine turning Reasa human. The unease I felt then I feel again now."

His words echoed her own unease, something that had been lurking in her subconscious for a while but only now coming to the fore. Only, she didn't feel that it related directly to her. No, it was more directed towards Caleb. His reactions had been out of kilter some time now. "Caleb, you are the only one of the Triumvirate who has been alone in recent months. I have always been around either you or Gard, and Gard has usually been around one of us or with Rayne. Is it possible that at some point you may have intersected with our enemy? We know how powerful this person is mentally. Should we consider that he is capable of getting into one of our minds if we are not with each other?"

Rhianna hoped and expected her mate to immediately argue with her, to assure her that the direction her thoughts were travelling in was ludicrous, but from his expression she could see that this was something he had considered too, and it sent a chill of fear down her spine. Caleb was one of the strongest people she knew, almost as strong as Anakatrine. Hosting Callain's spirit should have protected him...but it hadn't protected him from Gard awakening Callain.

A gasp escaped her, her fear escalating. "What if this goes back further than the last few months? What if Gard wasn't the first to meet you when we were in Europe?" she whispered. "What if it had been so easy for Gard to reawaken Callain because someone had already been there before him?"

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"I don't know, Annie," he answered, his voice grave. "I would have to wonder how anyone other than Gard would have been able to detect Callain's soul within me to know that it would be beneficial to try to turn my mind in the first instance."

Pulling out of his arms, Rhianna paced the study. "We know whoever has been planning this has been doing it for years not months. The division between Europe and stateside has been evident for centuries. That could have been the first step in our enemy's campaign. It's only a small leap from there to see that spies among us here would have quickly shown who were the power players on this continent. It's more than obvious that, despite the Vampire Council ruling, you hold a significant amount of power among our people. Getting to the Council would be difficult. Getting to one individual would be much easier."

"Fuck," Rafe growled loudly. He had been silent for a long time, dread filling his bones as he listened to his sister and her mate talk. Now the possible impact of what they were saying was fully seeping into his brain, the situation appeared much direr than the other two had considered. "It's not just the Vampires either," he interjected. "That warning to beware of the wolves we can't see makes more sense too. Any assault on one of our species would be bad enough but to fully conquer us here you would need a two pronged attack because we are united through blood and family."

Rhianna halted her pacing, her expression so grave it was enough to keep her brother and mate silent as they waited for her to speak. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "We need Anakatrine to first search within Caleb's mind. I think we need Callain in attendance too, Caleb, so if you could please concede control to him. We cannot discuss this any further until we know for certain that we are not being spied on by our enemy."

There was no denying the tension in the air. They had no idea if, or how much, they may have been inadvertently giving away to whoever was trying to destroy everything they loved. Caleb finally moved, sitting down on the sofa beside the window, closing his eyes as he did so. It was the only outward sign that he was relinquishing control to the Vampire King.

Rhianna sat beside him though she didn't mirror her mate by closing her eyes. She experienced less discomfort ceding control to the Vampire Queen. Caleb by his very nature hated to be out of control, so he always found it more difficult to allow Callain dominance.

To Rafe, it was always mildly disconcerting to see the Vampire Queen and her King. When Anakatrine was in residence, it felt as if he had lost his sister completely. He knew that wasn't the case and, that for Gard, he must feel the same with Anakatrine being subjugated most of the time. The two alternate brothers' complicated relationship with the little redhead was enough to confuse most people, let alone themselves.

The slight shifting of Rhianna's posture was enough to tell him Anakatrine was present. The change in Caleb looked markedly more pronounced, but that was likely down to Callain's frustrations at being absent for such long stretches of time. Now the Vampire King turned to his Queen, long fingers gently caressing her cheek. Though their appearance was different visually in this incarnation, somehow it appeared that they could recognise each other's souls.

"This is indeed troubling, my love," Callain said, leaning forward to brush his lips against Anakatrine's. "I did not think to look within. My arrogance clearly knows no bounds."

A soft peal of laughter escaped the Vampire Queen, amusement shining within her lavender gaze. "If arrogance was a deadly sin, then every alpha male or female on the planet would be guilty, dear heart. We should not berate ourselves for what we may have missed. Instead, we should rectify our oversight and close the door on our internal interloper."

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"Our?" Callain's eyebrow rose in surprise.

Anakatrine nodded, the amusement dying from her eyes. "Annie is less perturbed by my presence so once alerted to the possibility I began my search. I have found the point of entry within her mind though it would appear that there hasn't been any recent incursions. I believe that to be because she doesn't keep me as securely locked down as Caleb does you. My lurking presence may have been sufficient to ward off any attempts to gain access of late."

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"Damn Caleb," Callain growled. "I warned him there would be consequences in keeping me subjugated."

Anakatrine touched his cheek with a gentle hand, soothing some of his frustration. "None of us knew that there would be a danger, Callain. If you want to blame someone then you should blame me for not seeing this possibility. I have foreseen so much of what was to come, but this danger completely eluded me."

His expression changed at her words and he nodded his acceptance. "You always were the very best of us, my Queen. I often wonder what I would have been if not for you tempering my arrogance. I have checked within Caleb's mind and there is evidence that it has been tampered with. The last incursion was around the time Caleb and Annie were at odds with each other. I am reasonably certain that it was just before you stripped Thereasa of her immortality, so I think that knowledge is safe for now. It appears that whoever has been visiting has kept their attempts to as minimal as possible and has only pushed on Caleb's overprotectiveness and his belief that he doesn't deserve the happiness he currently enjoys. That is probably why I didn't notice it."