

## Chapter 242

He soothed his mate gently and took up the tale. "They ruled wisely for millennia," he said quietly. "In those days being Ancient was a given, not the rare commodity it is now. The peace appeared absolute so Anakatrine decided our people had evolved enough that there was no more need for a royal hierarchy. She formed the very first Vampire Council in a bid to retire from power, to allow our kind to rule themselves in wisdom. None of them had any idea of the rot that was hiding underneath the surface of our people. It was only when the first Vampire/Were mating occurred that it became obvious."

Gard stood up and paced to the desk coming to stand beside them and turning to meet the wolf's sceptical gaze. "Three thousand years ago the first hybrid child was born," he continued when Caleb stopped speaking. "She was viewed as an abomination by the vampire nation. The Council ordered the death of the child and her parents. Anakatrine tried to stop it but her voice was no longer being heard by the corrupt vampires. She managed to rescue the child but at great expense to her magical energy. She gave the child to The Guardian and entrusted him to hide her safely while she conjured a false image of the infant to fool our people."

Rafe couldn't help the loud snort that erupted out of him, shaking his head in disbelief. "Magic?" he interjected moving further into the room. "Kings and Queens? Guardians and magic? You really expect me to believe this shit?" He couldn't believe Caleb and Annie were doing this. He stared at them as if he'd never seen them before. Did the stranger hold them in his thrall somehow? Everything he was hearing was totally preposterous.

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"The Guardian left his queen to do her bidding," Gard continued as if he hadn't been interrupted, his voice cold and lifeless. "He was connected to his sister and her mate by a bond only death could break. The Council rose up against them. Every single wound, every single cry of pain drove The Guardian to his knees. It became too much for him. He hid the child alone in the forest and raced back to protect them. He was too late. Anakatrine and Callain were destroyed at the hands of their own people. He had failed his queen, his beautiful sister. Grieving he returned to complete her last edict. The child was gone, her blood soaked gown the only thing that remained of her. He had failed her too."

Rhianna turned to him, slipping out of Caleb's grasp to wrap her arms around Gard as his pain crashed over her. She had always known that he blamed himself but this was the first time he had ever vocalised it. Despite her earlier anger at him for revealing his presence she couldn't let him hurt like this.

Rafe watched his sister embrace the other man and he couldn't help the jealousy that coursed through him. He could see the deep affection between them, their similar colouring sparking his fear again. He dragged his gaze from them and saw Caleb watching him intently. There was compassion in his eyes as if he knew what he was thinking and feeling at that moment.

"Even if this is all true, if I can suspend my disbelief, what does this have to do with anything today? This was millennia ago." Rafe's voice came out sounding raw as his fear ratcheted up as he took in the three people standing before him. Three...a triumvirate. The breath left his body in a painful gasp, denial ripping through him.

"No!" he ground out hoarsely. "Annie? Tell me you're not implying what I think you are. Please!"

"Rafe." Rhianna flew across the room to him as he sat down dazed in the armchair Gard had recently vacated. "I'm so sorry. I know this is hard for you, that it all feels unbelievable. If someone had told me all this five years ago, I would have felt the same way. It was only when Caleb awoke Anakatrine within me that I found out the truth. I wanted to tell you so badly. I know I should have but I was scared you wouldn't want me in your life any more."

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"It's not possible," he whispered his voice breaking as he stared down at her kneeling before him. She was his Annie, not some dead vampire queen. He was her brother, not this stranger in his home. He couldn't process it, couldn't believe the growing horror building up within him. "Annie, please don't say this is real. Tell me it's made up, that you're my baby sister. Don't take that away from me."

He saw the truth in her eyes, heard it in the tortured sob that ripped from her throat as she reached for him. "No!" He pushed her away, standing up abruptly. Everything he had believed in was being ripped away. His whole life before he became a Were had been a vicious lie. His need to flee the pain consuming him was overwhelming. With an anguished roar he ran from the room, the house, and flew into the forest to try and outrun the knife carving into his soul.

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Rhianna fell to the floor, loud wracking sobs ripping through her body as Rafe rejected her so vehemently. Caleb had her in his arms instantly, crushing her tightly as she wailed inconsolably.

Gard stared down at them, hatred filling his soul as his sister crumpled under the impact of the wolf's rejection. Rage roared through him, inflamed by his already erratic emotions caused by Rayne. He took off after the wolf, ignoring Caleb's frantic cry and the tall, blonde female who appeared at the library door.

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"What's happening?" Lacey cried, her voice full of fear as she felt her mate's anguish and saw Rhianna disintegrating in Caleb's arms. Her brother-in-law met her gaze with a tortured one.

"Stay with Annie," he ground out, reluctantly releasing his own mate. "I need to protect Rafe." He was gone in an instant, leaving the bewildered woman reaching for Rhianna.

"Annie, tell me what's wrong," Lacey whispered shakily. "Tell me Rafe will be okay."

Gard caught up with the wolf easily. His instincts were to rip it to shreds but he knew Anakatrine would hate him for eternity if he did so. She cared about this wolf, her anguished sobs testament to that. So he controlled his instincts and concentrated on subduing the Alpha before he did anything to cause himself some harm. That would destroy his sister and he had failed her enough in the past. He wouldn't do so again.

He tackled the snarling animal, using his superior strength to pin it to the forest floor. He wasn't gentle with his methods but he didn't go out of his way to be brutal either.

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"I should kill you right now, dog, but it would destroy her if I did. Stop fighting me before I have to use more force than I wish to." The barked command was cold and deadly. It had the desired effect. The wolf stilled instantly though stayed tense.

Gard didn't release his grip but he didn't tighten it either. For five years he had hated this man with a passion. Rafe Hanlon had had years of being with his sister, lost years when she had lived and Gard hadn't known about it. He had envied Rafe that time with her, hated him for having her laughter and her tears. Jealousy was a potent and often violent emotion. Gard had dreamed of the violence he could do to this wolf, all the while knowing he could never harm a hair on his head.