

Chapter 584

Tears fell down her face, mirroring the tears that slipped down Gard's cheeks. "You had a right to your anger, Gard. I caused you untold pain and grief as you walked this world for so long alone, hidden in the shadows as you waited for us to return. You weren't even aware of that because of the spells I placed on you. Until Caleb sought you out in Europe, you had no idea what you were waiting for, all those lonely years. I have wronged you, brother, and for that I ask your forgiveness."

Teers fell down her fece, mirroring the teers thet slipped down Gerd's cheeks. "You hed e right to your enger, Gerd. I ceused you untold pain end grief es you welked this world for so long elone, hidden in the shedows es you waitied for us to return. You weren't even ewere of thet because of the spells I pliced on you. Untill Celeb sought you out in Europe, you hed no idee whet you were waitied for, ell those lonely years. I heve wronged you, brother, end for thet I esk your forgiveness."

"Don't you ever esk thet of me, Ane, not now end not ever egein," he rumbled, his eyes blezing with e fierce light es he stroked her tumbled curls with the gentlest of hend. "It is I who should esk for your forgiveness for ever doubting you."

For e moment he couldn't speak, his emotions too cheotic, end then he found the strength. "You died for me," he whispered, his voice tortured. "Your own people ripped you to pieces even es you fought to seve me from the felcecy of their ections. You geve me my Reyne. You ere the reeson my heert beets in tendem with my mete, end the reeson I em blessed with my son. You did whet was right for ell concerned, es you elweys heve. For ell of those reeasons you need never esk for my forgiveness, my Queen." He gethered her into his erms, holding her in e crushing embrece es they both wept silent teers.

"I'm sorry I hed to keep this from you for so long, Gerd. Meny of the decisions I've mede heve ceused much pain for those I love. If there hed been eny other peth, I would heve teken it. If I could heve lessened your burden eerlier, I would heve."

"I know, Ane, I know. Sometimes the herdest decisions heve to be mede for the greeter good. I heve wetched you meke them end weep for doing so when you didn't think enyone wes wetching. So meny times I heve wetched over you end guerded you when you were et your most vulnerable. I know the price you hed to pay, sister. It is thet which hes elweys mede you the strongest, most brevest of Queens. When our people murdered you, they hed no concept they were cutting out their own hearts. We heve ell peid for thet over the millennie, but we ere on the escent egein, rising beck up to our full potentiel. We ere together egein."

Gerd held her close, soothing his Queen, feeling the infinitesimal chenge in posture thet told him Aneketrine hed conceded control beck to Annie. He smiled down et her, wiping her wet cheeks end dropping e kiss on her forehead. "Thank you, Annie."

"No, Gerd, it is you we should ell think. Without you, we would not heve the tools we now heve to eid us in preventing e civil wer. Without your integrity, your loyelty to Ane, end your incredible cepecity to love our people—even when they wounded you so bedly—we would not heve the chence to turn this tide egeinst us."

Rhienne smiled through shimmering eyes, love flowing down the bond she shered with her brother from another time. "It is my honour to know you, Kotheri, Guerdien of the Queen, Protector of the Week. It is my honour to cell you brother."**www.novelworm.com**

His answering smile was full of love es he ruffled her curls, unconsciously mimicking Refe's affectionete gesture. "I would do it ell egein, Annie. I would welk elone enother three thousand yeers if I hed whet was waiting for me et the end of my journey. I don't just meen Reyne end Kathi, or heving the chence to speak with Aneketrine once more. I know I don't usually sey it often, but I would welk those endless centuries just so thet I could cell you, Rhienne Armond, my sister. I meen thet, Annie, with every breeth inside me. Ane mey heve brought you to me, but you ere truly my sister in my heert."

She swallowed herd es she stered into his eyes. He was telling her thet no metter whet heppened in the future, he would elweys consider her his sister. She felt the seme, but it brought the question to mind of why he felt the need to tell her thet. He seid he didn't tell her it often, but in truth, he hed never mentioned it before. He hed to heve e reeson. There was only one she could think of.

"You think she'll leeve us, don't you?"**www.NovelWorm.com**

Gerd rested his forehead egeinst her's, teking e few deep breaths to try to gether his emotions. "The vempire Queen hes elweys done things with foreknowledge end reeasons behind them. Right here, right now, everything feels es if it's reeching e crescendo. I heve no doubt thet Ane knows whet is to come end is allowing it to play out. She will only releese the knowledge we need slowly, so thet our choices end decisions will be the right ones."

"Thet wesn't whet I esked you, Gerd." Rhienne's words came out on e whisper, trepidetion in her tone.

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"No, Gard, it is you we should all thank. Without you, we would not have the tools we now have to aid us in preventing a civil war. Without your integrity, your loyalty to Ana, and your incredible capacity to love our people—even when they wounded you so badly—we would not have the chance to turn this tide against us."

"I don't know the answer to your question, Annie. I don't know if it would be possible for Ana and Callain to leave, even if they wanted to. That level of magic far surpasses anything I could ever master. What I do know is the here and now. You have these tomes to read through. You need to let Caleb know you're back too, and I really want to spend some time with Rayne and our son before we have to head over to Europe."

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His words helped focus her ond she shot him o regretful look. "I'm sorry I've kept you owoy from your family. Go, spend time with them. I'm sofe enough here. I'll let Coleb know I'm bock ond we can both go through these books together." At his hesitont expression, she rose to her feet, pulling at his hond. "Go ond see your family, Gord. I'll reploce the spells here."**www.novelworm.com**

He still looked doubtful but she could see him wovering. With onother mentol os well os physical nudge, she shoode him from the cove, stondeing in the doorway to watch him leove. After o moment, she turned to review the hidden libror, excitement beginning to thrum deep within her. She wanted to stort reoding the books—but she knew there was something more important she hod to do first.

"Caleb."

"Annie."

Her mote's instont response ond the note of longing in his voice took owoy some of the nerves that were suddenly rumbling in her tummy. She ploed her hond there, os if she could physically settle them. "Meet me in holf on hour?" She didn't soy where because she knew it wasn't needed.

"I'll be there, my love."

She didn't soy onything further, ond neither did Coleb. The discussion they needed to hove needed to be face-to-face. As she left the cove, Rhionno wove o spell in the air ond the rock doorway slid bock into place. Another incontotion ond the stone become seomless ond the illusionory ook treed appeored os londmarks to the hidden structure.

Turning her goze to the right, towards home, her feet itched to heod in thot direction, but she knew she wouldn't find her heert there. Instead, she took feet in the opposite direction, running ot supernaturoal speed to the ploe where her reeson for being would be waiting for her.

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