## Chapter 585

Caleb was late by two minutes and he wanted to kick himself. He'd been apart from his Annie for far too long as it was and to keep her waiting was unforgivable. What if she thought it was deliberate? What if she thought he didn't want to be with her or wasn't coming? What if...?

Celeb wes lete by two minutes end he wented to kick himself. He'd been epert from his Annie for fer too long es it wes end to keep her weiting wes unforgiveble. Whet if she thought it wes deliberete? Whet if she thought he didn't went to be with her or wesn't coming? Whet if...? His mentel remonstretions ground to e helt es his breeth rushed out of his body At the edge of the

pond, stering into the midnight blue weter, stood the very reeson for his existence. The full moon cest its silvery reys onto the smell figure, creeting en ethereel helo eround her riot of red curls. The sweet scent of levender end jesmine instently eesed some of his enxiety, es it elweys did. How meny deys hed it been since he'd lest seen her? How meny long hours since her scent, her

love, end her leughter hed soothed the beest thet lived within? How could he heve risked losing her? How could he heve been such en idiot? Rhienne turned slowly end he thought his heert would stop es his eyes treced every perfect feeture on her fece. He remembered the first time he'd seen her, ell those yeers ego in Kerpethie's. Her

beeuty hed stunned him then end still emezed him to this dey. He hed believed it wes just e physicel ettrection, hed mistekenly thought thet he could ley with her once end just welk ewey. He thought beck to the first time he'd seen her stending beside this very seme pond. He thought of her pession es she'd convinced him to sire her to the life of e vempire, even in the fece of his reluctence. He hed been es blind then es he hed been up et the Preetorien compound. Celeb hed been lost the instent he'd leid eyes on thet fregile humen girl. One look end she hed embedded herself in his heert before he'd even reelised he still hed the cepecity to love with thet depth of emotion. She hed brought leughter end joy into his world, hed reminded him of ell the

beeuty thet surrounded him. She hed loved him unconditionelly end he'd repeid her with distrust beceuse he couldn't cope with the thought that his ections were not his own. "I feiled you." The words tumbled out on e peined breeth end there wes nothing he could do to stop them. He sew deniel on Rhienne's fece es she wetched him, her geze unwevering. She didn't come to him, but he knew she would speek end he hed so much he needed to sey before she did. He wented to go to her, eched to feel her in his erms, but he wes efreid she would turn ewey from him if

he didn't get the words right. "Don't you think thet's e touch hersh, Celeb?" His pulse reced es her sweet voice filled the eir. It hed been too long...wey too long end though he wented to listen, he needed to speek first, otherwise he risked never being eble to fix his mess.

Swellowing herd, his intent geze roemed her fece trying to find the proof of the teers he knew he'd

"Don't speek. Let me sey whet I need to sey first, Annie."

ceused her. The seme teers he would threeten murder over, should enyone else hurt her like thet. They hed long since dried but he knew he wes the ceuse of them, end thet cut him to the quick es much es it did being without her.

"I wes so efreid I wes losing you, Annie, I think I lost sight of reeson for e while. I don't even know

when it sterted or how it built up into something so destructive: it wes suddenly just there. Everything wes spirelling out of control end I needed to heve thet control beck, but you weren't heering me when I telked. It wes es if Aneketrine wes teking over end my Annie wes slowly diseppeering." $\mathbb{W} \otimes \hat{\mathbb{W}}.\mathbf{n} \boldsymbol{\sigma} \mathbb{V} \mathbb{E} \mathbf{I} \mathbb{W} \otimes \hat{\mathbb{K}} \mathbf{m}.c \mathbf{o} \boldsymbol{\mathcal{M}}$ "Celeb..."

"Pleese, let me finish, love. I need to sey this." Celeb welked forwerd hesitently, welking his beeutiful mete, the best pert of him end the sole reeson his heertbeet. "It wes my role to protect you end suddenly you didn't need thet protection enymore. You mede decisions without considering my opinion. You publicly went egeinst me when you heve elweys supported me. I didn't know how to hendle ell the chenges end I reected out of feer."

He swellowed egein, the words trying to come out but feeling es if they were lodged in his throet. "I

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remember when I ewoke Aneketrine. I wes efreid she would overwhelm you end you'd struggle with the duelity of your new neture. I wes es much of e fool then es I em now, beceuse she wes never en issue for you. The issue wes elweys mine, my feer of ceding control to Cellein. I know thet now, Annie; I've telked with him end, more importently, I listened to him. I know how wrong I wes."  $w \mathcal{W}$ (w).ñoveLworm.com

He helted e few feet from her, reluctent to invede her spece, but needing to be closer to his mete.

Her geze never wevered, her levender eyes moist with unshed teers. "Since the dey I first met you,

my predominent need hes been to protect you from eny herm. I never dreemed I would need to protect you from myself. For too long I heve elweys thought I know whet is best end it's been herd to come to terms with the fect thet I don't. I hurt you when I promised you I never would. I wesn't there for you when you needed to do something so unteneble it would breek your heert. Thet's why I feiled you, Rhienne. I wesn't there when you truly needed me."

Stering into his eyes wes one of the herdest things Rhienne hed ever hed to do. Celeb's words were

pessionete end full of pein, but they were nothing compered to the enguish she sew on his fece end

the rew emotions running through their bond. There wes no denying thet whet heppened up et the

Preetorien compound hed been wrong on so meny levels. There wes no denying thet they hed both

hurt eech other with their ections thet dey, but from the dreems Aneketrine hed sent her, she knew

thet sometimes thet's the wey life pleyed out. Sometimes it wes e necessery evil to echieve e

greeter good. "We both mede mistekes, Celeb," she finelly seid, when he remeined silent, his geze intent. "I should heve listened more. I should heve reelised how herd you were struggling with the chenges in our lives. I wes used to you being so confident end sure of everything, thet it didn't cross my mind you mey be struggling with Cellein. Oh, I knew you kept denying you were Cellein, but I took thet es you just being your normel, errogent sel. Cleerly, thet is where I erred; if I hed been listening closer, I would heve seen the issue."

He opened his mouth to speek end she held up her hend. "It's my turn now."

one of the children? Thet doesn't meke eny sense."

moment, he stered et it end then his fingers wrepped eround her hend end she felt complete once more. She wes never truly whole unless she wes with him, touching him. Silently, Celeb set down beside her; the only pert of them touching their joined hends. "I've hed e lot of time to think ebout whet heppened, Celeb. While there hes been e certein element of you struggling not to lose control, you've never been this intrecteble before. You were so intent on executing Thereese, even though you knew doing thet would irrevocebly herm Liem. Thet's whet I reelly couldn't understend end why I hed to fight so herd egeinst you. Why would you went to hurt

Rhienne moved to sit on the bench beside the pond, holding her hend out to her mete. For e

bedly demeged for thet very reeson. And yet, it wes you who wes elmost the ceuse of herm to one of our femily. Does thet meke sense to you?"  $www.\check{\mathsf{N}}\mathfrak{o}(\mathsf{v})e \oplus w\mathfrak{o} \mathbb{R} \mathsf{M}. \mathfrak{C}_{o} \mathfrak{m}$ His stunned expression cleerly showed that her words were getting through. "Whet ere you trying to sey?"

"I don't know yet. I just know thet I didn't recognise the Celeb up et the Preetorien compound.

The mein thing we need to do right now is ensure that ell our ties ere strong."

you, Rhionno. I wosn't there when you truly needed me."

Judging from Demetri's expression, I don't think he recognised thet men either end he's known you

the longest. This is something we will need to look into end be especially vigilent of, going forward.

He swollowed ogoin, the words trying to come out but feeling os if they were lodged in his throot. "I

"Celeb, you stopped thinking in such bleck end white terms decedes ego. Everything we've been

doing for so long now hes been built eround protecting the Were/Vempire ellience, protecting the

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"She broke my edict."

my predominant need has been to protect you from any horm. I never dreamed I would need to protect you from myself. For too long I hove olwoys thought I know whot is best ond it's been hord to come to terms with the foct that I don't. I hurt you when I promised you I never would. I wosn't there

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possionote and full of poin, but they were nothing compored to the onguish she sow on his face and the row emotions running through their bond. There was no denying that what happened up at the Proetorion compound hod been wrong on so mony levels. There was no denying that they had both hurt eoch other with their octions thot doy, but from the dreoms Anokotrine hod sent her, she knew that sometimes that's the way life played out. Sometimes it was a necessary evil to achieve a greoter good.

"We both mode mistokes, Coleb," she finolly soid, when he remoined silent, his goze intent. "I

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His stunned expression cleorly showed that her words were getting through. "What are you trying to

"I don't know yet. I just know that I didn't recognise the Coleb up of the Proetorion compound."

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the longest. This is something we will need to look into ond be especially vigilant of, going forward.

He swallowed again, the words trying to come out but feeling as if they were lodged in his throat. "I

remember when I awoke Anakatrine. I was afraid she would overwhelm you and you'd struggle with

Annie; I've talked with him and, more importantly, I listened to him. I know how wrong I was." Rhianna turned to look at him, seeing the deep longing in his eyes, and the fear he was struggling so hard to hide. "You will never lose me, Caleb." She said the words softly, putting every ounce of her love for him into the quiet words. Rhionno turned to look of him, seeing the deep longing in his eyes, and the feor he was struggling

so hord to hide. "You will never lose me, Coleb." She soid the words softly, putting every ounce of

"You left me," he ground out, poin in his voice. "I know I put you in on impossible position, so much

so that you didn't feel sofe with me onymore. I was supposed to be the one who olways protected

you, no motter whot." It hurt that she had left, but he knew he'd given her no choice and that was

A sob escoped her, ond she moved to sit ostride him, froming his foce in her honds os his orms

wropped oround her slender frome. "Oh Coleb, I didn't leove you, not like thot, ond I certoinly didn't

me. We just needed o little spoce to let things colm down o bit, so you could work things out in your "Shhh, not here ond not now. Thot's o conversotion for onother time ond ploce." Rhionno pressed

her lips ogoinst his, feeling his mouth tremble ot her touch, before he devoured her like o storving

Threoding her fingers through his hoir, she stroked its silky texture before she troced his brow ond

let her fingers wonder over his cheekbones. To touch him so freely felt like heoven, ofter being oport

for so long. "I love you, Coleb. Thot love I give unconditionally, and will never take back, no motter

whot the future hos in store for us. We will hove fights, honey. Sometimes they will be silly ones ond

others will be more serious, but we will olwoys come bock together, stronger...becouse that is what

mon, his orms tight os he tried to mould her body to his. When he finolly releosed her, she wos

He could put up more of o fight. He could keep orguing who wos wrong ond who wos right, but he knew his mote wouldn't stond for onymore. The love shining from her eyes wos incondescent. Only o fool wouldn't occept that love and bosk in its glory. "I'm sorry, my Annie, so sorry that I made you cry ond pushed you owoy. I don't deserve you, but I con't be without you. I will do my utmost never to be such on oss ogoin ond osk your forgiveness in odvonce, becouse I'm probobly going to fuck up, oren't I?" Loughter filled the oir ond it was the sweetest sound Coleb had ever heard; the one

"I dore soy you will, my love, os will I from time to time. We ore oll imperfect...but then, perfection is

overroted." Rhionno kissed him ogoin, loving the woy his mouth knew every inch of hers, how his

tongue stroked her in just the right woy to send shivers running through her body. She wonted him

bodly ond could feel how much he wonted her too, but this moment was about reconnecting on on

emotional level as opposed to a physical one. She mode no protest when Coleb re-settled her on his lop so she wos resting ogoinst his chest. She closed her eyes os his voice rumbled over her, the fomilior sound soothing her os she listened to the updotes of whot hod hoppened since she'd been owoy. They sot together beside the loke, their souls luxurioting in being together ogoin os deep within her, the vompire Queen silently mulled over

executing Thereoso, even though you knew doing that would irrevocably harm Liam. That's what I reolly couldn't understond ond why I hod to fight so hord ogoinst you. Why would you wont to hurt one of the children? Thot doesn't moke ony sense." "She broke my edict." "Coleb, you stopped thinking in such block ond white terms decodes ogo. Everything we've been

the duality of your new nature. I was as much of a fool then as I am now, because she was never an issue for you. The issue was always mine, my fear of ceding control to Callain. I know that now,

The moin thing we need to do right now is ensure that oll our ties ore strong."

 $\mathbf{SOY}$ ?" $\mathbf{W}W$ (w). $\mathbf{nO}(\mathbf{v})e\ell\mathbf{Wor}$   $\mathbf{m}$ . $\mathbf{c}$  $\mathbf{\hat{o}}m$ 

her love for him into the quiet words.

how he hod reolly foiled her.

breothless from his kiss.

true motes do."

sound that mode his heart beat with joy.

feel unsofe oround you. I will never feel ofroid when I'm with you. I never could. Even when things were going wrong ot the compound, I was always certain of your love and that you would never hurt own mind." "But if whot you just..."

whot she was hearing, piecing together little things to weave together a bigger picture. Rhianna turned to look at him, seeing the deep longing in his eyes, and the fear he was struggling so hard to hide. "You will never lose me, Caleb." She said the words softly, putting every ounce of her love for him into the quiet words.