

## Chapter 712

For a long moment the vampire just looked at her, then she heard the whirring of the printer beside him, and he pulled off an A4 sheet and handed it to her.

Glancing down, Dara stared at the image of Kothari, now called Simon Ducat. He had been here as they had expected. Clearly she must have given the correct password for the forger to give her the information. Looking back at him, she gave him a brief smile. "How long ago was he here?"

"Close to five hours now. He's had sufficient time to leave the country with the travel documents I gave him."

It was enough to make her heart sink, but Dara tried not to be too disheartened. At least they had a name now and she could call it in and have one of their contacts at the airport let them know when Kothi had travelled. "Thank you for your assistance. I won't bother you any longer." She didn't need travel documents, her mother had arranged those with their own contact while she was packing.

"Just who the hell is he? And you?" Faraday asked as she turned around to leave.

Giving him another smile over her shoulder, Dara stored the printed page in her pack beside Kothi's journal. "Let's just say my father and his twin brother are extremely grateful for your assistance today."

The vampire watched the pretty blonde leave, swallowing hard as he did. He didn't need to ask just who her father or his brother were, there was only one vampire family that consisted of a set of twin brothers. However, that wasn't why he swallowed hard, even though the Romanov twins were something to be feared by anyone with any intelligence.

No, the reason he felt fear clog his throat was he finally understood that he had been in the presence of not one, but two, hybrid offspring that day...and they scared the complete shit out of him.

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The darkness was oppressive, holding him sucked downed in a maelstrom of bonds so tight that no matter how hard he fought, he couldn't free himself. Something nagged at his sluggish mind, something so urgent that he fought against the darkness with renewed vigour, desperate to overcome it.

Sarayne...Sarayne...Sarayne...

He had to find her, had to save her. Where was she? Why couldn't he think clearly? Gard tried to call to his mate, tried to find her down their mate bond but there was nothing there, just more darkness...Dear God if she was...he couldn't continue down that line a thought.

Suddenly there was a faint light, so minute that for a moment he thought he'd imagined it, but it began to blossom a little brighter, and his sluggish mind travelled towards the beacon. It was like staring through a keyhole, locked out of the room that was bathed in light and offered freedom. A flash of red beside the illumination, the colours beginning to mute as soon as they had arrived...

"Anakatrîne! Ana, hear me!"

There was no answer...there was only the darkness once more. The light faded away and the fragile lucidity that had gripped him faded within as he swirled once more into the void.

No! No! He had to reach her...he had to reach someone! It was to no avail though, as shadowy figures in the real world injected a serum into his arm as he lay helpless. Gard was once more entombed in a world of utter blackness, where he silently screamed knowing no one could hear him.

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"Annie?" Rafe's voice cut through the babble of noise surrounding Rhianna as they sat in the Alpha's study being updated on everything that had happened since they'd left the night before. www.NôvÈLL@rm.com

Caleb had woken her early, knowing that she would have wanted to find out what had happened to Gard and Rayne as soon as possible. He'd informed her of Demetri's visit in the early hours of the morning, and the more recent news of the discovery of Michael's body by Freya and Nors. Once they had reached the Armand-Hanlon Pack, they had learned of Kothari and Dara's absence, and the magnitude of what had happened was only now sinking in.

Her brother's voice startled her out of her reverie, and she blinked slowly, trying to clear the fog that was whirling through her mind. Caleb was staring at her with a concerned expression, and it was only then that she realised that some time had passed since she'd last spoken. Something else had teased at her subconscious mind; something so urgent she had completed zoned everything else out.

"He's alive," she whispered, feeling the elation of the long dead vampire queen within her mind. Anakatrîne had gone deep, to a place Rhianna didn't know how to go to. Wherever she had gone, she had returned with those two words.

"Gard is alive," she said more firmly, just the words helping to shake some of the overwhelming grief from her soul. Anakatrîne wouldn't have told her if it wasn't true. She had to hold onto that hope.

"Are you sure?" It was Caleb who asked the question, his concern still apparent. "I can't feel anything down the Triumvirate bond, Annie." It was clear that he was afraid she was getting her hopes up.

"Neither can I, Caleb, but Anakatrîne is certain. She must have had some kind of contact with him. Gard is alive. That's all I know. There is no news on Rayne, but we have to believe that she is too, for Gard's sake."

Just the mention of the vampire queen's certainty was enough to bring some relief to Rafe and Lacey. Anakatrîne hadn't been proven wrong yet, so if she had been able to sense Gard somehow, there could still be hope that things would turn out okay.

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"I hope you're right, Annie, because I fear for Kothari if he doesn't find them safe," Rafe answered, running a hand through his rumpled hair. His eyes felt as if someone was stabbing hot poker through them, his large shoulders were uncharacteristically hunched over with tension. When had he last slept? He couldn't remember, and he couldn't afford to sleep at the moment with all that had happened.

"That's it, time for you to go sleep," Aaron Alexander gave his Alpha a pointed look from his position at the window. Rafe had asked him to attend when Caleb and Annie had arrived, to ensure his number two was completely up to date on the situation.

"Aaron."

Rafe's warning growl would have intimidated some of the more maternal pack members, but it just brought a cocky grin from the blond wolf. Aaron had been instrumental in Rafe's recovery when he had been the victim of a forced turning many years before. He had been his best friend ever since, and often his partner in crime before they had met their mates.

"There is nothing you need to be doing that is urgent, Rafe. Should we get any news from Dara or Europe, we can wake you up and let you know. The pack is secure and the Praetorians appear to have taken it upon themselves to adopt the pack as a whole rather than just the Vârcolac." Aaron moved over to stand in front of his friend.

"In addition, Lacey doesn't look like she's willing to go rest without you, and she needs as much rest as possible in her condition," he added. "I can take care of things for a few hours."

Rafe looked at his pregnant mate, seeing the lines of fatigue under her eyes. He felt a pang of guilt at not having noticed it earlier. She hadn't uttered one word of complaint, and she had been there at his side to help lend him strength. He knew it was pointless to try to make her get some rest without him, so he gave in to his friend's common sense. Truth be told, there was nothing he wanted more right now than to lie in his beautiful mate's embrace. "Fine."

He gave his sister a tight hug, understanding the strain she was under with her brother from another time missing. His Annie felt things so intensely, he knew it was killing her. However, she had Caleb to be her strength, so he had no qualms about leaving his sister in the vampire's capable hands. "If Anakatrîne has any more news..."

"You'll be the first to know. Aaron's right, Rafe. Both you and Lacey need some rest. I will stay here with the pack until you wake."

He could maybe have argued with them but he couldn't argue with his deep-rooted need to take care of Lacey. It was ingrained into his soul, and he needed to ensure Lacey and his children were safe and well. Looping an arm around his mate's shoulders, Rafe headed out of his study and upstairs for some much needed sleep.

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As the Alphas left, Caleb pulled Rhianna into a warm hug, leaning down to kiss the top of her head. "I need to check in with Demetri," he sighed. "He and Mara are arranging an emergency session of the Council. I should probably attend given the difficulties they'll likely face. I'll be back in a few hours. Will you be okay on your own?"

Rhianna could understand his concern, but the foolishness of his words couldn't be ignored. "Caleb, I'm in the heart of one of the strongest packs on the Northern Continent. We're surrounded by Praetorians as well. I am hardly alone, my love. Go and do what you need to be doing. I want to catch up with Mac anyway, to discuss Aaron's interesting observation with him. It's been a while since I checked in on what the Praetorians are up to."