

## Chapter 257

The question made her freeze in shock, confusion crossing her face for a moment before she suddenly softened a bit more and sank down onto the bed beside her. "Does he require me to? I don't know how to react with your rituals. In my world everything is so clear cut. You see what you want and if both parties are agreeable you take it. Weres are more complicated. Your social structure is confusing."

Rayne held her breath, staring in awe at a vampire with eyes so old they shone with the knowledge of millennia. Freya Eriksson may be Ancient but she was completely out of her depth when it came to something as simple as falling in love.

She pushed away her own misery and reached out to the other woman. She couldn't help herself from doing so, she'd been reacting to other people's hurt her entire life. "It's not so complicated, Freya. You just need to let him in completely. Take a leap of faith. If you find it difficult to believe in yourself then believe in him. He will catch you if you fall."

The vampire regarded her intently for a long moment and then the tension slowly drained from her body. "Eat your toast," she ordered. "I still want you out of his bed as soon as possible. But I will not drag you out bodily." She rose and returned to her sofa.

Freya mulled over Rayne's words, silently conceding that she could see why Dayton found the cat so intriguing. Up close to her she could scent the pain the other woman was trying to force down. She could understand the misery she lived in at the moment because she had been there herself. Despite that, Rayne still tried to reassure a vampire who could just as easily rip her throat out if she wanted to.

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The wildcat was strong. She would adjust to whatever was hurting her. She had Dayton at her side and she now had an Ancient vampire watching over her too. Freya's lips twitched in a derisive smile. She was growing soft. She would never admit to the other woman that her thoughts had changed, but she admitted to herself that she would now protect Rayne, not just because Dayton had asked her to, but because she wanted to.

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Dayton flew up the stairs hurrying back to his room. He'd left Freya alone with Rayne while he sought out answers from his Alpha. Rafe had been reluctant to talk but he'd held his ground until he'd gotten the truth. He'd had to appeal to his Alpha to get the information, arguing that it was in Rayne's best interest if he had all the facts. That had finally swayed Rafe and he'd told him the whole story.

It was a heartbreaking tale all around, not just for Rayne. He could understand Gard's reaction the night before even if he still wanted to rip the other man apart with his bare hands for hurting his friend. He was intelligent enough to know that it had been an impossible situation, two core loyalties battling against each other. He didn't know if Rayne would be able to understand it though.Www.Nóvè(!)wóRM.com

His concern for Rayne was twofold. He didn't know if she could heal from the discovery her mate had abandoned her as a child. And he wasn't wholly confident of leaving her alone with Freya. He felt guilty for doubting his mate but she was still so new to her emotions. He wasn't sure just how far she'd come.WWWW.n.vElworm.cOm

He entered the room and his eyes went first to Freya who was watching the door expectantly. She would have heard him approaching so he wasn't really surprised. The slight smile tugging her lips warmed his heart and he relaxed instantly. His gaze turned to the bed and he saw Rayne was awake and eating breakfast. She looked shattered but she was functioning. It was a start.

He strode across the room, bending down to rub his lips gently against Freya's. He kissed her at every possible opportunity. He knew it grounded her, soothed her, and he loved the taste of her mouth. He was honest enough not to pretend he was being altruistic.

"This nursemaid act is becoming a habit," he teased lightly against her lips. "You're going to ruin your reputation."

"Not if I toss you out the window I won't," she remarked drolly, but pleasure danced across her face at the approval in his tone.

"Now you know Rafe asked you to play nice, Freya," he laughed softly, kissing her again just because he wanted to, smiling as her lips curled against his.

"This is me playing nice," she retorted. "If I was being mean you'd already be laying out there rueing the day you ever met me."

He bit her bottom lip hard, his tongue lavng the nip he'd given her. "You are going to be so much trouble," he chuckled breaking away from her. His eyes shone with excitement as he ran a thumb over her bottom lip and then turned to Rayne who was watching them intently.

His gaze turned pensive as he took in her wounded expression. "How are you feeling?"

The silver in her eyes pulsed dully as she met his gaze. "I've been a whole lot better," she admitted.

He sat down on the bed, moving the tray when it became apparent she wasn't going to eat any more.

Freya took it from him. "I will leave you to talk." She didn't wait for anyone to object, simply strode from the room leaving them alone. It was hard to do, especially when she had seen the softness on Dayton's face when he looked at the cat. But she knew Rayne would talk better without her being present and she wanted to prove to Dayton that she could be rational about things, that she could accept his friendship with the other woman even if it did make her gut clench painfully.

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Dayton relaxed as the door closed behind her turning his full attention to the woman in his bed. Although he wanted Freya close to him, he knew Rayne needed his undivided attention. The pull of two opposing needs helped him understand Gard's dilemma a bit more and his anger ratcheted down another notch.

He moved up the bed, silently opening his arms as he rested against the headboard. It was a testament to just how fragile Rayne felt that she flowed into his embrace with barely any hesitation, her arms coming around his stomach to clutch tightly.

"I talked with Rafe," he murmured softly. She stiffened in his arms and he dropped a soothing kiss on the top of her head. "You need to hear this, Rayne. You can't make any decisions without knowing the full facts, no matter how painful facing some of them will be. Isn't that what you've been trying to bang into my thick skull all these years?"

She knew what he said was true. It didn't make her want to listen to him though. Her emotions were all over the place, so screwed up that even her cat was skittish and unsure. The need to run was a compulsion so deep it was only Dayton's arms that anchored her to the bed, hell even to the compound.