

Chapter 258

He started talking quietly, holding her close as he told her a fantasy tale of Kings and Queens, of a race of beings so beautiful and powerful they could have been great if not for one small flaw; they were corrupt to their very core.

It was mesmerising even as it was so cruelly tragic. He was talking about her birth, her parents, about how a vampire queen tried to save their lives but ultimately failed. This wasn't a fantasy. This was reality, a history that she was part of.

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She could understand now why she'd recognised Caleb and Rhianna. They carried the souls of that king and queen even though their faces were different. She was from their era; she felt the pull of those souls deep within her. She'd heard the tales of the end of the vampire royalty when she was still young, long before their memories had been erased by the Vampire Council. It had made her sad at the time, not realising why it affected her so much.

Why she hadn't recognised Gard she didn't know. Had her subconscious mind tried to protect her from the knowledge her mate had chosen another over her? The three vampires together exuded a power and magic never before witnessed. Had it taken all three of them being present at the same time to spark her long dormant memories of her childhood?

"The bond those three shared was like nothing we've ever experienced," Dayton interrupted her thoughts, his arms tightening around her. "They had magic as well as a more complicated type of mating bond we know." He stroked her hair gently as he talked, offering his comfort as he walked down the road that caused her heart to ache so badly.

"You remember Gard falling, Rayne. Every time he fell it was because he felt another piece of Anakatrine being ripped apart. He kept going, kept trying to save you as his sister died slowly under the assault of their people. He felt Callain fall, knew she had no one left to protect her. He was her Guardian but he was her brother too. It was an impossible choice to make, one I don't think I would ever have been able to. He had to go back. He had to try and save her. He thought he'd hidden you well enough that he could come back for you later. He was too late to save Anakatrine and you were gone when he returned."

She listened silently, trying to imagine the anguish Gard must have been feeling at the time. Her own pain was a hot knife deep within her and it fought against the words she was hearing. The rational part of her could understand, the mate part of her couldn't. She had come second to Anakatrine. She may have been a child at the time but she had been his. She should have come first.

The ugly, selfish nature of the thought ripped her apart. But so did the many years of being alone, of not knowing who she or even what she was. So many years of only being able to soothe the ache within her by helping others find peace from their own pain.

Now she was expected to ease Gard's anguish. The person who was responsible for every tear she'd ever shed; the clawing aloneness deep within her.

She didn't have the strength to forgive him. She didn't have the strength for anything any more. All she had was a well of pain so deep within her that if she were to start screaming she wouldn't ever be able to stop. Gard had abandoned her, left her helpless and alone.*W@W.0(v)el()worm.c@m*

The memory of the cold, pitch black forest, the terrifying sounds around a little girl so afraid she couldn't even whimper any more was all that surrounded Rayne at the moment. That feeling of terror had haunted her dreams every single night of her life, even though she had never understood why. It most likely would until the day she died.

She remembered the darkness and then a pain so terrible she screamed until she was hoarse. Her next memory after that was of her human parents bathing her, her mother singing softly with tears in her eyes, her father stroking her head soothingly.

She had always known they were not her real parents; something deep inside her seemed to recognise that right from the very start. But they had bathed her with love for the twenty years she'd lived with them and she had loved them just as fiercely.

They'd been an older couple, too old to have had a child her age. Sometimes she'd seen her mother holding a child's blanket to her chest, her eyes far away as if reliving something from her past. She'd never asked her parents about it, somehow sensing they had a grief so strong they were unable to talk about it.

With her memories returned to her and the wisdom of age, she now began to suspect they had lost their own child. Possibly her father had heard her scream when she was attacked by whatever had caused her the pain that night. He could have rescued her, taking her home to ease his wife's grief and his own.

She knew she would never truly know what had happened after Gard left her that night but she thought her speculation was probably pretty accurate. And she didn't fault her parents for taking her in and loving her so unconditionally. Those first two decades of her life had been what had shaped her into the person she would eventually become.

She couldn't regret that part of her life even if her heart had broken as she'd buried first her fragile mother and then a bare handful of months afterwards her father. They'd loved each other so much they couldn't bear being apart from each other once their mortal bodies began to fail.

After they had passed was when the real misery had set in, the aching need to belong somewhere, to find out who she was. She had walked alone since the night she'd buried her father until the day she'd met the man who now tried to comfort her, afraid to let anyone else in, the fear of losing them too much to bear.

But Dayton had proven a true friend and finally a sense of belonging had begun to settle over her. She'd allowed herself to trust in someone and that in turn had brought her to Gard. She'd lowered her defences to her vampire, accepted him into her heart only to discover that he was the very reason she'd been so lost. How was she supposed to forgive that?

"Rest some more," Dayton sighed when she didn't speak. "Think on it when you feel a bit stronger. Just don't make any rash decisions. Don't run, Rayne. We need you. Gard needs you."*www.it(v)lW0rm.com*

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She remained silent until he left, the tears falling when she was finally alone. She curled into a ball and wept silently as her soul felt pulled in a thousand different directions at once.

Gard was her mate and he was hurting. She wanted to go to him and yet she couldn't make herself do so. The frightened, abandoned child deep within her couldn't forgive the man who had left her to die even as the woman ached to ease his suffering.

After a long time she rose silently, moving to the window to stare out into the forest. The sounds of the pack were all around, the pack who were welcoming her into their fold. They offered her protection, a sense of belonging she'd never had before. The children needed her to teach them so they could remain safe. Her skills were valued here. She was being offered the one thing she'd craved all her life, a home.

But her heart was a shattered wreck and she would only cause heartache and damage in the long run. She had stayed so long because Dayton had needed her. Now he had Freya. He was well on the road to recovery and she knew his life would be different now. He would know a joy that would heal his every nightmare. He would be happy.