

Chapter 259

Rayne shadowed herself, eased the window open and shifted into panther form. No one would be able to track her. No one would see her leave. She silently asked Dayton's forgiveness as she jumped from the window and disappeared into the trees.*www.NovelWorld.com*

Her cat hissed loudly at her. She ignored it and ran as fast as she could. This wasn't a decision her cat could make because this was the woman's heart involved. It didn't stop her animal trying to take control though, but she was old and was strong enough to retain control of her dual personality.

So it was with some shock that she found herself slowing down as she neared the smooth rock formation that hid the cave from view. She hadn't consciously run in this direction but she was there, at the special place Gard had whispered in her ear the night before. Where he would be waiting for her!

A raw, gut wrenching pain gripped her as she stared at the rock. She didn't want to be there, didn't want to see him. But she walked the secret path anyway, slowly padding into the cave.

Gard was sitting on the cushions before the burning fire, staring into the flames as if he could find answers deep within. He didn't look around as she entered but she knew he was aware that she was there. The confidence which usually oozed from him was gone, his body language showing a weariness of a man with a deep weight on his shoulders.

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"I didn't expect you to come." The words were spoken tonelessly, his head turning to look at the panther watching him carefully. She met his gaze and his expression was as blank as it had been the night before when her memories returned. The scent of his anguish was strong though. He couldn't hide that from her.

She moved silently, entering further until she was close but still out of reach. She should shift, talk to him but she lay down on the cushions and rested her head on her paws. It would hurt too much to talk but there was a slight lessening of her pain just being close to him.

Gard watched his cat approach, aching to reach out and touch her but seeing the skittish look in her eyes, the deep melancholy she didn't try to hide. He didn't think his heart could break any further but it did as she lay down beside him and maintained her panther form.

All night he'd waited for her, reliving every moment of the night before as he stared into the flames of the fire. Rayne's smiling face as she'd entered the Alpha's home. She'd looked so beautiful she'd taken his breath away and it had taken all of his self control not to cross the room and drag her into his arms.

Being apart from her had been sheer agony; he'd been desperate for the scent of her, the touch of her soft skin, the taste of the woman who was his everything. But he'd known what was to come so he'd forced himself to stay a room apart from her.

And then she'd looked at Caleb and Annie, his sister saying her true name and uncovering memories no child should ever be forced to remember. When Rayne had finally turned to him, the betrayal in her eyes had ripped his heart to shreds, her anguished cry a thousand knives piercing his very soul as she understood the enormity of his actions that night.

He hadn't been able to stay away from her then. His need to comfort her, to explain, to try and beg her forgiveness had consumed him until it was a clawing pain deep within him. He hadn't wanted to surrender her to her pack, had fought a furious battle with himself to obey his sister's words, but Rayne had needed what he wasn't capable of giving her so he'd left her despite every single part of him screaming in denial at doing so.

He'd never dreamed she'd come to him voluntarily. He'd hoped for it but her pain had cut so deep the night before he hadn't allowed himself to believe it. And now she was here, hurting and distrustful but she'd come and he knew he only had one shot at convincing her he'd never fail her again.

"I've been alive for over six thousand years, Kitty. For three thousand of them there was only ever Anakatrine in my heart. She was everything, my whole world. My life was hers to do with as she wanted. She chose to love me, protect me, and forgive me anything. Our bond was unto death itself." The love in his voice was unmistakable as he spoke of his sister. The connection between them had been everything.

"Right to the very end I obeyed her. She told me to save you even though we all knew what would happen that night. I left though every part of me wanted to stay. Her pain ripped through me as if the wounds were my own but she'd asked me to save you so I kept going. She was dying so you could live and I would not fail her, I would not make her death pointless."

His breath rasped out painfully hard. "But I did make it pointless. Callain and Anakatrine died and I was unable to save them. I broke my last promise to her and abandoned you to your death too. I failed to save my sister, I failed to perform her last task and I failed a helpless child who needed me more than my Anakatrine did. The worst part of it all is I failed my mate, betrayed her so badly that she will never be able to forgive me."

Rayne didn't think her heart could break any more than it already had. The loneliness in Gard's voice, the sheer aching agony as he relived his past was excruciating. Her cat roared in fury and pain, the woman wept silent tears, and the terrified little girl with a love so pure and innocent it shone iridescently, opened up her heart.

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Her mate was in the same emotional torment she was in, his pain just as crippling and destructive. She couldn't bear it on top of her own. His guilt would destroy him and that in turn would destroy her.

She loved her vampire with all her soul and always would. There was nothing they couldn't overcome together. She shifted instantly, throwing herself the last distance into his arms, weeping hard as his agony ripped her apart.

"Don't," she sobbed against his neck. "Don't punish yourself like this. There's nothing you could have done to change things. They happened for a reason and we'll never truly know why. You did the best you could, Gard. You were one man against an entire people who had hatred in their hearts. Forgive yourself."

Gard groaned, his arms automatically clutching his beautiful cat to him as her tears bathed his neck and she whispered her words against his skin. He couldn't believe she was here, that despite everything she had come to him.

He had failed her and yet she comforted him, forgave him that failure when it wrenched his soul to pieces. He didn't deserve her forgiveness but he would take it greedily because he couldn't let her go. She was the one woman who eclipsed even his love for Anakatrine. She was the other half of his soul and she was reaching out to him, allowing him into her heart.*www.NOVELWORLD.COM*

"Sarayne," he breathed softly, tears wetting his cheeks as he shook in her arms. "I'm so sorry I left you frightened and alone, not just as a child but for every moment of your life up until now. If I could change it I would."