

Chapter 251

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Her name is Rayne," he said quietly looking down at their joined hands. "You haven't met her yet but I know you'll like her. She's feisty, independent, incredibly beautiful and as sexy as sin. When I'm with her, she is all that exists in my world. You told me to find love and I did. But she ran from me, discovered a way to hide so I can't track her. Being apart from her is tearing me up inside."

"The wildcat?" Rhianna gasped softly. She'd heard all about her, knew that there was some suspicion that she could be a hybrid child. She had kept her own counsel on that point, waiting to meet Rayne before she spoke her thoughts on it. Hearing that Gard had found his mate in her both filled her with elation and also dread.

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If Rayne was who she suspected she was, then Gard's pain would only increase rather than lessen when it was revealed. "Are you sure?"

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Her brother met her gaze. "Completely. She's mine, Annie. It doesn't matter if she tries to deny it. We belong together. She's aware of it too. When we made love she claimed me with a word. A Were can't take back that word."

She swallowed, dread washing over her at the total conviction in his voice. "Gard...I don't know how to say this." Rhianna couldn't continue, swallowing again as she tried to make herself speak.

Her tension transmitted to him and unease flitted across his face. "Say it," he demanded his fingers tightening around hers.

"You know who she is, don't you? If she's as old as she claims to be there can be no other explanation." She watched the haunted expression in his eyes, saw denial clashing with the truth. "You can't deny it, Gard. You must have known the moment her uniqueness became evident."

Gard shook his head, releasing her hand and looking away as he fought her words. He couldn't admit it to himself, couldn't allow the truth to surface because if it did, if he let himself believe then he didn't think he could live with the knowledge.

"You can't hide from this, brother," Rhianna whispered sadly.

"I know," he groaned hoarsely, his expression so haunted it ripped at her heart. "I think I've always known but it was only after Rafe found out about me, when he was telling you about the children that everything finally clicked into place. If Rayne truly is a hybrid child then there is really only one child she could be."

"Oh, Gard!" Rhianna moved around the table, wrapping her arms around him, understanding the extreme pain she'd been feeling for days now.

He had left Rayne in the forest to try and save his sister. He had abandoned an infant, believed he had been responsible for her death all these centuries. To find out the child had lived and he hadn't protected her would be bad enough. To discover that child was his destined mate and he had betrayed her would be an agony beyond imagining for a man whose very core was to be a guardian.

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"I left her," Gard choked out staring down at the table. "All those centuries she's been alone not knowing who or what she was. Three thousand years, Annie. She's walked alone her entire life because I left her." That knowledge would torture his soul for eternity.wvw.n©Ve(l)wO-r-m.comm

She held him tightly, tears rolling down her face as he let go and clung to her. She was the only person he would allow himself to be vulnerable around. That was until he found Rayne. But his mate wasn't there right now so he wept silently in his sister's arms, releasing the overwhelming guilt he felt for his past actions.

"She will forgive you," Rhianna whispered gently, tightening her hold on him. "She's your mate. She has to forgive you because if she doesn't it will rip her apart inside. We'll find her somehow. We'll make her understand."

Gard wished he had her faith. He wanted to believe his sister but he couldn't. How could Rayne ever forgive him when he couldn't even begin to forgive himself?