

Chapter 681

Despite his ire, she could hear the concern and relief in his voice. She could only imagine what he must have gone through seeing her fall like that. "You're immortal," she snorted, pulling herself up so she could straddle the branch facing him. She needed a few moments to allow her body to heal, and from the look on her mate's face, he needed a few to calm his racing heart.

Looking up, she realised just how far she'd fallen. It was a miracle Gard had managed to get to her in time. Turning her gaze back to his ashen face, she reached out to place a hand on his chest. His heart was racing so fast it was a wonder he wasn't hyperventilating. "I'm fine, Gard."

"Only because I caught you in time," he growled, a faint trace of panic still shining in his eyes. He pulled her into his arms, his hold so tight she thought he would crack a couple of her ribs. "Don't you ever do that to me again, Sarayne. I swear I will make you regret it for at least a millennia if you do."

She hid her smile in the crook of his neck, sending love and reassurance down their mate bond and allowing him to threaten her with whatever dire retribution he needed. If it helped to calm him anxiety levels down she could put up with it. "I'm fine," she reiterated, rubbing her lips against his neck. "I'm safe."

She kissed up his jaw, sighing when he turned his head and plundered her mouth in a kiss so desperate it brought tears to her eyes. She returned his kiss, allowing him to ground himself in her touch until his heart finally began to slow its erratic beat and his touch gentled.

"I love you more than life itself, Sarayne," Gard whispered against her lips. "I am nothing without you, my heart. Please don't ever scare me that way again."

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"I promise I will do my very best, my darling, but we are living in dangerous times. Please don't hold it against me if I can't keep to that." She would never lie to him or give him empty reassurances. He wouldn't want them from her anyway.

Gard lowered his forehead against hers, a rueful smile crossing his handsome face. "I guess that is the best I can ever hope for," he sighed, his hands slowly trailing down her back, his fingers tracing her spine. "Are you healed?"

"Good as new," she answered, smiling to lend weight to her words. He would be giving himself a hard time that he'd hurt her while rescuing her and she needed to divert him before he went down that path. "Though you and I are going to be having a discussion about you hitting me, Mister..."

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It had the desired effect, his lavender gaze turning resolute. "You deserved that spanking."

"Remember those words when I turn them back around on you one day," she countered, moving away to look at the next grouping of trees. "I think you forget that I am Vârcolac sometimes, Gard, and so very much stronger than you when I want to be." She gave him a saucy wink.

Throwing his head back, he laughed loudly. The sound startled some nearby birds and sent them fluttering into the evening sky. "Bring it on, woman. I'm not afraid of you." He rose beside her and examined their route. The distance between trees appeared fairly uniform.

Glancing to the side, he captured her gaze. "We should get a good run at this last section, our forward momentum making the jumps easy. Is there anything that concerns you?"

She shook her head, in full agreement with him. Her panther shouldn't have any issues, but she didn't want him to be second guessing her abilities. "Just for the sake of your piece of mind, why don't you go first and I'll follow at five second intervals? I'm sure my panther can make each jump but there is no harm in being cautious."

His answer was to smile and nod his head. "That was just what I was going to suggest."

It was Rayne's turn to laugh now and she rolled her eyes. "Men..." she muttered under her breath, but her vampire was already leaping into the next treetop and it was time for her to shift back to panther form and follow his lead. ©Ww.NovELw0Rm.c0(m)

It wasn't long before she could detect a break in the treeline up ahead, a sign that they were closing in on their location. A handful more leaps and then Gard was waiting for her as she reached the last tree.

"We're here," he breathed softly, reverence in his tone. "We can continue on foot from here."

It was easier for her to make her way down the tree in panther form, so she waited until they touched down on the mossy ground before she shifted back to human. The trees and foliage were still relatively thick where they'd come down so she made sure her clothing was sufficient for the terrain so her skin didn't get too nicked. Her long black hair she quickly plaited down her back, so it wouldn't get in the way.

Gard was retying his dark auburn locks at his nape with a leather thong, his gaze alert as he surveyed the area. "I don't see any obvious signs of disturbance," he mused. "Might not be a bad idea to check a little further afield before we head deeper in towards the Palace."

Rayne didn't recognise this part of her former homeland. She had been found on the western side of the Palace and had lived most of her younger life in two of the villages leading away from the vampire court. From what she could remember, most of the Romany settlers had moved as far away from the court as if they could sense the danger that was brewing at that time. Any folklore that they may have had about this area, had been carefully wiped out of existence within two generations. She was probably the only person outwith the Triumvirate who still remembered any of the history of this place.

"I'll take the left," she answered crossing to his other side.

"You were already on the right side," he grumbled with no real heat in his tone.

"I know; I just felt like taking the left side. Sue me."

"Some days I think you just like teasing me, woman."

"Of course," she laughed, "Isn't that my job?"

He grinned back at her, rolling his eyes in mock exasperation, before his expression turned serious. "If you see anything even remotely suspicious don't investigate it on your own. Come and find me."

"Ditto," she shot back, giving him a broad smile. "Meet back here in half an hour?"Ww.novELw0Rm.c0(m)

Gard nodded, stealing a quick kiss. "Don't do anything foolish," he breathed against her lips, causing her to laugh once more.wW(w).nov(ELw0Rm).com

"Like I said...ditto," she quipped back, turning to head into the closest treeline.

Gard watched her go before he turned to his path and vanished into the waiting trees.

Rayne alternated between both her forms to traverse her section of the mountain forest. Sometimes it was simply easier to be a panther to get through a particularly densely packed area. She completed her sweep, her innate ability to tell time alerting her to the fact she had to head back. She didn't encounter anything out of the ordinary so she was relaxed as she returned back to her mate.

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"I know; I just falt lika taking tha laft sida. Sua ma."

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