

Chapter 684

She fell forward as her legs gave out, barely able to stop her forehead smashing off the ground as she landed in a heap. Her vision began swimming in an instant, and the strength in her arms gave out as she tried to pull herself up from the ground. "Gard, run!" she screamed in her mind, because her voice wouldn't work despite how hard she tried to make it.

"Trap!" She tried again, knowing that she was close to losing consciousness and he most likely couldn't hear her. Blackness descended though she fought it every step of the way, her heart hammering wildly as she tried to reach her mate. "Run, Gard...run..."

Something wasn't right, he could feel it with every step he took. The area he was traversing was too pristine, too devoid of all tracks. There should have been animal droppings, some indication that something had travelled over the ground and yet there were none and their lack was every bit of a warning sign than if he'd detected footprints.

Gard was certain no one had actually stepped foot on the Palace site but the further he walked towards the rear the more sure he was that someone had visited the area in the last century. He wanted to kick himself for not checking this far back the last time he'd been there but then he supposed he'd had no call to at the time. Now, all he could think about was getting back to the Palace and his mate. They were far too vulnerable up here on their own when they knew nothing of what may be waiting for them.

"Sarayne, head back to the Palace."

He took a couple of steps backwards and then he froze on the spot.

"Sarayne!"**wWw.NovelWorld.com**

Gard spun to his left and took off at supernatural speed. It was the fastest route to her last known location. Dread filled his soul, fear clogging his throat as he ran. There was no way in hell she wouldn't answer him when he called. Something had to have happened to her.

"Sarayne! Answer me!"

Total silence greeted him, and he realised that he could barely feel their mate bond. It was as if someone or something was muting the bond but he knew that was an impossibility. Only they could do that, or Rafe, and their Alpha was thousands of miles away. "Sarayne, where are you?"

All contact with his mate cut off a split second after something stung him in the neck. The huge vampire fell forward with a loud crash, a branch spearing him in the shoulder as he fell. Gard roared out in fury as he toppled forward, fear for Rayne the only thing he could think of. They had been ambushed, of that he was now certain, lulled into a false sense of security at finding the Palace site and front entrance completely undisturbed.

She fell forward as her legs gave out, barely able to stop her forehead smashing off the ground as she landed in a heap. Her vision began swimming in an instant, and the strength in her arms gave out as she tried to pull herself up from the ground. "Gord, run!" she screamed in her mind, because her voice wouldn't work despite how hard she tried to make it.

"Trap!" She tried again, knowing that she was close to losing consciousness and he most likely couldn't hear her. Blackness descended though she fought it every step of the way, her heart hammering wildly as she tried to reach her mate. "Run, Gord...run..."

Something wasn't right, he could feel it with every step he took. The area he was traversing was too pristine, too devoid of all tracks. There should have been animal droppings, some indication that something had travelled over the ground and yet there were none and their lack was every bit of a warning sign than if he'd detected footprints.

Gord was certain no one had actually stepped foot on the Palace site but the further he walked towards the rear the more sure he was that someone had visited the area in the last century. He wanted to kick himself for not checking this far back the last time he'd been there but then he supposed he'd had no call to at the time. Now, all he could think about was getting back to the Palace and his mate. They were far too vulnerable up here on their own when they knew nothing of what may be waiting for them.

"Soroyne, head back to the Palace."

He took a couple of steps backwards and then he froze on the spot. "Soroyne!"

Gord spun to his left and took off at supernatural speed. It was the fastest route to her last known location. Dread filled his soul, fear clogging his throat as he ran. There was no way in hell she wouldn't answer him when he called. Something had to have happened to her.

"Soroyne! Answer me!"

Total silence greeted him, and he realised that he could barely feel their mate bond. It was as if someone or something was muting the bond but he knew that was an impossibility. Only they could do that, or Rafe, and their Alpha was thousands of miles away. "Soroyne, where are you?"

All contact with his mate cut off a split second after something stung him in the neck. The huge vampire fell forward with a loud crash, a branch spearing him in the shoulder as he fell. Gord roared out in fury as he toppled forward, fear for Rayne the only thing he could think of. They had been ambushed, of that he was now certain, lulled into a false sense of security at finding the Palace site and front entrance completely undisturbed.

Darkness was descending and he shook his head to try to clear it. He couldn't pass out, not here and now, not when Rayne needed him. "Rayne...Rayne..." Gard lost his fight to stay conscious, inky blackness claiming his last thought of his missing mate.

A cloaked figure entered the cave, his tall frame concealed by the charcoal grey garment. Outside were close to a hundred elder vampires. Inside, were two prone figures bound in chains so thick it would have taken all the assembled vampires to break them. The figure stood peering down at their prey, his lips stretching in the rictus of a smile. It was the only part of the male that could be seen, his hood concealing the majority of his face.

"You have done well," he said telepathically to the lone vampire in the cave with him.

"The formula you provided made the task easy, Master," the bald-headed male replied, bowing low.

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"It certainly did work to subdue them; however I will test to ensure that it dulls their magical abilities too. All this will be pointless if the toxin is ineffectual against that." Hunching down beside the bound couple, the Master danced inside their sleeping minds, his psyche flowing down the pristine corridors within until he found the area he was looking for.

The girl's abilities were of the lesser in offensive terms, but he still placed a block around her ability to shadow and shapeshift. As long as she remained dosed with enough of the toxin he'd formulated, she wouldn't be able to break through his block.**wWw.NovelWorld.com**

Next, he turned his attention to the male, reaching out a gloved hand to brush away a lock of auburn hair that partly obscured his face. He had seen this one around over the centuries and knew that he was a force to be reckoned with. "Well met, Guardian," he whispered tracing a long finger over a chiselled cheekbone. "Long have I yearned for this moment, though I did not expect it to be so soon. I am not yet ready to play my final hand, old one, though I will enjoy watching the chaos your disappearance engenders."

It was the first time the vampire beside him had heard his Master's true voice, and it caused tears of adoration to flow down his face at the sheer beauty of its tone.

With no further words, he entered the Guardian's mind, finding his place of magic and bolting the door firmly shut. It would be disastrous should the male be able to unlock the door while in captivity. His wrath would be like none other and should he escape his bonds...the Master would lose many of his followers should that occur.

He would have to ensure that didn't happen, and made a mental note to stay close until he could determine how long the toxin would keep the couple unconscious.

"No one enters the cave," he instructed the vampire at his side. "No one speaks to them, no one interacts with them. And most definitely no one who has a key to their bonds comes within a hundred feet of this cave. I will remain for another few hours but then I must leave this place. After that, you are in charge of the prisoners, Heathen. Should they escape, your life will be forfeit. Are we clear on that?"

The vampire fell to his knees, fierce determination shining from his mind. "Yes, Master. It will be as you instruct. No one will enter the cave except to administer the toxin."

The cloaked figure stifled down a grimace of disgust at the zeal in the vampire's mental tone. Weaker minds were much easier to subdue but they burnt out faster than he would have liked. He would have to cultivate another to take Heathen's place if the vampire continued down his current rate of decay.

Sweeping passed the kneeling male, the Master strode out of cave and into the early evening air. A hundred vampires all knelt as one, his love, and approval bathing them where they knelt. This was as it should be. This was as it always should have been. Soon now, it would be his time, and the world would quake in fear at his very name.

Thousands of miles away a deep male voice cried out, frantic brown eyes opening in a gasp of pain.

"Rafe?! What's wrong?" Lacey sat up beside her mate, her hands automatically coming around to clutch at her abdomen.

"Gard...Rayne...I can't sense them anymore, Lace. I can't feel them down my Alpha bond!"

"No!" The word choked out, tears filling Lacey's eyes as she stared at her mate. "Are they...?" She couldn't say the word that filled her soul with dread.

With no further words, he entered the Guardian's mind, finding his place of magic and bolting the door firmly shut. It would be disastrous should the male be able to unlock the door while in captivity. His wrath would be like none other and should he escape his bonds...the Master would lose many of his followers should that occur.

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The vampire fell to his knees, fierce determination shining from his mind. "Yes, Master. It will be as you instruct. No one will enter the cave except to administer the toxin."

The cloaked figure stifled down a grimace of disgust at the zeal in the vampire's mental tone. Weaker minds were much easier to subdue but they burnt out faster than he would have liked. He would have to cultivate another to take Haathan's place if the vampire continued down his current rate of decay.

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