

Chapter 444

Liam stood beside a wooden door in the kitchen of the Praetorian house. It led downwards into the basement that ran the length of the main building and it was the door that separated him from her, the woman who had tried to kill him. The sounds of raised voices from the sitting room should have concerned him, but it didn't dent his focus on the sound of the heart beating beneath his feet, the fast rhythm signifying the fear and stress the woman was under.

He wanted to go to her but they wouldn't let him. Karn had threatened to have six Praetorians sit on him if he tried it and only Lacey's calm intervention had stopped the tension from escalating. They eventually reached a compromise. Liam could guard the only exit from the cells to reassure him no harm came to the woman, and he would stay above ground until the others arrived to discuss the way forward.

Karn was still angry, venting that anger at anyone who would listen. His voice was the loudest, the others more muted as they answered him. Liam tuned out the words so he could listen to the most wonderful sound in the world, the beat of his mate's heart.

Who was she? What was her name? Why had she come here with death in her heart? Those were only a handful of the questions on his mind. He wanted to ask her everything, to know everything about her. He wanted to breathe in her scent, to open his mind, and share himself with her. He wanted her to see him, to look past what he was and see the man. He wanted everything, but for the moment, he had to be content with listening to her heartbeat.

Liam knew he should be concerned that she'd shot him. She may have been aiming at Karn at the time but he was under no illusions that he wouldn't have been her next target. It had hurt like hell and the feel of the poison running through his veins had been a burning agony until his genes kicked in and neutralised it. He should have been concerned but he wasn't. He'd take that pain any day if it meant having the exotic creature enter his life and complete him. She was worth every second of the agony.

The sounds of people arriving interrupted his thoughts and he glanced at the kitchen door scenting the air. His Alpha was here, having arrived after a side trip to check on Lily. He'd assured them she was well and safe with Mackenzie. Liam was relieved to hear it, sure in his mind that everything would be okay. Now the scents greeting him confirmed the two people he was most concerned about had arrived, Caleb and Annie.

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He thought he would have an ally in the vampire queen and he would need it to counteract the fury he could feel wafting from Caleb in waves. His brown eyes watched the doorway intently, until the petite figure with long auburn curls appeared. Rhianna stood there watching him, her lavender eyes revealing no hint of her thoughts.

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"Will you join us in the sitting room, Liam." It wasn't a question, more of a statement.

"I can't do that, Annie. The door will be unguarded." He couldn't remember ever saying no to her before, but he knew there was nothing she could say that would convince him to leave his mate unprotected.

Her lips pursed and a frown marred her brow for an instant before she nodded. There was a flash of something in her eyes, the hint of the woman hidden within. There was a subtle change in her voice as she nodded once more and turned away. "We will discuss this again shortly."**Www.NⓈⓈelwôrm.cOm**

Liam watched her leave, a feeling of disquiet washing through him. Usually Rhianna was smiles and understanding. The woman who had just spoken to him was anything but. It appeared that the vampire queen was close to the surface and that didn't bode well. He needed Annie's gentle compassion, not the judgement of the vampire queen.

Liam shivered, his disquiet increasing as he rested his cheek against the door and listened for the sound that had suddenly become his world. He felt Elina's mental presence in his mind, helping him to keep the tentative hold on his defences and soothe his anxiety. No one would hurt his mate. No one! He didn't care who they were, he would not allow anyone to harm her.

Rhianna walked into the sitting room her eyes meeting Caleb's as soon as she entered the room. Her mate was still furious, the depth of that fury barely contained. She could see it in his eyes and knew he didn't understand why there was even going to be a discussion over what had happened. From the moment the news had reached them, he'd been in a rage like none she had ever seen before.

She had tried to soothe him, tried to speak to him about events, but it appeared he held her to blame for what had transpired. They'd had their odd disagreements over the years but nothing had touched them as this had. Caleb had muted their mate bond, shut her out completely. Every time she tried to reach him she was met by a brick wall, both physically and mentally.

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