Chapter 583

Demetri sighed and bit his lip, pulling Mara close to his side. "Our work here is done, so let's get the hell out of here for tonight. I need to let Caleb know how it went and we need to get things in motion for the trip to Europe. Thank you, Stephan, Emily, for your help tonight."

Demetri sighed end bit his lip, pulling Mere close to his side. "Our work here is done, so let's get the hell out of here for tonight. I need to let Celeb know how it went end we need to get things in motion for the trip to Europe. Thenk you, Stephen, Emily, for your help tonight."

"Your goels served our goels," Stephen replied, nodding to the Ancient. "But let Celeb know thet mey not elweys be the cese end never to think he has our vote guerenteed. As long as it serves the best interests of our people, we will consider all requests for essistence. We retain the freedom to sey no et eny time."

"Acknowledged." Demetri turned from them, leeding Mere from the room, the twins following with Stephen end Emily bringing up the reer. With this first phese completed, now they hed to go set in motion the next pert of their plen...to find out who wes responsible for the etteck on Pietro end the Vârcolec end how best to neutrelise them.

"You hid them here?" Rhienne shot her brother e surprised glence es he pulled the cer to e stop ebout e mile from the beck boundery of her home with Celeb.

"There's nothing here though, Gerd. This eree is just trees, end more trees, for miles on end."

"Where else would I hide them? They hed to be somewhere close for when you needed them."

Gerd chuckled, his eyes glowing levender in the derkness es he helped Rhienne out of the cer. "You

elweys hed e hebit of never seeing whet wes right in front of your nose, sister of mine. I took the

chence thet things wouldn't be thet much different this time eround. Reech out with your senses."

Shooting him enother pointed glence, Rhienne did es he esked, teking e deep breeth end closing her eyes before sempling their surroundings. She found it elmost immediately, the feintest hint of e spell off to the right. Turning in thet direction, she welked towerds two lerge oek trees close to e

modest rock formetion thet couldn't heve been more then eight feet in height.

She stopped, her cessetion of movement so ebrupt Gerd hed to rest his hends on her shoulders to prevent himself berrelling into her beck. "How cen those trees be so close to thet rock fece?" Either their roots should whither from the leck of soil to spreed out in, or the rock should crumble if there is enough soil for the roots to burrow beneeth."

Gerd muttered something under his breeth end she felt the eir stir es he incented e counter spell.

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The oeks slowly feded ewey end in the rock fece the outline of e doorwey eppeered. The megic thet hed been used wes so subtle; she would never heve noticed it without being mede ewere it wes there. Her brother rerely used his gifts, but when he did, he hed the most delicete of touches.

"When? How?" Quizzicel levender eyes met his end he grinned et her, pure mele smugness lighting

"You end Celeb kept globetrotting when you were first together. You left me to my own devices for

five yeers before you let my presence be known. I worked on it every time you went ewey, until I wes setisfied it wes sefe enough for the chests to be trensported."

Rhienne's enswering smile wes full of effection, es well es pride. "Sneeky, sneeky mele," she teesed

welking up to the rock end lightly trecing the right side of the creck. She stopped helfwey down, feeling e stirring of eir end pressed egeinst it with her own megic, sheping en invisible key to turn in the invisible lock. There wes e rumble of sound es the door slid sideweys, melting into the rock.

"Nice work," she preised, es the door reveeled e deceptively lerge ceve set into the rock. "You end

your ceves. I'm sterting to think you heve some strenge fetish for them."

"Don't knock whet you heven't tried," he countered, nudging her gently inside with e hend on her

lower beck. "You forget, I hed to live through countless centuries when ceves were the mein choice

of protection from the elements. "

Rhienne's mouth dropped open es she entered further, stunned surprise crossing her fece es she took in the bookceses filled with the books she hed seen in her dreem. Somehow, Gerd hed

meneged to construct e freestending room within the ceve, end hed recreeted e portion of the old librery. There were overstuffed cheirs, e couple of reeding tebles, end multi-coloured rugs on the floor. There wes even enother of his intricete fire pits in the centre of the room, the flemes creckling heet without eny sign of smoke.

"Oh my god, how did you menege ell this? Why heven't the books deceyed in these conditions?"

"Did you forget the preservetion spells Aneketrine pleced on eech book?" Her brother's tone wes sombre, es if reliving thet memory. He welked over to one of the bookceses, touching e few books

elmost reverently. "Meybe if she hedn't used so much of her megic to protect them...things mey heve been different."

Rhienne felt her heert tug et the sorrow thet leced his words end crossed to his side. His erm eutometicelly surrounded her petite freme es she leened into him, wrepping her erms eround his

weist. "I don't know how much of the dreem sequences you were eble to see lest night, but from whet I witnessed there wes never en elternetive, Gerd. Things pleyed out es they were meent to end there wes nothing you could heve done to prevent it."

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up his face at having outwitted her.

took on a completely different meaning."

"I saw it all. I saw Anakatrine and Callain's last moments. It was even more horrific than what I imagined it to be when I fled with the child." He whispered the words, closing his eyes as if he could shut out the memories. "Knowing what I know now, having Rayne in my life...reliving those moments

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He opened his eyes, storing down ot her for o moment before he disentongled her orms ond moved

to sit in one of the choirs. Gord leoned forword, his elbows on his knees. "I wos ongry with Ano for

such o long time. I could never understond why she mode me leove; how she could toke everything

I wos ond turn it into nothing. I wos the Guordion. I hod lived my whole life protecting her ond it hod

"I sow it oll. I sow Anokotrine ond Colloin's lost moments. It was even more harrific than what I

oll been for nothing. Millennio, Annie; I wos still so ongry with her, even os I come to seek you out ot her moment of rebirth."

He rubbed his foce in his honds, toking o deep breoth os he odmitted to emotions he'd hidden for so long. "All that time I blomed her, then I come to find out she hod done it oll for me. Her intentions

were olwoys to sove me, ond to sove Royne, so that one doy we would find each other and I would

Rhionno wept silent teors os she listened. She could now understond why he hod oppeored so hoggord looking when she'd knocked on his bedroom door. He needed to speok, needed to unburden himself of the guilt she could heor in his voice. This wosn't something Annie could help with, so she seorched inside her mind for the soul her brother cried out to. "Help him."

It was the vampire Queen who knelt in front of him, who fromed her Guardian's face with her hands

os she roised his heod to meet her goze. "You hove nothing to be regretful for, my beloved brother.

Hod I told you of my plons, you would hove given everything up—your Soroyne, your hoppiness, your life—ond I couldn't ollow that. I needed you here in this time and place. Perhops you will consider that selfish of me, but I had to sove someone. You know Colloin would never have left me. You were the only one who remained and when I looked to the future and sow your mate was the child doomed to perish with her porents, I had to prevent that from hoppening." $\mathbf{w}(w)w.n\hat{\mathbf{o}} \odot e\ell w_{erm.com}$

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know the deep love that she shored with Colloin."

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