

Chapter 682

"All clear my end," she announced as she exited the trees to where he was waiting for her.
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"Same here," he answered, his gaze already sliding from hers as if irresistibly drawn to the hidden structure waiting for them. "Time to go home," he murmured, and she followed him forward towards where the Vampire Queen had once held her court.

The decay of thousands of years couldn't diminish the beauty of his former home. Everywhere Gard's gaze fell, he remembered another time and the magnificence that was his Queen's Palace. As he and Rayne threaded their way passed thick foliage into the clearing that had once been the Palace's great courtyard, he slipped back in time to see the breath-taking vision it had once been.

They halted by a crumbling wall that was now at mere ankle height, however his mind's eye saw the gracefully curving crescent moon construction that had been three feet high and made of the palest limestone. In a hushed voice he spoke, bringing to life an era long passed to his silent mate. "The crescent moon was our family's crest. All who saw it knew it signified the Royal House of Ardweni, our great grandmother, and the first of the Vampire Queens. It was the symbol of all that was right in our world, of all that was good about our people."

He breathed deeply, closing his eyes as he let it out slowly. "This wall here used to stand three feet high. It curved towards the main door to the palace and was flanked by urns full of the most beautiful flowers to scent the air. Many a night Anakatrine and I sat on that very wall, mapping out the stars above, as night bled into early dawn."

His lips quirked in an affectionate smile, reliving memories long passed but still greatly treasured. "Ana was fascinated with the sky above us, she couldn't get enough of it. She used to lament often that she couldn't soar through the skies like a birds above, and I had to often remind her that it would be considered unseemly for a Queen to frolic in the air."

Rayne laughed quietly, threading her arm through his and resting her head on his shoulder. "How old was she at the time?"

"She was six." He sighed as he said it, a trace of sadness in his voice. "It was after our mother had passed and Ana had ascended to the throne. I was barely a man at the time, and yet I had more freedom then than she would ever have again. I tried to give her as many moments where she could be just a child, but often my role was always to remind her she was a Queen. She did not have much of a childhood."

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"I'm sure whatever childhood she had with you was treasured, my love. She would not have turned out to be one of the greatest living Queens if that had not been the case. I am sure that even at that young age she was aware that she was speaking flights of fancy. That you would sit with her and listen shows that you were the perfect Guardian for your young Queen."

"I loved to hear her laugh," he admitted, smiling down at her. "If only you could have known her, Rayne, and heard her laughter. That one day when you did meet, Ana was so full of sorrow at what was to come. You would have loved her and she you, I am certain of that."
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When she merely smiled, his gaze turned back to the courtyard. "You can just about make out the grid pattern the mosaic tiles were set in leading up to the main door." He pointed to the ground and she could almost make out what he meant though time had done too much damage to get a clear picture.

"The tiles were blues and greens with accents of silver and golds," he continued. "Each tile was a mini image in itself but grouped together they created an underwater vista of what life must have looked like beneath the waves of the sea. In those days our people were very artistic."

"It sounds amazing." For some unknown reason Rayne found she couldn't speak in anything above a near whisper. The expression on her mate's face was so full of awe it touched her heart that he was sharing this part of his life with her. It seemed out of place to talk normally and she didn't want to break the spell he was weaving all around them.

"There were two great pillars beside the entrance into the hallway. The Roman's adopted the same style later on, but I'm sure there was a vampire at the heart of that architecture." Gard was standing by a crumbled wall so decayed it was hard to see there had ever been a doorway there. He walked forward, onto a large expanse of moss that was growing unevenly.

"Beneath our feet were more limestone tiles in fractal patterns. They were shades of reds, pinks and purples. Visitors often stood in the hallway for hours at time just admiring the many different hues. Our mother eventually placed seating in the hallways for those guests who took their time appreciating the beauty that surrounded them."

His hand swept to the left, to the largest shell of wall that still remained standing. "The staircase ran up the left wall, to the Royal suits. It was always guarded fore none could ascend without express Royal permission. Each tread was of the shiniest white marble, a lavender runner lining the middle so no one would accidentally fall down them. Ana loved to sit at the very top peering down at Mother's guests as they arrived. She was impossible to keep in bed when she was a child."

Rayne could see the vista in her mind's eye, a mental image of a little redheaded girl so full of excitement as exotic guests arrived at her home. The wealth of love in Gard's voice was unmistakable, and she was now beginning to understand why he had searched so long for his beloved Anakatrine to be reborn.

He appeared to shake himself out of his reverie for a moment, turning to smile at her and gather her close to his side. "Come, the throne room was this way." Gard led them forward into another overgrown moss area, only this time the walls on either side of them appeared to be more stable.

"Have those walls been pointed?"

Her mate's smile broadened, happiness exuding from his big frame. "When I first awakened Callain I came here," he breathed softly. "I knew Anakatrine would return soon and I longed for our old life together. I started rebuilding the throne room one brick at a time. I wanted her to have her home back once more."

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Silence hung around the open room as he stopped talking and Rayne let her eyes sweep across the huge area. "You didn't finish your task though. Why did you stop?"

"Banaath our faat wara mora limastona tilas in fractal patterns. Thay wara shadas of rads, pinks and purplas. Visitors oftan stood in tha hallway for hours at tima just admiring tha many diffarant huas. Our mothar avantually placad saating in tha hallways for thosa guasts who took thair tima appreciating tha baauty that surroundad tham."

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