

## Chapter 691

The pain was gone and it felt so amazing. Reasa slowly opened her eyes, blinking against the harsh whiteness that surrounded her. Where was she? Glancing around in confusion, she tried to clear her head but it felt kind of fuzzy, as if what she was looking at wasn't real. The last thing she remembered was being in the forest and the next she was here. Was this what the afterlife looked like?

Michael had shot her at point blank range. There was no way her fragile human body could have survived that kind of trauma. She only hoped that her sacrifice had given Pietro the precious seconds he'd needed to heal enough to protect himself. Maybe it had been enough time for the pack to get there and help him...if he had called to Cassia as she'd told him.

"Was it a hard choice?"

Reasa spun around, her mouth opening in surprise as she stared at the beautiful woman standing watching her. Her thick red hair was pulled up in an intricate design, and she wore a flowing deep purple gown cinched at the waist by an ornate silver belt with a crescent moon clasp. Reasa was certain she'd never seen the other woman before and yet, she appeared familiar somehow.

"Annie?" Even as she breathed the name, she knew it wasn't Rhianna standing there. They shared the same colouring but their faces were different.

"Was it a hard choice?" the woman asked again and this time Reasa listened to her words, understanding what she wanted to know.

"No," she answered quietly, reliving that moment in the forest once more and knowing if she had to do it over again she would make the same choice.*wW(w).(n)0v'elW0r:M.co(m)*

"Do you know who I am, Thereasa?"

Knowledge came to her in an instant, awe overwhelming her. "You are Anakatrine, last of the great Vampire Queens." Tears came unbidden and the need to subjugate herself to the woman who had taken everything from her and yet, in the process, had given her back her most precious possession. Reasa knelt down on both knees, bowing her head. "Thank you, my Queen, for the gift of my soul. I didn't deserve it but I am grateful for your generosity."

The Vampire Queen let out an inelegant snort, so surprising Reasa's head shot up to see open amusement on the other woman's face. "Oh, stand up, child," Anakatrine laughed, holding out a hand. "Do you want to know a secret that only Callain and Gard know? I used to bespell my audience chamber to turn the tiles into cushioned pillows. It still looked like it was tiled but it was soft when my subjects knelt. It used to confuse the hell out of them but I always worried that their knees would get sore with all that kneeling. I never could abide all that kneeling malarkey."

When Reasa only gaped at her open-mouthed, she laughed again, pulling her to her feet. "What? I'm not what you expect of a Queen? I can be many things dependant on the circumstances. Sometimes I am benevolent, others I am a warrior. There are times when I must make the most painful of decisions and then there are times like these, when I can just be one woman talking to another."

"I don't understand what's happening here," Reasa whispered, her confusion absolute. "Am I dead like you are, living in someone else's mind?"

Anakatrine's gaze turned serious, her hands squeezing Reasa's tightly. "You are between worlds...in a place only Callain or I can walk. Unfortunately, we cannot walk in the same moment here, but I can feel an echo of him behind me sometimes."

She waved her hand at nowhere in particular, a graceful arching of a limb that was so beautiful it made Reasa catch her breath. "Out there, Mallen is working to stabilise your body with the Vârcolac donating their blood to help repair the damage. In your mind, Liam is wading through your shattered hallway, searching desperately for the pieces of your psyche to hold your mind together as they work. In here, it is just you and I, two women having a pleasant talk. Why don't we sit for a while? You've had a busy night and must be weary."

Bright red, high-backed armchairs appeared out of nowhere, and Reasa allowed herself to sink into one as the vampire Queen settled into the other. "Why am I here, Anakatrine? Why are we here?" It seemed like the most important question in the world, one that she had to have answered.

"Why do you think, Thereasa?" Was the cryptic response, confusing her further and yet, opening up her thoughts too.

"I am being judged."

Anakatrine snorted once more, laughter dancing across her face. "I am not judging you, child, I am merely spending some time with you while you make your decision."

What was she talking about? What decision was she required to make? "Please...I don't understand...can't you talk without riddles."*wWw.môV'ELw(o)R(m).c0M*

The smile the vampire queen gave her was one of fondness though there was more than a hint of ruefulness about it. "I have spent eons talking in riddles, child. Sometimes it is hard to break the habit. When I stripped you of your immortality, I told you that you had three souls to save, Thereasa. Name those souls and our time here is done."

Everything Rhianna had told her was true, it had been the vampire queen who had taken her immortality. She had known it at the time, known it when she knelt before this woman, and she now knew the answer to the question just posed to her. "Liam," she breathed seeing his beautiful face as if he was standing before her.

"I forgive you..." a voice echoed in her mind, the last sound she could remember hearing. "Pietro..." Tears fell down her cheeks, the emotions within demanding an outlet.

*WwW.nov'ELW©r'm.(c)omm*

"Was it a hard choice...?" The question from the vampire queen, the one she had answered without needing to think..."No..."

Anakatrine was watching her closely, glowing lavender eyes brimming with a love that was so fierce it was incandescent.

"Thank you for my soul..." Reasa's voice, her words uttered only a few breaths before as she knelt before this wondrous being...

"My soul..."

Heat radiated throughout her body, a soft warm glow that wrapped her up and embraced her in a safe cocoon. She wasn't afraid of it, she didn't understand it, she just knew that it would do her no harm.

"Thank you for Liam's soul, sweet child. Thank you for Pietro's soul, fierce vampire. While I grieved that I had to take such dire steps to lead you home, I had faith that you would one day find your own soul once more. Never forget who you are, Thereasa. Never let mistakes of the past define you. This is who you are now, a woman who has saved countless innocent lives. A woman who was willing to give her life to save another. Welcome home, child."

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