



# No Matter the Cost

by Mikiah Sanderson

**H**ER HEART POUNDED IN HER EARS. SHE SWALLOWED HARD as tears filled her eyes and chills traveled up and down her spine.

“This isn’t how I thought I’d die,” she whispered. “It’s not how I thought my life would end.”

Her words seemed loud in the stillness, in the darkness which had been her constant companion.

“I thought you weren’t afraid to die.” James’s voice came from beside her as they stood facing the arena.

A sigh escaped her lips before she could stop it. She took strange comfort in looking at her prison guard face to face, without the rough wooden door of her cell separating them.

“Just because I’m not afraid of what comes after death, doesn’t mean I don’t fear the pain death will bring.”

“It might not be so bad,” James offered, though his offer was weak at best.

Christina shuddered as she thought of it. “There is no way it will not be bad, James. This is Vervolgen. Here, everything is meant to torture those who serve Vladar. Being torn apart by wild beasts is the only thing the arena offers. There are no other options.”

Silence. Then, “Given the chance, would you have done anything differently?”

Good question. If she could go back and live her life again, would Christina have changed her actions? Just like she had always read in books, her life seemed to flash before her eyes.

“It’s not long,” Christina whispered. “My life I mean. Seventeen years. So short a time, in the scheme of things.”

“Tell me about it,” James murmured, his voice barely audible. “Tell me what made you choose to do what you did. What put you on the brink of death today?”

“We don’t have much time.” She glanced at the bars separating them from the arena and the wild dragons waiting there, roaring, searching for their prey.

“No. So make it quick.”

“Quick. That’s what my life will be.” A huff of laughter escaped her lips, but she committed herself to telling her brief story.

“I was born a Child of the Darkness. The blight of all humanity was upon me from birth. Sin stained everything I did, everything around me. In the darkness of the Commander’s regime, in the darkness of Vervolgen, where all serve themselves, I decided to stand against the darkness. A light shining alone.

“My parents were Fidela, the faithful who hold to belief in Vladar. The faith for which they are persecuted. I accepted Savanton as my Savior and Lord at an early age, and I’ve held to Him as my only refuge in this dark world.

“As I was sharing my faith, telling others how they too might be saved, I was captured.

“Imprisoned, I was tortured in every way imaginable. My captors thought to turn me from my faith. I’ve held true to Vladar, however, and so, here I am.

“Given the chance, would I have done anything differently?” Christina paused for a moment to truly search her heart. “No,” she said at last. “I have used my life, however short, to serve Vladar with my all. In the end, that’s all we can do.”

Christina fell silent, for she could not deny the fear constricting her heart, nor the tears pooling in her eyes.

“I’m sorry, but it’s time.” James pursed his lips, his eyes radiating so many different emotions.

With a single nod, Christina straightened, lifting her head high. With halting steps, she followed James as he swung back the bared doors to the arena.

As Christina made her way out of the shadows and into the bright sunlight of the arena, as she stared down the wild, starved dragons who were to be her death, she found a smile pulling at her lips in spite of the fear which threatened to overwhelm her.

She had made it. Despite the hardships, despite the trials, she had remained faithful to her Lord until the end, and she knew it was not over. For her or for those who would come after.

For in the shadows of the arena, James stood watching the brave girl whose faith had inspired him to give his life to Vladar, and he vowed she would never be forgotten. He was Fidela now. He would pick up the flame she had laid down, and he would lead the others to freedom, no matter the cost.