

The Golden Fool #Chapter 112 112: The Door's Demand (1) - Read The Golden Fool Chapter 112 112: The Door's Demand (1)

The ocean channels pulsed with an urgent blue light as Cale pressed his palm against the massive trident door. His face, illuminated from below, twisted with concentration, sweat beading on his forehead despite the cool, damp air.

The water swirled expectantly around his ankles, gathering in intricate patterns that fed into the glowing sigil, yet the massive stone barrier remained stubbornly unmoved.

Apollo felt the bow vibrate against his spine, its song matching the rhythm of the channeled water with such precision that his teeth ached. The gold in his veins responded in kind, warming beneath his skin like metal held too close to flame.

"Nothing's happening," Nik whispered, his voice unnaturally loud in the chamber's hushed atmosphere.

Cale pressed harder, his jaw clenched with effort. The trident blazed brighter beneath his touch, casting sharp shadows across the ancient walls, yet the door remained sealed.

The water channels pulsed more intensely, their blue glow almost painful to look at directly.

After a long moment, Cale withdrew his hand, staggering backward as if physically pushed. His face had drained of color, leaving him ashen in the eerie blue light.

"I felt..." he began, his voice hoarse and uncertain. "I felt something missing. Like reaching for someone's hand in the dark and finding empty air where they should be." He looked down at his own palm, flexing his fingers as if they'd gone numb. "It's not enough. I'm not enough."

The humming of the sea deepened around them, no longer the gentle lapping Apollo had grown accustomed to but something more resonant, more deliberate, like the slow inhalation before speech. The water continued its rhythmic pulse, but slower now, more patient.

'It's waiting,' Apollo realized, watching the water swirl in those same deliberate patterns. 'Waiting for something more than Cale alone can provide.'

Thorin broke the uneasy silence with a curse, his boot splashing in the shallow water as he stepped back from the door. "That's it," he declared, his voice echoing against the ancient walls. "I've had enough of this cursed place. First an ocean in a forest, then water that moves like it's alive, and now a door that demands... what? Blood? Souls? I'll not stay to find out what else it wants."

"We can't leave," Mira protested, stepping forward. Her injured arm remained clutched against her chest, but her face showed determination rather than pain. "Not when we've come this far. We need to trust Cale."

"Trust him?" Thorin's laugh held no humor. "The boy just admitted he can't open the door! Whatever's happening here is beyond any of us. This temple has been underwater for centuries for a reason. Let it stay buried."

"The sea protects him," Nik pointed out, limping closer to Cale's side. "You saw it yourself. When the water rose before, it formed a circle of calm around him while trying to drown the rest of us. If we stay with him, we stay safe."

"Until we don't," Thorin countered, his beard still dripping from their earlier soaking. "Until whatever power recognizes him decides we're not welcome anymore. I've seen too many ancient places with ancient guardians to believe any of this is benevolent."

The argument continued, voices rising and falling with the rhythm of the water that still swirled around their ankles. Apollo stood slightly apart, feeling the bow's vibration intensify with each passing moment. Its song had changed from eager anticipation to something more insistent, almost demanding.

"The door won't open until it gets what it wants," Renna observed, her practical voice cutting through the others' debate. She stood with arms crossed, studying the massive barrier with calculating eyes. "And it clearly wants more than just Cale's touch."

The hunter's pragmatism silenced them momentarily, each considering her words. Apollo felt the weight of their gazes as they looked around the circle, old suspicions rising to the surface like bubbles from the depths.

A light touch on his arm made him turn. Lyra stood beside him, her green eyes reflecting the blue glow of the water channels. She nodded toward a shadowed alcove away from the others.

"A word," she said quietly, already moving in that direction without waiting for his response.

Apollo followed, feeling the bow's vibration increase with each step away from the door, as if protesting the distance. In the relative privacy of the alcove, Lyra turned to face him, her expression unreadable in the dim light.

"The bow," she said without preamble, her voice pitched low enough that the others couldn't hear over their resumed argument. "It's vibrating in perfect sync with that trident carving. I can see it moving against your back."

Apollo kept his face carefully neutral. "Ancient objects often respond to places of power."

"No." Lyra stepped closer, her gaze unwavering. "It's not just Cale the sea recognizes. It's you."

The bow pulsed violently at her words, a sharp jolt that Apollo felt like a physical blow between his shoulder blades. The gold in his veins surged in response, warming to uncomfortable heat beneath his skin.

"You're mistaken," he said, forcing his voice to remain steady despite the bow's reaction. "The water responds to Cale. You saw how it parted for him, how it protected him when it rose against the rest of us."

The bow thrashed harder against his back, as if punishing him for the lie. Apollo clenched his jaw against the sensation, willing the weapon to stillness.

Lyra's eyes narrowed slightly, noting the tension in his posture. "Your bow disagrees," she said softly. "It pulses harder when you deny the connection. Almost like it's... angry."

She stepped back, her expression shifting from confrontation to something more calculated. "Keep your secrets for now. But remember that lies have a way of surfacing, especially in places like this where truth seems to be the currency."

Before he could respond, a shout from Mira drew their attention back to the group. The water, which had been swirling gently around their ankles, suddenly surged upward with alarming speed. Not in the violent deluge that had threatened them earlier, but in deliberate patterns that rose like liquid sculptures from the chamber floor.