

Chapter 302

When the final robe was secured, Vladya stepped back and gave a small nod.

Daemonikai inclined his head slightly. "Thank you, Grand Lord Vladya."

Under normal circumstances, Vladya would have taken the title as the jest it usually was, but today there was no humor in his voice.

He gave a simple, respectful nod in return. "You're welcome, Your Grace."

The rest of the day passed in much the same way. Daemonikai carried an air of aloof formality that set the tone for the entire ceremony.

Everyone in attendance noticed the shift, though no one dared address it openly. Vladya himself kept a cautious distance.

By evening, as the people feasted and danced to the vibrant music, he finally stepped away from the event square, seeking a moment of quiet. The slaves' performance was energetic, but he found little enjoyment in it as usual.

He hadn't made it far before he heard footsteps behind him.

"What is wrong with His Majesty?" Ottai asked, falling into step beside Vladya.

Vladya did not break stride. "I have no idea."

"For days now, he's been giving off this unapproachable air," Ottai continued, concerned. Lowering his tone further, almost a whisper, he added. "Do you think... it has something to do with the return of his madness?"

Vladya stopped abruptly, turning to look at his worried companion. Then his eyes shifted back toward the square, where Daemonikai sat at his grand chair, scribbling something on a scroll.

The grand king's posture was rigid, his focus intense.

"I'm not sure," Vladya admitted finally.

"I worry there may be a rift between him and Emeriel," Ottai voiced out. "I'm worried that what happened in court may just be a front for the people, and that Emeriel never truly forgave him for that night."

"That is a possibility," Vladya conceded.

Ottai sighed. "And you? How is your plan with Princess Aekeira coming along?"

Vladya shook his head as he resumed walking. "I spent all day yesterday in the Royal Library. Going through every document, combing through anything I could find on Soul Returns and Resurrection."

"That's good, that's good." Ottai was nodding. "So, what did you find?"

"Nothing."

Before Ottai could respond, the ground beneath them began to tremble.

Subtle at first. A faint vibration that barely registered underfoot.

But it quickly grew in intensity...rumbling carrying through the festival grounds.

Dust stirred on the wind. Nervous murmurs rippled through the people.

Ottai glanced around sharply. "What's going on?"

The people began stepping out of the square, their eyes lifting to the sky.

Above them, a strange red star had appeared. Brighter than any other, its light pulsing faintly like a living thing.

Ottai gasped, freezing. "Is that...?"

Vladya could not help it, his lips curved into a smile. A broad smile of disbelief as he stared at the glowing star.

"The Oracle is waking," Vladya breathed.

The tremors grew, and the whispers turned to shouts as people pointed skyward, their voices filled with wonder and fear.

"She is waking," Vladya repeated, his heart thudding. "Finally. Thank the sky and the sea.."

The soldiers were already moving the people, the festival ending earlier than anyone had expected. Voices carried across the grounds as families gathered their belongings while the guards directed them toward safety.

Daemonikai had stepped out of the arena as well, staring at the sky, his face softening. Vladya approached him, Ottai following closely behind, both of them glancing upward.

"Is that really what it looks like?" Ottai asked in disbelief.

The grand king nodded once. "It is." He looked at Vladya. "She may have an answer for you. An answer on how you can get your soul back."

"She may." Vladya couldn't believe the happiness he felt. Suddenly, his future looked even brighter than it had when he woke up this morning. "I'm trying not to get my hopes up, but..."

"Hey! This is good," Ottai clapped a firm hand on his shoulder. "It's okay to get your hopes up."

"Let us focus on ensuring the people return home safely and quickly." Daemonikai cut in. "Then we will be ready to receive her."

He glanced back at the glowing red star. "Knowing the Old Lady, the fortress will be her first stop."

Vladya nodded, and they got to work.

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Deep in the heart of Urai, where the land was wild and untamed, lay a strange, secluded cave no one dared to venture near.

Birds had long since taken flight. The winds howled with an aggressiveness that could not be matched.

Churning violently, creating a swirling vortex that tore through the trees, tearing leaves from their branches. Lifting grasses from the ground and scattering them into the sky.

Inside the cave, darkness ruled.

Dust blanketed every surface, undisturbed for centuries.

The cave was vast and eerie, lined with ancient coffin-beds, their surfaces engraved with cryptic symbols that glowed faintly in the dim light.

At the very center of the cave, one of the coffin-beds shifted.

The lid creaked, stirring the silence as it began to slide open.

Dust billowed into the air, and inside, a female figure lay. Her body perfectly still, as though frozen in time.

Then, her eyes snapped open.

Memories flooded her mind all at once.

Moving like a torrent, each image sharp and vivid. The Eclipse Moon Night. The deaths of so many. The aftermath of that fateful night. The chaos, the wars, the heartbreak. It was all there, rushing through her consciousness, piece by piece.

From the moments of her sleep down to events that unfolded during her long sleep. Everything she had missed.

Seven hundred years this time, the Oracle thought.

Her body moved slowly, muscles awakening. Rising from her coffin-bed, stepping out, her feet finding balance on the cold ground.

She extended her hand.

From the shadows, her staff flew into her grasp.

The ancient wood hummed faintly in recognition of its wielder. The Oracle gripped it firmly, curling her fingers around the familiar weight. It pulsed with energy.

Her gaze shifted back to the coffin she had risen from. The cryptic symbols along its edges sparkled, then dimmed...until they faded entirely, leaving the surface bare.

A lot has happened while I was in you, she thought, keeping unreadable eyes on the now-empty bed.