

Chapter 305

Grand King Daemonikai stopped himself, studying the Oracle's expression. The regret in her eyes was answer enough.

"Let me guess. You cannot tell me." The last shred of hope slipped from his grasp.

The Oracle's grip tightened on her staff. "I'm afraid this is something you must figure out on your own, Great Grand King."

Daemonikai's lips pressed into a thin line, his frustration showing.

Ahead, Emeriel grabbed Aekeira from behind, catching her off guard and sending her basket flying, its contents scattering across the grass.

Aekeira let out a startled yelp that quickly melted into full-blown laughter, accompanied by a fit of giggles.

"They are always so happy," he murmured. "As if they have never lived a nightmare."

The Oracle followed his gaze. "Their light shines so brightly, I doubt it could ever be extinguished. Princess Emeriel is much more than just a Syren, Soulbond, and Grand Queen. She has dormant powers."

His brow furrowed. "Powers?"

"More like a gift," she clarified. "She was created with them—tied to your bond with her. They were supposed to awaken when the two of you finally, wholeheartedly come together to give your bond a chance. Only now, your bond is..."

Powers? What kind of gift? Questions flooded his mind.

The Oracle turned, beginning to walk again, and Daemonikai fell into step beside her.

"I may not be able to tell you much about your condition, but I can tell you this—keep that princess as close to you as possible. And keep fighting for what you have," she glanced at him. "Who knows? You may triumph in the end."

By the time they reached the meadows, the daylight has reduced drastically. The wind was softer here, carrying the scent of blooming flowers.

Daemonikai broke the silence. "Can Vladya recover his soul without the use of black magic?"

The Oracle's expression grew somber. "Our kind is powerful. Many things are possible—if one is willing to lose something of great value in return. It is either dark magic or magical artifacts."

Daemonikai's heart sank.

"This will crush Vladya," he told her. "He was so hopeful..."

The Oracle wavered. "There is a ritual I can attempt."

"Really?" Daemonikai's gloom vanished. "That would be—"

"The success rate is really low. Perhaps twenty percent," she interrupted firmly.

"If there is a success rate, then it's a chance worth taking," Daemonikai said. "You were the one who told me to have a little faith, were you not? I'm sure Vladya would not hesitate at all. He's come so far, and he's finally happy again. I hope what he has with Emeriel's sister lasts. If he can get his soul back, that's one less thing to worry about."

"Hmm."

Daemonikai's gaze darkened. "I still cannot believe he performed Hav'zie de Baah that night. Nor can I believe the gods took but gave nothing back. His bondmate still died."

The Oracle kept quiet.

Only after a long pause did she speak. "The world is not always as black and white as it seems, Grand King."

Daemonikai rolled his eyes.

"I'm afraid this is where we part ways, Your Majesty." The Oracle said as they reached the towering entrance gates of the fortress.

Daemonikai halted as she did. "Thank you for stopping by. And... for waking."

The old woman inclined her head, her silvery hair catching the last rays of the light. She turned to leave, but hesitated.

"Her next heat is close," she said suddenly, those black-and-gold eyes pinning his. "Very close. A mini-heat, but may be as agonizing as a full one. If not more."

Daemonikai tensed. That had been weighing on his mind too, more than he let on.

The thought of Emeriel suffering through something worse than her full heat two years ago bothered him greatly..

The Oracle pinned him with a serious look. "Listen to her body. Notice even the smallest detail. Then listen to your own, and simply... be you. That is the only way you can help her."

Committing those words to memory, his head bobbed once. "I shall heed your warnings."

A rare flicker of empathy entered her ancient eyes. "I also apologize for the young princess you both lost," she said quietly. "But who knows? The gods may smile upon you and bless you with another. If not now, then somewhere in the future."

A daughter.

His child with Emeriel would have been... a girl.

It was a dagger to the chest.

Daemonikai looked away, willing the pain in his heart to subside.

The Oracle resumed her slow departure and he watched her go, feeling a whirlwind of emotions.

But just as she reached the edge of the courtyard, her voice carried back to him, slightly raised but still calm.

"And who said the soul exchange spell did not work, Great Grand King?" she said. "It did. Just... not in the way Vladya expected. He will understand with time."

Daemonikai frowned. What?

Just wait a goddamn minute.

"What do you mean by—"

"And beware of the Vampire of Greyrock," she cut in, clearly a warning this time. "He is more dangerous than he seems."

As soon as the words left her lips, she winced sharply, her hand flying to her temple as though struck by a sudden, searing pain.

Daemonikai didn't need to ask—he knew exactly what was happening.

She had just spoken something she should not have said.

And it had hurt her.

His frown deepened. Why would she risk such pain just to give him a warning he already knew?

The Oracle had withheld so much throughout their conversation, choosing her words carefully... why go against her oath, wasting a warning on something so glaringly obvious?

When he reached his study, Vladya was already there, waiting. Restless, anxious, and brimming with impatience. He stood near the wooden desk, fingers tapping absently against the gilded edge of a book left open, though his eyes were fixed solely on the door.

As soon as Daemonikai entered, Vladya straightened. "Did you speak to her about my soul?"

Daemonikai met his gaze and nodded, un rushed. Letting the silence stretch a moment before he spoke. "I did."

A beat passed. Vladya inhaled sharply. "And?"

Daemonikai leaned casually against the door, and smiled knowingly. "She's looking into it."

The words worked like lightning had struck Vladya. His face shifted instantly...from doubt to elation, from disbelief to hope.

When he spoke again, it was almost a whisper. "I could get my soul back?"

"Remember, she's not promising anything," Daemonikai warned. "And the success rate is low, but—"

"But there's actually a possibility?" Vladya's tone held barely contained excitement. "And she agreed to look into it?"

Daemonikai inclined his head, amused at his friend's reaction. "Pretty much."

Vladya let out a long breath. The grin that stretched across his face was wide, unguarded, almost disbelieving. "What instructions did she give? Is there a regimen to follow?"

Daemonikai shook his head, "Only that you should go to her haven at dawn for the first ritual. That will determine whether the rest may work."

Vladya absorbed the words, looking reverent. "For the first time ever, something can be done," he murmured, more to himself than to Daemonikai. "It's no longer an unreachable dream. A hopeless vision of a mad male."

Daemonikai's eyes went soft. Walking over, he clasped a hand over his friend's shoulder. "Congratulations, my dear friend."