

Chapter 310

"I am so relieved, so ecstatic, I could kiss you right now if I were not certain the ancient one would send me six feet below for it!" Lord Ottai exclaimed. "This is the best news I have heard all week."

Unable to bear his touch any longer, Emeriel wiggled out of his grasp. "I am just as excited, Your Majesty," she said, catching her breath. "But let us hope Lord Vladya arrives before the waves start."

As if doused with cold water, the smile vanished from the ruler's face, and his expression paled.

"Yes, yes, about that," Lord Ottai spoke. "I have already sent out the message. I dispatched one of our fastest messenger birds. At this point, we can only hope..."

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Grand Lord Vladya and Grand King Daemonikai waited just outside the Oracle's Haven. The royal entourage had already proceeded to the shrine for the celestial offering.

Her dwelling bore celestial patterns intertwined with ancient runes, glowing faintly under the shifting light.

The oak door creaked open, and the Oracle emerged with her back to them, balancing a bundle of herbs in her arms. But when she turned and saw them, she looked surprised.

"What are you doing here, Your Majesties? You should not have come."

"Today is the celestial offering from the southern people." Daemonikai reminded her patiently. "We are here to observe the rites, as is our duty."

"I am well aware of that," she placed the bundle of herbs on the ground before rising. "But you rarely attend such ceremonies. I assumed you would not trouble yourselves to be here. And you—" Her eyes shifted to Vladya. "You are not even a Southerner. You rule the Western Clans. What business do you have here?"

"The Oracle's home is open to all, and the Oracle receives whomever seeks her. The Oracle does not discriminate." Vladya recited the sacred book with amusement.

The grumpy old lady huffed, muttering something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like, "That damned book again."

Daemonikai's brow furrowed. "Do you truly not wish us here?"

Vladya was bothered too. He could not recall a time when she had hesitated to grant them an audience.

She sighed, shaking her head. "That is not it, Great Grand King, and I apologize if I have given that impression. But your females are entering their heat cycles. You should not be here."

The moment the words left her lips, she doubled over, coughing violently.

Blood spattered onto the ground, her face contorted in pain.

Vladya scoffed. "Let me guess, you have just said something you should not have—wait." His face changed when the words hit home. "Our females? Going into heat?"

The Oracle straightened, wiping the blood from her mouth. "I have already begun, I may as well finish. Yes, the princesses have entered the peak of their cycles. Now, more than ever, they need their males with them."

Daemonikai's mouth was agape as he stared at her blankly.

But Vladya could not help wearing a deep scowl. "Wait, Oracle. There seems to be a misunderstanding. Aekeira cannot go into—"

"She can. And she has," the Oracle interrupted impatiently. "I told you to watch for the signs, did I not? Your woman has always been a Syren, compatible with you. Why do you think your connection with her has always run so deep, even in the beginning, when you believed you hated her? Why did you feel those urges whenever you were intimate with her—to unleash on her, release in the womb? Why did her blood call to you? Why do the voices in your head always go silent when she is near? Why do your feral episodes now come fewer and farther between?"

Her words struck Vladya like a hammer against an anvil.

"You have been with your soulbond all along, Grand Lord Vladya." The Oracle coughed blood again. "The first ritual was successful. And because her traits were long overdue to manifest, the slightest nudge at the place where your soul should be shot her straight into a full heat."

Vladya heard every word, but they collided with a wall in his head.

Syren?

Soulbond?

His knees went weak, and he collapsed to the ground.

Or would have, if Daemonikai was not suddenly there, steadying him with a firm grip.

Vladya turned his bewildered gaze to his friend, searching for reassurance. He found a slow, genuine smile on that face.

So Daemonikai had heard it too. The words were truly spoken.

Not conjured from countless dreams.

Not a hope he had dared not voice aloud.

"Congratulations, old friend," Daemonikai's deep voice was hoarse with emotion. "I am so happy for you."

"She is saying Aekeira is my..." Vladya's throat went dry as sand.

He forced his throat to keep going. "The Oracle is saying Aekeira is my... Do you think it is the truth?"

"The Oracle does not lie, V.D.," Daemonikai told him softly, clapping a hand on his shoulder.

"And you may not have noticed, but I am currently coughing up a rather concerning amount of blood," the Old Lady rasped, struggling through another violent fit.

Something warm traced down Vladya's cheek.

He wiped at it absently, then stared at his damp fingers. A tear.

I have a Soulbond.

Then, Daemonikai was grasping his face between firm hands, forcing Vladya to meet his gaze. "Vladya, this is truly great news—look at me." His voice was steady, urgent. "I know it is overwhelming, but you must listen to her right now. This is not the time for shock, not the time to fall into a daze. She said they are in heat."

Vladya nodded, numb.

"Do you understand what that means?" Daemonikai pressed. "They are suffering without us. We are high in the mountains, thousands of miles away, and we need to be thinking about how to get to them. Our women are in heat, and we are not there to ease their pain, Vladya Theriozydovkar Skyvaktó."

And it finally struck with the force of an earthquake.

Ice flooded Vladya's veins. "T-They need us. What in the ruins are we doing here...!?" He was already shifting, his muscles rippling.

"Wait."