

## Captive Slave 342

Chapter 342

Four months later.

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

Screams echoed all around him. The dungeon reeked of old blood and scorched flesh.

"I shall ask again," Vladya snarled, dipping a branding iron into the bed of hot coals until it gleamed red with heat. "What can you tell me about the dark mage who dared to tamper with the mind of Urekai's ultimate ruler?"

The iron hissed as he raised it, reflecting a glow in the wide, terror-stricken eyes of the male shackled before him.

The prisoner shook his head hard. "I don't know! I swear it! I don't know anything!"

"Wrong answer." Vladya pressed the iron to the mage's bare chest.

The sizzle of burning flesh came as the prisoner's screams pierced the air.

Grand King Daemonikai turned away, striding for the dungeon's arched entrance, leaving Vladya to his work. They'd swept through the city and rounded up every mage in Urai, and it was the same useless answer for over a month now,

Fifty mages they had taken, but only three had been dark mages. All held in dungeons where no light touched and no sound escaped, tortured day and night. Yet, none gave him the answers he needed.

His eyes drifted to one of the cells as he passed. A mage strung upside down, a ruin of welts and open wounds on his body. Blood dripped from his back as the whip cracked against him again. The mage's roars would last no more than another few hours before his body gave out. Iron collars at his neck, wrists, and ankles rendered his magic useless, as it had for all of

them. *Www.nOve@w@rm.c0M*

Usually, Daemonikai was a ruler of patience. He had no taste for punishing the many in pursuit of the one, but that was before.

He was desperate, furious at the world and himself. He was a male on the verge of yet another madness, and he was running out of time.

The guards pushed the heavy iron gates, and he stepped out, the gates clanging shut behind him. "Keep me informed of any new developments."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Yaz bowed low.

Still nothing new. No news on the dark mage. No evidence that tied any of it to Zaiper. The Oracle was still away from Urai, handling 'loose ends,' as she had put it. All remained stagnant.

The only thing different was the passage of time and his increasingly darkening heart.

His blood boiled. Rage, his new companion walked alongside him.

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Everyone stood as Daemonikai entered the arena. *Www.nOve@w@rm.c0M*

Cheers and applause swelled, hands clapping in unison, voices raised in praise. His people waved banners, flowers scattering through the breeze as he made his way to the high dais.

The Grand Rulers were standing, arrayed in their ceremonial regalia, every color and crest shining in the afternoon sun. Reaching his seat, Daemonikai turned to face his people.

"Greatest citizens of Urai," his voice rang clear. "We stand before you today to celebrate this momentous occasion. The day your First Ruler," he gestured briefly toward himself. "And his Third-" His gaze found Vladya, who gave a firm nod before flashing a brief smile to the crowd. "-proudly stand before you to announce we are free of mindlessness."

The roar of the crowd was ear-splitting. Shouts of victory. Fists raised in triumph. Daemonikai let them revel in it for a moment before he raised his hand for quiet. "You asked for this day, and so here it is," he said smoothly. "Drink, dance, and celebrate, knowing your rulers stand fully restored, minds unclouded. Our focus solely upon you, our people. We will carry this kingdom to its next greatness, without the dark thoughts of madness in the shadows of our minds!"

The lies came easily now. He had practiced them until they became second nature. For a male who had despised deception, he had grown skilled in it.

Skilled at deceiving his people. At deceiving his woman. *Www.nOve@w@rm.c0M*

"Our lands flourish once more. The famine is long past, our crops grow strong, and the rains come of their own accord." He lifted his ceremonial goblet high. "To a new chapter in our lives. To the next level!"

The roar shook the grounds. Females crowned with garlands threw petals, showering the arena in a storm of color and sweet scents.

And before we take our seats." He lowered his goblet. "The Third Ruler and I would like to welcome our females, the very reason we stand here today. Our blessings from Ukrae."

The gates opened, and both princesses entered the arena.

Emeriel and Aekeira smiled brightly as they made their way toward the dais. At five months pregnant, both glowed with that peculiar light often seen in expectant females. From afar, they might have passed for twins. Dressed in identical gowns, differing only in color, nearly the same height, though Aekeira stood a little taller. Both bellies rounded, though Emeriel's was slightly more pronounced.

As they reached the dais, Emeriel walked straight into his arms.

Human filth, the Voice snarled in his head. It would be so easy to reach inside her and rip the little one free.

Daemonikai held her tighter for half a second, then forced himself to ease his grip. She smiled up at him, but it didn't reach her eyes.

No, the ever-present sadness she thought she hid so well was right there.

"How do you feel?" he asked gently. "Does your chest still hurt?"

"Just a little. The healer made certain I took the potions, so it has eased."

"Good." He took her hand, guiding her to the seat beside him, Vladya doing the same for Aekeira. *Www.nOve@w@rm.c0M*

"Thank you," Emeriel sighed softly settling herself, hand resting on the swell of her belly.

Hours passed in a blur of ceremony.

Feasts, oaths, and blessings. And through it all, Daemonikai's attention never strayed far from her.

Even when he spoke with ministers or acknowledged the nobles who sought his favor, his mind was half-turned to her. He saw every smile she gave every noble who approached to greet her.

Look at Lord Jakal, the Voice said. See the way his eyes linger on her. He is unmated, searches still for his life partner. I wonder what he imagines now...

Daemonikai released his gritted teeth. Across the arena, Lord Jakal had taken Emeriel's hand, bowing low to press his lips against her knuckles.

Does he think of those thighs? The sweet thighs that have not opened for you in over five months? Does he imagine them wrapped around his waist? Daemonikai forced his jaw to relax as Emeriel glanced his way and beamed.

He returned the smile with a flawless, smooth one, then she turned back to Lord Jakal, speaking softly.

Those pretty thighs, the Voice crooned. He will take her, and she will welcome him. His mind is clear... he does not mount his female half to death.

"Shove those thoughts away," Vladya said suddenly beside him. "Do not let them win. Whatever they are telling you, it's not true."

"I know, I know. It is just..." Daemonikai exhaled. His fists ached from how tightly

he had clenched them and he forced his fingers to ease, one by one. "Sometimes, it's really, really difficult."

"I know. I have lived this too," Vladya said with pity.

"Congratulations, Vladya." His tone was flat, but the sentiment was genuine.

Unlike himself, Vladya was healed fully. He had not suffered a single feral episode

in four months. His mind was clear, his beast calm and engaged, more at peace than it had been in centuries. Everything truly did improve since Vladya started drinking from his Soulbond.