

Captive Slave 371

Chapter 371

"Anything else anyone wishes to add before we call it a day?" Daemonikai rose to his feet, voice signaling dismissal.**wWw.novelW0r.c0m**

The court was already stirring with movement-robles rustling, chairs scraping— echoes of people ready to leave, the post-session chaos humming through the air.

"Actually, yes, Your Majesty." High Lord Gaff stood. "It's about the eclipse moon night."

Everywhere went quiet.

"I think it's time we stop pretending it isn't around the corner and begin making real preparations."

"It's been around the corner for years now, Lord Gaff," High Lord Belzebob countered, folding his arms.

"Oh please," Gaff shot back. "Are we truly going to pretend we haven't noticed the repeated signs? The quarter moon has appeared more frequently in the past months than it should. No one knows exactly when it will come, but the signs are there. I believe it's time we stop delaying and start preparing."

Daemonikai's good mood withered entirely. Eclipse moon night-the very words made his shoulders tense. He would rather not think of it. Not of the last, and certainly not of the one still to come. But Gaff, as the High Lord of Ceremonial Affairs, was right. Turning their heads would not banish what waited for them.

"Sit down," Daemonikai commanded.

Reluctantly, the council returned to their seats. And for the first time in a long while, they were going to address the elephant in the room.

"What do you have, High Lord Gaff?" Daemonikai asked.

"Thank you, Your Grace." Gaff cleared his throat, clearly uncomfortable. "Actually, I do have a suggestion. And I must say... this is not only my opinion. A few of the other lords mentioned it, casually... while we were at the tavern, drinking."

He looked toward the mentioned lords. Not one of them met his gaze. A few cleared their throats. A few looked at the floor.**ww0.N0vellw0rm.c00**

Daemonikai's patience thinned. "Get on with it."

Gaff braced himself. "Instead of facing the night alone, we thought... we should call upon the werewolves for protection. We are allies, are we not? They could safeguard us just for that night."

Murmurs rose. Some at the ridiculousness of the suggestion, others considering.

"Absolutely not," Daemonikai snapped, silencing the hall. "The fewer who know of our vulnerability, the better. The humans already learned enough—and the damage they did with that knowledge was catastrophic. Yes, we now know it was one of our own who betrayed us, but that doesn't erase the fact that many of us were slaughtered by human blades."

He swept a cold gaze across the court.

"Now you suggest we trust werewolves? Beasts stronger than any human, more powerful by leagues. Even if they are our allies, how do we trust anyone on a night when we are utterly defenseless, when none of us can protect what we care for?"

"But with the Chalice, we'll have strength," High Lord Jakal pitched in.

"And what if just like that night-it's taken away?" Daemonikai's eyes bored into him, trying to keep his anger in check. They were only making a suggestion, and truthfully, there was some sense in what they said. But he did not wish to consider it. Not after last time.

The mere thought of repeating that failure made bile rise in his throat.

"Daemon, stay calm," Vladya murmured.

Daemonikai looked over and saw Vladya staring pointedly at his hand. He followed his gaze seeing his claws had slipped out.

One deep breath. Two deep breaths.

His claws slipped back in.

Daemonikai straightened. "There will be no werewolves. No external forces. We will face eclipse moon night ourselves and form a unified plan-together-to protect what remains of us. But we will not reveal our weaknesses to outsiders, no matter how strong the alliance, no matter how much we trust them. Trust is not armor. That is all for today."

Rising, he marched out of court.

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Sinai had been searching for Zaiper for over an hour before she finally found him

in the woods, crouched beside the carcass of a freshly killed stag.

"I bet you feel refreshed after that hunt, huh?" she said, falling into step beside him as they started back toward their hideout. "It's good to see you back on your feet."

He didn't look at her. "Why are you being a pest, Sinai?" he growled, forging ahead. "What do you want?"

Still in a foul mood, clearly.

She matched his pace, choosing to ignore the snarl in his voice. "It's about your secret hideout—the one we've been trying to reach, but somehow haven't. At this rate, we'll be caught before we even get there."**wWw.no(v)elwo+rm.com**

"Sinai."

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Do you know how long I've been preparing for a day like this? Even while hoping it would never come?"

How would she?

"Seven hundred years," he said before she could speak. "That's how long. In that time, I spent fortunes and caution building a sanctuary-completely fortified, concealed, and nearly invincible. It lies deep underground. One of those places even the boldest wouldn't dare venture into."

That... gave her a sliver of comfort.

"But how long until we reach it?" she pressed. "We've been running for weeks."

"And that's where you're mistaken." His mood lifted a bit, a smug gleam sparking in his eye. "We've been creating diversions. Running, hiding, drawing them further and further from the truth-making it seem like our destination is some far-flung place. In reality, the shelter lies in the heart of the city. Close enough to monitor Ravenshadow and all my targets-while remaining utterly hidden from them."

She blinked, impressed despite herself. This was actually... surprisingly smart.

"So, while they scatter their forces across Urai and beyond, sweeping even the smallest villages, we stay right under their noses..." she mused aloud.

He nodded. "Razarr's idea. I thought it was brilliant."

But the moment Razarr's name passed his lips, his good mood evaporated. Whatever light had returned to him flickered out again.

Sinai stifled the urge to roll her eyes. She'd be dead if he caught even a hint of it.

It was almost laughable-seeing someone as ruthless as Zaiper, a male who flinched at neither torture nor slaughter, undone by the death of a lover.

"I do not feel such petty things."

Yeah, right.

"So what's the plan going forward?"

she asked, steering the conversation away from the sore spot. "I have a suggestion. Once we're off the road, we lay low for a few months. Let things settle. Our numbers have dwindled-we need to recruit. Find soldiers, nobles willing to join your cause-"

"I need to get my hands on Emeriel."

Sinai was caught off guard. "O-kay... but that's later. Much, much later. Right now,

we need safety. Believe me, I'd love to get my hands on her too, but—"

"No buts," he snapped as they stepped into a clearing. "I know your little feuds with her, all your back-and-forths. But this-it's personal now. Daemonikai took something from me. I intend to return the favor."

"And how do you plan to do that?"

"I still have a spy in the kingdom."**www.NoVeln0RM.com**

Sinai started. "I thought Vladya had all of them executed. One still lives!?"

He nodded once.

"That's... gods, that's excellent news," she said, suddenly invigorated. "We'll know everything. Their movements, their weaknesses. This will change everything." "Yes. A hidden weapon," Zaiper stated. "She'll feed me everything I need to track Emeriel. And when the time is right, I'll strike."

"Let's not waste this opportunity. We should wait, recover, and plan properly," Sinai pleaded. "Please, Zaiper. You're acting on anger. You're not thinking this through."

Zaiper moved without warning, seizing her by the throat, lifting her off her feet. He hurled her away.

Sinai shrieked as she flew through the air, her back striking a tree with a bone- jarring thud. Pain exploded down her spine, and for a moment, her lungs seized.

"Stay out of my way whore." His eyes burned gray and yellow, his voice deeper. "If I ever want your opinion, I'll come find you. Until then, don't stick your mouth where it's not needed."

Coughing, gasping, Sinai pushed

herself up, blood on her lips. "Emeriel does that Soulbond thing where she calls Daemonikai with her mind whenever she's in danger! You've seen it happen. You know what she can do! How do you plan to bypass that!?" she screamed, coughing blood. "If you go through with this, you'll be leading the rest of your soldiers to their deaths!"

Zaiper's anger burned. "I have reason to believe something wrong with their bond.

That night he went berserk, I was there. There was no recognition in his eyes, no awareness, only raw instinct. The night you shot her with your arrow... she didn't call to him then, did she?"

Sinai's breathing slowed. No, she hadn't. The realization landed hard. "Something is broken between them, and I'm counting on it," Zaiper growled. "I will take Emeriel. And Daemonikai will pay for what he's done."