

Captive Slave 379

Chapter 379

Sinai stirred.*Ww.nóvëL@órm.Cm*

Her head throbbed dully as consciousness returned. Her limbs were leaden, her senses sluggish. Every inch of her body ached as though she'd been wrung out and left to dry.

"You know," came a dry, amused voice. "This would have been far easier if you had simply offered a sack of gold coins. No need for betrayal."

She bit back a groan as she sat up-or tried to. Her head nearly smacked against metal. She stopped just in time and blinked her heavy eyes open.

A cage.

She was locked in a cage. Low ceiling, cold bars, no strength in her limbs. She felt weaker than she had as a newborn.

Toxins. She couldn't smell them, but she could feel the sluggish burn in her bloodstream. Her body had woken several times before, but whatever drug had been used on her had dragged her back under.

Now, she forced her eyes open again.

"When one is fleeing for his life, mage," Zaiper's voice cut in, far too at ease. "The last thing on his mind is coin. I didn't even have twenty gold to my name, much less a full sack."

He sounded closer. Standing, probably, somewhere beyond the bars.

"Besides," he continued. "She had this coming. Sinai's been a liability for a while. She knows too much, always has. You never know what someone like her might do in a tight corner. She'd sing like a bird if it meant saving her own skin."*www.Nó@eQWôrmL.@om*

You coward. I gave you centuries of loyalty.

"Mm," was the answer.

A moment passed, then his voice shifted. Distant. Resonant. As if reciting a prophecy. "In four moons' time... when the last buds fall and the first frost descends... the eclipse moon will rise again over Urekai."

Zaiper's breath jammed. "Excellent. Now I can prepare accordingly."

"Prepare with what army, Zaiper?" he said.

"Vampires," Zapier said with delight. "Oh, I have so many plans. I will bring them all to their knees."

Sinai tried to stay awake, but her body was shutting down again. The drugs still clung to her blood like mist. Her eyelids fell, heavier than stone.

As her head tipped forward and darkness closed in again, one final thought drifted through her mind.

He'll pay for this. I'll make sure of it.

The royal carriages rolled to a halt.

Soldiers dismounted fast, forming a protective circle around the lead carriage as its door swung open. Grand King Daemonikai stepped out first, his presence commanding immediate attention from the gathered crowd. A heartbeat later, he extended his hand inside.

Emeriel placed her palm in his, and he helped her down with the utmost care.

Cheers broke out around them. The villagers stood at a respectful distance, cordoned off by guards, but their joy was unmistakable—smiles wide, voices raised in praise, hands waving from behind barricades.

They had traveled to a small, rustic village in Urai, where the Oracle was receiving treatment. Word had arrived the night before, the Oracle had begun to self-heal. One of her shattered bones had mended during the night.

When Daemonikai received the news, he had ordered the bell tower rung at dawn. The people had gathered in the village square, desperate for good news, and he had given it to them.

The cheers now were not just for him-but for hope.

Emeriel blinked rapidly against the emotion welling in her chest. She had feared, as many had, that the Oracle would never rise again. That her life would be taken by the sacrifice she made to reveal Zaiper's treason. But now, here they were. And there was joy in the land, yet again.

Behind her, Grand Lord Vladya helped Aekeira down from the second carriage. Grand Lord Ottai followed, assisting his own bondmate. Together, the rulers and their consorts turned to face the crowd.

The cheering rose to a roar. Flower petals fluttered through the air, cast like blessings. Many of them were thrown at Emeriel and Aekeira.

Emeriel felt emotional. When did this become our life?

Daemonikai's arm slipped around her waist as they turned toward the sanctuary. Inside, the haven was small but beautifully kept-modest and warm, clearly prepared with respect.

The Oracle lay at one side of the room, propped slightly, a nest of pillows supporting her fragile body. Her eyelids fluttered open as they entered*wwW.nóVëlwôrm.cm*

She looked... old.

Still broken in many places, her bones not yet whole, her skin pale and drawn. But her eyes, those ageless, soul-deep eyes, still held the glint of divinity.

"Everyone else leave," Daemonikai commanded.

The soldiers and shamans bowed and filed out. The door shut behind them, sealing the space to only the Grand Rulers and their bondmates.

"The great... rulers... of our... time," came the Oracle's weak but audible voice.

They all bowed their heads in respect.

"About the eclipse moon night, I-" A wracking cough stole her words, and she clutched her chest.

"Say no more, Oracle," Daemonikai

spoke up. "You've already given

more than any of us could ask. What you did will never be forgotten. We might've caught Zaiper eventually for his recent crimes, but not for that one. The crime he committed against all our people.

We would have never known. You gave us the truth, and for that, I owe you everything. We all do.

Do not speak. Do not strain yourself. Simply rest. That is all we ask now."

There were murmurs of agreement from the others.

The Oracle's lips curved, just faintly. "Thank you Great Grand King." Then her gaze shifted. Slow. Intent Toward Emeriel and Aekeira. "Blessed princesses..." Her hand trembled as she lifted it, just lightly,

then let it fall. "Come."

Emeriel met her sister's eyes, Aekeira giving her a small nod. Together, they stepped forward.

Emeriel glanced toward the Oracle's hand. "May I...?" she asked softly.

The Oracle nodded.

Emeriel took her hand gently. It was hot to the touch-feverish. "It's an honor to meet you," she whispered.

A faint smile ghosted the woman's lips. "I suspect... you now see the colors, do you not?"

Startled, Emeriel's eyes widened and she drew back instinctively, glancing over her shoulder at Daemonikai.

He only smiled and gave a slow nod.

Emeriel turned back. Her voice hushed. "Yes."

The Oracle's eyes glittered. "Asvia'hes Araz. A bond seer."

The words resonated with power.*www.n@QElworm.cm*

"When one is physically touched by the gods," the Oracle said slowly, "He leaves a mark. A trace. Your Soulbond with the Grand King did not activate it, as it should have. It

was dormant. But the life you

created together-your child-that sacred spark... it awakened the gift."

Emeriel stood still, heart humming.

"Because of you," the Oracle continued. "Our people will suffer less. They will

know who they belong with. There will be fewer broken bonds. Fewer failed rituals. You are a treasure, Princess Emeriel. A light to the Urekai."

Emeriel bowed her head. Humbled beyond words.

"You have a gem for a lifemate, Great Grand King," the Oracle's voice was fragile

but clear as she turned her gaze to Daemonikai. "Treasure her, always."