

Ivaldi: Book 2 Chapter 12

The Demon-Killer

“And that was when I met you, I suppose,” I said, “And the rest, as they say, is history. But what about the dungeon?”

Teja’s face darkened. “This part is difficult,” she said. “I don’t entirely understand it myself. It started in the village, where I had been going about every seven days for... sustenance.”

“You had a lover there?”

“No. Well, yes, but he didn’t know it. I couldn’t risk being recognized. I went to him at night, in his sleep, and made sure that he stayed asleep. To him it was a dream, and evidently a pleasant one. He never missed what he gave me, but he enjoyed what I gave him. He was a young farmer, as yet unmarried and an orphan, so he lived alone. Because of that his house was safest for me to enter.”

“But he didn’t do... that to you?”

“No, no, one man alone would not have been capable. It was a gang of young men from Stanets, most of whom I knew, including Tash and my brother Vanaksha, the second heir. They were led by a crazy old man. They burst into the house that night while I was... feeding. They caught me with ropes around my legs, arms, and neck. Of course the young farmer woke, and was terrified. They told him he had been the victim of a blood-sucking demon, and there was blood on my lips and a wound on his neck to prove it. To see his face distorted in horror was perhaps the worst thing that befell me that night. I have never before seen any human so frightened... of me.

They dragged me out to the village square and summoned all the villagers, who were equally terrified. The old man, whom they called Dru, told them that he was a demon-killer, and had enlisted the aid of these young men to rid the village of the demon, a task which only he could perform, since demons could not be killed by ordinary means. I tried to speak, but one of them hit me in the face, saying, ‘Silence, demon, you shall not use your evil tongue to bewitch these poor people.’

So the villagers did nothing but pray and weep while Dru and the men dragged me away. They mounted their horses, still holding me by the many ropes cinched tightly around me. I was half-dragged, half-carried between them. When we finally got to that ruin I could stand on my feet again and had a chance to observe a little. I noticed that Tash looked peculiar; the dark shade of his skin seemed to be coming off in places, leaving patches of bald pinkness. He saw me looking and spat: ‘This is your curse, bitch-demon. But when you die I will be free of it.’

‘Who told you that?’ I asked.

‘Dru.’ He gestured to the old man. ‘He knows your kind, and with his help the House of Khan will at last be free of you. Thank Grisa I didn’t marry you.’

‘Yes, thank Him,’ I said drily. ‘Probably your cock would have fallen off.’

It was not wise to provoke Tash; he likes nothing better than an excuse to hurt someone weaker than himself. He beat me severely with his riding crop, all the more when saw that he could not make me cry out. The others stood holding the ropes and watching until Dru finally called him off. By now my clothes were in tatters, and they seemed to enjoy seeing me naked and bleeding. My hair had come loose, and one man sawed off a hank of it with his knife, saying, ‘This will make a nice surprise for dear little Ashkvan.’ Vanaksha nodded approvingly.

They dragged me into the dungeon and helped Dru chain me. You saw how tightly I was bound, and with eight chains of strong iron. I doubted I could break them, and I did not want to try with all of the men watching. Better to wait and hope for a chance of escape when they were gone.

Dru explained to them that the only way to kill me was to leave me to starve, far away from other demons who might hear my cries and come to my aid. He had chosen this site very carefully, and was sure my fellow demons could not find me here; they preferred to stay nearer to the human beings they depended upon for sustenance. But he said that the young men should not stay: my death-curses would be potent and dangerous. He alone would remain to administer the rites necessary to break my magical grip on Tash, though he was in peril of his soul.

This seemed to jolt the young men, reminding them that they were dealing with a demon and not an ordinary helpless woman. After a few final jeers they filed out, leaving me alone with Dru.

I did not know what to expect from this demon-killer. Incantations? Torture? But he merely stood watching me, with a thoughtful expression. Finally he broke the silence, this time speaking Ivaldin:

‘I know you are not a demon. You are a vampire. And I want to be one too.’

I was stunned, and more than ever afraid. What had happened to the vampires’ much-vaunted protective secrecy? How much did he know, and how had he learned it?

‘What do you mean by vampire?’ I hedged.

‘A being who lives on the blood of the living, and is thereby made immortal. I want that immortality.’

‘I cannot give you that,’ I said flatly. I am not ready for it.’

‘Ah, but you can,’ he responded with certainty. ‘All that is required is the blood, and you certainly have that. You take mine, I take yours, and that is enough. The

question is,' he added softly, as if to himself, 'will you do it willingly, or must I force you?'

'You cannot,' I said in rising panic. 'It's impossible. I'm too young. It isn't allowed.'

'Your precious Elders wouldn't like it, would they? But I'm not asking their permission. I will take what I want. And if you try to oppose me, you will suffer, possibly even die. Do you want that? You who could be immortal?'

This man knew far too much. And he was insane. Even if he managed the Change, he would have to be killed.

'The others will not accept you. Especially if you harm me. They will kill you.'

'They'll have to find me first, and I know enough about them to avoid them. Whereas they will not suspect my existence. Unless you tell them.'

The threat was clear enough. Reflecting further, I realized that it was a certainty. He could not risk me coming after him later. Even if he believed any vow I cared to make, I would be putting myself in danger by allowing him to live - I would be considered his legitimate blood-master (of this repulsive old man? the thought was disgusting), and responsible for his actions. It was his life or mine, and at that moment it appeared that the death would be my portion.

He watched me thinking, and nodded. 'I make myself clear,' he said.

'There is no reason for me to help you make the Exchange, if you plan to kill me anyway.'

He shrugged. 'Cooperate or not, it does not matter.'

'You cannot force me to take your blood. The very idea disgusts me.'

'If you're hungry enough you will.'

'You will be waiting a long time for that,' I snapped.

'I think not.' He smiled evilly and took from his pack a short, sharp knife. He slashed it down my wrist, and I heard my own blood spattering on the stones. The wound healed in a few minutes, but he kept cutting me, here and there all over my body. It went on forever, and he seemed to enjoy it. Yes, it hurt, just as much as any knife-slash would hurt you.

I weakened with the loss of blood - it happens even to us - and, as he had predicted, after a day I grew horribly hungry. I was weeping with pain and craving when he finally made a cut in his own chest and leaned over me, bringing the wound to my mouth. I turned my head away, but could not resist my need, my own will to survive. I turned back, and drank from him. My mind cleared a bit as I

fed, and I formed a hazy plan to drain him dry and thus kill him. I began sucking fiercely. But he pulled away far too soon, and laughed at me.

‘You see,’ he said triumphantly, ‘I know your kind. Now it is time for me to join them!’ He made one final cut, this time on my breast, and drank from it. I had not much blood of my own left by this time, and he seemed intent on killing me by the same death I had wished for him. I do not know if it could have worked, but the ecstasy of Exchange took him, and he fell away from me. He dragged himself away and out of the room, seeming to have forgotten me entirely. I do not know where he went; I soon fainted, and knew nothing more until your blood revived me.”

The story was as strange as it was horrible, made the more so by Teja’s flat, emotionless recital.

“Like it or not, I suppose you have a bond with him now. Does it give you any sense of where he is?” I asked.

“No. He must be far away. He probably had some other bolt-hole to retreat to for the Change, and afterwards fled as fast as he could. If I get near him again I will know it.” Her eyes burned, showing far more of her rage and anguish than her voice had during her narrative. “And so will he,” she added grimly.