

## One Curse for Two Souls

Viktor was turning into sand. His fate was sealed, he knew it. His feet were already reduced to a pile of grains. The curse was eating at his ankles, threatening to swallow him whole. Soon, the curse would reach his vital organs, and all he could do was suffer until death had pity on him. He was lying on towels and rags, placed by Clara, who refused to lose any grain of him. As Viktor was accepting the horror of his fate, he only wanted to engrave Clara's face into his mind, memorize the way her lips curled into a smile, the deep brown of her eyes, the way her laughter still made his heart skip a beat, even after fifteen years of marriage.

Unfortunately, these days, Clara was never laughing. She cried, tore through books with a fury he'd never known she had, and tested spells until her body collapsed on the cottage floor. To add insult to injury, Viktor couldn't even stand up to carry her to their bed. He couldn't even comfort her, tell her everything would be all right. He couldn't lie to her, not when it was obvious he would be nothing but dust in a few days. He was a prisoner of his own body—trapped in a cage he couldn't escape.

That night, Viktor's legs turned into sand. Clara was by his side when this happened, her face painted with the colors of horror. With shaking hands, she opened a grimoire, turning the pages frantically.

"This one is going to work. I know."

She read the spell, her voice betraying a fear that made her whole body cold, almost too stiff to be alive. She raised her hands above Viktor's legs. A blue electric field appeared between her palms, only to disappear immediately. Clara's face soured, her eyes shining with tears. She tried again.

And again.

And again.

Her cries were stuck in her throat, making her voice sound distorted.

"It's going to work, I promise. Let me try one more time. One more time. It has to work. It *has* to work."

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Seeing his wife in such a state made his stomach turn. His heart couldn't bear this awful vision. No failure was ever this painful to him. Viktor vowed his life to making her the happiest woman in the world. He was a slave to her; he had given her everything she wanted, no matter how trivial or impossible. She could ask for the moon and Viktor would find a way to reach it. But here she was, tormenting herself to find a cure for this impossible sickness. Nothing he could do would make her feel better. What else was there to say? His heart sank. He had failed as a husband.

With his last few ounces of strength, Viktor raised his hand and touched her cheek, wiping away her tears with his thumb.

"Clara, stop," he said, his voice weaker than he intended.

"No. I will find a solution. I will find a way to stop the curse. I promised you."

She tried again, but his hand dropped from her cheek to her hand. He pulled her hand to his chest, to his heart. It was still beating, still alive.

"Just stay with me. I want to feel you in my arms one last time."

"Don't talk like that. Don't—"

"Please."

He saw the way her chest was rising, her breath too fast and uneven. Her lips were trembling, her face swollen with tears threatening to fall. Her big eyes reflected the desperation in her heart. He pulled her gently, and Clara lay down next to him, in his arms. He could feel her trying to avoid putting weight on him. Her body was shaking, her hands gripping his shirt as if she was drowning in the sea and he was the rock keeping her above water.

"Remember when we went to the Riviera Cascades? You scared the soul out of that pickpocket boy," he said.

Clara chuckled, wiping the tears from her face with the sleeve of her dress.

"You should have let me burn his pants."

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"You've always been such a feisty woman. That's what I love about you. Nothing can stop you."

"And nothing will ever stop me."

A pause. A long silence, heavy with words none of them could say. Viktor had to. His time was running out, and there were things he wanted to say to her. He had to force the words out of his throat. His voice was almost burning him as he said:

"You should forget about me, Clara. Find another husband. Be happy."

Clara sat up, looking at Viktor, anger and sadness twisting her face.

"Don't you dare tell me what to do. I will *never* love anyone else but you. I'm not giving up on you. Never."

"But I promised you that I'll make you happy... if it means that you'll be with someone else—"

"Shut up. Stop saying stupid things and rest. There's no one else but you. You are cursed with my love. It's eternal. You can't get rid of me."

Viktor smiled. He brushed a strand of her hair from her face, his fingers following the shape of her features. She was a beautiful woman. A beautiful woman with the soul of a thousand suns. How lucky he was to have known love from a woman like her. He smiled, pulling her gently for a kiss. They whispered "*I love you*" to each other until Clara fell asleep in his arms.

By the morning, Clara woke up in a pile of sand. Her heart twisted, her body stiff with an incurable pain. She lay back down in the bed of dust that was once her husband. He absorbed her tears until her body couldn't cry anymore. Until she was ready to get up and get back to work. She promised devotion to her husband, she promised that she would always love him. The emptiness of his absence numbed her soul, her mind was now a black hole, but what remained in her was the devotion she vowed to Viktor. She wrapped the sand in the sheets, and carried him on her back to every corner of the world. She would search for an antidote, for a way to break this curse until the end of time. Somewhere in this empty, cruel world, a remedy exists, and she will find it. She will find it and spend eternity with her lover, even if it meant turning into sand herself.