

## Chapter 108

"You are so beautiful."

Emeriel whirled around to find Lord Herod standing in the doorway, his eyes filled with warmth.

Last week, when she visited him for food, he had made her an offer of a safe space to dress up like a female and explore her femininity inside his home.

"This is a safe haven, Emeriel," he had said, gazing into her surprised face. "You've never truly lived as the lady you are. Vera has many garments here, and I have no female offspring. If you ever wish to see yourself as the princess are, you are welcome to try them on."

Emeriel had thanked him for his kindness, but declined the offer. However, in the days that followed, the temptation took root in her.

She had always wondered what it would feel like. As a child, she had occasionally donned Aekeira's clothes, with her sister standing guard, watching the door like a hawk to ensure they were not caught. But that had been over a decade ago.

Realizing this might be her only chance to explore her femininity in a secure environment, she had informed Lord Herod when she arrived that she would like to accept his offer, if it was still available.

He had instructed two of his household human slaves to assist her in selecting and dressing in a suitable garment. Now, gazing at her reflection in the mirror, tears welled up in Emeriel's eyes as she heard his voice once more.

"You are very, very beautiful, Emeriel," Lord Herod added, his voice warm and sincere as he entered the chamber fully. The servants, acknowledging his presence, inclined their heads respectfully before discreetly withdrawing. "The dress suits you perfectly. You would have made a truly stunning princess."

"Thank you, My Lord," Emeriel curtsied, a lump forming in her throat as she glanced back at the mirror. She couldn't deny that she looked remarkably beautiful.

Her hair flowed freely around her shoulders, tumbling down her back like a waterfall of black waves. The deep blue velvet gown, adorned with shimmering pearls and gemstones, accentuated her slender figure, its long flowing sleeves and fitted bodice creating an elegant figure. The soft, warm footwear felt like a luxurious caress against her skin.

"I hope you don't mind that I am wearing your late bondmate's clothes," she said hesitantly, "I could still remove them if—"

Lord Herod smiled gently, shaking his head. "It brings me joy, little Emeriel," he reassured her, his eyes sad. "For thirty years, her things have remained dormant, untouched. I could not bring myself to part with them. Rivera would not mind at all. In fact, I believe she would be cheering you on."

Emeriel's heart ached with sympathy for his enduring grief. "I'm so sorry."

He nodded. "Would you like to accompany me to the Lantern Festival tomorrow night? You could go as you are, dressed as a female. No one would give you a second glance. You look completely different from the boy in well-worn breeches and tunic, with his hair tied back in a ponytail."

Emeriel looked back at her reflection, her heart fluttering with excitement. She truly loved how she looked in the feminine attire. She did look different. But could she really go out in public like this, without anyone recognizing her?

A wave of newfound confidence washed over her. "I would be delighted to attend the festival with you, My Lord," she replied, a radiant smile illuminating her face.

"Excellent." Lord Herod's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. "The lanterns are almost ready. Yours is particularly lovely. You should go to the courtyard and see it for yourself. If there's anything you'd like the workers to adjust, they would be happy to oblige."

Emeriel might have been a prince for twenty years, but she had learned the refined manners of a princess by attending many of Aekeira's lessons alongside her. Dressed in this elegant attire, those lessons seemed to come naturally.

She curtsied gracefully, her voice filled with gratitude. "Your kindness towards me is immeasurable, My Lord."

Stepping out of the bedchamber into the grand expanse of the residence, she was met with an unexpected announcement resonating through the air.

"Hail to His Majesty the First, the mighty and supreme sovereign ruler of Urai, His Grace, Grand King Daemonikai."

My beloved?

Emeriel froze. Rooted to the spot as the entrance doors swung open, revealing the magnificent figure of the grand king.

Her heart thudded as their eyes met across the room. Beloved is here. My beloved is here.

She was paralyzed, unable to do anything but stare.

Grand King Daemonikai approached, his gaze locked onto her, and a hush fell over the room.

Emeriel, her legs trembling, managed a deep curtsy. "Y-Your Grace," she stuttered, from a parched throat.

Silence met her greeting.

As she raised her eyes, she saw the grand king for the first time up close.

His face was expressionless, but those piercing green eyes scrutinized her intently. Taking in every detail of her appearance, from the crown of her head to the tips of her toes.

Moments felt like an eternity. Emeriel was beginning to think he would not respond to her.

"You honor me with your graceful curtsy." His voice a deep, resonant baritone sent shivers down her spine. "To whom do I owe the pleasure of her acquaintance?"

Oh, that voice.

It was even richer and more captivating than she had imagined. He really was, without a doubt, the most handsome male she had ever encountered in a kingdom filled with good-looking males.

So striking, intimidating, and powerful—more so up close. It was the kind of face one would dare only to steal one—or two—fleeting glance at, for fear of being caught staring.

But he had caught her.

Emeriel quickly averted her gaze, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. "Uhhh, I am...uhmm..."

"Your Grace," Lord Herod's voice interjected, a welcome relief to Emeriel. He came up behind her and bowed respectfully. "To what do I owe this great honor of your magnificent presence?"

"I came to discuss matters of importance," Daemonikai replied, his eyes fixed on Emeriel. "But first, tell me, Herodis, who is the lady?"