

## Chapter 11

Emeriel frowned as Madam Livia added, "At least, I think that's what the Urekai call people like you."

A Syren?

Emeriel shifted uneasily, feeling confused. "What does that mean?"

"It is what the Urekai call non-Urekai who can go into heat. It means you are able to bond with a Urekai. Your body is changed enough to mate with them, with new glands and all. Hades, you might even be a Soulbond."

Now, he felt even more confused. His face must have shown it because Madam Livia took a deep breath and nodded. "Very well, let us start again. What do you know about Urekai bonds and bondmates?"

"I know that what humans call marriage, Urekai call bonding," Emeriel began. "It is rare for a Urekai to find their Soulbond: the one person meant to be their true partner. Their soulmate. Only Soulbonds can have children easily. Most Urekai pair up through contracted bonding—they choose their own partners. It is not because they do not want the bondmate nature made for them, but because finding a Soulbond is extremely rare."

"Good, good. You are right so far," Madam Livia said with a smile. "This will make it easier. Go on."

"Um," Emeriel thought hard, searching his memory. "I know contracted bonds are very hard to create. There are rituals and steps to follow, and even then, the bond might not form if their souls do not connect. But for Soulbonds, the souls connect naturally, and the bond is said to be ten times stronger."

"Excellent." Livia nodded. "I will take it from here. Do you remember what happened last night? Have you ever felt anything like it before?"

Emeriel shook his head.

"You went into heat," Madam Livia stated. "It is like menstruation for human females, but more complicated. Also, while menstruation happens monthly, heat does not follow a set cycle. It might happen once every three months or twice in one month—it is different for every Urekai female and syren. What this means is, you are a syren now, so you can marry a Urekai."

### GRAND LORD VLADYA

Grand Lord Vladya walked with regal grace as he approached the forbidden chambers.

With his hands behind his back, he moved with poise, dressed in a long, flowing white robe decorated with detailed golden patterns. The fabric trailed behind him like a river of silk as he walked.

People quickly stepped aside, bowing deeply until their heads nearly touched the ground. Turning toward the southern wing, he followed the corridor leading to the forbidden chambers.

The soldiers bowed as he approached.

He dismissed them with a wave.

Vladya waited until the hallway was empty before stepping toward the massive metal gates, made of iron rods strong enough to resist the Urekai's immense power.

These gates fortified all the dungeons in Ravensshadow Fortress and had held Urekai prisoners for over a thousand years. They were the strongest of their kind.

But Daemonikai had broken through these gates four times. Four separate times. Effortlessly.

The people believed the beast was locked behind the gates, unable to escape. But in truth, it stayed there because it wanted to.

Inside, the room was completely dark. Pitch black to humans and young Urekai.

But to someone as ancient as Vladya, with his heightened vision, it was as clear as daylight. The space was vast and mostly empty, with no decorations.

His eyes landed on the girl. She lay curled protectively into herself, unmoving.

As he stepped closer, the beast's scent reached his nose. His own beast stirred inside him, growing at the presence.

Vladya turned toward the huge, powerful form of the king beast, its yellow eyes locked on him. The beast growled, stepping closer.

Vladya stood still, forcing himself to stay calm and unthreatening, trying to appear as harmless as possible. If the beast sensed danger, it would attack. And as a mindless creature, Daemonikai surely would.

It had happened before, leaving Vladya with scars that reminded him he had lost his best friend forever.

The beast circled him, its movements slow and predatory, showing its annoyance at Vladya's presence in its territory.

Stopping in front of Vladya, it loomed close, towering over him. Then, leaning in, its snout extended, the king beast waited. It wanted to assert dominance.

Vladya's own beast growled angrily inside him, furious at the challenge. But holding back his beast and every alpha instinct, Vladya lowered his head and tilted it to the side in submission.

The feral beast pressed its snout against Vladya's neck, sniffing deeply. Unsatisfied, it released aggressive pheromones, trying to provoke Vladya's beast.

Vladya shut his eyes tightly, enduring the sharp, needle-like pain in every part of his body. He did not respond.

Finally, the beast seemed satisfied. It pulled back, turned, and walked back to its favorite spot behind another set of iron bars.

The danger was avoided.

Vladya exhaled deeply, his tension fading. Turning, he moved toward the girl, planning to lift her lifeless body. But as he got closer, he stopped.

She was still breathing.

He could see bloodstains and bruises around her private area, but she was alive...in one piece. What in the world?

Looking closer, he noticed grab marks, burns from the beast's snout, and other bruises all over her body. Yet, aside from those, the girl was unharmed.

Vladya had not expected this. Shock froze him in place.

When a Urekai beast went feral, the instinct to kill was so strong that some believed it was even greater than both bloodlust and sexual need.

A wild beast's touch always led to death. No matter what it did, the end result was always...death.

Even if she had survived, Vladya thought he would find her torn into pieces. But here she was, whole.

And she had been in this chamber all night. How was this possible?

Vladya glanced at the beast. Its yellow eyes, still empty of recognition, glared at him. Then he looked back at the girl on the floor. How is this happening?

A small flicker of hope stirred inside him. Vladya pushed it away.

It had taken him a hundred years to accept that his best friend's mind was gone forever. And it had taken additional months of healing from the near-fatal wounds the same beast had given him to make that realization final.

Do not do this to yourself again, Vladya. Daemonikai is gone. He had the scars to prove it.

Bending down, Vladya carefully picked up the unconscious girl. His eyes were drawn to her left arm, which had more bruises than the rest of her body.

It had multiple grab marks and snout burns. The beast had repeatedly pressed its nose to her arm, smelling her scent there more than anywhere else.

But why? None of this makes sense.

Outside the forbidden chambers, Vladya saw two guards approaching. They locked the metal gates behind them, securing the chamber.

"Tell the head maid, Livia, that I summon her to Blackstone," he ordered.

### PRINCE EMERIEL

Emeriel was at a loss for words. His wide eyes stared at Livia in shock and disbelief, as if the older woman had suddenly grown a second head.

"I do not want this," he blurted out, voice rising with panic. "I do not want any part of it."

"We cannot choose to be a syren, Emeriel," Madam Livia said firmly. "Many human females have tried to become one over the centuries, even doing extreme things, but it simply does not work that way." She paused, her voice softening. "There are countless females who would give anything to be in your position right now."

"But I do not want it!" Emeriel exclaimed, springing up from his seat, unable to sit still. He paced the length of the room anxiously. "Let them have it. I do not care. I do not want to be a syren, a bondmate, or anything else!"

Livia looked at him silently, her expression saying more than words ever could.

Running a shaky hand through his ponytail, Emeriel stopped and turned to face her, his chest rising and falling with rapid breaths. His voice trembled as he asked, "So, that horrible, painful experience I had last night... That was called a heat?"

"A mini-heat," Madam Livia corrected, folding her hands neatly in her lap.

"A mini-what?" Emeriel's jaw dropped, his eyes nearly popping out of his head. "It gets worse than that!?"

"I cannot say for sure, Emeriel," Madam Livia released a deep breath. "I am not a syren, nor do I know any syrens. I do not know if the symptoms get worse during a full heat. But I can tell you how lucky you were to only experience a mini-heat last night."

Emeriel stared at her as if she had completely lost her mind.

"Lucky?" he asked incredulously. "You think that was lucky?"

"If it had been a full heat, Emeriel," she said slowly, "it would not have stopped on its own."

Emeriel's stomach churned, but he forced himself to listen, his fingers gripping the back of a nearby chair for support.

"In a full heat, you would have needed to be mounted by a Urekai male. Not just once, but repeatedly. He would need to knot you, again and again, until your heat calmed." Madam Livia told him. "And when your womb descended, he would need to release inside it while your body locked him in. That, my dear, is how heat sex works. You may need to look it up in the library for more details. But one thing is certain—a full heat cannot end without multiple rounds of heat sex, and self-pleasure does not help."

A marathon of heat sex? Mounted? Knotted? Release into my womb?

Emeriel's knees gave out, and he collapsed into the nearest chair, his face pale.

It all sounded like something out of the terrifying stories told to scare children under the moonlight.

For a moment, he thought he saw pity in Livia's eyes, but he couldn't be sure. He wasn't sure of anything anymore.

"Do you now understand why I said it would be nearly impossible to keep pretending to be male?" Madam Livia stood, gathering her herb bag. "While I feel for you, I do not play favorites. You will be treated like every other slave and expected to work just as hard."

The older woman looked at her. "You may have hidden your gender, but your beauty cannot be concealed. These lustful masters will notice you sooner or later. What if one of them finds out your secret? Also, you will be required to bathe in the river like everyone else. What will you do then?"

Emeriel's skin crawled with discomfort.

Of course, he had already known this; it was no different from all he knew about the lives of slaves and commoners. But hearing it so clearly now made his situation feel all the more real.

Tears welled in his eyes. He wanted Aekeira. He needed his sister.

A knock sounded at the door. "Mistress Livia? Your presence is requested in Blackstone," a soldier announced loudly.

"I will come shortly. Thank you," Madam Livia replied. The sound of footsteps faded.

"What is Blackstone?" Emeriel asked.

"It is the domain of Grand Lord Vladya. He rules the western wing of this estate, and his home is there," Livia explained. Then, in a quieter tone, she added, "I wonder why he wants to see me."

Emeriel wiped his eyes, swallowing tightly. "Do you think it's about my sister?"

"You may go now. I have already told Slave Master Gaine that you will work in the cellar for now. The soldiers will come for you soon."

A cellar slave? It was not ideal, but it could have been worse. "Thank you, Madam Livia, for everything," Emeriel said softly, standing to leave.

"Emeriel?"

He turned back, looking at her. "Yes, Madam?"

Livia hesitated. "I would not hold out hope regarding Aekeira."

When she said nothing more, tears once again sprang to Emeriel's eyes, and he let out a quiet sob. He had dreaded the thought, refusing to entertain it. But deep down, he knew he had been fooling himself.

Emeriel walked unsteadily back to his chambers and locked the door. Falling to the floor, he wept bitterly.

### PRINCE EMERIEL

Three days passed, and Emeriel was moved to the slave quarters in the southern wing.

The room he was given was small and bare, with only a tiny bed in one corner.

Thankfully, Madam Livia had managed to get him clothes that covered his whole body, sparing him from the revealing attire other slaves wore.

As the evening fell, marking his first day as a cellar slave, Emeriel tightened the chest-binds around his chest and put on his work clothes. He tied his hair into a ponytail.

He hadn't heard anything about Aekeira. Hadn't seen his sister.

Whenever he tried to ask Madam Livia, she would change the subject.

Emeriel refused to believe his sister was dead and her body discarded. At least during the day.

But at night, he would curl up on his cold bed and cry himself to sleep. Every single time.