

## Chapter 148

AEKERIA

When she heard his voice—a sound so deeply familiar and comforting—Aekeira could not suppress the surge of emotions that flooded her, hearing his voice. Her heart raced, and butterflies erupted in her stomach, a tumult of excitement and relief crushing her.

She rushed toward him. "Your Highness." Her hands fluttered over him—touching his chest, belly, and shoulders in a flurry of worried motions. "Are you alright, my lord? Are you hurt? Did something happen?" Aekeira scanned him for any sign of injury.

Then, she froze, her hands stilling on his body.

What in Tartarus had possessed her to touch him in such a manner without his permission? And in public, no less.

His body stiffened under her touch.

Aekiera's hand recoiled as if burned, her eyes darting around in sudden panic. The expressions on the faces surrounding them—slave masters, Urekai maids, and human slaves alike—ranged from shock to outright horror. Even slave master Tyke, with his usually sneering face, stared at her as though she'd sprouted a second head.

"I-I'm sorry, Your Highness," Aekeira choked out, her head bowed, cheeks flushed a deep crimson. Shame rained over her, and her heart raced with embarrassment and confusion. "I didn't mean to...I was just worried."

Since when do I make rash decisions concerning the well-being of anyone but Em? she thought despairingly. Why, oh why would I do this?

But then he moved closer, his towering form casting a shadow over her. He extended a hand, his calloused fingers outstretched towards her. She looked up, a jolt shooting up her arm as she hesitantly placed her shaky hand in his. His grip was firm yet surprisingly gentle, the warmth of his touch seeping into her chilled skin. The force of his gaze, those fathomless gray eyes, held her captive.

"I am fine, Aekeira."

Her heart leaped in her chest like a hummingbird desperate to escape its cage. "Mmh..." she tried to speak, but her thoughts scattered, leaving her mute,

It was only when his piercing gaze shifted away from her that she able to breathe again. He turned towards the slave master. "Tyke."

"Yes, your Highness!" the slave master's response was instant, his head snapping down so low his forehead nearly touched the ground.

"When Aekeira finishes her duty, you do not give her more, do you understand me?" Lord Vladya stated, each word dripping with authority.

"Y-yes, My Lord." The slave master's voice trembled slightly, betraying his nerves.

"The only duties she should be given are the general ones when shared. No extra duties."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

A pause hung in the air, heavy and pregnant.

"Apologize." The single word sent a ripple of shock through the onlookers.

Aekeira stood shocked. Even Yaz displayed a flicker of surprise.

"Uhhh, I think I'm okay, your Hi—"

"Apologize to her, Tyke."

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EMERIEL

Emeriel's body, sated and languid, craved sleep after another round of hurried lovemaking to stop the beginning of a heatwave.

Females love their heat, Lord Herod had said. Emeriel was beginning to comprehend the meaning behind those words. The pleasure King Daemonikai had given her... it surpassed anything she had ever imagined.

Being with the beast had been good, but it was driven by mindlessness and instincts, often accompanied by pain and discomfort. This experience with the male was like a dream come true. Never had Emeriel thought it possible to feel this way.

Everything she had seen and heard about him made Emeriel believe he could never be this way with her. Gentle. Kind.

He treated her not only as a person, but as someone he...cared for?

No wonder females love their heat, Emeriel mused, a soft, wistful smile gracing her lips. No wonder they look forward to it.

If this was how it always was, if Emeriel could have this male like this, then she welcomed the agony of heatwaves. If she could have this connection again and again, then she eagerly awaited more of her heat. For the first time, she was happy to be a Syren.

Despite all the challenges and impossibility of them being mated, Emeriel was happy that it was him. That he was her fated mate.

"Here, rise," his deep voice rumbled, pulling her from her reverie.

The thing was, Emeriel's limbs were unwilling to obey. She tried to move, but her bones felt as liquid as the sea.

"Allow me." Strong arms encircled her form, lifting her effortlessly until she rested against the curve of his legs. She buried her nose in the crook of his neck, inhaling his scent. I could stay this way forever.

A cool cup pressed against her lips, and she instinctively parted them, the refreshing liquid sliding down her throat. The water, infused with a subtle sweetness, hinted at berries and honey. She drank gratefully, her eyes closed, savoring this stolen moment between them.

"That's it. Good girl," he praised, causing her stomach to flutter. Making her feel so good. Emeriel wanted more of it.

A spoon pressed against her lips, and her eyes opened. The small silver spoon held a morsel of poached pear. He was going to hand-feed her...?

In what universe did she fall into? Emeriel didn't care.

Obediently, she opened her mouth, and the delicate sweetness exploded on her tongue. Next came a sliver of warm bread, infused with olive oil and fragrant herbs. Its crispy edges and delectable taste delighted her senses. He fed her more of it, until she could eat no more.

King Daemonikai gently wiped away a stray crumb from her chin. "There you go. A little nourishment, and our little Syren shall be ready to return to her slumber."

Emeriel's body hummed with contentment. She reached out a tentative hand, hovering in the air. "May I touch you, Your Grace?"

He nodded once.

Her fingers traced the planes of his face, her bleary eyes fixed upon him. The sharp angles of his cheekbones, the strong line of his jaw, the gentle curve of his lips... committing every detail to memory.

"You are the most handsome male I have ever laid eyes on," she murmured.

His eyes softened even further. "I have grown averse to the touch of others, yet I have come to realize...I like your touch, young princess."

Because I belong to you. I was made for you. You are mine. My Beloved.

Her fingers trailed down his nose, tracing the contours of his lips, the sharp line of his jaw, the column of his neck. Warmth spread through her. Emeriel felt at peace.

For the first time since her arrival in Urai, she felt whole. Complete.

Her Beloved hand-fed her every morsel until she was fully satiated. Then, the grand king laid her down and cleared away the plates. Emeriel drifted back to sleep, her heart lighter than it had ever been.

May this heat last as long as forever. May the outside world never intrude.