

## Chapter 158

The door opened, and Aekeira entered to see Em on the bed, unclothed, a thick towel beneath her. Identical towels were stacked nearby—Aekeira counted ten—before her attention snapped back to Em.

Her sister made pained sounds, curled in a fetal position with her back to Aekeira. She hadn't reacted to the sound of the door.

Aekeira approached, heart aching. "Em..."

Em jerked, slowly unfurling to face her. Eyes fluttered open. "Keira?"

"It's me." Emotion thickened Aekeira's throat, and she leaned in, embracing her sister. "Em, I've missed you so much."

Em whimpered. "Don't touch me. Hurts."

"Sorry, sorry." Aekeira pulled away but remained close, worry etched on her face. "How do you feel? You look ill."

"Just very tired." Em's face contorted in discomfort. She parted her legs slightly letting out a long, pained moan as a whitish fluid began to seep out from—

Aekeira's cheeks flushed. Oh.

Is that why Em's belly was swollen, like a woman newly with child?

Finally, Em slumped forward, the towel beneath her soaked. Concern far outweighed Aekeira's embarrassment. "Is it supposed to be like this?"

Em managed a weak nod.

"Do I need to change your towel?"

"Not yet." Em settled back onto the bed, her breath shallow.

"I'll be back." Aekeira rose, hurriedly filling a bowl with water from the nearby pitcher and fetched a washcloth. Returning to Em's side, she dipped the cloth in the water and began to gently clean her sister.

Em's skin was burning hot and Aekeira took care to avoid contact, making sure only the washcloth touched her body.

Em drifted in and out of sleep, occasionally wincing or moaning in pain. Aekeira's throat tightened, fighting back tears as she ran the wet cloth over Em's arm, down her chest, and over her ribs. Her sister was clearly suffering.

Em stirred restlessly, murmuring incoherent words.

"What did you say?" Aekeira leaned closer, straining to hear.

"I want him," Em cried, a tear slipping down her cheek. "My Beloved."

"He's needed in court, Em. I'm sure he would be here if he could," Aekeira lied gently, hoping to soothe her.

Em nodded, then let out another pained sound as more fluid leaked from her parted legs. Aekeira replaced the soaked towel with a fresh one. Eventually she breathed a sigh of relief as Em's breathing evened out in sleep.

The door creaked open. "How is she?" Lord Herod entered, his voice hushed.

"She just fell asleep." Aekeira drew the sheet over Em's form, brushing away a tear. She looked at Lord Herod with concern. "Is it always like this?"

He nodded solemnly. "Sometimes worse, sometimes better. It's the nature of the heat. She'll recover, don't worry too much."

"But why does it happen this way?"

He paused at the foot of the bed, considering his words. "During heat, a female experiences extreme lust and unnatural stamina to endure three days of continuous coupling. Something entirely impossible outside of heat. Any harm that comes then, she won't feel, due to the overwhelming arousal. It's like being dosed with a powerful drug, but now it's wearing off."

"Beloved..." Em murmured in her sleep, shifting restlessly, her face contorted.

"What about the grand king?" Aekeira hesitated, dread creeping in. "He spent three days with her in this state. Do you think he's realized that Em... that Em is his..."

"I don't know, child. Let's hope not," Lord Herod sighed. "We had a visitor last night—the Werewolf King and his entourage. They waited for the grand king, even after the grand lords tried to receive them. It's a matter of importance. The grand king will be occupied for some time, perhaps even journeying to Furx."

"The werewolf kingdom?" Aekeira echoed.

"Yes. We are allies. Recently, important matters have arisen between our kingdoms. The point is, he'll be very busy for a while."

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RAZARR

Razarr's jaw hung slack, stunned by the news.

The sword he had been polishing hovered in his grasp, forgotten. Galeb, his third-in-command, had similarly abandoned his task of cleaning their shield, equally shocked.

"Are you certain of what you just said?" Razarr finally managed, his eyes fixed on his second.

"Absolutely," Mich said gravely. "I doubted it myself at first, but my source is impeccable."

Razarr continued to stare, half-expecting Mich to break into laughter and reveal it all as a jest. But after centuries of fighting side-by-side, Razarr knew Mich was not one to trifle with such matters.

"Emeriel is a girl?" The words tasted absurd even as he spoke them.

"Not only that," Mich continued, his voice low, "she's a Syren who just went through her first heat. And spent it with the grand king."

"Impossible!" Galeb hissed. "This is madness!"

Yet, a strange sense of clarity washed over Razarr. The pieces of the puzzle were finally clicking into place—the feral beast's odd behavior toward the boy, the unexplainable events surrounding Emeriel... it all made a twisted kind of sense now. This was the missing link.

"Are you absolutely sure your sources are reliable, Mich?" Galeb pressed. "I trust your judgment, but this..."

"I kept watch on the boy, as ordered," Mich explained. "But he vanished from the fortress a few days ago. Initially, I assumed it was a harmless escapade. He was at a high lord's estate, and I thought perhaps there was a... sexual thing going on. But after two days passed with no sign of him, I grew suspicious. Especially when all the male staff had been dismissed, replaced by female soldiers."

"The telltale sign of a heat," Razarr murmured, tracing the grooves of his sword with a fingertip.

"Exactly." Mich sat beside them. "But I had to be certain. So I had one of the soldiers taken by my men. He wouldn't divulge a thing, no matter how much we... persuaded him." Mich snorted. "Damn thing was loyal to a fault. But when I heard in the fortress the grand king was off helping a young female through her heat, my suspicions grew. Still, I needed confirmation. So, I had my men kidnap the soldier's bondmate, threaten to slit her throat if he didn't talk."

Galeb hummed in approval. "Then, he talked, I assume."

"Spilled everything. The boy is actually a girl. A Syren."