

Chapter 175

The court erupted into chaos. Concerned shouts and confused questions rose. Their world was tilting on its axis.

Ottai and Vladya hurried outside. Alarm was already spreading beyond the court, the people shouting as they caught sight of the beast.

"Do you think he's gone..." Ottai's voice faltered as he ran with Vladya. "...f-feral again?"

"No," Vladya snapped. "I think he was summoned."

"Summoned?" Ottai parroted, bewildered. "What in cruel fates does that mean!?"

They sprinted down the winding stairs, bursting into the courtyard where a throng of people had already gathered. All eyes were fixed on the towering entrance gates, flung open, from the beast's hasty departure.

There was no way they could catch him unless they shifted into their own beast forms. And even then, given the sheer speed with which the grand king was running, their chances were slim....

Vladya skidded to a halt, a contemplative frown furrowing his brow. Ottai, too, was trying to make sense of the situation, but nothing about it made sense.

"This is not the time to be vague, Vladya. You said summoned?"

"Yes, summoned. Called upon. Whichever term you prefer," Vladya said reluctantly.

Ottai spluttered. Do you believe this male? "First of all, no one can 'summon' our grand king. Secondly, for him to react this way? No kind of summons can do that. No one has that kind of power. Not the elders, not the Oracle, and even if they could, both are still in deepsleep. Which leaves us no one with a power high enough to even attempt that."

"His Soulbond can. His Soulbond called out to him." In a near-whisper, Vladya added, "What the hell was she thinking?" before walking away.

Ottai stood rooted to the spot, too shocked to move. His eyes trailed Vladya who was trying to calm the growing panic among the people.

Even as Ottai saw Zaiper hurry towards them with the grand king's bloodhost in tow, Ottai was still too dumbfounded to move a muscle.

Soulbond?

Did Vladya just imply what Ottai was fairly sure he'd heard the male imply? Soulbond...?

His mind repeated the word over, and over, and over, again. A concept so foreign, so rare that it was inconceivable.

Unbelievable.

"It's your fault, Ottai," he said to himself. "Next time, do not ask for explanations from a male battling feral madness."

With that perfectly rational reason in mind, Ottai cleared his mind of such a ridiculous statement. He joined the other grand lords in their efforts to quell the unrest.

Would the beast return?

Did it go on a killing spree?

Is Daemonikai feral again?

The questions swirled in Ottai's mind. If one can be cured of feral madness, could they fall back to it again?

Ottai was terrified.

Worried and utterly terrified.

EMERIEL

"Give me the damn torch," one of the masked assassins snatched the flickering flames from another's grasp before turning to Emeriel. "I'm afraid this is your end."

"The fact that you're hiding your true identity and spending time with him is simply unacceptable. He even shared your heat with you," M said, disgusted. "You reek of him so much that if we closed our eyes, we'd think it was our king we had tied up. We can't allow someone like you to keep roaming around him."

He hurled the torch into the pile of wood at her feet. Flames licked greedily at the dry kindling, spreading fast. The assassins stepped back, watching with cold detachment and satisfaction.

"Take it out! Take out the light!" The ropes cut into Emeriel's arms, every inch of her body screaming in pain. Yet she fought against her bindings with every ounce of strength she had.

The fire was spreading, the heat growing. She could feel it against her feet, the flames inching closer.

Would King Daemonikai even come for her?

It was always the beast who answered her calls, now the grand king had returned, would he care enough to save her?

I'm going to die. Gods, I'm going to die here!

Her thoughts spiraled in a chaotic terror. Where had they taken her?

Which cave were they in?

Even if the king answered her silent plea, could he reach her in time if they were too far—

A deafening roar split through the air. So loud, so powerful, Emeriel felt it in every fiber of her being.

"What was that?" one asked, fearfully. They all looked around, searching for the source of the sound.

"Not what. Who," another choked out.

A massive beast stood at the cave entrance, dominating the entryway.

"Holy shit. The grand king?" G stumbled backwards. "How is that possible? How did he know about—"

The beast moved with a speed that defied its size, its tail bristling with sharp spines swept forward, scattering the firewood, sending flames skittering across the floor. Then, halted for a heartbeat in front of Emeriel's stunned face, before coiling around the ropes that bound her.

With a quick tug, the ropes snapped and fell away, freeing her arms and legs.

Her captors barely had time to react before the beast charged at them in a blur of motion. The first male didn't have time to scream before the beast's claws moved, separating his from his shoulders.

The second one had almost reached the entrance when the beast's tail snagged him, dragging him back as if he were no more than a ragdoll.

"Please, plea—" he began, but the beast caught him midair, snapped his spine, and discarded his lifeless body.

The third assassin's desperate plea was cut short as the beast crushed his body against the cave wall, the sound of bones snapping followed. The remaining ones shifted into their beast forms, their bodies rippling with the change.

Emeriel, trembling with adrenaline, watched from a distance. The size difference was staggering. Even in their transformed state, the assassins were dwarfed by the grand king's massive form.

But it was three against one.

She watched, her heart pounding so hard she thought it might burst from her chest. The fight was vicious, brutal.

One beast lunged forward, only to be lifted off the ground as if it weighed nothing and hurled across the cave. It landed with a bone-crunching thud, a yowl of pain escaping its lips as it crumbled to the ground. The other two charged together, their claws flashing, their roars filling the cave.

Blood splattered across the cave floor. For a short moment, they held their own against the grand king. Emeriel winced as scratches appeared on her beloved's skin, dark lines marring his otherwise flawless hide.

Then, with a powerful swipe, the grand king sent another head flying, the body crumpling lifelessly to the ground.

What is it with her beloved and ripping heads off shoulders? A rush of fondness bubbled up inside Emeriel. So magnificent, so adorable.

Then, she caught herself. There was nothing 'adorable' about death, blood, and gore. What in Ares' name was that?

When she looked again, the battle had ended.

Her beast had shifted back, and in his place stood King Daemonikai, fully clothed in his regal attire, his back to her. In his grasp was the last of her attackers, now dying.

"Who sent you?" the grand king thundered.

Emeriel gasped.

He turned toward her, his features stormy and intense. "Soulbond? Galilea? You are my Soulbond!?"

Reality crashed down on Emeriel like a blizzard. He knows.

He. Knows.

Her knees buckled under her, and she curled into herself.

"How are y-you here, my king?" the dying man croaked, blood bubbling at his lips. "How did... how did Emeriel get you here on time..." He coughed, spasmed, and then went limp in King Daemonikai's grip.

"Emeriel?" Her beloved's brows pinched together, looking utterly confused.

Emeriel's eyes met his, helplessly. She was physically naked, yet in that moment, she felt more exposed than she ever had in her life.

King Daemonikai's eyes roamed over her, taking in every detail.

The torn slave garments discarded carelessly on the other side of the cave. The messy state of her ponytail, the dirt smudging her face.

His gaze bored into her, scrutinizing. Analyzing.

"I have only met Emeriel once. One night, a night of heat when lust clouds all senses. But I have seen, and I have been with Galilea," the grand king said, in a low, dangerous tone. "I know every inch of her body, every feature of her face. Everything."

His stormy features darkened further, eyes blazing with dark green fire. "And I am certain I stare at Galilea right now. So, tell me, Galilea... Who. Are. You?"