

Chapter 183

Daemonikai's eyes snapped up, locking onto hers. Eyes that had been asleep mere seconds ago were now blearily open. She rubbed them to shake off the remnants of sleep.

He had to leave before the pull of this bond dragged him into a storm he was not ready to face.

"Go back to sleep." Daemonikai said crisply, turning toward the door.

"Wait, please."

He heard a shuffle and his jaw locked tight. He couldn't do this. Not now. Not like this.

"Stay over there," Daemonikai snapped. "Do not come close to me."

A sharp intake of breath came behind him, and though he did not want to—gods, he did NOT want to—Daemonikai turned to look at her.

Hurt flashed in her eyes, before she quickly masked it, swallowing tightly.

"As you wish, I would not..." her voice wavered, her hands fluttered helplessly before falling to her sides again. "I will not come closer. But please, do not leave."

"Why?"

"Just..." She looked so small, even smaller than he remembered. So fragile, lost, and achingly vulnerable that every instinct within him screamed, protect.

But Daemonikai slammed the doors to them.

"Just please-please say something," she pleaded, her swollen eyes begging him.

"Why?" he repeated, his voice sharper, colder.

"Anything is better than the silence." Misery rolled off her in waves. "Anything at all. Hit me, shout at me, use the s-sp-spiked whip, lock me away in the Hole, anything. Just react. Say something. I beg of you."

Her words sank into him, cutting deeper than any royal dagger could. The last of his doubts, the denials he clung to, crumbled like the walls of Olympus.

Daemonikai had tried not to believe it. A larger part of him already knew she was truly his Soulbond, yet there was a small part of him clinging to denial. It's not true. They must be joking. It's unbelievable. There's no way Ukrae and the fates would do this to me.

Evie had always told him he was good at ignoring things he didn't want to see. And she had been right. The signs had been there all along, but he had refused to see.

It was insane how his entire being had tuned into her moods, craved her scent, how she soothed him with just her presence and the sound of her voice. His beast had called her mine more times than he could count. If that hadn't been enough to clue him in, the way every feeling during sex had sharpened tenfold should have been.

He, a master of control, had barely managed to keep himself from losing it with her. He, who did not go into rut for anyone before sex, not even his own bondmate, had taken one whiff of her scent in heat and was immediately hit with the father of all ruts.

But Daemonikai had chosen not to analyze it. Some things, after all, were better left unexamined.

However, now, the mere thought of anyone—anyone at all—whipping or hurting her brought a fury so strong to his being. The need to tear apart anyone who dared harm her, who had hurt her before, or who might ever try in the future, was far too strong.

There was no denying it anymore. This human girl, standing before him with guilt-ridden eyes, was his Soulbond.

Bile rose in his throat, but Daemonikai gulped it down.

"I am sorry," she said after a long pause. "I know it sounds lame, but I am tr-truly sorry. I tried to stay away. Lord Vladya made me swear I would, and I did try with everything in me. But when you stepped into Lord Herod's home that morning, stopping right in front of me, I knew I was in trouble." Emeriel's shoulders slumped, eyes dropping to the floor. "This... this thing is way bigger than me. I tried so hard."

Anger simmered in him. "So you thought lying to me, coming to me in deceit was the way to go? Giving me a false name?"

"Galilea is my maiden name, it's not a false name, Your Highness."

"But it's not the name you answer to, is it, Emeriel?"

The guilt shone brighter. "I did not think it through. Lord Herod, he... he knew about my predicament, and sought to protect me." Her eyes begged him to understand. "He thought after the pleasantries, we would not have any other exchanges."

Daemonikai thought of that day. He had asked her to walk with him, and she had shown him the gardens.

The pull between them had been magnetic, he had no idea it was the bond, and had given in to its demands, scenting her like a caveman. The beginning of countless other encounters where that bond only grew stronger.

There were so many questions he could ask, but instead he blurted out. "Did you lay with Herod?"

It took her by surprise, like it did him. "No. Never."

The tightness in his chest loosened. Just slightly. "But he would have taken your heat." Daemonikai's voice was low, strained. "If the bond had not drawn me to you that night, you would have given your heat to him. The whole time, I was ridden with guilt—guilt that I was stealing my high lord's woman simply because I could, abusing my power and strength. And all this time, Herodis was the one stealing what belongs to me?"

"No!" Emeriel's head whipped side by side. "Please, Lord Herod never touched me that way. He doesn't see me that way. It's true I begged him to take my heat, but only because I did not want to bear the pain. Those waves of agony. I knew I could not have you. I begged, and he declined. He didn't do it, not even when he saw me writhing, suffering. He went into a rut, and I t-threw myself at him, begging him to put me out of my misery. And still, he wouldn't," she cried, "He sent a messenger to you instead."

It was the truth, and it spilled out in hurried, jagged breaths. The sincerity in those blue eyes pierced through the fog of Daemonikai's anger. His beast, attuned to even the slightest falsehood, had quieted—satisfied with her explanation.

He remembered the morning Wegai handed him that message, but still, a part of him had needed to hear it from her. Even after summoning Herod for questioning, he still had not felt settled. Now, though, some of that uneasiness slipped away.

Appeasing your jealousy when there were far more serious issues to discuss, Daemonikai.

"He never touched me that way," Emeriel reiterated.

"We spent three nights together." He palmed his forehead, rubbing the dull throb. "Three days, and you never thought to tell me the truth? 'I live under two identities, Emeriel is a girl and she is me, and I am your Soulbond, it's your right to know, so you can decide if this bond should grow further'" He whipped his hand away, eyes hard. "You never thought to tell me any of that?"

She whimpered, tears flooding her red-rimmed eyes.

But Daemonikai was far too angry to stop. "My reputation precedes me, Galilea. Surely one or two persons aware of your deception warned you that I despise lies."

"I'm sorry, I was scared. I did not know how to tell you. I—"

"Sorry does not change the fact that YOU DECIEVED ME!" he bellowed, the rage he'd held on a tight leash for days spilling over. "I hate that you deceived me. I have executed people for less!"

She flinched, her arms hugging herself protectively.

"We fed that bond!" He barked thunderously. "Every time we got together! Every walk, every breath of your scent, every time we had sex, every knotting, We. Fed. That. Bond."