

Chapter 206

GRAND LORD OTTAI

He stood by the door, staring at Daemonikai's unmoving body sprawled across the bed. The grand king looked almost lifeless, his pallor stark against the dark sheets.

The only sign of life was the faint, barely perceptible rise and fall of his chest. So subtle that one would have to get close to see it.

His breathing had slowed even more over the past few weeks, each breath coming longer between the last. Shallower than what was normal for any living being.

The Urekai guard on duty, offered a respectful greeting, while Livia, who had been tending to Daemonikai with cold compresses to regulate his burning fever, rose and bowed deeply.

"How is he?" Ottai asked, moving further into the room.

"Still refusing food, your highness. No sign of waking in the past four days." The head maid replied.

The longest stretch yet.

A week without sustenance, and four days without opening his eyes. Typically, he would awaken every other day, staying conscious for a brief thirty minutes before slipping back into unconsciousness.

Now, his slumber grew longer. Deeper.

"His temperature?" Ottai asked, his eyes briefly scanning the untouched feast.

"I've kept it regulated as best I can, but it's barely holding," Livia looked at the grand king's feverish face. "He's heating up faster."

Ottai gave a small nod. "Thank you, Livia. You are one of the few humans I can trust with him. You've done well."

"It's an honor, my lord." She hesitated. "Was your trip successful?"

"Yes," Lord Ottai's lips curved into a faint smile. "They are back in Urai."

The older woman beamed. "That's a relief."

"It is. You have been here all day. Go and get some rest, Livia."

She summoned the maids, who swiftly packed away the untouched platters of food. With an incline of their heads, Livia and the guard departed with them.

Ottai took a seat beside Daemonikai in the stifling quiet.

"I know wherever you have retreated must be far more appealing than reality, Daemon. Perhaps that's why I cannot judge you too harshly." Ottai said, his eyes on the still form. "But this place you have hidden yourself in—it's not real."

"The eclipse moon night is nearly upon us once again. We cannot do this without you. Your people need you. I need you." A tight knot formed in his chest. "Please, come back before you are lost to us forever."

Ottai hoped against hope that something—anything—would stir in the grand king.

But there was no response.

No change.

Nothing.

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MISTRESS SINAI

She stormed down the hall, her shoulders trembling with the force of her fury.

Why was Ukrae suddenly determined to make her life a living hell?

Why were the fates conspiring against her, snatching away her hard-won peace?

What had she done to deserve this torment?

Emeriel is back.

Emeriel dared to return!

Two years of peace shattered by a mere fly she could swat away. One she should have squashed years ago.

Sinai rounded a corner, and there she was.

The mistress gasped, coming to an abrupt stop. Had she not been looking so fervently, she might have passed without realizing the "lady" before her was Emeriel.

The transformation was staggering. So much so it left Sinai's jaw on the floor.

Gone were the rough male slave uniforms. In their place was an elaborately designed gown, adorned with intricate stones and diamonds that shimmered with every movement.

Her hair, once pulled into a tight bun, now cascaded down her back like a black waterfall, decorated with glittering stones and delicate lace that caught the light. Stunning. Commanding.

This was a far cry from the meek, little male slave who had always tried to blend into the background. This Emeriel commanded attention.

Her presence radiated an aura of power and authority. Confidence.

She walked with her shoulders high, her head held even higher, as if she owned the very fortress itself. Behind her, Wegai stood in his brooding, protective glory, along with two other soldiers.

Sinai. Hated. Her. So. Much.

Emeriel's steps faltered when she saw Sinai, and that, at least, brought satisfaction to the mistress. Yes, little bunny, be afraid. You have every reason to be.

But Emeriel showed no fear.

Her face remained indifferent as she resumed her pace, heading straight toward Sinai.

"Look what the cat dragged back in," Sinai sneered. "It's the filthy slave. The lying, deceitful slave. How dare you show your face here again? It's a wonder no one has put two claws through your eyes by now."

Emeriel stopped beside her. Slowly, she turned her head to the side, meeting Sinai's gaze with a cold, condescending look.

Her eyes flicked over Sinai from head to toe, dismissing her as though she were nothing more than a bothersome fly not even worth swatting, and continued on her way.

No words were said to Sinai.

No acknowledgment.

Nothing.

Emeriel merely eyed her, and kept walking.

What the hell?

The mistress scoffed, stunned. Did Emeriel just... dismiss me?

She had.

Emeriel had looked at her, looked through her, and decided Sinai was not worth her time.

And it enraged Sinai to the core.

She lunged, grabbed a fistful of Emeriel's hair, and yanked. Fulfillment flooding her when she heard the other woman yelp in surprise. Finally, a reaction.

But before she could savor the moment, Wegai stepped in, gripping Sinai's wrist firmly.

"How dare you walk away while I'm speaking to you!?" Sinai shrieked in rage as Wegai carefully disentangled Emeriel's hair from her fingers. "You dare to dismiss me!?"

Emeriel smoothed her hair, composed. Her expression remained infuriatingly calm.

Sinai seethed. Where did this newfound poise come from? Where was the fear? Where was the cowering?

Had this girl spent so much time with Daemonikai that she'd adopted this annoying, imperturbable behavior of his?

Her fury burned hotter. "You think because you're no longer a slave you have the right to waltz around here dressed like that? You are no better than the rats that scamper in the sewers! How dare you come back here?"

Wegai moved, but Emeriel signaled him not to. Instead, Emeriel stepped closer...into Sinai's personal space, and met Sinai's gaze with cool detachment.

"You have not changed, mistress. You are still the same loud, and annoying woman who sticks herself where she has no right to be." Emeriel said.

Sinai's nostrils flared. What did she just say to me? "What did you just say to me!?"

"I don't answer to you. Not now, not ever." Emeriel continued in a steady, completely unbothered tone. "And I would appreciate it if you kept your hands off me."

"Have you LOST YOUR MIND!?" Sinai screamed.

"Always the noisemaker." Emeriel merely said. "You stay out of my way, and I'll stay out of yours. Keep your hands off me, mistress. I'm not here for drama."

Sinai was too dumbfounded to speak.

Emeriel squared her shoulders, staring Sinai down. "I hope we do not run into each other in the future, Mistress." Then, she whirled around and walked away.