

## Chapter 210

Emeriel's breathing quickened in the silent room as her eyes drank him in. Ravenously devouring every detail of him.

Control yourself, Emeriel. There was no bond to blame now. This is all you. Have some restraint.

Easier said than done.

She was grateful to be alone with him. No one could see how hard she struggled. How difficult it was to be in the same room with him again.

The effort it took not to rush across the room and collapse on top of him, just to feel his body against hers one more time.

The memories were the hardest.

Those stolen nights in his arms, tucked away at the cottage, making love after love. The fog of heat and the passage of time had blurred the memories, and she had survived by blocking them.

But now, here in this room with him, the years shrunk and disappeared, and it felt like yesterday.

The memories that had once been hazy were suddenly vivid, flashing very clearly.

Emeriel's whole body shook.

She stumbled back out of the room, closing the door behind her. Leaning against it, she gasped for breath. Her knees weak, her heart too fragile.

It was easier to fight for control when he wasn't in sight.

You are stronger than this, Emeriel. Get a hold of yourself.

It took a while, but finally, she felt calmer. Composed, she re-entered the room and sat on the chair beside his bed, waiting until the tight constriction in her chest loosened. Until breathing became less of a struggle.

"My king," Emeriel whispered. "Hello, my king."

Taking his hand in hers, she gave it a light squeeze. His feverish skin burned against her palm. "How have you been? Where are you? If you can hear me, come back. Your people need you."

Once she started speaking, it became easier. The tight coil in her chest began to unwind.

"Very soon, the eclipse moon night will be here again. They are terrified to face it alone. There is a famine, and the younglings are starving. They looked at me—me, a human—with hunger in their eyes, instead of disdain. Can you imagine that?"

Clinging to his hand, the heat seeped into her skin. Too hot.

She rose from her chair, fetching the basin of chilled water and a washcloth. Returning to his side, she dipped the cloth into the water, wiping his face.

"You are not leaving them in good hands, my king. Lord Zaiper is eager to rule, but he does not care about the people. Not like you do. They need you. They always need you."

Her hand moved from his brow to his neck. His body radiated a hotness that seemed to climb higher with every passing second.

Peeling back the bedding to wash his body, Emeriel gasped.

His left arm was covered in dark lines, like cracks filled with blackened blood, trailing upwards and disappearing beneath his sleeping clothes.

With unsteady hands, Emeriel lifted his garment, following the grim path, tracing it back to his chest. The thickest, blackest lines pulsed from the center of his chest.

His soul was truly dying.

"Oh, my beloved," Emeriel whispered, shakily as she stared at the mark of his slow death.

Her fingers traced the darkened veins, her forehead dropped to his chest. "How could you let grief get you to this extent? You cannot leave like this."

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IN THE SPIRIT REALM.

"Our children won't talk to me."

Evie squeezed Daemonikai's hand, offering comfort.

They were walking hand in hand along the beach, the soft rhythm of the ocean waves lapping at the shore.

"Myka too?"

"Yes." Daemonikai sighed. "I found him earlier, but he wouldn't say a word. Just... vanished. It's disheartening."

"I know. We may not remember the moment of our deaths—no dead person does—but we do have some knowledge about the circumstances surrounding them. Myka feels guilty for failing to protect me. And Alvin, for bringing this upon our people. For failing you." Evie said sadly. "I don't think he will ever forgive himself."

"I wish I could tell them I forgive them," Daemonikai said bitterly. "I wish I could make them see that none of this is their fault. It's me who should carry that burden, not them."

Every time he got close to either of them, their eyes would widen at the sight of him, and they would disappear, like wisps of smoke caught in the wind. Hours later, they would reappear on a different part of the endless shore, and the search would begin anew.

"I wish I could at least talk to them," he muttered. "But they won't let me. I have so much to say."

"I know." Evie rubbed his arm soothingly. "I know, my love."

They walked in silence for a while. The only sounds were the cries of gulls and the ceaseless roar of the ocean.

"Oh, my beloved."

They both stopped, their heads snapping up.

Daemonikai's brows furrowed as he scanned their surroundings. "Did you hear that?"

"I did." Evie was staring at him with soft eyes. "Did you?"

He nodded slowly. "But... you didn't call me."

"No. She did. The female who is the real reason you are here."

Daemonikai frowned. "You're confusing me again. I'm here because of you."

"No, my love. You are lost to the realm of the living because the one thing that should anchor you there—your soul—is dying. And so, your spirit wanders, into the otherside. Drawn to this place, the Dead Oceans."

Daemonikai's gaze swept across, taking in the vast expanse of water and sky. "So that's where we are."

"Yes. Every soul on the verge of passing experiences this. Their spirit wanders into the otherside, seeking joy and peace, finding it in the places they yearn for most. Your departed loved ones can sense your presence. They choose whether to come and keep you company."

"Huh. That's something they never taught us in those 'Dead and the Living' study sessions." Daemonikai smiled. "So you are keeping me company?"

"Yes, I am. Our sons, too," Evie returned his smile and continued walking, pulling him gently along with her "But whenever you seek them out, they retreat."

Daemonikai's smile faded as he followed. "But why?"

"Come back, beloved."

That voice again. It went through his entire being, spreading like the finest wine. "That wasn't you."

Her head moved from side to side. "You know who."

"It's not possible." His jaw tight, he looked away. "She is far, far away."

"I don't think so. For her voice to pierce the veil between worlds and reach you here, she must be in Urai, close to your physical body." Evie countered, her lips curving into a subtle smile. "She's the first to find you, even here."