

## Chapter 212

"When she left, she took all the color with her, drowning my world in black and white. I never realized how brightly she lit up my life, from the first day I met her as Galilea, until she was gone." Daemonikai admitted.

Admitting it aloud for the first time was like shedding twelve heavy cloaks Daemonikai hadn't known he was wearing.

"Oh...dearest, I know." Evie gave a kind, watery smile. Taking his hand, they walked along the shore, the waves lapping gently at their feet. "I know you better than you know yourself, Daemon."

He breathed deeply, the air suddenly feeling lighter, fresher. He could finally say it without drowning in sorrow, without the rain of guilt.

It was exhilarating.

"I don't know what I ever did to deserve a woman like you, Evie." Daemonikai said sincerely.

"I was the lucky one." she exhaled a slow breath. "Always have been."

"Galilea made me feel strange things. But I was okay with it, for it distracted me from my misery. That was, until I found out why she made me feel that way." He stared out at the ocean. "I felt so angry, deceived. Guilty. I thought sending her away was the best thing to do."

"But it wasn't, was it?"

At first, he felt nothing but emptiness. Then his nightmares came more frequently, followed by dreams of her in his arms, in his life. It was torture.

To his left, he saw the family he had lost, the empty pit that was once the center of his universe. On the other side, he saw the soulbond he had lost—a female whose body he craved, whose scent he was addicted to.

Daemonikai had drifted into a new version of hell.

"Those memories..." Evie spoke softly. "The ones you recovered from your feral time... they didn't make things easier, did they?"

As if that hell wasn't enough, those lost memories came.

Daemonikai recalled the night they flooded his mind. Vivid, fragmented images.

Emeriel patiently handfeeding him.

His beast mounting her again and again.

The surge of rage he'd felt as he tore apart the slave master who dared to touch her.

He remembered how she'd summoned him to court, and he had answered, driven by a need to protect her. A need to possess. A need to keep her safe from harm.

Finding a strange contentment in her presence. Emeriel had been his beacon of light in the face of his mindless instincts.

He recalled holding her in his arms in the dead of night as she bravely cuddled against his fur.

Memories of how she'd risked her life repeatedly to be with him. Satisfying his sexlust. Coming to him during her heats, and he, in turn, plunging into his ruts, even in his feral state. His instincts along the line of; Must take her, must make her mine.

"I don't want you to die," Memories of her crying as she said those. She had hugged his beast form on that hallway after he saved her from armed assassins. "They are going to kill you, and it hurts me so much. Please, don't die."

"Here," she had whispered, baring her delicate throat to him. "Drink from me. Take what you need."

He remembered the sweet nectar that was her blood, the heavenliness sliding down his throat. He remembered her tears, her pleas for him to stay alive and take his male form again.

Emeriel had loved him wholeheartedly.

In a feral state where he had nothing but pain to give her, she had given him everything.

That was the beginning of his illness.

Daemonikai pulling himself from the swirling vortex of memories, and stared at the seashells surrounding him. "Emeriel is a little being stuffed full of love and light."

"The gods do not make mistakes, dearest." Evie agreed.

Now that he was finally opening up, it was easier to confide in her. To pour out his mind, including his doubts.

"That girl deserves better than to be saddled with an ancient like me. A male who once razed an entire village to the ground."

"That was millennia ago, dearest." Evie bent down to pick up a spiraled seashell. "What she deserves is to be with her soulbond. Let the past stay where it belongs...behind us. You are a better male now. A wonderful one. If you weren't, our people wouldn't be so devoted to you. And they are."

She examined the shell for a moment, a blissful smile on her face, before tossing it back into the ocean. "You've already secured your place in history as Urai's greatest ruler, a title you'll hold for all eternity. I am so proud of the male you've become."

"Our people don't like her, because of what she represents." Daemonikai's eyes trailed the movement of the shells as they vanished beneath the waves. "They hate the idea that my Soulbond is human. They would have killed her two years ago if I hadn't set her free."

Evie's smile faded. She nodded, understanding in her eyes. "The people will need time. They love you deeply. In time, they will come to accept and protect what you care about. I have faith that Emeriel will win them over."

After a pause, she added. "But don't let their reservations become the wedge that drives you apart again, dearest. For five millennia, you have lived for them and their expectations. You put them first, as a king should, and you love them greatly. But it's time you did something for yourself, my love. Damn everyone else. After all, you lost us while saving them."

Daemonikai flinched, those words stinging like a slap.

Evie, sensing his distress, took his hand into hers. "It's the truth. You lost us saving them, and look at what it's doing to you. You saved thousands of lives that night, but the ones who could have kept you sane and anchored were lost."

"And because of that, you are walking every edge of death, leaving them unprotected and at the mercy of someone like Zaiper. In the end, you are no use to anyone this way. Not them, not yourself. This time, be selfish, my dearest. Take what you want. Put Emeriel first. Protect her. Don't lose your Soulbond because of our people."