

## Chapter 216

A week later.

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

He let out another uproarious laugh, his voice echoing through the room.

Sprawled lazily across the table in nothing but a flimsy pair of undershorts, his broad shoulders shook with amusement as Razarr kneaded the tense muscles beneath his skin

"So, let me get this straight," Zaiper drawled, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. "A human, not just any human, but a tiny human girl, knocked you around and turned your lights off, now you want me to punish her in court for it?"

Mistress Sinai clenched her teeth, feeling the heat of embarrassment rise in her cheeks. It was bad enough as it is, but hearing Zaiper mock her made it worse.

Every time she recalled Emeriel's effortless takedown, Sinai wanted to crawl into the ground.

She had woken up to the concerned faces of her maids, who had crowded around her, asking if she was alright. The shame had been so great, she had lied, telling them she felt lightheaded and fainted. The humiliation burned her from the inside out.

This was the first time she had spoken of the incident. Sinai wanted retribution. She wanted to see Emeriel not just punished, but humiliated.

But instead, here she was, watching Zaiper laughed at her until his eyes watered, reducing her to a laughingstock.

Zaiper moaned, as his head guard—and lover—pressed down on a particularly tense knot in his shoulder. "That is a good one." Turning to Sinai, he added, "You mean, a little touch on the neck, and poof...lights out?"

"It was not a 'little touch'," Sinai snapped, not for the first time. "I have no idea what she did, but it hurt like the whips of hell."

"Mmm," Zaiper hummed skeptically. "Maybe you should consider attending training sessions. You'd need it if your lights go out at the slightest caress."

Sinai's eyes flashed angrily. "That's not what this is about, and you know it. It happened so fast —" She paused, breathing hard. "You know what, forget it. Just tell me when and how she will be punished."

Zaiper let out a long sigh, his amusement slowly ebbing. "I'm afraid you are on your own with this one, dearest Sinai."

"What?"

"Firstly, the court dislikes involving itself in petty female squabbles. We have far more pressing matters to attend to." He lifted a hand, gesturing lazily.

"Secondly, the female in question has a lot of attention on her right now. Something like this could backfire spectacularly. People might hate her more, or they might hate you more. They might even protest in her favor, which, let's be honest, would be even more humiliating for you."

Mistress Sinai's stomach churned.

"And lastly," Zaiper was not done, "which is the most crucial point, really. I cannot involve myself in anything that concerns Emeriel."

Sinai bit back her frustration. "But why!?"

"Because, dear Sinai, that I have no desire to be thrust into the spotlight again when it comes to that female." Zaiper's eyes slid shut as Razarr's hands moved on his lower back. "You know what happened in the courtyard after her deception was revealed. I have no intention of being accused of going after her again or harboring ill will towards Daemonikai. The people are already looking for a scapegoat, and it will not be me."

Sinai stared at him, flabbergasted.

"I plan to take over his throne, but it wouldn't benefit me if people knew I harbored ill will for their beloved grand king. Don't you agree?" He rolled his shoulders, clearly enjoying Razarr's touch. "So, no, I won't interfere. Not when it has nothing to do with me, nor offers no benefit to my cause. You'll have to sort this one out on your own."

Sinai couldn't believe her ears. She simply cannot believe this.

"Don't give me that look, lovely Sinai. My hands really are tied." Zaiper chuckled. "Worry not, I will make it up to you in another way."

"This is the only way I want!" Sinai was so angry she could spit nails. "And why are you so cheerful today, anyway? Is there a special occasion I'm unaware of?"

"Why, of course," he drawled, stretching languidly. "If I'm to be grand king soon, I might as well start getting ready, don't you think?"

She eyed him suspiciously. "What is it this time?"

"My plans are already in motion, sweet Sinai. Tonight, Daemonikai will die."

Her heart skipped a beat. Sinai schooled her expression. "And how do you plan on getting this done?"

"Oh, it's quite simple, really. Nothing grand or complicated." Zaiper purred. "I handed a human a weapon capable of killing him with a single stab to the chest. A killer disguised as a mere herbalist."

Sinai mulled over his words. "You handed this human one of our relics?" That would be reckless, even for Zaiper.

Zaiper scoffed. "I would never be so foolish, of course not. Just a normal dagger, laced with our poisons. Ottai will be in Mabblewood tonight, so my killer will slip past the guards under the pretense of delivering herbs."

He smiled. "If all goes well, the human be handsomely rewarded. If it goes south, the human takes the blame, or I'll eliminate their entire family. It's a win-win situation."

"It is," she finally muttered, "if your plan goes accordingly."

"Good. Now, as I was saying, perhaps it's time you return to the training fields if a mere tap from a small human can knock you unconscious."

Just like that, Sinai's annoyance was back, accompanied by her never-ending embarrassment.

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PRINCESS EMERIEL

She emerged from the garden, carrying a small basket packed with delicate magnolia blooms, borage leaves, and a handful of ripe fruits.

As she neared the fortress building, someone tugged at her garment from behind.

She turned, only to find... no one.

Confused, her eyes lowered. And there, barely reaching her knees, stood...a youngling.

An actual Urekai child.

Emeriel had glimpsed them before—rare as they were. The Urekai kept their children close, guarding them like treasures, never letting them to stray far.

But this one... this girl child was alone. No adult waited nearby, no watchful parent in sight.

"Fruits," the youngling mumbled, her eyes fixed on the basket.

Emeriel's gaze darted around, wary of onlookers who might misinterpret the interaction. She didn't need a crowd accusing her of harming their child.

"Where are your parents, young one?"

"Sick mama. No food." The child held her clothing and tugged again. "I'm hungry, princess."

Her words tugged at Emeriel's heart. Kneeling down, she met the child's gaze. In human years, the child would be no older than six, but in Urekai years, she was likely even younger.