

Chapter 220

"Stay with me," she cupped his icy hands in hers, ignoring the biting cold. Touching him everywhere she could reach...his forehead, his shoulders, his arms. "Please stay with me, your Grace. You can do this. I know you can."

Driven, Emeriel sprang up and dashed out of the room, only to return with armfuls of blankets. She piled them on top of him, burying him under a mountain of wool.

Yet, it didn't seem like enough. He needed more. He needed more!

"I'm here! Step back, Emeriel!" Lord Ottai barged in, two buckets in hand, steam rising from them in furious spirals. "Get those blankets off him, quickly."

Fumbling, she tore the blankets away and Lord Ottai wasted no time tipping the first bucket over him.

The boiling water hissed as it hit his frozen skin, drenching him from head to toe.

The heat vanished almost instantly. The water cooled within seconds.

Light-gods... This is not real. There's no way this is happening.

Swearing under his breath, Lord Ottai grabbed the second bucket and poured it over him as well.

The result was the same. The water turned cold before it could even begin to do its work.

More guards arrived, carrying an endless supply of steaming buckets. Lord Ottai continued to offload bucket after bucket over the grand king, each time the warmth vanished almost as soon as it touched his frigid body.

Emeriel lost count of how many buckets they'd used, her heart sinking deeper each time the water failed to warm him.

Out the window, the night sky was alight with firesticks. The grounds were filled with a crowd kneeling in prayer. Urekai...and humans.

Her breath caught. There were no soldiers pushing the humans back. No conflict, no hostility. Just peaceful coexistence. Prayers whispered into the night, for the grand king's safe crossing and return. A moment of unity between the two species. So rare, so beautiful.

Looking back at King Daemonikai, puffs of air shuddered out of Emeriel in relief.

His temperature had begun to shift. A touch of color had returned to his skin. The cold was slowly retreating.

"That's enough for now," Lord Ottai said, his voice hoarse but relieved.

"But his temperature is still low," Emeriel protested.

"We are trying to help him cross the Cold Sea, not drown him." The grand lord glanced around. "Livia, use the washcloths."

Madam Livia stepped forward, knelt beside the bed, and began to carefully wash the grand king's body with the steaming water.

The chill remained, but at least the water no longer hissed in contact with his skin. Finally, Emeriel relaxed.

But it didn't last long.

Minutes later, the cold crept back in, crawling up his body like a wakening tide.

Enough of this.

Without a second thought, Emeriel started taking off her clothes.

Lord Ottai looked at her, alarmed. "What are you doing?"

Ignoring him, she shed her everything quickly. Heat. I must keep him warm.

Naked, she climbed into bed beside King Daemonikai, pressing her body against his frozen skin. The cold was biting, painful. But she didn't care.

Arms encircling his chest, legs entangling with his, Emeriel wrapped around him like a snake. Body trembled from the cold, but she gritted her teeth. I'm not letting go.

"Are you out of your goddamn mind!?" Lord Ottai bellowed.

"This is dangerous, Emeriel!" Madam Livia shrieked, panicked. "You could freeze to death!"

She tuned them out. Must warm my man. Mine.

He's not yours anymore, a part of her reminded her.

For now, Emeriel whispered back inwardly, just for a little while... he's mine. I must save him.

"You're just as stubborn as he is. Why am I not surprised anymore, that they chose you for him!?" Lord Ottai sounded frantic.

Moving atop him, Emeriel shifted so her body covered as much of him as possible. "Stay with me," she murmured, her breath ghosting over his neck. "Just stay with me a little longer."

Her fingers traced over his skin, cold to the touch, but she didn't stop. She couldn't stop.

"This is dangerous." Lord Ottai's tone turned pleading. "Please, Emeriel, listen to me."

"If he becomes too cold, I will move away," Emeriel finally responded.

"Are you sure?" Lord Ottai asked.

No, he was already too cold. "I'm sure," she had to try hard to keep her teeth from clattering.

Madam Livia's head snapped up. "But—"

"Get the pile of blankets," Emeriel cut her off, eyes locked on the king's pale, unresponsive face.

They were quickly covered with a pile of warm wool. But the cold swallowed every bit of warmth, Emeriel barely felt the layers of fabric.

Madam Livia continued her work, exposing the king's feet and hands one by one to wash them with the hot, sizzled water.

"You are the strongest male I know," Emeriel's hand cupped his cheek. "We all believe in you."

Leaning in, she gazed into those vacant green eyes. "You are the almighty Daemonikai, king of the Urekai. You will glide across that sea like it's a mere creek."

Pressing a kiss against his cold lips, she whispered. "You are not alone. I'm right here beside you."

As the night deepened, stretching on in silence, everyone departed one by one.

Much later, Lord Ottai rose as well, walking to the door. "I will check back in the morning," he said.

Emeriel felt his eyes on her back.

"The gods couldn't have given him a better Soulbond. You're stronger than many of our females combined, Princess."

Emeriel had no words for that, so she didn't respond. She heard the door close behind her.

Alone with him, she finally let herself go, her teeth chattering uncontrollably. She was so cold she could barely feel parts of her body.

Still, her eyes stayed on him, vigilant. She kept speaking to him, even as her voice trembled.

His temperature fluctuated, sometimes warmer, sometimes colder, but it never reached that terrifying, bone-deep icyness again.

She watched over him as the night stretched on endlessly.

Only at dawn did her eyes grew heavy. The exhaustion she had fought tirelessly, finally closing in.

You can't afford to sleep. You must stay awake.

But in the end, fatigue became too much. Her eyes fluttered shut, and she succumbed to the pull of sleep.

Head resting on his chest.

Hands clasped tightly in his.

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"Emeriel..."

The soft whisper drifted into Emeriel's dreams.

No... no, I just fell asleep, she thought groggily, her mind struggling to cling to the remnants of rest. I need more.

"Emeriel...wake up."

His voice.

Her eyes flew open.

It took her only a moment to remember where she was, why she was there, and whose warm body her naked one was pressed against. Whose hand was now softly stroking her hair.

Lifting her head, she looked at his face.

Those green eyes, once vacant and distant, stared back at Emeriel, this time full of awareness.

They blinked slowly.