

Chapter 223

Emeriel moved gracefully across the room, carrying a tray loaded with vials and pouches, and placed it gently on the table at the far end.

Dressed in a luxurious red gown, her full princess regalia was on display. And Daemonikai was dumbstruck.

She was stunning.

Hell, she was more than stunning...only he couldn't find words adequate to do her justice.

There was something about her now, something that hadn't been there before.

Yes, Daemonikai had seen Galelia, and this female before him looked exactly like her, but there was something...more.

Was it the way she carried herself? A way only someone who has mastered the 'royalty poise' could manage.

"Good day, Your Majesty," she said, her voice steady as she focused on the herbs. "Madam Livia was indisposed this evening and has assigned me to deliver your medicines, I hope you don't mind?"

Crossing the room to him, she held out a small cup filled with a dark, pungent liquid.

Hand-feed me, like you did when I was feral.

The words rose in his throat, but Daemonikai trapped them there. Instead, he extended his hand, accepting the cup.

"You didn't return," he stated, taking a sip of the bitter concoction.

She looked away, her tone cool. "I was busy."

Daemonikai tried to find something beneath that disinterest, but her face betrayed nothing.

He had seen her—felt her—there with him on the Cold Sea. He'd been so alone, the icy waters dragging him down, his body numb and his hope waning.

But then she had been there, her heat pressing against him. Her voice a beacon in the darkness, talking to him, soothing him.

His voice had pulled him back when he had nearly given up. Her touch had led him home.

And now that same woman, who had risked her life to save him, stood before him with such staggering indifference.

"How was your day?" he pressed, trying to draw her out.

"Fruitful." Her tone clipped. "Productive."

Daemonikai handed back the empty cup, and she rose to retrieve another vial from the tray. His eyes followed her every move.

"My day was filled with grueling meetings of official matters," he volunteered. "For a bedridden king, my people certainly don't seem to care."

"They are relieved their grand king has returned," Emeriel handed him a platter of ground roots and plants. "Everyone rejoices. Celebrations have been held in every corner of the fortress."

Daemonikai took a bite. "And you?" his eyes locked with hers. "Do you rejoice?"

Her baby blue eyes met his eyes for a moment.

For the life of him, Daemonikai couldn't read her. Her face had gone from relaxed to completely blank in the blink of an eye.

It was unnerving to see on a face that was once so expressive.

"I wouldn't be in this kingdom if I wasn't," she finally replied, her tone neutral.

Dammit, just go for it. "Emeriel, I want to talk to you about two years ago." He said earnestly. "I want to apolo—"

She turned away, giving him her back. "There is nothing to talk about. I must take my leave," she said curtly. "Madam Livia will be here soon with the rest of your medicines." A glanced over her shoulder. "Good night, Your Grace."

After she left, Daemonikai stared at the door she'd exited, the room's quietness suddenly too loud.

If she were angry, it would have been better. Anger meant she still cared enough to be upset.

But there was no anger. Only conviction, and a gaping distance.

Had he lost her forever?

Daemonikai had been so certain that once he returned, once he was whole again, he could make things right. But now he wasn't sure.

Had he ruined his chances with her before they'd even begun?

PRINCESS EMERIEL

She stood before the mirror, the servants adjusting her garment. Yet again, she chastised herself all over again for the night before.

Why had I paid him a visit? she asked herself for the hundredth time.

There was no logical reason to take the medicines from Madam Livia just to have an excuse to see him.

Two years had passed, and Emeriel had almost forgotten just how hard it was to resist that male.

Or perhaps, with their bond dormant, she had naively assumed she would no longer be affected by him.

How wrong I was.

Seeing him awake and hearty, those mesmerizing green eyes on her, had sent jitters through her body. It was all she could do to suppress the tremors that threatened to overtake her.

Emeriel didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

She had built herself up over these years... Years of carefully constructing walls, brick after brick with care, only for one night—just a few moments in his presence—to make those walls quake and the foundations to tremble.

"Thank you," she said as the servants finished. "You all may leave."

They filed out, leaving her alone with her thoughts.

"There is no bond between you two anymore," Emeriel told her reflection firmly. "You have no business feeling this way. You didn't work this hard, become this strong, just to fall down the same rabbit hole again."

What had he wanted to tell her?

As she walked back to her chambers last night, curiosity had nagged at her. Even now, it still disturbed her. The question itched at the edges of her mind.

But Emeriel did what she did best. She suppressed it.

Sometimes, there's wisdom in ignorance. Peace in not knowing. It's better not to know.

A knock echoed through the room. "Deliveries, Princess!"

Crossing to the door, she opened it to find a basket of flowers left on her doorstep.

A faint smile touched her lips. It was no surprise.

Every morning since the grand king's awakening, she had received many flowers from the Ureka people. They pile the gifts by her door like some sort of peace offering.

Their attitude had changed so much since her return. Some days, Emeriel still had a hard time fully believing it.

But, their gestures stirred a warm joy deep inside her. A hope that was...hesitant. Wary.

In some way, a defensive part of her was waiting for the other shoe to drop. For the hate and choas.

Today's offering was a bouquet of vibrant red lilies. Lifting the basket, Emeriel brought it to her nose.

The scent washed over her, soothing her frayed nerves like rain on a sunny day, and just like that, her tension drained away.

Nothing like the smell of fresh flowers to start her day.

Another knock startled her. "Deliveries, Your Highness."

Emeriel lowered the lilies. The servant held an even larger, more extravagant basket overflowing with flowers.

The servant gave a respectful bow. "From His Majesty, the king."