

## Chapter 230

PRINCESS EMERIEL

That night, she slipped under the covers, a soft, unguarded smile still on her face. She hadn't felt this happy in ages.

Both the male and beast occupied her thoughts even long after their parting.

While the male stirred up emotions she wasn't ready to face, the beast was different. Easier. Safer.

She could manage the beast's affection without risking the walls she had carefully built around her heart.

Lord Herod had said Urekai males were basically linked to their beasts, two halves of the same whole.

But Emeriel didn't allow herself to dwell on that, casting reason aside, and embracing the simplicity of her beast's company.

That day in the woods had been agonizing.

Leaving him there had been one of the hardest decisions she'd ever made, but she'd had to do it.

It was either that or succumb to the all-powerful urge to collapse into his arms. Beg him to take her back. To see beyond pity and offer her even a fraction of his love.

She had left with the last shred of her dignity intact, determined to avoid him.

But her beloved had been persistent. And today, she had genuinely enjoyed her beast's company.

You know who you truly wish to spend your day with is his male form, her inner self argued.

"No, I do not," Emeriel muttered firmly.

She imagined her own mind laughing at her. You long to see him laugh, to see that rare, carefree smile. You crave to be cherished by him, to hear him call you 'beloved' once more. You wish for his arms around you, for his embrace and his kisses.

You may deceive everyone else, but here, in the deepest recesses of your mind, you cannot lie to yourself. You are starving for him, for the man you've tried so hard to forget. You want to cast aside the past and fall back into his arms.

The heaviest longing Emeriel had ever known sprang within her. So intense that tears stung her eyes yet again.

"No, you will not do this to yourself again, Emeriel," she chided herself aloud. "You must not let your guard down. If you do, just like two years ago, you will be defenseless against the pain. You cannot fall into that hole again."

Her tears dried without falling.

Oh, Emeriel... her inner self mourned. Give yourself a break.

Emeriel rolled onto her side, curling into a fetal position. The grand king is recovering well. Although the bond remains dormant, his soul is beginning to heal.

Perhaps it was time she started preparing to return home.

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Two days later.

Emeriel hadn't seen King Daemonikai for two days. It was a good thing, right? She craved solitude. To be left alone. Uninterrupted. Undisturbed.

So, why did she keep glancing over her shoulder, half-expecting him to appear?

Why did a smile touch her lips every time she recalled his last visit?

I'm pathetic, and I know it.

The grand king had been busy, occupied with matters of state. Especially the long-awaited rain the day before. The first in two years.

The entire city was in a festive uproar, alive with celebration. Laughter echoed the streets, chants and songs in the air. Urekai of all ages danced and played, their joy infectious.

Standing atop the highest tower, Emeriel looked down at them. The sight was almost surreal.

Since her return and their king's recovery, she had seen a new side of the Urekai. In the past, there had only been hatred and anger. But today, there was warmth, playfulness, even kindness.

Is this how they were before that disastrous night? Before the massacre that had swept away their loved ones and plunged them into years of suffering?

The thought was sad. Almost painful to contemplate.

According to history, the Urekai had always kept to themselves. Peaceful and kind, granting passage to travelers and aiding any species that didn't make enemies of them.

Despite being the strongest species, they didn't wage wars to dominate others, seize lands, or conquer kingdoms. No, that was the way of the vampires. The Urekai focused solely on protecting their own and neutralizing threats.

So why, in all that is both gracious and evil, would their ancestor, King Memphis, think it was a good idea to betray and attack the Urekai?

Emeriel found that highly suspicious.

Yes, King Memphis had been a tyrant, but like King Orestus and every other ruler with a modicum of sense, he had been wary of the Urekai.

How could he have orchestrated such a bold and devastating attack on a species that even he feared?

And more importantly, how had he carried it out with startling success?

Emeriel had been to the Great Mountains. She had seen why they were considered a legendary boundary that could never be crossed.

The labyrinthine passages, ever-shifting rocks, magical stones that appeared and disappeared at random, dry ground that could suddenly transform into crocodile-infested rivers, and paths that stretched endlessly. She had gotten lost and nearly died there.

Even if Prince Roland had learned the secrets of the Great Mountains and their passage rites from the grand king's youngest, how had they navigated with such accuracy and speed, arriving in Urai just in time for the massacre?

The journey from the human land to Urai took three days, while the Urekai's night of weakness under the eclipse moon lasted only twelve hours. How had they achieved such impeccable timing without setbacks or assistance?

And what of the stolen magical relic that could have protected the Urekai, granting them strength to fight back?

Too many questions that needed—

"Princess, His Majesty summons you," a guard's voice announced behind her.

Emeriel swiveled her head, a slight frown on her face. "Which of them?"

"His Majesty the First, the mighty and supreme sovereign ruler of Urai, His Grace, Grand King Daemonikai."

"A simple 'the first ruler' would have sufficed," Emeriel huffed, even as her stomach flipped over, her heartbeat quickening.

Suddenly, she went from brooding to feeling very much alive.

Deities, I have it bad. Like, really bad.

She did a mental check for their bond. Nope, still dormant. These feelings were all her.