

## Chapter 232

Emeriel stiffened.

Control your reactions, or you will break this fragile moment. So Grand King Daemonikai curled his hand into fists, resisting the urge to let his hand wander.

Since his return, he had longed to do this. To hold her, just like this.

Maybe he had imagined it happening horizontally. On a bed. On the floor. Her naked body writhing under him while he spread those pretty little thighs apart and bury his dick deep inside—

Unsafe zone. Retreat.

Don't think about those sexy legs wrapped around your waist, her broken cries in the air while you —

Emeriel drew back.

Reluctantly, Daemonikai let his arms fall away. "Thank you, sweetheart. I needed that."

For a second, he saw something unguarded in her eyes. A naked longing that mirrored his own.

But she blinked, and the walls came back up.

"What work do you need assistance with, Your Grace?" she asked, politely.

Daemonikai gestured to the empty chair opposite him, using his other hand to adjust his erection.

Settling into it, their knees brushing beneath the desk. They worked in companionable silence, interrupted only by the sound of quills scratching against parchment.

He noticed her watching him occasionally, but whenever he met her stare, she quickly looked away.

So he stopped intercepting, letting her eyes linger on him as they pleased. He enjoyed it too much.

Time drifted by, the hours blending seamlessly together. At some point, his arousal subsided, much to his relief. Now, he felt at ease. Calm. Content.

Emeriel was thorough in her work, much to his surprise. Each scroll she completed was neatly organized and eloquently written. He was impressed. Was there anything she couldn't do?

To think this lady before him, writing gracefully, was the same male slave who had served his meal two years ago, stooped over and skittish. Completely unbelievable.

And he could still feel her gaze on him from time to time.

Was this the right time to bring up the past? To bring up this rift between them?

That day in the woods, she had been adamant about not wanting to hear his apologies or explanations. With his first attempt a disaster, Daemonikai hadn't figured out how to broach the subject again.

But he enjoyed this calm between them now. Selfish though it might be, he didn't want this tranquility to end.

No, he would wait. His chance would come. Another time.

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PRINCESS EMERIEL

Emeriel needed a slap. Or maybe ten. Anything at all to stop her from eye-fucking King Daemonikai across the desk.

Your beloved, that ever-present voice of her annoying little self reared up again.

No, not my beloved. The grand king of Urai.

The voice snorted, mocking her shamelessly.

He worked with complete focus, his gaze flitting across the ledgers, occasionally pausing to make calculations.

His brows furrowed when something didn't add up, only to smooth out once he resolved it.

The way his quill moved across the paper was almost... seductive, really. Or maybe that was just her.

She felt warm. Every part of her was acutely aware of him. Every sigh, every shift in his seat— Emeriel felt it all.

And you wonder why you've only managed to review three trade records in hours? Her inner voice tsked. Your most productive work so far has been ogling your Beloved.

Squeezing her eyes shut, she gave herself a firm mental shake. Get a grip, you gawking, horny fool.

Resolving to focus, she picked up a ledger and forced her attention on its figures.

A moment later, Emeriel could no longer ignore the inconsistencies. She frowned. "Some of these numbers don't add up."

King Daemonikai raised his head. "Let me see," he extended his hand.

Emeriel passed him the ledger, careful not to let their fingers brush.

"Ah, Lord Zaiper's transaction records over the year."

"Yes." Emeriel reclaimed the ledger, her brows knitting together as she reviewed the figures again. "There's a glaring gap here. These records don't align at all."

"With Zaiper, they rarely do," Daemonikai said in a wry tone. "He always has an excuse for them."

"But isn't this a crime?" Emeriel asked incredulously. "The people are starving, and he's stealing from them?"

"When confronted, he insists he's given the funds to the poor, starving villagers in the outer settlements. He even manages to find witnesses to back his story."

"But you suspect his claims aren't true?" Her lips thinned. "Why does he still get away with it? Lord Zaiper is neither a good ruler nor a decent male. I'm sure many would agree with me."

"Oh, everyone knows Zaiper can be a nightmare," Daemonikai let out a chuckle. "He has ruled beside me for millennia; it's hard to miss that."

He folded the scroll he had just finished reviewing. "But in our kingdom, any accusation, especially one leveled against a ruler, is a grave matter. One must be certain, with irrefutable evidence and reliable witnesses. If not, the allegation holds no water."

Emeriel shook her head, not hiding her displeasure.

Daemonikai shrugged. "It's the way of the court, young one. Zaiper is a nightmare, yes, but he's a cunning one. He's careful to leave no trail, no solid evidence, no credible witnesses. Until there's proof, it remains mere speculations."

"He doesn't like you very much," Emeriel said bluntly.

"The feeling is mutual," Daemonikai said, unbothered. "But for the most part, we keep out of each other's way." His eyes met hers. "Zaiper wants to be grand king."

Emeriel reared back. "Really?"

"Mmm."

She had never considered that possibility before, but now that she did...it made sense. Lord Zaiper had always come across as ambitious and scheming.

"If you knew that, why would you still keep someone like him by your side?" Emeriel asked incredulously.

King Daemonikai shrugged. "The Dragaxlov family has always seen the Naelzharoth as rivals, competitors. For millennia, even before Zaiper assumed the throne after his father, it has been that way. They want to be Nil'nhile."

Emeriel was intrigued. "What does that mean?"

"First. They wish to be 'first' in everything," he stated. "First ruler. First clan. Urekai has four clans and, thus, four rulers. Greyrock holds the headquarters for all northern Urekai, just as Frostfall holds for all southern Urekai... my clan. But as First Ruler, I oversee all. The Dragaxlovs have no right to encroach on my territory, but I can enter theirs. That," he smiled faintly, "is why they despise being second."

Emeriel's head bobbed as she absorbed this information.

Unrolling another scroll, King Daemonikai picked up his quill. "This rivalry didn't start with Zaiper, and it probably won't end with him."

"It can't be easy ruling alongside them."

"It's not difficult." King Daemonikai scribbled on the parchment, his tone light. "Everyone is entitled to their opinions and ambition, as long as they don't act on them."

"Actions are what breed consequences. Actions are what we prosecute." A shoulder lifted, and fell. "Zaiper might hunger for power, but he wouldn't dare act on them."

I think he might have played a part in what happened five hundred years ago.