

## Chapter 260

"Two years ago, I didn't know how to move forward after losing everything," he said, his voice low and husky, "I didn't want to move forward. I thought the pain and misery I felt could not get any worse, that I had hit the bottom of the abyss "

His eyes, filled with a deep sadness, holding hers captive as he brushed away a stray tear from her cheek. "But then I lost you, and the worst truly came."

Emeriel's breath hitched, tears spilling down her cheeks faster.

"I tried to forget you, but it was impossible. I didn't realize that you were the thread holding me together all along. Keeping me from falling apart. And when that thread was cut... I had no anchor." His hand gently cupped her neck. "Do you know how many times I wanted to come to you? How many times I had to talk myself out of coming for you?"

"Really?" she breathed, her voice catching in her throat.

"I should have chosen you over the damn guilt," he confessed, his voice laced with regret. "And when I went to the great mountains, I should have made the damn crossing."

"You were really going to come get me?" Her lower lip wobbled. "You went to the gr-great mountains?"

He nodded curtly. "You said I never knew you enough to feel more than guilt and pity, but I actually do, Emeriel."

"You know Galilea," she said, sadly. "I may be her, but she is not all of me, Your Grace. Most of the time, I had to hide who I truly was, just to survive."

He shook his head. "I don't mean Galilea. I mean the Emeriel who was there for me when I was feral." He gently wiped away another tear. "The one who saved my life."

The air rushed out of her lungs, and she took a step back, her eyes widening in disbelief. "You remember?"

"Everything," he revealed. "The good, the bad, the ugly. I remember all the sacrifices you made, even when I was undeserving of them."

"You really remember when it was just the beast and I?" She felt joy and relief. He finally has all the memories we shared in the beginning.

"Yes. I apologize for not remembering sooner." A shadow fell over his eyes, and he took a deep breath. "The more I tried to pretend that I was okay, that I wasn't missing you, the more I shut down. Coupled with everything else, my soul began to wither. I was ready to use death as an escape. But when I got to the otherside..." He paused, eyes softening. "Evie opened my eyes to the truth. She made me see things differently."

"Hold on. You met your dead bondmate?" Emeriel's brow furrowed.

He gave a nod, his voice soft. "Apparently, when a soul wanders into the otherside, their departed loved ones can feel their presence. She talked some sense into me. Made me see things clearly, admitting to myself every single thing I wanted to remain blind to."

"She spoke in favor of us?" Emeriel couldn't comprehend that. It must have been so hard for her. "She must have been a remarkable woman. Not everyone would do that."

Taking Emeriel's hand, King Daemonikai brought it to his lips, kissing each finger, one after the other. The warmth of his touch sent shivers down her spine.

"She was. And she helped me come to terms with many things, one of which is that I want to be with you, Emeriel." The conviction in his voice rang clear. "I wish to learn how to be better. How to take care of you the way you deserve. All I need from you is a chance to make this work."

"Is this... real?" she couldn't help asking, her heart in her throat. "I'm not dreaming?"

"All real, dearling." He stepped even closer, his presence enveloping her. "All real. If I come to your dreams, there will be far less talking done and much more touching."

She gave a watery laugh, looking down at their joined hands, a feeling of wonder swarming her. "Your Grace..."

"Daemon," he corrected gently.

She looked up at him, her cheeks warming. "I know," she whispered, shyly. "It's just... it's going to take time for the name to feel natural. You've always been 'Your Grace,' or 'King Daemonikai,' or 'the Grand King' to me. Even in my mind, that's how I address you. Either all those or..."

"Or...?"

The tips of her ears pinked. "Or...m-my Beloved."

His eyes darkened slightly, a hint of a smile curving his lips. "Always. You may call me that whenever you wish." His voice turned deeper, huskier, as he leaned slightly closer. "Although last night, I specifically remember someone screaming 'Daemon.' You cried my name so many times, I started to feel like the new god."

The warmth in her cheeks spread down her neck, her entire face heating up. "You... you shouldn't say things like that!" she gasped, her voice rising an octave. "You say the most unconventional things out loud!"

"You really are a pretty prudish little thing, aren't you?" He chuckled, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "And all mine."

The intensity of his claim rocked her. She liked it a lot.

"Yours," she echoed, her heart thrumming rapidly. "That is all I ever wanted to be. Yours."

He folded her into his arms again, kissing her forehead. "You will be that and more. I'm truly sorry about everything, Emeriel."

"I forgive you, and I'm sorry too..." Her heart was overflowing with love. She reveled in the feeling of being held by him, safe and secure in his arms. "I love you so much."

His breath caught, and his arms convulsed so slightly around her. "Emeriel... Tartarus, I don't know what an ancient like me did to deserve such a treasure like you. I have not saved a kingdom, nor have I cured all the sicknesses of the world. What goodness of such magnitude could I have done to earn you?"

Emeriel glowed from within. She felt cherished. Special.

I am the lucky one, Daemon. I always will be.