

## Chapter 262

PRINCESS EMERIEL

Gasps rippled through the court, stunned silence following.

Jaws dropped. The high lords and the grand lords.

Only Grand Lord Vladya seemed unaffected, one brow arching to his hairline as he leaned back in his chair.

Grand King Daemonikai extended his hands toward her, his emerald eyes softening as they locked onto hers. "Come to me, dearest."

Emeriel moved automatically, her feet carrying her forward before her mind could catch up. She felt dazed, her body acting on instinct as if pulled by an invisible tether.

Reaching him, she placed her trembling hands atop his, her gaze never leaving his.

"Her name is Emeriel Galilea Evenstone," Daemonikai announced, his voice unwavering. "Ukrea has blessed me with the gift of her, and today, I officially show her to you so she will be accorded the respect and honor she deserves—as my woman, and as my Soulbond."

A pin could have dropped and been heard. Not a single breath, not a whisper.

Or maybe it was just the ringing in Emeriel's ears.

His words hit her like a tidal wave. His woman. His Soulbond.

He was announcing them publicly. Officially claiming her.

Her heart pounded a fast, uneven rhythm as if it might burst free of her chest at any moment.

He smiled softly, just for her, as he gave her hands a reassuring squeeze. "As many of you know, I lost my family centuries ago." Daemonikai's deep voice rose in the stillness, his eyes sweeping across the room, locking onto each noble as if daring them to look away.

"It hasn't been easy. That pain... I never thought I could heal from it—Many of you witnessed what it did to me—how I fell apart. Descended into madness. I never thought I could find my way back. I thought my life was over... I wanted my life to be over."

Emeriel's eyes fell to their hands, still intertwined. Slowly, she raised her eyes to his.

"But this woman, pulled me back from the brink. Not just once but over and over again." His gaze returned to the court, his words ringing out with absolute clarity. "While many of you fought to eliminate my wild beast, she fought to save me. She offered her body and her blood, bringing me back from madness. I was drawn to her, even when I had no memory of who she truly was. Repeatedly, I sought her out, wanting to be near her... even when I thought she belonged to another."

They gasped again.

Emeriel couldn't bring herself to look away from him. His words were so raw, so sincere, they caused tears to blur her eyes.

Daemonikai released her hand, stepping back. Clasping his hand behind his back, he walked to the raised podium with regal grace.

From his new vantage point, he faced the court once more.

"And after I discovered who she truly was, I sent her away. But whatever was left of my empty heart—whatever small measure of life remaining—went with her. A sickness took root in me. My soul was dying, and I was sure that would be the end. But she came for me."

A muffled sob escaped Emeriel's lips, and she pressed a shaky hand to her mouth, trying to stifle her cries further.

"Even when she was hurting, even when anger burned in her heart, she came back." His voice softened, though it carried just as far. "And she saved me once again. Night and day, she stayed by my side, tending to me."

Her other hand frantically wiped at her tears, but it was a futile effort. They fell faster than she could chase them away.

Daemonikai's gaze finally rested on her again, filled with tenderness. "Today, I stand before this court to tell you all about this kind, beautiful princess Ukrea saw fit to bless me with." His lips curved into a soft smile. "And to announce that she is mine."

All eyes turned to her.

The nobles regarded her with shock, awe, and disbelief, as if they were seeing her for the first time.

Emeriel's heart swelled and ached all at once. This is real, right? Heavens, let this not be a dream.

"I wish to court her," Daemonikai announced suddenly. "To build something meaningful with her. Something that can, I hope, grow into something even more profound. So that one day, she may stand beside me as my Grand Queen."

The court erupted into chaos. That, apparently, was the last straw.

Loud murmurs, gasps, and shocked exclamations filled the air, echoing off the walls.

"How could you say such a thing, Your Grace?" A voice rose.

"It hasn't gotten to that!"

"Our Grand Queen... a human?!" one from the back exclaimed.

"After all they did to us? This cannot be happening!"

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

He let the noise swirl around him, his watchful gaze sweeping across the court as he observed them. Then, he swiveled his head, meeting the eyes of his grand rulers.

Zaiper's expression was a stormy scowl, his jaw clenched. As if he'd swallowed something bitter and couldn't spit it out.

Ottai wore a beaming grin so bright his eyes crinkled at the corners.

While Vladya offered a more reserved smile.

Glancing back at the court, his voice cut through the chaotic murmurs like a clap of thunder. "Silence."

The hall fell deathly still, leaving a ringing silence in its wake.

A nervous cough broke the quiet, drawing Daemonikai's attention to the right.

High Lord Jakal rose, stiff in his military uniform, as he raised a hand. "May I address the court, Your Grace?"

"Go ahead, Lord of Military Affairs."

Jakal shifted uncomfortably, his hands clasped tightly in front of him. "I understand where you are coming from, Your Majesty. Many of us do... it's just..." He hesitated, his eyes darting across the room before returning to the king. "It's going to be incredibly hard for our people to accept the idea of a human as our future Grand Queen. I mean, we lost so many to their kind. Entire families shattered. Many of us still carry those scars—both seen and unseen."