

## Chapter 265

"Starving yourself is not the solution," Vladya added quietly.

"She tried to kill Emeriel. My bloodhost—the one person whose existence is tied to keeping me alive—poisoned and almost killed my Soulbond, the one person in existence who is my life." The words came out in a suppressed fury, vibrating through the room.

His hand gripped the edge of the table until his knuckles turned white. "I knew Sinai was hard—vicious, even—but this? This is vile. This makes me question what else she's done. What other horrors she has hidden."

"You need her," Vladya said calmly, even as understanding gleamed in his silver-gray eyes. "Bloodhosts aren't just anyone, Daemon. You don't have another, nor does anyone else. They are exceedingly rare, you know this. For another to emerge, the current one must die, and even then, it could take years. Many of our kind do not survive the waiting period."

"You're not telling me anything I don't already know."

"I wonder about that, you need a reminder, evidently," Vladya added. "Your control is legendary but you are hungry. Very soon, you will start throwing pheromones around."

"It will not get to that," Daemonikai snapped, his patience thinning.

"You cannot give Sinai the maximum punishment," Vladya said warily. "She must get away with the minimum. I know it, you know it, the court knows it. Why not get it over with?"

Daemonikai glanced at the abandoned glass of water, lips pressed to a thin line. He knew all that. That was precisely why he tried to avoid dwelling on Sinai and her crime.

"While staying away might be punishment for her, you're also punishing yourself. You are still recovering from soul death, and on top of that, you're healing from the poison ravaging your organs. You need to feed."

Daemonikai sighed, sinking into the chair opposite his friend, leaning back, and closing his eyes.

He tried to block out the incessant pounding in his skull, the headache constant now. At this rate, he'd win a trophy for enduring the sheer number of headaches plaguing him.

Rarely did a moment pass where his mind was clear and pain-free, and he knew—deep down—he couldn't keep this up much longer.

"I will feed from Emeriel when it becomes too much," he muttered, the words heavy with reluctance.

Vladya nodded. "That's good—great even. Her blood is special to you; it should curb the hunger, at least for a while." He hesitated, his gaze steady on Daemonikai. "However, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, my friend, but you know you can't sustain yourself on it. It won't satisfy you, nor will it restore your full strength. She may be your soulmate, Daemon, but she is not your bloodhost."

"Have you forgotten? A thousand years ago, I survived without Sinai's blood for five years." Daemonikai grunted.

"Of course, I remember. She was banished from Urai." Vladya's expression turned dark. "You know what else I remember? The suffering you endured during that time. Evie nearly died because you were draining her dry and we nearly lost over five hundred people in this kingdom... twenty we actually did lose because you couldn't stop."

Daemonikai grimaced. Those were dark times, one of intense suffering and loss he preferred not to revisit.

"Think it over, my friend," Vladya said, rising. "Resolve this situation, and quickly. Even if you intend to feed from Emeriel, you know you'd never forgive yourself if you put her life in danger."

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PRINCESS EMERIEL

She sank deeper into the warm water, letting the soothing heat seep into her throbbing muscles. The ache she felt all day finally starting to melt away.

Leaning back, she closed her eyes, the faint ripple of water lapping against the tub. She smiled in enjoyment.

Emeriel didn't regret staying. What she did regret was the time she had wasted being miserable. She had spent so long resisting, refusing to give her Beloved—herself a chance to be happy.

A soft knock broke through her thoughts.

Emeriel opened her mouth, ready to dismiss whoever it was.

"Em, are you in there?"

Aekeira. Her heart skipped.

Sooner or later, she knew she'd have to face her sister. If there was anyone she had missed as much as her grand king, it was Aekeira.

"I'm in here," she called out in a soft voice.

The door opened, and Aekeira hurried in, her smile radiant and infectious. "Oh, Em, I heard everything that happened!" She was practically glowing with excitement. "I'm so happy, so so happy for you."

In a rush, Aekeira crouched by the tub, throwing her arms around Emeriel's neck in a tight hug. "I'm so glad you came back!"

Emeriel closed her eyes, leaning into the familiar warmth of her sister's embrace. Heavens, how I have missed this.

"I'm glad I came back too," Emeriel admitted in a murmur.

"So you were really going to leave?" Aekeira pulled back, her expression shifting to one of hurt. "Without telling anyone? Without telling me? You were going to leave me here... all alone?"

"You are happy here," Emeriel met her sister's eyes. "I didn't want to tell you because I didn't want to jeopardize that—or worse, make you feel like you needed to leave with me. And I'm not sorry for protecting your happiness."

"You are a horrible sister," Aekeira's voice broke, as her lower lip quivered. "Terrible, absolutely horrible... and completely adorable sister."

Emeriel snorted.

"When rumors about what happened in court started flying, I could hardly believe them." Aekeira let out a watery laugh. "But then Vlad—he told me everything, and..."

"Vlad?" Emeriel arched a brow. "As in Lord Vladya?"

A soft blush spread across her Aekeira's cheeks.

"Huh. Interesting." Emeriel bit back a smirk.

"What made you change your mind?" Aekeira asked quickly, steering the conversation back.

"I couldn't bring myself to cross Boundary Lake," Emeriel's voice dipped low. "Every step felt like I was tearing my heart out." She hesitated. "Last night, I... uhm..."

"You what?"

Emeriel's eyes dropped, a small, wistful smile playing on her lips. "We were intimate. And it was perfect. Not just the act itself but everything. The way his arms felt around me... the things he said. Just looking into his eyes while we were..." She trailed off, heat flooding her face at the memory. "Let's just say suppressing my feelings after that wasn't exactly easy."

Her sister's eyes grew soft. "You don't know how joyful hearing this makes me."

As Emeriel climbed out of the tub, her sister bustled over to rummage through the drawers, pulling out a brush.

Emeriel slipped into her nightwear, her movements slowing as she caught sight of Aekeira. A wave of nostalgia washed over her.

It was their old routine, taking care of each other like this. It felt like a lifetime ago.

"How do you feel now?" Aekeira asked, sparing her a glance as she set the brush down. Her eyes held a trace of worry. "Really, on the inside?"

"Happy," Emeriel breathed truthfully. "Incredibly, immeasurably happy."

Beaming, Aekeira gestured toward the chair.

Emeriel took her seat, swallowing hard as her eyes met their reflection in the mirror.

For the first time, she noticed something different about her sister. A radiant glow seeming to shine from deep inside.

Aekeira had been smiling since she'd walked through the door, looking so contented.

Her sister was... happier. Truly and completely happy.