

Chapter 267

PRINCESS EMERIEL

At the sight of Grand King Daemonikai, her pain...dulled. Receded into the background.

All she could focus on was him. How to shield him from the agony she knew was coming.

"Daemon..." Her voice wavered stepping toward him, her head shaking slightly. He was never meant to find out.

"Is it true?" he asked, his voice hoarse and trembling. "Did we make a child two years ago and lo—"
— His throat worked, hard. "Did we lose a child?"

The dread on his face was undeniable.

His eyes were practically begging her to say no. To tell him it wasn't true.

That it was a lie, a cruel jest. A fabricated story to placate Aekeira.

Emeriel saw it all in his gaze. The raw fear, the refusal to believe.

And for a passing moment, she considered lying to him. Telling him exactly what he wanted to hear. Anything at all to spare him the weight of this unbearable misery.

But lying would not save them. Not from this.

"Yes," she admitted. "I had a miscarriage."

He staggered back as if struck.

"No," he breathed, his eyes searching the ceiling, the walls, anywhere but her face.

"It cannot be." He shook his head violently, as if trying to dislodge the truth. "It cannot be."

Emeriel's eyes leaked more tears.

Her sister moved in her periphery, wiping away her own tears. Aekeira met her eyes briefly and mouthed, "I will be back later."

The sound of the door closing barely registered. Emeriel's focus remained fixed on her Beloved. "Daemon, I am sorry."

"But it cannot be." He closed the distance between them in an instant, his hands gripping her shoulders. Not harshly, but with the desperate strength of a man barely hanging on. "It's not possible."

"It is." Her face scrunched as fresh sobs racked her. "I got pregnant, Your Grace. I carried your child. And then I..."

Her hands flew to her mouth, muffling the sound of her cries. "And then I lost him. I didn't even know I was pregnant. I..."

Daemon's hands trembled against her shoulders before suddenly falling away. It was as though all his strength had left him in a single breath.

He turned without a word, his movements slow and heavy, and began walking.

Out of the chambers and into the hall.

His shoulders stooped, head hung low.

He looked so defeated it hurt Emeriel to her core.

Wegai stepped forward as if to follow, but she shook her head, silently commanding him to stay back.

The head guard obeyed, though he looked plainly worried.

Emeriel followed Daemonikai, keeping two paces behind him as he wandered aimlessly down the hall. His steps were leaden, dragging... like each one was a battle.

He moved out of the building and into the courtyard.

The night air was cool, the breeze swirling around them, tugging at their clothes. Emeriel wanted to say something—anything—to offer him comfort. But no words came to mind.

Sometimes, words simply were not enough.

His body swayed and he staggered on his feet.

Emeriel quickly closed the gap between them, wrapping her arms tightly around his midriff.

"Daemon..." she whispered in a plea.

For a moment, he allowed it.

He let her bear half his weight, leaning into her as though the burden was too much to carry alone.

Tears streaming down her face, she held him that way for a while.

Daemonikai stared blankly into the distance, his breath coming in uneven bursts, his eyes dry.

For that small mercy, Emeriel was grateful. She didn't know if she could bear to see him cry. It would surely destroy her completely.

The breeze whispered around them, calm and gentle. If only its refreshing touch could reach inside, soothe the pain killing them both.

At last, Daemonikai straightened, stepping out of her embrace. He didn't look at her as he began walking again in slow, wandering steps.

Emeriel watched him for a moment before following. Two steps behind, just like before.

They walked out of the courtyard into the meadow, the stars twinkling like scattered diamonds above them. The moon's glow over the empty field, trailing their path.

When they reached the middle of the field, Daemonikai stopped abruptly.

Emeriel halted a few steps behind him, watching as his shoulders sagged once more in despair.

Then he dropped to his knees, arms hanging limply at his sides.

Tilting his head back, he stared up at the endless sky. "How could you do this to me? How could you..."

Emeriel swiped at her tears, even as fresh ones spilled over. She stayed where she was, resisting the pull to go to him. Giving him the space he needed.

"You took my first son," his voice trembled in the stillness. "My second son. And now..."

His head fell forward, his chin nearly brushing his chest. As his body swayed, he thrust his arms out to catch himself, his hands bracing against the ground, preventing a complete face plant. "How could you let this happen again? How could you punish me this way?"

Every word, every heart-wrenching question was a dagger to Emeriel's heart.

Every part of her screamed to comfort him. She ached to go to him, to hold him, but she didn't.

Heavens, it was so hard. What if his healing soul, so fragile after all it has been through, started dying again?

Weeping silently, she forced her feet to remain planted.

"You could have punished me in any other way, but not this." A single tear rolled down his cheek, glistening in the moonlight.

"Not this..." His voice broke as he looked down at his trembling hands. "Is it not better to never give them at all, if you keep r-ripping them from my arms like this?"

Resolve crumbling, she walked to him unsteadily until she stood in front of him.

"Get up, please." Bending, she gripped him under his arm, trying to lift him, but he was too heavy.

Fortunately, he helped her, shifting his weight, straightening to kneel upright.

But before he could pull him to his feet, he wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close. Holding her so desperately, like an anchor... as if to keep himself from breaking apart entirely.

"How could this happen to us?" he asked shakily, looking up at her. Another tear traced a slow path down his face. "How could we lose a child?"