

Chapter 269

HIGH LORD HERODIS

He stood by the window, gazing out over the open field bathed in moonlight.

The night breeze whispered around him, carrying a lovely scent of grass and distant woods.

News of the court had reached his ears, and he couldn't stop smiling.

"I am so happy for you, my dear friend," he murmured softly, his voice barely audible over the rustling leaves outside.

"Who are you speaking to?"

Herod turned at the sound of the familiar voice, catching sight of Dale stepping into the room.

His son's sharp, inquisitive gaze swept over him as he entered.

"No one, son," Herod smoothened his expression.

Dale's brow lifted, his skepticism clear. "So now you talk to yourself?" He sighed, striding to the bed and flopping onto it with an exaggerated motion. "I told you, Father, this loneliness is starting to get to you."

"I am not lonely. I have you," Herod countered defensively. "Besides, I am not a lunatic."

Dale snorted, shaking his head. "If you say so." Leaning back on the bed, he propped his head on his hands. "But tell me, why are you smiling? Do not think I missed it."

Herod chuckled. "I am grateful, is all. Things are finally starting to look up for my friend."

"Friend?" Dale frowned for a moment before realization dawned on his face. "Oh, you mean the grand king's Soulbond? The human princess?"

"Uh-huh, that's the one." Herod's smile deepened.

Dale knew everything about his friendship with Emeriel...Herod had told him the full story a years ago.

"Today, the Grand King made an official statement, and my friend even got to address the court," he informed his son, trying to keep his emotions in check, though warmth swelled in his chest. "I still remember vividly how impossible this day seemed two years ago."

"You live dangerously, Father." Dale's voice carried a note of incredulity, a tone Herod had grown used to over the years. "Heavens, of all the females to be friends with, you chose The Ultimate's woman? I'm still amazed by it all. You cannot imagine the fear I felt when I read your letter detailing everything that happened."

"I told you, it was not like that—"

"Look, I know you're lonely, Father. I get it. But please, refrain from making reckless decisions and taking deadly risks just for companionship."

Herod resisted the urge to roll his eyes, keeping his smile steady.

"Yes, sir," he said lightly, humor dancing in his voice.

No matter how often he assured Dale his relationship with Emeriel had been purely platonic, his son remained unconvinced.

Some days, Dale seemed to believe him. On others, he spoke as if expecting the main gates to burst open, the grand king storming in to deliver swift vengeance for daring to befriend his Soulbond.

Herod understood where his son's worries stemmed from, however misplaced they might be.

Dale claimed his return home was purely for business in the city, but Herod did not buy it. Certain his son had come back to keep him company, his arrival happening only three months after receiving Herod's heartfelt letter.

Glancing at his boy, now reclining with his eyes closed, a deep sense of pride filled Herod.

At three hundred and fifty years old, Dale was every inch the mature, refined gentleman he and Rivera had raised him to be.

Regardless of Dale's reasons for returning, Herod was simply grateful to have him home. As much as he denied it, the loneliness had crept into his life in recent years.

His son's presence made it easier to bear. Just as Emeriel's companionship had once done.

He missed it, he missed her. Missed the ease with which she had once filled the silences.

Herod was glad she was back in Urai, and he was proud of the progress she was making.

Turning back to the window, he let the cool breeze caress his face. The field stretched before him, endless, bathed in silvery moonlight.

He closed his eyes briefly, his heart lighter than it had been in years.

PRINCESS EMERIEL

It was a long journey beyond the fortress into the woods.

For hours, Grand King Daemonikai ran like a blur through the tall trees while she held on tight, hands secured around his shoulders. The wind rushed past them, whooshing all around them.

The ride was both exhilarating and calming.

When they finally reached a small cottage nestled beyond the mountains, he slowed.

The structure came into view, elegant, surrounded by a picket fence entwined with flowering vines. The cottage looked peaceful.

Daemonikai set her down gently before the door, taking her hand as he led her inside. The interior pristine yet homely, held the faint scent of lavender in the air.

They moved through the space in a companionable silence.

While Daemon filled the tub with steaming water, Emeriel wandered into the bedroom, her fingers trailing over the polished wood of the furniture.

She opened the closet, revealing a variety of clothing. Rows of tailored male attire alongside an assortment of feminine clothes.

The women's garments caught her eye. Each piece beautifully made, from elaborate ceremonial gowns to soft, delicate nightgowns.

Are they his late bondmate's?

"They are not Evie's."

She turned, startled to find him leaning casually against the doorway, his arms crossed.

"I had the servants prepare the closet for you after I woke up. I always intended for us to come here."

"You do not have to explain," she said, her fingers brushing the fabric of a gown. "But thank you."

He nodded once. "Come, the bath is ready."

Minutes later, they were in the tub, bathing in silence. The warmth of the water soothing the exhaustion from their bodies.

Following his guidance, Emeriel turned, giving him her back as he ran the washcloth gently over her skin. When he finished, he presented his broad back to her.

She mimicked his earlier motions, tracing the cloth over the expanse of his shoulders, the muscles beneath her touch strong.

Afterward, they dressed for the night and laid on the bed, facing one another. Gazing at each other for a long moment.