

Chapter 281

He landed a brutal blow to Ottai's stomach, stealing his breath, and Ottai staggered back, gasping for air.

"What's going on, Your Grace?" he wheezed, wiping blood from his mouth as he forced himself to stand. "Get a hold of yourself! Even you in your right mind would not want to go to her in this state!"

Daemonikai broke into a dead run, moving with a speed that defied his usual grace.

Ottai gave chase but couldn't match his speed.

People scattered out of their grand king's path, their screams and shouts filling the air.

Workers abandoned their carriages, mothers scooped up their crying younglings, everyone rushing for safety.

"What's happening?!" Zaiper appeared from the opposite direction, running towards Ottai in alarm.

"Stop him!" Ottai shouted, his voice desperate. "He has lost control! He cannot reach his woman like this!"

Zaiper cursed, his eyes widening with apprehension and... something else, as he joined the chase.

Something Ottai couldn't quite decipher.

PRINCESS EMERIEL

At the door, Lord Vladya turned back to look at Emeriel. "Thank you for being there for him that night. When Aekeira informed me of the baby, I was... worried all night. I knew he would take the loss hard."

Pain flickered across his features. "He has suffered enough loss already... dangling on the edge because of it..." He trailed off, his brows drawn together in concern.

"You don't need to thank me, My Lord. I will always be there for him. I love him so much," Emeriel said with a soft smile, unashamed to admit it to anyone.

"And what about you?" Vladya asked, his gaze searching her face. "It must not have been easy for you either."

"It wasn't," she admitted honestly. "But I had him. We had each other."

Lord Vladya's expression turned thoughtful. "You know, I yearned for a child for so long it was a craving deep in my soulless heart. This longing has been inside me for so long, it feels as though it has become a part of me."

He exhaled heavily. "But then, when I think of Daemonikai's losses, I wonder which is worse: never having them, or having them and losing them?"

Emeriel carefully masked her surprise, even as her heart ached for him.

Never would she have imagined this formidable ruler confiding in her, sharing something so personal. How much he wanted offspring wasn't news to her, but his telling her felt... special.

"I loved his late children like my own," Vladya continued, his voice quieter now. "I watched Alvin and Myka grow from children into fine young males. When they died, and their father went mad, I had to bury them. That loss has stayed with me to this day, and I wasn't even their father." He looked away, jaw tight. "Just... thank you for not giving up on him."

Aekeira slipped her hand into Emeriel's. When Emeriel looked at her sister, she saw a watery smile on her face.

"He won't always get it right." Lord Vladya's gaze shifted to Aekeira as he spoke. As though imploring her as well. "But don't give up on him."

"Rest assured, Lord Vladya, I will never give up on him," Emeriel said with conviction, "My only regret was waiting so long to rekindle what we have. But even then, I never stopped loving him, neither did I let him go. And I never will."

A commotion arose outside.

Distant shouts, cries, and hurried footsteps.

Aekeira turned alarmed eyes to the door. "What's going on?"

Lord Vladya stepped out of the room, only to collide with... Daemonikai.

"Daemon? Why are you running—?" Vladya's brows furrowed as Lord Ottai and Lord Zaiper appeared behind him, hot on his heels. "What's happening?"

"Take a good look at him, Vladya." Lord Ottai looked deeply sadly and confused all at once. "Just look."

What was going on? Emeriel remained inside the room, watching the exchange with growing unease, heart thumping in her chest.

Lord Vladya turned to Daemonikai, watching him with scrutinizing eyes.

"Get to her. Have her," Daemonikai growled in a primal voice. "Drink her. Mount, mount, mount."

Whatever Lord Vladya saw in those eyes seemed to alarm him too because his entire body tensed visibly.

"Daemon, you cannot take her in this state," Vladya said firmly, trying to reason with him. "You will hurt her immensely."

"So thirsty. So hungry."

It became clear to Lord Vladya that his words were falling on deaf ears, and he glared at Lord Ottai and Lord Zaiper. "What the fuck is this?! Why is he mindless?"

Emeriel's ears rang. Mindless? Did she... hear that clearly?

Stepping forward, she tried to intervene. "What is—"

"Stay right there and do not say a word!" Lord Vladya and Ottai shouted in unison.

Emeriel was about to ask why, but... she didn't need to. Because right before her eyes, her Beloved went berserk.

Growling and snarling in her direction. He lunged forward, trying to force his way through the others.

Her voice had acted like a trigger of some kind.

Lord Vladya held him. "No, Daemon—"

"Mate! Mine!" he snarled, his claws extending with a loud shink.

"We have no idea how it happened," Lord Ottai explained, tensely. "He just suddenly became like this."

Lord Zaiper demanded. "What's wrong with him?"

"Daemon, Daemon, listen to me..." Lord Vladya's voice was desperate, placating.

Ignoring the claws, he gripped the grand king's shoulders, trying to force him to make eye contact. "You cannot touch your mate like this. If you mount or drink from her in this state, you pose a very serious risk to her life."

Daemonikai lashed out with no finesse and no warning. With a wildness that was shockingly brutal as he attacked Lord Vladya.

The male—her Daemon, or at least the one who wore his face—attacked his best friend, the one he loved most, with an intent to kill.

Lord Vladya took his half-shift form, roaring as he fought back.

Lord Ottai and Zaiper moved quickly, trying to restrain Daemonikai from behind.

The commotion was deafening. A crowd was gathering.

Emeriel could hear other voices in the distance, scared and panicked.

"He must never get into this chamber!" Lord Vladya barked, his voice strained with effort. "Aekeira, take your sister and go through the window! Ottai, grab his wrists!"

"Must get to her!" Daemonikai roared, swiping his claws towards Vladya's neck.

Lord Vladya deflected the blow, but the claws still grazed him. Blood trickled down.

Emeriel's heart hammered against her rib. What is wrong with my mate?

Seeing him so out of control, ruled completely by instinct, filled her with a dread that chilled her bones.

She longed to call out to him, to try and reach the Daemonikai she knew, but the grand rulers' warnings held her back.

And his eyes... those green and yellow eyes...

They remained locked on her, burning with lust and something—Something wild and deadly.

Unlike anything she had ever seen in them before.

The first night Emeriel had met the beast came to mind. The night the feral him had mounted her.

Her hands turned clammy, and she gripped her garment tightly. The vivid memory of that night... how intense and unpleasant it had been.

That night, the beast had scented her, recognizing her to some extent because of the bond they shared.

Her male and his beast were not entirely aware but had a semblance of instinct urging them to keep her alive... regardless of what they did to her.

But their bond was severed now.

And as her gaze searched his eyes she found... nothing.

No spark of recognition.

No trace of connection.

Only wild lust and thirst, a hunt for the woman he wanted to sate it on.

And for the first time in a long time, Emeriel was terrified of him.

Watching the way he was determined to kill the people standing in his way, an ugly feeling rose in her gut.

One that told her... tonight will not end well.