

Chapter 291

Emeriel was glad Daemonikai had returned to his senses. Whatever had overtaken him that night had been terrifying. Uncontrollable.

She could still see the wild, vacant look in his eyes. She could still feel what had happened afterward.

Shoving those vile, disturbing memories down, Emeriel thought of something else.

The days before that horrible night. Their days together at the cottage.

She thought of the male who was her soulmate. Who had never given up on her, even when she had given up on herself.

Daemonikai had chased her tirelessly. Relentlessly. He had been determined to prove their bond deserved another chance.

Her grand king had stood proudly in court and fought for her. Before an audience filled with those who hated her kind, he declared her his Soulbond. His Woman.

And Emeriel wouldn't lose him over this. Never.

"I know that look."

Emeriel blinked, looking at her sister, whose head had lifted again to watch her. How long had she been observing her?

Aekeira's brow lifted. "You're not giving up on him, are you?"

"Never," Emeriel whispered matter-of-factly.

Aekeira nodded. The corners of her lips tugged upward. "Mmm. I didn't think you would."

Then, she settled her head back onto Emeriel's belly.

"No protests?" Emeriel was mildly surprised.

Aekeira sighed. "Emeriel, you have loved this male even when he was nothing more than a mindless beast we had to serve to survive. Even as you laid there, unconscious and dying, I knew when you woke, you wouldn't give up on him. It's just who you are. And I respect that."

Emeriel's lips softened into a faint smile. "Thank you."

"Who would have believed, ten years ago, that this would be our life today? That you, Em, would get to live like this. A girl. A princess."

Emeriel's gaze drifted to the ceiling. "It amazes me too. If someone had told me back then that I would be here, living this life, I would have thought them insane."

"I used to think the best thing that could ever happen to me was being sold to a kind aristocrat." Aekeira let out a small, bitter laugh. "Someone who might make me his breeder. Maybe even let me service his men to 'keep them happy' but would at least offer me protection. He'd keep others, the ones he didn't authorize, from hurting me. That was my dream, Em. That was hope to me back then."

Emeriel didn't chastise her for the harshness of the thought. She saw the truth in it.

Back then, such a life would have been considered a blessing. Compared to the endless horrors they had endured before meeting the Urekai, it was almost a mercy.

"I never thought we would find love here, Keira," Emeriel said softly. "Powerful men who care for us in return. Who want to protect us, possess us, and keep us for themselves instead of sharing us. So what if they have more demons to fight than the demonchasers?"

Emotions welled up as Emeriel continued. "So what if their minds deteriorate from time to time, and they do things they cannot control? So what if they are broken?"

"You're right." Aekeira's throat worked against Emeriel's belly as she swallowed hard, her voice quiet when she spoke. "And that's why they have us. We will always be there to pull them out of the dark. Even if it consumes us. Because that's how much we love them."

She paused. "Now I fully understand why you did what you did, Em. Because it's exactly what I would have done for Lord Vladya. What I have already done for him in the past."

Emeriel stroked her sister's hair gently. "I remember. That day, when my secret came out in the courtyard, Lord Vladya had a terrible episode. You told me."

"It was the day he opened up to me for the first time." Aekeira smiled faintly, caught in the memory. "The day I realized I was in love with him. He had so many dark thoughts back then...he wanted to whip me but thankfully, he ended up whipping the slave master who hurt me instead." In a lower tone, she whispered. "Even then, when I was so terrified, I was fully prepared to be whipped by him, Em."

Emeriel stared at her sister with sorrow and admiration.

"That's why I knew, deep down, that I would do anything for him," Aekeira said, her voice dripping emotion. "I love that male so much that making sacrifices for him comes easy. It always has."

Emeriel understood completely. Exactly how I feel.

"Maybe one day, we will tell the story of this day too." Aekeira's tone turned wistful, "All of this will be a thing of the past. My Vladya will have his soul back, and I will be a Syren. We wouldn't just be bonded, we would have children together. He will be free of his feral symptoms, and we will finally be happy."

Emeriel smiled tenderly, letting her sister's dream wrap around her like a warm blanket. I like this dream.

So, she added hers. "Maybe one day, my Daemon will no longer battle mindlessness. He will sleep peacefully, without the nightmares that leave him restless. His soul-death healed, his blood nourishment no longer a worry. Maybe our bond will form again, stronger than ever."

She paused, her voice growing even softer. "Maybe one day I will give him children and help him heal from the ones he lost. And maybe, in time, he will grow to love me as much as I love him."

Aekeira rose, staring at her with tears shimmering in her eyes.

"And all these dark times will be behind us," Emeriel smiled through her own tears, still spilling her own dreams. "He will be healthy and strong again, like the Daemonikai he was before the tragedy. The Grand King Daemonikai of the legends, without the bondage of tragedy holding him down. Maybe one day, we will look back on this moment and smile, saying... 'Look how far we have come...'"

Aekeira shifted closer and pulled her into a hug.

Emeriel felt her throat tighten as she returned the hug, even as the pressure sent a sharp pain through her spine.

But she bit it back, choosing instead to lean into the embrace, her tears spilling on Aekeira's shoulder.

"Yes, Em," Aekeira whispered, her voice warm in her ear. "Maybe one day, all of this will merely be a story of the past."

Maybe.

Emeriel blinked back tears as a bittersweet smile touched her lips. What a beautiful, fragile illusion they had painted together.

A dream of a brighter future, untouched by the dark shadows of their present.

"When I recover more, I'm going to go see my Beloved," Emeriel declared softly. "I don't like the thought of him spending days lost in self-loathing, drowning in guilt and self-destruction."

Aekeira pulled back just enough to look at her, her own tears threatening to fall.

She gave a small nod. "Then I guess we need to get you recovered as soon as we can."

Emeriel managed a watery smile. "Then I guess so."