

Chapter 294

PRINCESS EMERIEL

Emeriel stood before the tall mirror, staring at her reflection as Amie fastened the buttons down the back of her gown.

The fabric felt soft against her skin, designed in a simple yet elegant style that prioritized comfort over extravagance.

Behind her, the faint clinking of glass jars echoed as Madam Livia brewed her final portion of the morning.

It's been four days since she fully woke up. Most of Emeriel's bruises had faded. Her face looked less pale, and the dark shadows under her eyes were fading too.

Though her left arm still ached from time to time, the swelling had gone down, and she could now use it without much trouble. She flexed her fingers absently, with caution.

"You look so beautiful, my princess," Amie let out a wistful sigh, stepping back to admire her work.

"Thank you, Amie." Beautiful wasn't the word she'd use, but at least she looked better than she had in recent weeks. That was enough for now.

"Here," Madam Livia came to her with a steaming wooden cup. "Drink this while it's still hot, Princess."

Emeriel took the cup, its bitter scent wafting up as she brought it to her lips. She drank it quickly, grimacing as the sharp taste hit her tongue and burned down her throat.

"Sorry about the taste," the older woman said with a grimace of her own. "But it's for your own good. You have made remarkable progress, and I'm glad to see you doing better."

Emeriel managed a small smile. "Thanks, Madam Livia."

"It's just Livia now," the headmaid reminded her for what felt like the hundredth time.

"That will take some getting used to, so until I do, you're still Madam Livia."

The older woman sighed, shaking her head with faint exasperation.

"Amie, you may leave us now," Livia instructed, and the young girl bowed before slipping out of the chamber, the door closing softly behind her.

Emeriel adjusted the hem of her gown, smoothing it over her hips.

Through the mirror, she noticed Livia shifting uncomfortably, her hands fidgeting with the apron she wore.

"Is anything the matter?" Emeriel met her gaze through the mirror.

Livia wavered. "It's just... I know what he did was brutal and unforgivable. But I hope you will keep an open heart. He is not that kind of male. Lord Zaiper is more likely to—"

"Madam Livia—"

"—and I know," Livia pressed on in a rush, "I know he hasn't come to see you again after that first day, but he—"

"We will be alright," Emeriel cut in firmly, turning fully to face the headmaid. "There's no need to worry. He is my destined mate. Dormant bond or not, severed or not, I'm not letting him go."

Relief spread across the headmaid's face, and her shoulders slumped. "He will likely push you away," she mumbled in defeat. "He won't even see Lord Vladya."

"He can try."

The headmaid regarded her for a long moment. At last, she nodded.

"Very well, Princess. I will leave you to finish getting ready." Livia inclined her head before leaving the room, the door clicking shut behind her.

Left alone, Emeriel turned back to the mirror. She adjusted the sleeve of her gown, smoothing the fabric over her shoulder.

It's alright, my Beloved. I will come to you.

.....

Emeriel approached the corner that led to the Royal Residence. She moved slower than usual, her body still weak from recovery, but she carried herself with grace, refusing to let her exhaustion show.

"You may go back, whoever you are," came Wegai's firm voice from around the corner. "The Grand King is not receiving visitors at the—"

Emeriel turned the corner, and Wegai stopped instantly.

His sharp gaze softened as he quickly straightened, bowing low. "Princess."

"Is His Majesty inside?"

The head soldier faltered, his lips parting as if to speak, but no words came.

The pause told her everything she needed to know. Without waiting for his answer, Emeriel stepped past him.

Entering through the grand entrance, the familiar corridors felt eerily still. The servants paused in their work to greet her hastily, their eyes lingering on her curiously before they hurried on.

At the door of his bedchamber, Emeriel raised her hand to knock. Pausing, she decided against it and, instead, reached for the handle.

She half-expected it to be locked, but to her surprise, the door turned easily under her hand.

The chamber was dark.

Stepping inside, Emeriel stopped just past the threshold, her gaze adjusting to the dim light. All the curtains were drawn tightly, blocking out the sun.

The scent of stale ale and unventilated space assaulted her nose. Scanning the room, she searched for him.

His once-immaculate bedchamber was in a mess. Clothes were strewn carelessly across the furniture, and empty bottles of ale littered the floor.

But...he doesn't drink. Emeriel's heart lurched.

King Daemonikai had once told her ale upset his stomach and made his beast restless.

Then, she heard a faint groan.

Following the sound, she walked around to the other side of the bed...and there he was.

Grand King Daemonikai lay sprawled on the floor, his large frame partially hidden by the shadow of the bed. Head rested against the side of the mattress, eyes closed.

"Your Grace?" she called, tentatively.

Nothing.

Emeriel bent down, placing a hand lightly on his shoulder. "Your Highness...?"

His eyes snapped open, the sudden movement startling her.

Gaze unfocused, darted around the room as if trying to piece together where he was. Then his nostrils flared... and then his eyes locked onto her.

They watched each other without any reaction from him. Then, without warning, images of him, unhinged and merciless, tore through her mind.

The memories of that night.

Emeriel squeezed her eyes shut so tightly it almost hurt, trying to banish them with sheer will, fighting to steady her breathing.

Then, he sighed. "It's nice to know you can still visit my dreams."

Pulling herself out of there, she cleared her throat. "It's not a dream..."

Daemonikai blinked.

For someone surrounded by gallons of ale, he didn't look drunk, but he also didn't look entirely present.

"You know, I think I prefer this dream." He said. "It's better compared to..."