

## Chapter 295

"Please, get up." She tried to pull him upright, but it was like trying to lift a slab of solid rock.

"I need you to help me here," she said in a strained voice, bracing herself as she slid both hands under his arms to support him.

Another heavy sigh. But, he moved, pushing himself off the floor. As he stood to his full height, he leaned heavily against her, burying his face into the crook of her neck.

"For someone who's only a dream," he murmured in a muffled voice against her skin, "you smell incredible."

Then, he pulled back, the haze in his eyes clearing. "Emeriel? What are you doing here? You should be in bed."

"I'm fine right where I am." Her eyes swept the room again, taking in the disorder. "What are you doing, Daemon? This isn't you."

He looked away. "Well, it seems I do not know myself anymore, anyway."

"Come, let's get out of here. We can wait in the study while the servants clean up."

Battle warred in his face. He looked at her with pain and hesitation as though he couldn't decide whether to accept the hand she was offering or to retreat further into the darkness.

"Emeriel..."

"Please," she urged, taking his hand in hers. "Do it for me."

After a long, tense pause, he let her guide him toward the door. But just as they reached it, he stopped.

"Why don't you wait in my study?" he said, his tone quieter now. More careful. "I could... also use a bath."

Emeriel wanted to argue.

Every instinct screamed at her not to let him out of her sight, not in the state he was in. But the pleading look in his eyes gave her pause.

He was asking for space, asking for some measure of control over himself.

"Okay," she released his hand. "But I'll be waiting for you."

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Busying herself with a historical book on his shelf, Emeriel waited in the dim study, the soft light from the fireplace flickering across the room.

The creak of the door snapped her head up. Daemonikai stepped into the study, closing the door quietly behind him.

He looked like himself again.

Gone were the filthy, wrinkled nightrobes, replaced with one of his heavy black garments embroidered with white designs along the hem and cuffs. His long hair was neatly combed and tied back at his nape, cascading like silk down his back. He stood straight and composed.

"I apologize for keeping you waiting," His deep voice was soft as he walked toward her.

"I didn't notice," Emeriel held up the book briefly before setting it down. Letting her worry show as she studied him. "How do you feel? You did have a lot to drink."

"You are worried about me?" He stopped just in front of her, those emerald eyes locking onto hers. "I should be asking you that question, not the other way around."

His gaze dropped. His voice carried shame. "There are no words to describe how I feel for what I did. None that could articulate how deeply sorry I am."

Emeriel didn't wait for him to say more, closing the remaining distance between them and wrapping her arms around his neck.

He stiffened instantly. Taut like a bowstring drawn too tightly.

"Please hold me," she whispered.

For the longest moment, he didn't react.

Then, at last, his arms came around her.

Slowly at first, then tightly. Desperately. Drawing her closer, clutching her in a way that made her gasp. Clinging to her like a drowning man who finally found something solid to hold on to.

"I am so sorry from the depths of my heart," he breathed, burying his face into the curve of her neck. "I know those words are inadequate. A feeble attempt to make up for—"

"Give yourself a break," she interrupted in a small voice as she nuzzled against his neck. Ravenously breathing in his familiar scent. "Do me one favor. Stop hating yourself. Stop the guilt, the anger. We have been through far worse. We'll get through this...together."

"No, there is nothing worse than this. There is..." a shaky breath. "I have prepared a special carriage and entourage to see you home safely."

Emeriel bit her lips.

"For so long, I wanted to hold onto you," Daemonikai said, lowly. "You were the one bright star in a sky so dark it swallowed everything else. I wanted to keep you for myself. But my mind is unstable again, Emeriel. What I did to you... I cannot bear the thought of it happening again."

She pulled back just enough to look him in the eyes, cupping his face. Her palms were warm against his cool skin as she tilted his head so he couldn't look away.

"I am going to say this once. Just once. And I want you to listen to me, Daemon. Truly listen."

His conflicted eyes searched hers.

"First of all, I knew exactly what I was getting into when I fell in love with you," she stated firmly. "For the Light-Gods' sake, I loved your mad beast first. Did you hear me?"

"Your mindless, raging, mad beast—was my first love. Do you know what that means?" She let the words settle. "It means I never expected this to be all bed and roses. Our love has thorns, and that's okay. I love you, Grand King Daemonikai, and we will fight this—whatever it is."

Her eyes bore into his, letting him see all the fight and determination in her tattered soul. "So, that carriage you have prepared? Use it to ship your guilt, sadness, and anger to the human lands, because I'm not going anywhere. I will be right here...By. Your. Side."

"You do not understand, Emeriel." Her male shook his head in sheer misery. "This is not a one-time occurrence. It will not just pass."

She stopped breathing. "What?"

A heavy sigh of defeat. "A few days ago, I began to feel strange again. I had Wegai bring me the strongest chains we have to restrain me in my chambers. When I regained awareness... I was in my beast form again."