

Chapter 311

The Oracle's command stopped him mid-transformation.

Half-shifted, he look at her through gleaming yellow eyes.

She looked deathly pale, her already white skin taking on a near-translucent hue. Her frail hands trembled as they gripped her staff.

"You two... be careful," she said in a weak tone. "I cannot see what lies ahead—not clearly. But I pray you make it in time. If not..." She shook her head. "Even if instinct takes hold, even if the rut consumes you—keep your wits about you. This cycle... they need you more than ever."

Vladya and Daemonikai exchanged a grim look before nodding.

"May the gods be with you."

Another nod. Then both shifted fully and took off, their beast forms vanishing from sight.

Night has fallen. Darkness settled over the Citadel.

Lord Ottai had moved Aekeira from her chambers to Vladya's quarters to better protect her.

Her scent had grown stronger. Far too strong.

Every Urekai male who caught a whiff of it wanted her.

Emeriel paced by the bedside, her eyes never leaving her sister. Aekeira had fallen into a fitful sleep hours ago, but she tossed and turned restlessly, crying out and gripping her stomach.

Madam Livia, Amie, and Lord Ottai remained close, each doing their part to maintain order.

Outside the door, the Lord Ottai stationed soldiers at every key position to keep intruders away.

"You need to sit and rest, Emeriel," Madam Livia urged for the umpteenth time.

Emeriel, too exhausted to argue, merely ignored her. She scratched at her raw arms, worried to death.

Will Lord Vladya return in time?

She had already seen the signs, right there. The moment Aekeira woke this time, the heat waves would come tearing through her.

And if he was not here when they did... If he was not here to soothe the ache...

Shaking away the thought, Emeriel moved to the tub of water, splashing her face. The relief was fleeting, barely there. Every inch of her burned. Had been burning for some time now.

"Here, let me help you with that."

Madam Livia cupped the cool water, pouring it over Emeriel's face, again and again.

It was a bit more calming now. She closed her eyes, the water running down her cheeks.

"That is enough, thank you. But I need to—" Emeriel clutched her burning stomach, wincing. "I need to make sure Aekeira is getting enough air and—"

"Stop for a moment, will you?" Madam Livia took her hand, guiding her to a nearby chair, pressing her down into it and handing her a cup of water. "Drink."

Emeriel hesitated but obeyed. The cool liquid did not quench the fires raging inside her.

"There. That is better." Taking the cup from her, Madam Livia studied her closely. "How do you feel?"

Emeriel's fingers curled into fists in her laps. Finally, she managed to breathe out through a ball of fear. "I know I am going into heat, Madam Livia."

She stared off into space, not bothering to hide the terror on her face.

"I mean how could I not know? Just look at me." She lifted her arms for the head maid to see her raw and red skin, streaked with thin lines of blood.

Madam Livia looked and winced.

"I thought... maybe if I ignored it, it would go away, I don't know what I thought." Emeriel let out a mirthless laugh, wiping her face with the back of her hand. "But my entire body is on fire."

"They will get here on time."

"Even you don't believe that." Emeriel glanced at the window, where darkness stretched beyond. "Why did it have to be tonight?"

Madam Livia took her hand and squeezed it. "You and your sister will be fine. Until they arrive, we have to do everything we can to ensure both of you are okay."

Emeriel stared at their joined hands. "There isn't much else to do. We—"

A sudden scream pierced the room. Aekeira bolted upright in bed, her mouth open in a wail so raw, so agonizing, it made Emeriel's stomach knot so painfully.

"Keira!" Shooting to her feet, Emeriel rushed to her side. Aekeira doubled over, gripping her stomach, and screamed again. Louder and more desperate.

"I need my male! I need my—" She rolled to the edge of the bed, away from Emeriel's outstretched hand, screaming. "Lord Vladya! Where are you!?"

Emeriel's heart shattered.

"Wait, Aekeira...!" She was reaching for Aekeira again, swiping angrily at the hot tears streaking her cheeks.

But Aekeira recoiled from her. "Do not touch me! Do not—" A strangled cry tore from her lips as shaky hands reached for her own breasts. Pinching her hard nipples. Body arching.

"Em, it hurts really really bad," she started to sob openly. "It h-hurts so much I don't think I can bear this...!"

Emeriel grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her hard. "Of course you can! You are strong! You can overcome—"

The words died in Emeriel's throat as fire rose deep in her core, like scorching lava, burning and burning.

Snatching her hands away, Emeriel threw her head back as a loud wail of agony ripped from her throat.

"Em, are you all right!?" Aekeira's voice was faint, distant, as though coming from another world.

"Hers is here too!" Madam Livia's muffled voice followed. "Amie, come, help me move her!"

All she could hear clearly was the crackling of flames. Deep inside her belly, everything burned.

Her organs were flaming. Her womb scorching. Her womanhood seared with unbearable need.

Emeriel's nipples throbbed, painfully sensitive. Even the brush of fabric there sent sharp jolts of pain through her.

Tearing at her clothes, Emeriel was beyond desperate. Mindless. Heedless.

The air was too thick.

Too hot. Really hot.

Suffocating her.

"Someone make it stop!" she let out another piercing scream. "MAKE IT S-S-STOP!"

Two voices rose in the air in unison.

Twin wails of absolute suffering from the very depths of their souls.

Echoing off the walls, piercing the hearts of many who heard it.

"MAKE IT STOP!!!"