

Chapter 324

HIGH LORD HERODIS

He had spent the entire day catching up with his dear friend.

He told Emeriel about his agricultural ventures, the farmlands he managed across the kingdom, and the quiet life he had built for himself in the years since she left.

In turn, Emeriel confided in him—about everything that had happened both in the human world and since her return.

But what floored him most? Hearing her confirm the rumors about the Grand King's mind failing again, were true.

The pain in her voice when she spoke of it touched him deeply. And the fact that she trusted him enough to speak so openly about it? That humbled him more than anything.

Now, they walked through the courtyard, heading toward the gardens. The afternoon sun was slipping away, making way for the soft hues of evening dusk.

Herod had been pondering her words all day, and no matter how he turned them over in his mind, something did not make sense.

"May I ask you something?"

Emeriel glanced at him, then nodded. "Of course. Go ahead."

"What does the Oracle say about his feral tendencies?"

Emeriel's gaze drifted over the landscape, the setting sun casting soft shadows across her face. "She remains silent."

Herod was expecting that, still he did not like hearing it.

"Daemon says when she does that, it is either because she does not see that side of things... or she does not want to interfere." she exhaled. "Anyway, I still find it disturbing."

"But something seems strange. Feral sickness is the most deadly affliction of our kind, but it does not appear without reason." Herod mused. "Our grand king's mind healed. The whole kingdom speaks of how happy he is these days. This does not make sense."

"Exactly. I have scoured the library, going through every book I could find, yet none answers my questions or offers further insight into what should be done."

"I am truly sorry you are going through this all over again."

Emeriel's beautiful face softened into a smile. "It is alright. We will get through this."

Herod studied her carefully. She had changed.

Physically, she remained the same—still radiantly beautiful, poised, elegant as ever. But the Emeriel standing before him now was not the same young woman who had once doubted everything. There was a confidence in her now, a conviction that had not been there before.

In the past, she had no faith in her bond with the grand king. But now, there was no bond at all, yet she stood firm. Fighting for what they had, speaking with certainty. Stronger, yet softer. Braver, yet more at peace.

A future Grand Queen, indeed. Herod smiled, feeling a swell of pride.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she slanted her head, bewildered.

"No reason." Herod blinked, shaking off his thoughts. "Forgive me."

Herod caught yet another worker stealing glances at her before hurrying off. "My workers are intrigued. They find it difficult to believe the Galilea they once knew... is now the grand king's female."

"I see the way they look at me. And then there is your son." She looked over her shoulder. "He seems determined to follow us for the rest of the day."

Herod, already knowing what he would see, breathed deeply before he looked.

Sure enough, Dale leaned casually against a tree, arms folded as he nudged a small stone with the toe of his boot. When their gazes met, his son immediately feigned deep interest in the sky, as if that had been his focus all along.

Herod pinched the bridge of his nose. "Ignore him."

Emeriel chuckled. "He looks out for you. He is a good male." Then, teasingly, she added, "How do I convince him no harm will come to his father for being friends with his ruler's female?"

"Do not bother. I have tried—repeatedly. It does not work." Herod shook his head. "Dale was born when the grand king was still feral, so he grew up on stories and legends. Tales of Daemonikai the Cruel, Daemonikai the Heartless, the Berserker King. Dale has never met him, only knows him by reputation."

The smile lingered on Emeriel's face as she looked again. "I can only imagine what's going through his mind right now."

They stepped into the garden, the scent of fresh flowers drifting through the evening air, and Emeriel halted.

"It is still the same," she murmured, staring at the rows of roses and vines woven into the trellises. "I miss this place."

"I knew you would."

Herod remained where he stood, simply watching her, content to observe as she moved from one flower bed to another. Grazing the petals, caressing them with reverence, whispering quiet words to them he could not quite catch.

"So, tell me, my lord," the words suddenly, her tone light as she spared him a glance. "Is there any new female in your life?"

Herod arched a brow.

"I will admit, I worry about you," she plucked a rose, bringing it to her nose, inhaling deeply. "I wish you had someone new in your life, a companion to share your days with."

I am fine. I am not lonely. Had it been anyone else, Herod would have given them that standard answer. But Emeriel was not just anyone.

"That would be nice," he confessed. "A companion would be a good thing...it does get rather lonely behind these walls. But the idea of courting for our kind, it is rather terrifying."

She quirked a brow.

"There is a lot at stake," he explained. "You must first develop genuine feelings for someone before even standing a chance at a successful bonding ritual. And more often than not, the ritual fails. Then you are left to deal with the heartache of loving someone who can never be yours."

Emeriel sighed in understanding, staring at beds of vibrant blooms. "A true vicious cycle."

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

He had been in his study since morning, buried amidst ledgers, missives from foreign kingdoms, and matters of trade.

Yet among these, the petitions stood out. The pleas of his people, begging for Sinai's release.

He had no doubt she had sent word to them, rousing their sympathy, imploring them to speak on her behalf. And they had answered.

Over the past days, the petitions had multiplied, each one urging him to grant her freedom. Soon, he would have to address them. Either stand firm or yield to their demands.

Wearied by the long hours, he pushed back his chair and rose, stretching the stiffness from his limbs. The study had begun to feel stifling, and he was in need of air.

He was to run the woods with Vladya and Ottai later in the evening. Zaiper was expected to join them, but of late, the second ruler had been scarce—so much so that Daemonikai rarely saw him at all.

Zaiper, who seldom missed a hunt or gathering, had withdrawn from court, neglecting his duties and avoiding matters concerning his clan. Instead, he was often seen going in and out of Ravensshadow.

Whatever he busied himself with was of little concern to Daemonikai. His mind was occupied with graver matters.

Like the disappearances.