

Captive Slave 339

Chapter 339

PRINCESS AEKEIRA

Aekeira sat by the window, stitching as she hummed an old lullaby. Sunlight spilled pale and thin through the lattice, allowing her to enjoy the quiet and peace.

Until Emeriel entered.

She moved like a sleepwalker. Eyes swollen and red, face pale with exhaustion. There were dark circles under her eyes, and her lips trembled even as she tried to hold herself together.

"Em!" Aekeira dropped her sewing at once, rising quickly to her feet. "Are you alright? Why do you look like-?"

Her sister crossed the room, collapsed into her arms, and started bawling. The kind where the sobs are harsh and violent as if dragged from the soul.

"Speak to me, what's going on!?" Aekeira was panicking more with every sob. "You're frightening me! You know you shouldn't be crying like this; you're pregnant for light's sake!" Now she was crying too, unable to hold back. "Em, please!"

Still, Emeriel only wept.

She cried as though there was no end to her pain. Sobbed as if no hope remained in the world.

Aekeira gave up, and only held her. She sank back onto the bed, drawing her

sister down with her, rocking her and crying with her, as though they were children again.

She had no sense of how much time passed. At last, the sobbing eased.

Subsided into torn breaths and hiccups.

"I'm broken, Keira..." Emeriel said in a whisper of defeat.

"How can you say that about yourself?"

"Because it's true," she looked at Aekeira with swollen eyes. "I am broken... and I don't know if I'll ever heal."

"You will. Tell me...please."

And then, haltingly, Emeriel did. She reminded Aekeira about that night months ago, and how it's still affecting their lives.

"My mind keeps drifting back to it whenever he touches me like that. No matter how much I try to stay in the present, the moment he is inside me, it's like a switch has flipped, and I'm back in your former chamber, begging the beast for mercy." She sobbed. "Heaven knows I would do anything to avoid thinking of that night. I don't even want to, yet I can't seem to escape it. I long to feel my male again, but I can't because all I see are the moments I was completely at his mercy, unable to escape, pleading for just a moment's reprieve as I bled everywhere, yet couldn't get one. When he hurt me so effortlessly, not caring about his strength or how torn I already was inside, he just kept taking and taking." Her eyes grew wider and wider, and she took her head even wilder. "That night plays in my head, and it's driving me insane. It's driving us apart, and it's killing him inside. Yet, I can't seem to move past it, Keira. My body opened for him during heat, and it remains ready to receive him, yet my mind feels closed off. I need help, but I have no idea what kind I need."

It was Aekeira who was weeping now after that full, rushed rant.

"Emeriel, how could you keep this from me?" She drew her sister closer. "When I looked at you that next morning, I knew something that terrible would not pass without leaving a scar, and I hate that I was right. What are you going to do now?" "I don't know," Emeriel sobbed. "But until I do, something has to be done. And that's what is killing me inside, Aekeira."

She pulled back, looking her younger sister in the eyes. "What do you mean?"

"While I take some time to figure myself out, I must make a decision to keep him sane, in order to protect him, myself, and our unborn child." She began crying again. "It's not a very pleasant decision, Keira."

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

Grand King Daemonikai crossed through the fortress gates as dusk surrendered to night, Ottai trailing at his side.

Training the birds of prey and the messenger fliers should not have taken so long, but the young hawk refused to be contained, fighting the falconer's every effort. One of the newly-bonded ravens had missed its mark entirely, vanishing into the gathering dark. By the time they returned to the Citadel, night had thickened fully. Ottai bowed low at the archway before heading toward Mabblewood. Daemonikai ascended the corridors alone and entered his bedchamber, already feeling the beginnings of an ache behind his temples.

Emeriel lay on his bed, her back turned toward the door.

He moved soundlessly, setting aside his belt and mantle, then stripped down to his nightclothes. When he climbed into the bed beside her, she stirred and turned to face him.

"I was waiting for you," she said with a smile.

"How are you feeling? Did you eat better today?"

"Yes, I did. Madam Livia gave me some herbs that helped me keep them down."

Something in her eyes bothered him, and she looked pale. "You are troubled. What's wrong?"

Pushing herself upright, she smothered her hands over the folds of her gown. "The head healer came today. He delivered the remainder of my medicines today, and he told me some things..."

"What things?"

She hesitated. "Please, don't punish him, it's who asked him questions about my condition."

He frowned. "Sure, I don't mind. You needed to know."

"He spoke of... your instincts. And we both know what happens when they're not... sated." She averted her eyes. "I've been thinking about everything and... the truth is, we can't bear for things to get out of control again."

Daemonikai sat up, ignoring his pounding skull.

"The possibility you may fall into an episode terrifies me, Daemon."

"It will never happen again, I'll make sure of that," he vowed, taking her face in both hands. "Look at me, Emeriel."

Slowly, her eyes met his.

"I would sooner hurl myself from the mountain peaks than harm you that way again."

"I don't want you to harm yourself either," she whispered. "So, I've found a solution."

"No, we're not trying again. I refuse to put you through that—"

"Take another female to your bed."

Daemonikai blinked.

Reprocessed the word, but they still held the same meaning.

Did she really say that?

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