

Captive Slave 352

Chapter 352

PRINCESS EMERIEL

"This one." Emeriel lifted a small vial to her nose, the golden oil inside glowing in the sunlight. "Sandalwood and amber-perfect for easing tension."

"Too heavy," Lady Morina said, selecting another vial infused with sage. "You need something that soothes but does not cling so thickly to the skin."

"What about this?" Aekeira reached for a slender vial marked Night's Calm.

"Lavender," Lady Morina noted with a faint smile. "I like it."

Emeriel was grateful the lady had agreed to make this journey with them. She remembered the puffy redness around Morina's eyes when they had sought her out that morning. Eyes that had wept for hours. Perhaps longer.

Emeriel could not imagine the depth of that grief, knowing the male who had killed her only son had not been a human invader but Grand Lord Zaiper. How could any Urekai comprehend such a betrayal?

It had been three days since the court had heard the Oracle's reveals.

Three days of gloom and mourning.

The markets were shuttered. The courts stood empty. Fields, once alive with labor and song, lay untended.

All of Urai mourned.

King Daemonikai had not left his bedchamber. He remained behind closed doors, beating himself up for not seeing Zaiper's treachery sooner.

Emeriel had wanted to comfort him. She had wanted to go to him the moment he disappeared behind those doors. But she had given him the space he needed.

Except one day passed.

Then another.

Then the third.

Worry had settled in her so much she confided in her sister. But Aekeira was struggling with the same. Lord Vladya had withdrawn into silence, locking himself away in his own rooms as well.

The sisters had spent long hours together, thinking of something-anything-they could do, but no answers had come. So, in desperation, they had sought Lady Morina's counsel.  
**W***W***.***(n)***oV***e***l***W***O***r***m****.***c**o**m*

"Relaxation and comfort," Morina had told them. "What they need most now is to know you are there. That you are not leaving them to bear this alone-even while you give them a little space."

So Aekeira suggested they try massage.

And that was why they found themselves in the market, picking out oils and salves on this mournful morning.

"Ah. A fine choice," the merchant said as Aekeira handed her the vial. "Blended with rose oil, valerian root, and a touch of cinnamon. Warms the muscles... and stirs the senses."  
**W***W***.***(n)***oV***e***l***W***O***r***m****.***c**o**m*

Aekeira arched a brow. "Stirs the senses?"

The merchant's smile deepened. "A touch of heat beneath the relaxation. If your men are warriors, then their bodies know strain. But a gentle burn... that can make them feel alive again."

The three women exchanged glances.

"We'll take it," Lady Morina said, setting a handful of silver coins onto the wooden counter.

....

That night, after Emeriel bathed, she dressed in a simple, loose nightdress. The soft clothing hung over her swollen belly, its drape flattering, making her bump seem smaller.

She gathered the basket she had prepared-vials of oil, a small clay jar, linen cloths, and a shallow bowl. Leaving her bedchamber, she made her way quietly through the hall toward his. But the soldier standing guard outside told her he'd gone to the study after his evening bath, so she went in search of him there.

The study was dark when she entered, but she knew her way around well enough. Crossing quietly to the nearest table, she reached for the candlestick.

"Leave it off," came a deep voice. Low. Rough.

She paused, her hand hovering over the candle. Then she set it back down.

Following his voice, she moved carefully to the desk. As her eyes adjusted to the dim, she could make out the shadow of his form.  
**W***W***.***(n)***oV***e***l***W***O***r***m****.***c**o**m*

He sat behind the desk, his elbows propped upon its surface, face buried in his hands.

Emeriel approached him, the basket in her hand making no sound as she placed it on the desk. "I have given you the space you needed for days, but I'm worried about you. I can barely sleep." She stopped herself from reaching for him. "I'm so sorry for everything you are going through."

Silence and darkness. Zero movement.

"I wish our bond was active again so I could share even a little of your pain. But I cannot and it kills me." She tried to keep the wobble from her voice. "Please, let me help you in whatever small way I can."

"Emeriel..." he groaned.

"Please," she whispered. "Let me help you."

He lowered his hands, straightening in his chair. Emeriel reached for his hand, drawing him to his feet. He rose without resistance.

She removed the heavy robe from his shoulders, then his loose undershirt before he sat again, slow and weary.

Reaching for the bowl, she mixed the oils as Lady Morina had shown her— warming them with her hands. Moving behind him, she placed her palms on his shoulders, the muscles hard as stone. She began to knead them.

Emeriel had never done a massage before, and truly, she had no idea if she was doing it well, but she felt better doing something.

He groaned after a few moments, his head rolling to one side as her thumbs worked into the knots at the base of his neck.

"I cannot believe all of this happened under my nose," his bitter voice came at last. "I had no idea..."

She did not interrupt. Smoothing the warmed oil into his skin, listening.

"Yes, I knew Zaiper hated me," Daemonikai continued. "I knew his family's obsession with the throne. When you have ruled for millennia, you become accustomed to it. I knew he was ambitious, but I didn't know he was this corrupt."

Her hands paused briefly. But she bit her lip and let him speak, working in silence as he emptied his thoughts.  
**W***W***.***(n)***oV***e***l***W***O***r***m****.***c**o**m*

"Beware the vampire of Greyrock." He laughed without mirth. "When the Oracle gave me that warning, I thought her foolish. Why risk pain to tell me something I already knew?" he paused, then scoffed. "What did I know? I was dining with the male who killed my entire family. Oblivious and fucking stupid."