

Captive Slave 358

Chapter 358

The training of a Grand Ruler was arduous beyond imagining. The most demanding and unforgiving known to their people. Training began at birth and never ended. He was too old for this.**wWW.nO(v)èL(w)eRM.©©m**

"I know you may feel your life has reached its twilight. That there is no more strength left in you to start again. But I ask you to reconsider. It may seem that the grief, the long loneliness, have drained you... yet two thousand years is not old. There may yet be another female for you out there. One who is truly compatible, who may walk beside you as you begin again."

Oh, how I wish for that. The ache in his chest deepened.

To have someone again to care for. To love and be loved. Someone who would color his world and keep the cold away.

"I know it is not easy. Believe me, I know this personally. But look at me, Herodis." The grand king moved toward him, his expression open in a way Herod had rarely seen. "I am living proof that life does not end when we think it has, certain we're too old. I, Daemonikai, am five thousand and two hundred years old, yet I have once more found a female I will not trade for anything in this world. She came at the most unexpected time and brought light back into my life. She filled it with color again." A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. "Today, I feel younger than I have in an age. And I'm about to become a father again."

Herod's throat constricted, his heart too loaded to speak. Unable to meet the grand king's eyes.

"You know, I've always wanted to remove you from your position as Lord of Agriculture," the King Daemonikai revealed. "I believed if Zaiper discovered your true identity, it would place you in danger. It troubled me for centuries... but you were too perfect at the post, giving me no cause to dismiss you, until two years ago."

"Wait." Herodis's eyes boggled. "What happened with your female... that wasn't the real reason my title was taken away?"

King Daemonikai snorted. "You protected my female, cared for her, helped her survive. Your deception angered me, yes, but even then I was thankful to you."

"Oh," he... did not know what to think of that.

"Think deeply on everything I have said. The life you believed had come to its end may, in truth, be only just be beginning. It's never too late to begin living again, Gustazlion Herodis Dragaxlov."

With those final words, the grand king turned and walked away, the door closing behind him.

Herod stood unmoving, staring at nothing.

"Your Grace! It's an honor to have you in our home," he heard his son's shout, his tone nervous and overly earnest. "Please, forgive my father all his transgressions, and do not take his life away. He truly doesn't know any better. Wake him any day to speak of crops and farming, and you've found the right male-but when it comes to friendships, bonds, and boundaries... my father is still terribly naive. He doesn't always realize when he crosses territories he should not."

This boy... Herod grunted, shaking his head. He really does have a poor opinion of his old male.

He heard Daemonikai's chuckle, low but not unkind. "Worry not, young Dale. I value your father's friendship with my treasure. But you may teach him still-there is no shame in a son instructing his father."

Herod heard the firm clap of a hand against his son's back, followed by the retreat of the King's footsteps.

Moments later, the door burst open, Dale striding in with a flushed face. "You really will get yourself killed one of these days, Father," he hissed. "But never mind. The Grand King has given me permission to train you into a better version of yourself." He jabbed a thumb toward his own chest. "So now, you listen to my instructions."

Herod quirked a brow. "I will, wouldn't I?"

Together, they stared at the door Daemonikai had passed through.

"Damn," Dale muttered finally, awed. "He's even cooler in person."

Herod chuckled under his breath. "That, son, is something we can agree on."**(w)Ww.Ñ(o)VèLwð©m.co©**

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PRINCESS AEKEIRA

There was laughter.

A serene lake.

Gentle breeze stirred the grass along the shore.

A male lay beside the water, a female at his side, their faces veiled in shadow.

Voices drifted on the air, soft and indistinct at first. Then it cleared a little.

"My dearest lord," the female said in a beautiful voice, soft as the breeze itself and full of affection.

The male drew her close. "My dearest lady,"

They held each other for a long moment.**WwW.Ñ©V(e)Lwo©m.©©m**

"I wish to ask a favor," she said. "But promise me you won't be angry."

"I can't promise that. I must first hear what it is."

The female sighed, a sound woven with both bliss and regret. "Very well. You know I love you."

He sat up, facing her. "Now you have me worried. Yes, I know that. Now ask."

She hesitated. "Promise me that if our bonding ritual fails... you will not fall apart." He shook his head slowly. "I cannot promise that Tiara."

Aekeira's eyes flew open. Breathing loudly, heaving, she could not catch her breath.

The door opened a second later. "Aekeira?" Lord Vladya filled the doorway with his broad shoulders and sharp, concerned eyes. "Are you well?"

"I'm fine." She dragged in another breath, forcing herself upright. "It's nothing... just a dream." Rubbing at her face, she drew a shaky hand through her hair. "You

were awake again, weren't you? That's why you're tuned in on me."

A faint shrug was his only reply. She could see the exhaustion shadowing his eyes, and it hurt her.

He was worn thin. Ever since the truth had come out about Lord Zaiper-about

what he had done-Vladya's nights had blended into his days.**wWw.nOvelworm.Co(m)**

He rarely slept. He rarely rested. His entire focus had narrowed to one goal: finding and bringing Lord Zaiper to justice.