

Chapter 46

"You're absolutely right," Lord Herod responded, and his head snapped up in astonishment.

The lord shrugged. "It's the truth. No one should have to pay for the sins of their forefathers. However, Urekai have long lifespans, and unfortunately, our people hold grudges for a long time. A human's life is short. Fleeting. And since we still suffer from the consequences of what humans did that night, forgiveness becomes incredibly difficult. We lost the most important person in every Urekai's life that night—Grand King Daemonikai. He had been our grand king for over four thousand years. Our people are lost without him."

A shiver ran down Emeriel's spine at the mention of that name. He brushed it aside. "But what about the other grand lords? Surely, one of them could take his place. Delaying the decision only prolongs the people's pain."

"The struggle for power lies between Grand Lord Vladya and Grand Lord Zaiper," Lord Herod explained. "The latter is truly cruel and would not be of any help to the people. Many wish for Lord Vladya to assume leadership, but according to what I've heard, he has no aspirations for the throne. Moreover, he is still wounded—he suffered great losses that night and is still grieving. He doesn't know how to recover from that pain. It has changed him."

After the events of the previous night, Emeriel couldn't discern much of a difference between Lord Zaiper and Lord Vladya, but he kept his opinion to himself. "And what about Lord Ottai?"

"Grand Lord Ottai is fairly good-hearted, but he lacks political acumen. Also, in Urekai society, only the strongest among us is deemed fit to be king, and while Lord Ottai possesses incredible strength, he is not the strongest. Furthermore, he has no ambitions for the grand throne."

Emeriel pondered for a moment before another question arose in his mind. "Forgive me for asking, but how did your late bondmate live for hundreds of years when she was human?"

A soft, nostalgic light entered Lord Herod's eyes. "When a Urekai forms a bond with a syren, their lifespans become intertwined. The remaining years the Urekai has left are shared with their bondmate. So, if I had three thousand years remaining, half of that would go to my non-Urekai mate."

"Wow," Emeriel exclaimed, amazed by the revelation. "Did you ever regret sharing your lifespan?"

"Never." Lord Herod shook his head firmly. "I would do it all over again in a heartbeat if it meant she would have survived her illness. Every Urekai wants the fulfillment that comes from being bonded to another and sharing our lifespan with them."

Emeriel hesitated, his curiosity still lingering. "What happens when the bondmate passes away?"

"Some believe that the remaining shared years return to the Urekai, but the truth is unknown," Lord Herod replied. "Since Urekai lifespans can vary greatly, with some living for only two thousand years while others for twelve thousand, there is no definitive answer. However, we Urekai are ageless. We do not age like humans."

Emeriel was fascinated. What would it feel like to live for hundreds of years? The concept was mind-boggling.

"My son, Dale, resides far away due to his deep love for nature and a passion for studying." Lord Herod's expression softened. "After Vera's passing, loneliness settled within these walls. I have taken a liking to you, Emeriel, and I hope we can grow close to one another."

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As Emeriel made his way back to the fortress, his mind filled with thoughts of his visit to Lord Herod.

For the first time in a long while, he felt a sense of calm and tranquility. He had tried to read Lord Herod's eyes when he declared his likeness for him, and while his gaze was intense, it wasn't predatory.

The rest of the dinner had passed in comfortable silence, and then Emeriel had left. Lord Herod had given him permission to visit again, and Emeriel knew he would. If only for the good food.

Perhaps Lord Herod could be the answer to his and Aekeira's situation. He might be the only Urekai capable of providing the assistance they needed. Lord Herod stood out as the first genuinely kind-hearted Urekai Emeriel had encountered.

He had taken the time to engage in conversation with Emeriel, seeing him as a person rather than a mere object to be tossed around. Speaking with Lord Herod had proven surprisingly easy, far from the terrible encounters Emeriel had come to expect from Urekai.

Emeriel headed straight for Aekeira's bedchamber and noticed Madam Livia exiting the room. He greeted the head maid, before continuing on his way.

Inside the chambers, Aekeira lay on the bed, reading a book. She looked up and smiled at the sight of Emeriel. The swelling around her eyes had subsided, and she appeared much better than she had in the past couple of days.

"I saw Madam Livia," Emeriel said as he walked in, closing the door behind him.

"She gave me more herbs and informed me that I would be resuming my duties tomorrow. I have no idea how she managed to keep me away from work these past few days, but I am grateful to her. How did it go with that Lord?" Aekeira's eyes looked resigned. "How bad did he hurt you?"

Emeriel shook his head firmly and quickly narrated how it went with Lord Herod. "I packed food for you," he finished cheerfully.

Aekeira looked surprised as she took the bread and meat from Emeriel and began eating quickly.

Emeriel felt a prickling sensation on his skin, and scratched his arm to alleviate the itch. "What about you?" he hesitated. "Have you had any interaction with Lord Vladya since that night?"

"Fortunately, no. I have not seen him, and I will do everything in my power to avoid him. I hate him so much," Aekeira replied between bites. "Besides, now that he's hurt me the way he wanted, I'm sure he'll move on to the next human slave to torment."

After eating, Aekeira lay down, her eyes growing drowsy. Emeriel wasn't surprised—some of the herbs Madam Livia had given her induced sleep.

"Try to get some rest, Keira," Emeriel reassured her. "I'll be here with you, at least until you fall asleep."

"Are you alright?" Aekeira asked.

"Huh?"

"You have been scratching your arms non-stop for the last few minutes. I'm sure they've turned red from all that scratching." Aekeira observed, sleepily.

Emeriel's fingers froze, and slowly, his hands dropped. He hadn't even noticed. "I'm fine. It's nothing to worry about." He forced himself to believe it, suppressing his rising panic.

It had to be nothing to worry about, because the alternative was scary. There was no way he was about to go into heat again.

No.

Oh, Lights, just no.