

Chapter 52

EMERIEL

Emeriel awoke in Aekeira's chambers, his sister hovering over him.

"She's awake, Amie!" Aekeira's voice echoed throughout the room. "Please go and fetch Madam Livia."

The ruffle of movements followed.

Emeriel's head throbbed with a headache, and his mouth tasted bitter from the herbs likely forced down his throat.

He attempted to sit up but winced as his body protested. "What happened?" he groaned.

"You had another mini-heat yesterday and somehow ventured to the forbidden chambers on your own," Aekeira's voice trembled with a mix of dread and disbelief. "When Amie told me, I could hardly believe it. By the gods, Em! Going into the forbidden chambers willingly and alone!?"

Memories flooded back to Emeriel. Aekeira was right—what had possessed him?

"I don't know, Keira," he admitted.

"But... but... I simply don't understand." Aekeira started to pace, visibly agitated. "There are plenty of Urekai males around. The guards would have gladly locked you up in a room and tended to your needs until the heat subsided. You could have easily gone to any of them. So why did you choose that beast? Why?"

"I really don't know. My body made the decision for me," Emeriel confessed, resigned.

Aekeira stopped abruptly. "What?"

Emeriel exhaled loudly. It was one thing to acknowledge the truth within himself, and another to voice it aloud.

He hesitated.

Aekeira noticed the strain, and guilt flashed in her eyes. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't be questioning you after the night you've had." She moved closer and settled beside Emeriel on the bed. "How are you feeling now, Em?"

"Like I've been trampled by a carriage. Every part of my body hurts."

A deep sorrow shadowed Aekeira's features. "I know that feeling all too well. Madam Livia said you needed to be awake to take a particular herb—what was it called again? Oh, snakevines. She mentioned it would be more effective in alleviating the pain."

"Okay," Emeriel surrendered to his body's exhaustion and lay back on the bed, abandoning his attempt to sit upright. "How did I end up here?"

"Madam Livia returned to the fourth wing in the early hours of the morning to check on you. And there you were, lying in the hallway." A note of awe and wonder entered Aekeira's voice. "The beast brought you out, Em. It laid you out in the hallway."

Emeriel did not expect that. His face must have shown his surprise, because Aekeira nodded.

"It sounds absurd to me too. I simply don't understand. The beast didn't harm you. It didn't make any deliberate attempt to inflict pain upon you. I simply don't understand what is going on."

Emeriel gazed off into the distance, falling silent for a moment.

"I couldn't control myself, Keira," he finally whispered aloud. "As soon as the heat started, all I could think about was him. In my mind, I claim him as mine. And when the heat intensifies, it becomes overwhelming, making it hard to think clearly, to maintain control."

He shifted his gaze to his sister. "I walked to the fourth wing on my own, Keira. I couldn't wait to be with him. To feel him inside me. All I could think about was presenting to him. Giving all of me to him."

Aekeira paled. Her lips opened wordlessly, before closing again.

Tears welled up in Emeriel's eyes. "I think I belong to that beast, Keira. I am his Soulbond."

"Never!" Aekeira snapped, her voice filled with vehement denial. "No way. Do not let such a dreadful thought enter your mind again, Em. Fate would never be so cruel. Don't ever entertain such thoughts again!"

Emeriel's tears continued to flow. "I don't want to think like that either. Ever. I don't want to be bonded to one of those heartless Urekai. The idea of being destined for one fills me with dread. I want no part of this."

He swallowed hard and looked away. "But it would be foolish to ignore it just because I want it to go away. I can't dismiss it simply because I wish it wasn't true. It feels true, Aekeira. Here, in my heart, it feels true."

"No, I refuse to believe it." Aekeira grasped Emeriel's hands firmly in hers, shaking her head with determination. "There must be another explanation. Perhaps your body craves more of him because he is the only one you've been intimate with. That feral took your virginity, so—"

"Not yet," Emeriel interrupted.

Aekeira's mouth snapped shut, confusion evident on her face as she stared at him.

"I mean, my hymen is still intact." Emeriel knew how ridiculous that sounded. How crazy. He had thought so too, when he found out during his research. "It has something to do with me being a syren."

"But the beast has mounted you twice," Aekeira added, trying to make sense of it.

"During my heat. According to what I read, no matter what a Urekai male does to sate a syren or Urekai female during their heat, the body repairs afterward," Emeriel explained.

"For the full heat, the healing could take more time, and be much more painful. However, in the end, the body repairs itself back to the way it was before heat. The beast has mounted me twice now, and both times I was in heat. And I've never had anyone else." He shrugged. "My body healed completely—hymen and all."

"Really?" Aekeira's eyes were wide with surprise. "Does that mean that if any of these lustful soldiers touch you now, they would disvirgin you again?"

"I guess. If I'm not in heat."

Aekeira was floored. "Now I worry for you even more than I did five minutes ago. I dread the thought of any of those lustful animals putting their hands on you."

Emeriel snorted. "You already worry too much as it is, Keira. Tone it down so you do not fall sick."

"I healed fast too," she recalled, biting her lower lip. "No hymen, of course, but I recall Lord Zaiper mentioning how fast I healed, for a human, that night he came here to visit."

"Thank the Light for that. I guess you're fortunate. I don't have all the details yet, but I've been spending time in the library, reading and trying to gain a better understanding. But there are countless books, and it will take more time." Emeriel said.

Hope flickered in Aekeira's eyes, too. "Yes, there must be another explanation. We will find it, I am certain."

Emeriel was not, and he took a shuddering breath. He chose not to reveal to Keira that his thoughts were consumed by the beast all times.

That he had erotic dreams about King Daemonikai's beast, awakened and pleased himself, while envisioning the various ways the beast could take him.

That last night, in that chamber, he had thought of the beast as his throughout their encounter. His beast. His beloved.

Emeriel kept all of that to himself, aware of how much it would freak his poor sister out. At the same time, he desperately hoped Aekeira was right.

He hoped to hell that there was another explanation for all of this. And not what his entire being was singing to him. That he was Grand King Daemonikai's Soulbond.