

Chapter 68

EMERIEL

"Secure the bindings," Mistress Sinai commanded one of her soldiers.

Emeriel was suspended, his arms spread wide and tightly bound. The ropes dug into his skin as the soldiers ensured they were secure.

His gaze shifted to a large basin of boiling water in the corner of the small underground basement. Steam rose aggressively from it, showing its scorching temperature.

Whips made of cowhide and leather, as well as spiked ones, were scattered about. There was a crown filled with thorns, a branding iron, and many other tools Emeriel had never seen before.

Emeriel swallowed nervously. Fear of the impending pain settled deep in his gut, though he refused to show it. A branding iron?

His eyes followed the movements of a maid, who appeared to be preparing a fire pit. Did Mistress Sinai intend to brand him? Force him to wear that crown with its piercing thorns digging into his skull?

"So, you must be enjoying these little niceties, aren't you?" Mistress Sinai smirked, moving closer to Emeriel. "By the time I'm finished with you, you'll beg for death. I will make sure your blood stains every corner of the forbidden chambers, so everyone will think that my Daemon devoured you for breakfast."

Emeriel couldn't believe the extent to which this mistress would go to inflict pain upon him. "Why are you doing this? What have I ever done to you?"

"I have countless reasons, really. But mainly? it's because you are a nuisance. You got yourself noticed by the beast. You should have stayed away from him."

Emeriel couldn't believe this female. "I never sought his attention. You think I wanted this? I was on my own when he came for me. He pursued me. He captured me. He claimed me!"

"That's a lie!" she hissed, drawing closer to Emeriel. Rage burned in her eyes, her fists clenched. "You may have fooled everyone else, but not me. You did something to him. Whatever it was, you better undo it, or I will kill you myself." She paused, a chilling smile forming. "Actually, it doesn't matter if you undo it. Because when I kill you, whatever spell you cast will be neutralized."

Angry tears flooded Emeriel's eyes as he regarded Mistress Sinai. This Urekai female was insane. What kind of crazy woman was King Daemonikai's bloodhost?

"What? Not going to say anything?" Mistress Sinai crossed her arms, a taunting smirk playing on her lips. "Beg for your life."

Emeriel sniffled, resignation sinking in. "Would it make any difference?"

"Oh... but you wouldn't know unless you tried, would you?" She gave another one of those annoying smirks. "Come on, beg for it."

Emeriel did not. Begging wouldn't change anything, and he wouldn't indulge this demented woman's dark fantasies.

"Alright then." Mistress Sinai turned her head. "Nora, prepare the spiked whips and fire them up. Let us begin."

AEKEIRA

Aekeira hurriedly approached Lord Vladya, desperation clear in her voice. "Your highness, I needed to see you, please..."

"You cannot be here, Aekeira. Not without summon." He began walking ahead toward his chambers. "Leave before I have you punished."

"Please, help me! Please," she pleaded, her voice trembling.

He whirled around, irritation etched on his face. "Why is it that every time I see you, you're always in a situation that requires help? And worst of all, for some reason, you assume that I would want to help you?"

If Aekeira had her way, she would never be in the same space as Lord Vladya. She would avoid him like the plague.

But she also knew that if anyone had the power to help her situation, it would be him.

"My brother... the mistress took him," Aekeira forced out, sniffing as she wiped her eyes clean.

"No. The beast took your brother, and he is not dead, as far as I know," he retorted as he turned away dismissively.

"No, no, no. Please, hear me out." Aekeira reached out and grabbed his garment.

He stopped abruptly, glaring at her hand.

She released her grip and stepped back. "Please, hear me out, your highness."

He studied her for a moment, his face inscrutable. He didn't command her to speak, and his expression suggested that she was one mistake away from being thrown out.

Therefore, Aekeira hesitated, awaiting his permission.

With each passing second, her hope waned. Perhaps he wouldn't help her after all. With Grand Lord Ottai away from the fortress, maybe her chances were better with Lord Zaiper.

Aekeira shuddered at the thought. Despite everything Lord Vladya had done to her, she would still choose him over Lord Zaiper. Without hesitation.

"Fine. Go ahead," he snapped, looking like the words tasted like ash in his mouth.

"A mistress took him. She looked familiar, but I don't really know who she is, only that she seemed like a lady. I saw her and the guards dragging Emeriel away."

Grand Lord Vladya's brows furrowed. He released the doorknob completely, giving her his full attention. "A mistress, you say? Long, brown hair?"

"Yes, my Lord!" How did he know that?

Grand Lord Vladya stepped away from the door entirely. "Yaz, follow me," he commanded his head soldier behind him. He then turned to Aekeira. "Come and show me where you saw them."

A wave of relief washed over her, and Aekeira hastily moved to keep up with Grand Lord Vladya's determined pace. She had expected more resistance...thank the gods!

She led him along the same route she had taken, back to the fourth wing, and then through the corner where she had spotted the mistress. Walking so closely to him, a prickle of awareness feathered through her skin. What was it about this hard, formidable male that made her go weak in the knees?

Fortunately, her deep worry for her little sister killed any potential arousal.

"Here, my Lord. I saw them around here." Aekeira came to a stop at the spot where she had witnessed Emeriel being dragged away.

"I will go ahead and search for them. They shouldn't be far," Yaz offered.

"No, that would take too much time, time we don't have," Lord Vladya countered. He turned to Aekeira. "Do you have anything that Emeriel has touched in the past twenty hours?"