

## Chapter 96

EMERIEL

Emeriel's body screamed with exhaustion.

Every rasping breath seared his lungs, every step sent tremors through his leaden limbs. Yet he ran, propelled by the blind instinct to survive.

"Damn, wish we had kept the arrow!" an assassin's voice grated behind him, followed by the ominous whisper of steel sliding free.

Emeriel reacted without thought, a desperate lurch to the side, barely evading the unseen blade.

So close, almost there...

He never saw the hands that seized him. One moment he was running, the next a vise-like grip yanked him off his feet.

His scream choked off as he dangled, kicking uselessly against the tremendous strength. A chilling laugh echoed in his ear.

"Got you at last, pretty prince," his captor hissed, a venomous glee in the words.

"Let me go!" Emeriel shrieked, his voice cracking. "The beast... he'll tear you apart if you touch me! Don't—"

"Silence, wretch! Do you really think you're special to our feral king?" the soldier barked into Emeriel's ear. "I will slit your throat and see how precious you are then!"

The now-familiar urge returned.

A persistent rush just like that fateful day in court. This time, Emeriel did not fight it. He surrendered.

"My beloved, I need your help. My beloved, please help me," Emeriel's desperate cries echoed against the cold stone walls.

His voice trembled with fear and dread. What if the beast does not answer his plea?

"What the hell is he saying?" one of them cackled.

A roar filled the air. It tore through the silence like a guttural explosion that seemed to shake the very foundations of the fortress.

"What in the name of all that's holy..."

"Gods above..."

Frantically, the soldiers glanced around, desperate to pinpoint the source of the sound. "Could that have been the feral?"

"Do not be a fool," the one holding Emeriel barked. "Let us get this boy out of here before someone spots—"

The crack of splintering wood cut him off. An ear-splitting snarl ripped through the air, followed by a blur of movement, too fast to track.

"Ukrae preserve us," breathed another soldier, his voice barely a whisper.

Panic rippled around them as the soldiers scattered like ants, their boots slapping against the stone floor. But the beast was a blur of muscle and fury, cutting them off with lightning speed.

It lunged, a whirlwind of claws and teeth, each strike tearing flesh and bone. Screams echoed, mixing with the sickening scent of copper.

Emeriel's adrenaline surged, numbing his senses. He'd come. His beloved came for him.

As the beast killed the last of its attackers, Emeriel stumbled forward, throwing himself into the beast's blood-soaked embrace.

"Thank you," he choked out, burying his face in the creature's thick fur. "Thank you, my King, thank you."

The beast paused, its rage seeming to ebb away. A gentle nudge from his massive head, accompanied by a soft, rumbling growl, conveyed a warmth that belied its fearsome anger.

"Do not die," Emeriel whispered, his words tight with emotion. Tears welled up in his eyes. "They're going to kill you tomorrow, and I... I cannot bear it. I refuse to believe you are as mindless as they say. I wish I could save you. I wish I could save you."

Emeriel pulled back, his face pale. The beast lowered him to his feet but did not release its hold. Emeriel did not mind.

"I know you're in there, somewhere. I just...don't know how to reach you," he murmured, his voice heavy with sorrow.

The beast rumbled again, its gaze slowly moving to Emeriel's neck, fixing there pointedly.

Emeriel held his breath, his heart pounding. Was that some sort of...communication?

"Are you trying to tell me something?" Helplessness mingled with desperate hope. "I wish I could understand..."

And then, he felt something else.

His blood surged through his veins, and a tingling warmth followed. Emeriel yearned, with a sudden, fierce intensity, for the beast to drink from him once more.

He tilted his head, baring the vulnerable curve of his neck. "Drink," he rasped, "Please, I want you to... to drink from me again."

It seemed the beast had been waiting for the invitation. A rough tongue lashed across his neck, followed by the sharp sting of a fang.

The beast had begun to feed.

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GRAND LORD VLADYA

Grand Lord Vladya stood frozen, hidden in the shadows. He watched, his hand gripping Yaz's arm,

stunned. Speechless. Unable to tear his gaze away.

After centuries of existence, filled with so many experiences both wondrous and horrific, very little could genuinely surprise him anymore.

He had borne witness to the full spectrum of the world's nature – the beautiful heights of goodness and the abyssal depths of evil. Yet, even with a past scarred by darkness, he had never, in all his extensive life, envisioned a sight such as this.

Daemonikai had broken free to answer the boy's call. The boy's strange call.

Vladya's voice caught in his throat, a strange knot of emotions twisting in his chest.

"Your Highness, did the feral beast of the grand king just... communicate with that boy?" Yaz's voice, though hushed, held a tremor that betrayed his normally unflappable demeanor.

Even in the low murmur, Vladya could detect the disbelief edging into his trusted soldier's tone.

Daemon had just saved Emeriel. Again.

His untamed, best friend had hugged someone with remarkable gentleness.

The boy was bloodfeeding a feral. Willingly.

Overwhelmed by the scene unfolding before him, Vladya struggled to process the sheer improbability of it all. His mind raced, each thought tripping over the last.

His eyes were wide with astonishment, jaw slack in awe. A lifetime of carefully cultivated composure faltered as his mouth opened and closed soundlessly, unable to form words. He was a master of self-control, nothing truly got to him anymore, yet this...

The beast clung to the boy as it drank from him.

Its paw did not dig into the boy's skin. Instead, it delicately used a fang to draw blood from the boy's pale neck.

He knew. Somehow, the feral knew using fewer fangs while bloodfeeding in beast form would reduce the risk of harming the feeder.

Soft moans of pleasure emanated from the boy, his body writhing restlessly as the beast's elixir coursed through his veins. But, if the feral did not stop soon, it would drain the boy completely.

The boy came with a throaty whimper. Shudders rippled through his small frame. He squirmed even closer to the beast, burrowing deeper like he wanted to disappear into that fur.

And the feral placed a hand on his back and caressed the boy.