

Chapter 120

"Y-Yes, Your Grace?" Her heart was lodged firmly in her throat.

Their eyes met, his green ones unreadable.

Panic surged through Emeriel. Why is he staring? Does he know who I am? Why—

A horrified gasp from one of the Urekai maids snapped Emeriel out of her trance. With a jolt, she realized she had stopped dead in the doorway, standing awkwardly in plain sight—a few paces away from the grand king.

He did not recognize her... he was waiting for her to drop the tray she carried.

"I-I apologize, Your Grace!" Emeriel blurted out, rushing forward, her face flushing with embarrassment. Her hands shook as she hastily arranged the dishes.

King Daemonikai's gaze burned into the back of her head. That look inspired a mix of fear, mortification, and— to her utter dismay—arousal.

Finally, Emeriel was done. She bowed deeply, then rose to join the other servers lined up against the wall.

The grand king's eyes lingered on her for a fraction longer before dismissing her with a cold indifference. There was no recognition in those emerald depths. No trace of the warmth he had shown Princess Galilea earlier.

Instead, his gaze was as frigid as ice. His broad shoulders were rigid with tension and power. He radiated an aura of silent warning: Come close to me and die.

After he ate in silence, they cleared the table. Emeriel had one foot out the door when the sound of that deep, authoritative voice stopped her.

"The human stays. The rest leave."

The other servers filed out, passing her in a blur of movement, until she was alone with the grand king.

His eyes fixed on her once more. That same unnerving gaze he had directed at Princess Galilea earlier.

Emeriel shifted uncomfortably.

He remained seated, his posture stiff. "You do not have a scent. Why?"

Emeriel's tongue felt thick and heavy. "I... uh... I don't know, Your Grace. I just—"

"Never mind." He cut her off with a wave of his hand. "It is not my concern, and I do not care. But why, in the name of all that is holy, does it bother me, human?"

"Huh?" Emeriel blinked, confused.

"I repeat, why does it affect me?" he said through gritted teeth, his eyes hardening. "I feel restless."

Emeriel had no idea how to respond.

Was it a rhetorical question? It sounded like one, but those intimidating green eyes seemed to demand an answer.

She cleared her throat nervously. "Uhhh..."

A commotion erupted outside the dining hall and the grand king gave a low growl, followed by similar sounds from beyond the doors.

Emeriel's eyes widened in alarm. What was happening?

The grand king's eyes flickered, the green momentarily overtaken by a hint of yellow. Then he rose from his chair with lethal grace, and strode past Emeriel, exiting the hall.

The commotion outside grew louder. A noise of hushed whispers and hurried footsteps. Emeriel's nerves were distressed with each passing moment. Unable to contain her curiosity, she stepped out of the dining hall, too.

Urekai maids huddled in small groups at every corner, their voices low and urgent. The soldiers were nowhere to be seen.

Emeriel approached one of the groups, feigning nonchalance as she listened in on their conversation.

"She should be in her home," one maid whispered, eyes wide with alarm. "Why would she let herself go into full heat here in the fortress?"

"That was a foolish thing to do," another agreed. "Does she not know her cycle?"

"Very foolish indeed. Her scent has traveled far. I'm sure every unbonded male in Frostfall and even Blackstone can smell it."

A smaller voice chimed in, "Maybe she has erratic heat?"

"True." A chorus of agreement followed. "Very unpredictable. Might be why she was unaware it would happen today."

"I pity her," one maid said with a wince. "She will be dragged into the woods and mounted by at least ten of them before her heat is sated. The recovery will be excruciating."

"Not if the grand lords can stop it," another replied. "His Grace has already left."

Emeriel backed away, heart pounding. A maid in full heat? The scent so potent it lured every unbonded male toward her?

Lord Herod said it was unusual to have four minis. Does it mean I also has erratic heat, and it, too, will come at any moment without warning?

Emeriel swallowed hard, a knot forming in her lower belly.

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

"They are here," Ottai signaled, his voice cutting through the dense forest air with urgency.

Daemonikai followed, Zaiper on his heels.

The arousal coursing through Daemonikai felt alien, unfamiliar. He was hard as stone. Consumed by desire to hunt down the source of the scent and mount her. To ride her so thoroughly, she would not be able to walk for days.

Control, he reminded himself fiercely. You are going to save the girl, not attack her.

He drew in a deep, steadying breath. It had been so long since a heat had affected him this way. When the scent had first hit him, a flood of dizzying arousal crashed over his senses, it had taken him a moment to understand what was happening.

"Get away from her, all of you!" Ottai barked as they approached the girl.

The soldiers – Daemonikai counted at least fifteen – snarled at the fourth ruler, their eyes glazed with lust and defiance. The primal urge to mount the female in heat had overridden their reason.

The girl lay sprawled on the dusty ground, her clothes disheveled and bunched around her chest, her legs spread eagle-wide. Her eyes were glazed over with arousal, her face contorted in a mixture of sexlust and pain, pleading silently for relief.

"Step away from the girl, all of you!" Zaiper ordered.

Several of the soldiers hissed in response. Their claws extended, their bodies tensed, ready to fight for their claim.

Daemonikai allowed his beast to rise to the surface, his body undergoing a partial shift. He grew taller, his muscles bulging, his features hardening into his fierce, hybrid form.

"Clear away from her. Now," his voice became a menacing growl.

Whines and whimpers filled the air, but the males slowly backed away, creating a path to the girl. Daemonikai was not yet satisfied, his beast still agitated.

With a sharp breath, he released a burst of pheromones into the air.

"Your Grace," several soldiers rasped in unison, their defiance replaced with fear and pain. They fell to their knees, heads bowed in deference. Even his grand lords felt the power of his dominance, their necks bared in submission.

The display calmed him slightly, but the agitation remained. With the absence of his bondmate to soothe him, the girl's scent and the multiple scents of male arousal assaulted his senses.

And for some inexplicable reason, his mind drifted to Princess Galilea. Her scent had been calming. Like a balm to his troubled soul.