

Chapter 229

"I don't think you've lost her, either. Beneath all those layers of armor is a woman who loves you more than life itself, Your Grace." Ottai said quietly, glancing back at her. "She stayed by your side through it all. Even when the chill of the frostfever became unbearable, she never left. Fought to keep you warm with her own body, despite the danger to her own health."

The grand lord shook his head in remembered disbelief. "Beneath that tough exterior is a girl who is hurting, afraid to extend her love again."

Daemonikai's eyes followed Emeriel as she approached an elderly slave woman struggling to carry a heavy bucket. Without hesitation, she took the bucket, lifted it, and carried it across the garden.

Underneath it all, she's still the same soft-hearted female he once knew as Galilea.

And Daemonikai would reach her.

He would tear down her defenses, one brick after another, until he found that girl again. And this time, he would never let her go.

"And Vladya? What about him?" he asked Ottai.

"Aekeira is with him. She spends most of her days there."

Daemonikai nodded. "She will bring him home."

"I hope so. Blackstone is empty without him."

"She will," Daemonikai said confidently. Now, it was time to go to his woman.

Rising, he climbed the rock. "Wish me luck, Ottai."

Ottai didn't miss a beat. "I absolutely will. Seeing as you're rather terrible at this whole courting thing."

"Of course I am," Daemonikai threw a glare behind him. "I'm four thousand years out of practice."

The fourth ruler's lips twitched at the corners. "I wish you all the luck in the world."

Daemonikai clapped him on the shoulder, then strode down the hill toward Emeriel.

It was time to try again.

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Along the way, Grand King Daemonikai gritted his teeth as yet another well-wisher greeted him.

How was he supposed to sneak up on his woman when everyone kept "Your Gracing" him?

He noticed the precise moment his princess became aware of his approach.

Pausing her conversation with two slaves, Emeriel's entire body went rigid.

But they were in public, and remembering her impeccable manners as Galilea, Daemonikai knew—hoped—she wouldn't cause a scene.

As he drew closer, she turned and offered him the perfect princess greeting, complete with a graceful curtsy.

"Princess Emeriel," he said warmly, taking her hand and pressing a soft kiss on her knuckles.

The contact sent a pleasurable jolt through him. He had to force himself to let go.

"To what do I owe the magnificence that is your visit, Your Grace?" she asked, tone formal.

"I wish to spend the rest of the day with you."

She made a nervous dart of her head. "It would be unkind of me to monopolize your attention, considering your quite busy schedule, Your Grace."

Hiding his smile, Daemonikai said smoothly. "I assure you, my schedule has already been cleared. I am, after all, a king recovering from one of the deadliest illnesses ever to afflict our kind." He shrugged. "My advisors insist I need more rest, and I can think of no better rest than to spend time with you."

Their exchange was attracting attention. Even the human women nearby were gushing over his words.

"Go with him, Princess," one of the women to Emeriel's left whispered in excitement.

"Follow His Grace," another echoed from the right. "You know you want to."

Moments like this made his heightened hearing a blessing.

"Nothing would bring me greater joy, Your Grace, but... uhm..." She gestured to the array of seedlings. "I must transplant these to the garden behind the fortress. It will take quite a while, and I cannot simply—"

"We will do it," several slaves volunteered in unison. The rest of the nearby workers chorused. "Just leave it to us, Princess Emeriel."

"Leave it to them," Daemonikai echoed, extending his hand with a smile.

With a resigned sigh, Emeriel placed her smaller hand in his, allowing him to lead her away.

But the further they ventured past the crowd, into more secluded areas, the stiffer her shoulders became.

Oh, she was mad, alright.

The best course of action would probably be to talk it out. To address the issues that separated them.

But their last attempt had ended disastrously, and Daemonikai was well aware of his deficiencies. He really wasn't good at this. Not the talking, not the wooing.

So, he would play dirty. That was his plan.

The angry princess spun around. "I do not appreciate—"

Daemonikai shifted.

Body expanding, fur erupting along limbs and claws extending, his male form melted away for his beast to come forth.

He stretched his powerful limbs, enjoying the familiar sensation of raw power flowing through his muscles. It had been a while.

"Oh..." Emeriel breathed, tension melting away in an instant. The anger vanished like it was never there.

For the first time since her return, he saw her eyes lit up. A genuine, dazzling smile spread across her face.

"Hey, friend," she raised her hand, palm open, extended to him.

His assumptions were correct. Emeriel's animosity towards him did not extend to his beast. His Beloved was partial, that way. For once, fortune was on his side.

Daemonikai had seen the memories of their relationship in his feral state, and he knew just how much she adored his second-half.

The beast was, in a way, her first love.

Raising a massive paw, he pressed it gently against her outstretched hand, and she intertwined her fingers with his claws.

"How have you been?" she whispered in a soft, affectionate tone. "It's been so long,"

I am fine, prettiest one, thanks to you.

"I know you can hear me." Her other hand dug into his fur. "It's okay if you don't respond."

Then, she shot him a stern look. "I know what you did, Your Grace. Don't think I'm unaware."

Daemonikai chuckled. The sound emerged as a rumbling snort from his beast.

"But I can forgive this," Emeriel conceded, smiling again. "I've missed the beast."

We missed you too, beloved.

Did she not realize he and the beast were one and the same?

"My good friend," she said, in such a tender voice, reaching up. "My beast."

Yours, my dearest.

Daemonikai leaned into her touch, lowering his head so she could stroke his cheek. He purred, enjoying her touch.

Sadness tugged at him. His male side couldn't get this unguarded affection from her.

But for now, he was content. The beast could reach her in ways the male couldn't, and Daemonikai was willing to take what he could get.

He could definitely spend the rest of his day this way.