

Captive Slave 375

Chapter 375

"Feverfew for the head," Madam Livia murmured, clipping the leafy plant and placing it into the basket Emeriel carried as the two of them walked through the woods. "Comfrey for wounds, valerian for sleep."

Emeriel whistled absently, her spirits lifted by the joy of her new gift. Her Daemon had decided to keep the revelation a secret for now, at least until the Oracle could provide more insight. In his own words, "To protect my pregnant female before the people start lining up in crowds outside the residence all day to see her."

"Are you listening to me?" Madam Livia asked, narrowing her eyes in suspicion. "Of course," Emeriel replied with a quick smile.

The woman wasn't fooled. "No, you weren't. I understand how difficult it must be not to think about the Grand King every waking moment, but if you truly want to learn herbal craft, you must focus, Princess."

Emeriel flushed, still smiling. She hadn't been thinking about Daemonikai... not exactly.

"Now, let's gather some valerian for-" Her words were cut short by the sharp whistle of an arrow striking her shoulder.

Madam Livia gasped and collapsed.

Emeriel didn't have time to react before she heard another whistle headed straight for her. Acting on reflex, she snatched it mid-air, flung it aside, and spun on her heel. She ran with all her strength, driven forward by instinct.

The shot had come from far off, giving her precious seconds. She bolted between trees, using their trunks to shield her from the line of fire. But she wasn't as fast as she used to be, one hand pressed to her belly.

"Get her! She must not get away!" a voice barked from behind. Footsteps thundered after her.

My Beloved, I need your help. My Beloved, please help me.

But even after the call, panic clung to her chest. It's not just me anymore. She needed to protect their child until he arrived. Emeriel could not bear the thought of anything going wrong.

Twigs cracked underfoot as she pushed herself harder, lungs burning. Did Lord Zaiper send them?

Her hand smacked the rough bark of a tree to steady herself. Running wouldn't save her; she needed to hide. Scanning the underbrush, she spotted a dense cluster of tall grass up ahead. It could be enough. She veered toward it.

But a root snagged her foot, and she stumbled.

The world tilted—she threw out her arms to break the fall, twisting her body to shield her womb as she hit the ground hard. Pain exploded up her arm, and she choked back a cry. Move. Move!

Bootsteps pounded closer, louder. She could hear the rustle of cloth, the sound of weapons.

Emeriel tried to get up, but it was too much effort, so she began to crawl. Dragging herself toward the hiding place, every movement a battle. Almost there. Almost-

A hand tangled in her hair and yanked.

"Got her!" the voice roared. Fingers seized her shoulder, jerking her to her feet. "Put the dagger through her chest, let's get out of here!" another voice shouted. Emeriel drove her knee into the inside of his leg, aiming just above the joint. His grip loosened just enough for her to twist herself free, drop low, and sweep his ankle with her heel.

He stumbled, catching himself before he fell.

"What in the devils!? We've got a fighter mama here," the masked attacker shouted, amused.

She drove her elbow into his throat before the grin could spread further.

He doubled over, coughing, clutching his throat. "Fuck!"

Emeriel took off running for her life, but his arm hooked around her waist and yanked her back, his brute strength crushing her body against his, pressing hard into her abdomen. My baby.

Reacting fast, she drove her heel down, hard, onto the top of his foot. He snarled, but didn't let go. She slammed the back of her head into his face. Pain jolted through her skull, but his own roar and loosened grip made the impact worth it. Tearing free, she bolted again

But he caught her again, driving her back into a tree, the impact jarring her spine. His hand clamped around her throat, cutting off her air.

"You annoying little brat!" he raged into her face. "Human scum."

"Let go!" she wheezed, clawing at his arm. Tears in her eyes, fearing for the life inside her.

He squeezed harder, hissing. "Let's see how fierce you are without air."

Her body bucked against him, arms curled protectively around her stomach, even as her lungs screamed. She couldn't breathe. Her legs kicked, her strength waning

From the corner of her eye, she saw other males. Many of them, masked and dressed in black robes. Just how many soldiers came out here today to kill her? To watch her die? This is fun for them.

A scream came from deep in the woods. A second one closer

The sound of men shouting in pain. Snapping bone. The wet crunch of flesh. "Emeriel?" Daemonikai's voice, deafening, furious, shook the forest.

She tried to cry out, but her voice was gone. Her throat crushed, lungs empty. "Emeriel!" Another roar, closer now. Wild, murderous. "I'm going north!" "Leave this to me," came Lord Vladya's voice, more beast than male.

"If you make a single sound, I'll rip my hand into your belly and drag the little one out myself," the masked soldier growled in her ear. He wrenched his hand from her throat, clamping it over her mouth.

Dragging her backwards

her body

pressed tightly to his as he pulled

her from the tree.

Emeriel struggled, but her limbs were failing. She wanted to shout, to scream to

her beloved that she was here. But her lungs burned, and her vision spun.

I can't... I can't...

Heavens, not now... please not now...

Darkness closed in.

She fainted.

Daemonikai had been introducing Herodis to Ravenshadow and its people when Emeriel's call came-and he had to react immediately.

Vladya insisted on joining him, already taking his beast form as Daemonikai shifted partially, the two of them entrusting their duties to Ottai, launching into a sprint toward the forest.

The rage flooding Daemonikai's veins was indescribable. His feet pounded the earth as he surrendered completely to his instincts, allowing them to lead him to his beloved. He was in half shifted

form when he called her name, his claws tearing through enemies, necks snapping beneath his rage as he searched.

"Emeriel!"

No answer.

His anxiety worsened. "Answer me! Just one word, dearest. One word is all I need!"

But he got nothing.

He had only one thing left to rely on-his nose. He needed to trail her scent.

Moving behind a branch that sheltered a quieter area, he suppressed the whirlwind of emotions long enough to channel his senses. His nostrils flared, his mind honing in on the moment. Focusing. Tracking.

Then, he caught the most distinct scent of her. And her fear. She had been so afraid.

Growling, he moved fast. Soldiers tried to intercept him, but he dodged them. Leaving them for Vladya, he hunted only the one that mattered.

Then he saw her.

The masked Urekai who carried her was sprinting through the underbrush.

Daemonikai roared, launching himself forward. The assassin caught sight of him —and immediately dropped Emeriel. She hit the ground hard, tumbling to her

side.

Daemonikai was about to slam into her attacker when a folded cloth was flung at him. Mid-flight, it snapped open, releasing a cloud of powdered toxins.

He jerked back, nostrils flaring. Dragonblood. Abadin leaf. The distinct scent of snakeskin probably even snakebone mixed in.

The moment it hit him, his muscles screamed. Any ordinary Urekai would have collapsed instantly-paralyzed and helpless, but he wasn't ordinary. Zaiper knew that, hence the overkill. A toxin blend strong enough to burn the bones of giants.

Still, Daemonikai pushed through. With every ounce of dwindling strength, he closed the distance, seized the assassin, and fought et

Blinded by pain and rage, he ripped the dagger from the assassin's belt and plunged it into him. Going for precise, vital points, again and again, until he collapsed-bleeding out and twitching.

"Daemon!" Vladya came crashing through the brush, in his male form, blood

streaked across his robes. "Are you all right!?"

"Toxins," Daemonikai gritted. "Take care of him. I need to get Emeriel." He spun and tore through the woods, the only thing guiding him now-his love.

He found her unconscious and fragile.

Lifting her into his arms, he took off again, feet pounding the earth, back toward Ravenshadow. Pain shot through his limbs. The toxins felt like fire in his veins, his blood boiling under his skin. His arms trembled from the effort of carrying her-but he did not stop.

"Stay with me," he whispered, over and over as he ran. "Stay with me, my angel. My radiant star." He kissed her forehead, never slowing. "You fought so hard like the lioness you are. I'm so proud of you. Now, hang in there for just a little longer, love. Stay with me."