

Chapter 55

Emeriel hastened toward him, grasping the Urekai lord's hand with pleading eyes. "I apologize for intruding at this late hour, but I didn't know who else to turn to. There will be another introduction of slaves tomorrow night at the Harvest Ceremony, and I know for certain that I will be introduced. I don't know what will happen if—"

"Easy now." Lord Herod gently placed a hand on Emeriel's shoulder.

"I don't know what to do." Emeriel's gaze met Lord Herod's. "You purchased your wife from her former owner, and I wondered if you might consider buying me and my sister as well." As the Lord's eyes widened in surprise, Emeriel hurriedly continued, "Please. I am willing to do whatever you need. Anything at all you desire."

Emeriel's trembling fingers fumbled with his tunic, undoing the knot and loosening the rope securing it. "You can have me. My maidenhood is intact. Sort of. I believe virgins hold value in the market—"

"What? Stop, Emeriel," Lord Herod intervened, placing his hand over Emeriel's, halting his movements.

Emeriel panted as if he had run for miles, tears welling in his eyes. He had not slept well at all. Panic surged through him whenever he remembered the impending ceremony.

Lord Herod exhaled. "Come with me."

He guided Emeriel out of the corridor and into the sitting room, urging him to take a seat.

"I am sorry, I apologize." A tear slipped from Emeriel's eye as he slumped forward, nervously tapping his feet on the floor. "It's just..."

"I understand," Lord Herod responded kindly. "I have no desire to touch you in such a manner. I won't take advantage of you. I understand the situation you are in. Honestly, I have repeatedly thought about how I can help you. But the truth is, I don't see a way. It would have been easier if it was just any lord that purchased you, but it was a grand lord. You were bought by two grand lords, and now, you belong to the grand king. It is impossible, Emeriel."

Emeriel suspected as much. He really had. But he had clung to a sliver of hope...

He gazed downward helplessly, fresh tears blurring his eyes.

Lord Herod positioned himself beside Emeriel. "The only solution I can think of is to lay a claim on you. Once the introductions begin, I can choose you, and you can stay with me. When I select you, no other lord will have the opportunity to take you."

Emeriel's head snapped up, hope brightening his eyes. "Do you truly believe that?"

Lord Herod nodded once. "Unless I choose to share, which I do not. The only obstacle that may arise is if a grand lord takes an interest in you. Only they possess the authority to claim you, even when a lord has already laid a claim. And based on the previous introduction, I am aware that Grand Lord Zaiper showed interest in you."

Emeriel couldn't deny it.

For some inexplicable reason, that grand lord had taken a real interest in Emeriel and Akeira. He bit his lip, his leg tapping with an increased rhythm of anxiety.

Lord Herod stilled Emeriel's restless motion. "Do not worry excessively, Emeriel. Hopefully, Grand Lord Zaiper will become interested in someone else, and you will be forgotten. He is almost what humans would call a 'womanizer.' And you are 'male,' so let's hope someone else catches his eye. Without his interference, I can protect you."

Emeriel nodded gratefully, feeling a sense of relief wash over him. "I am deeply grateful for your help."

"You have to leave before the slave masters of the fortress notice your absence. The punishment for that would be severe, right?" Lord Herod asked, prompting Emeriel to give a jerky nod before rising from his seat. He really did have to return before his absence was discovered.

MERILYN

Merilyn raised her hand to knock, but noticed the door was slightly ajar. With caution, she entered the room.

"I apologize for taking so long, Dear Vlad. I have been experiencing cramps these past few days. I believe the baby is due any day now..." Her voice trailed off as she caught sight of her master.

Grand Lord Vladya had his back turned to her, but the visible tension emanating from him made Merilyn watch him carefully.

She had known him long enough to sense when something was seriously wrong.

"Vlad?" she called out gently.

He moved fast, with lightning speed. In an instant, Merilyn found herself pressed against the wall, his fingers tightly gripping her neck.

"I am your master," he growled through gritted teeth, his voice deep and menacing. "Address me as such."

His beast loomed close. Oh, this was not looking good for her.

"Master," she whispered. Lowering her gaze, she assumed a submissive posture. "My master."

"That's right. You belong to me. Despite being bonded to another and carrying his child," his fingers tightened around her neck.

"You are still mine. You belonged to me the moment you became my bloodhost, during the time we were nearly bonded, and even now. You are mine, Merilyn."

"I am yours. Completely yours," she repeated quickly. She knew better than to defy an Urekai Alpha in a territorial state. An unpredictable state. Especially one as powerful as Vladya.

"You're correct," he murmured, his hand sliding down past her swollen belly to caress her womanhood through her clothes.

"Do you remember the times when we were lovers? Ah, the good old days. You were such a slut for my cock. Always wanted to be mounted. So hungry for my touch, eager to be claimed." He began to pull at her clothing.

"Vladya..." she protested, placing her hand on top of his to stop him. "P-please stop. What is going on with you?"

His grey eyes were almost gone, his yellow irises profound. "I could take you right now. Right here. All you have to do is spread those pretty thighs for me like a good girl."

"Please don't do this," Merilyn pleaded. She had once loved this male deeply. Though her bondmate held her heart, she had never stopped caring for Vladya.

It was one thing to be tempted during the pheromone-induced frenzy of bloodfeeding—the arousal was a side effect, and there was nothing to be done about it. But another altogether to face such temptation while clear-headed. "You know you don't want this."