

Chapter 84

EMERIEL

The news of the royal decrees spread through the fortress with the speed of light, likely reaching every nook of Urai as well.

For the first time in ages, the fortress lacked its usual bustling activities. Desolate, as if drained of life. The air was shrouded in a heavy blanket of mourning.

The slave masters, always wielding their whips with merciless authority, were nowhere to be seen. The maids, constantly scurrying about their duties, had vanished. The traders, known for their incessant haggling and bartering, were absent. Even the soldiers, usually barking orders and shoving their way through the crowds, had retreated into the shadows. Consequently, the slaves found themselves alone, restricted to their quarters.

Although the king had not been killed, everyone was already in a state of bereavement. The sense of hopelessness weighed heavily upon all. Inevitability. That night, Ravenshadow Citadel was as silent as a tomb.

Emeriel sat alone in his room, struggling to hold back tears. He blinked rapidly, wiping away at the tears escaping his eyes.

His heart burned, his soul ached. Emeriel was in severe pain that no physical wound could match.

A soft knock at the door startled him. It creaked open, and Aekeira's head peeked in. "Em?"

Emeriel hastily dried his tears. "I'm here. Is something the matter?" He avoided looking at his sister, hoping she wouldn't come any closer.

But Aekeira noticed his discomfort. "Are you crying?" She entered the room, rounding the bed to stand before Emeriel. "You are."

"I am fine, truly. It is just..." Emeriel sniffled, evading her probing eyes.

"It's the beast, is it not." It was more of a statement than a question. Aekeira sank onto the bed beside Emeriel. "Oh, Em..."

"It's just... I've tried not to feel like this, you know? But I can't help it." Emeriel gripped his chest, squeezing it to alleviate the unbearable pressure within. "I don't want him to die. My heart is breaking apart just thinking about it, Keira."

Aekeira regarded Emeriel as if he had lost his mind.

Emeriel shook his head. "I knew you wouldn't understand."

Aekeira wrapped her arms around him, pulling him into a warm embrace. Emeriel sighed in gratitude, resting his head on her shoulder, allowing the tears to flow freely.

"I'm so sorry you're hurting, Em. You're right, I don't understand, but I'm trying to." She ran soothing hands across his back. "It's okay, Em. I've got you."

Time passed, but Emeriel remained unaware of how long he wept. When he finally withdrew, Aekeira's shoulder was saturated with his tears. His sister rose and returned with a napkin, which she tenderly handed to him. He used it to wipe away his tears and blow his nose.

"I'm sorry for crying all over you like that. I'm supposed to be male, all masculine and hard. Not crying and whining," Emeriel said, his voice thick with shame.

"To hell with that notion. You're exactly the way you're supposed to be. Perfect the way you are."

Emeriel gave a jerky nod and brushed a stray tear from his reddened eyes.

"You are really his Soulbond," Aekeira whispered, her tone tinged with bitterness. "Oh, Em. Why must fate play such a cruel trick?"

"I do not know. I simply do not know."

"How do you feel? I don't mean about the royal decree, but about being his soulmate. How does it feel?"

Emeriel thought about it, staring into space...searching for the right words. "Overwhelming. Intense. Surreal. It's as if my heart and body have a mind of their own when it comes to him. Even in his beast form, he has so much control over me, I have no idea how it'll feel to see him in his human form." Another sniffle escaped his lips. "And I want to, Keira. So much it's like a living hunger inside me."

"Gods above." Aekeira's eyes widened. "It's that intense? Why haven't you said anything to me, Em? I didn't know you were going through this."

"You already made it clear where you stand regarding the beast, Keira. How could I possibly begin to tell you about this?"

"I'm so sorry. I should have been more supportive." Aekeira drew him back into her embrace, her voice filled with remorse.

"Don't apologize for that. You have nothing to apologize for. The beast has hurt both of us. He's mindless and doesn't even take a human form. Who would want their sister pouring her heart out about such a creature?"

"But still—"

"But still, nothing. If our roles were reversed, I would likely feel the same way." Emeriel pulled away and gazed into Aekeira's eyes. "But you know what, Keira? King Daemonikai may be feral, but somewhere deep within his void of a mind, he recognizes me. Perhaps not as his Soulbond, but as someone remotely important to him. That beast would never harm me."

"I really wish to agree with you, Em, but... I do not know. I still remember that night," Aekeira shuddered, "Everything about him screamed...wild and untamed. Animalistic."

"I slept in the forbidden chambers, last night," Emeriel blurted out.

Aekeira blinked twice. "You did what?"

"I couldn't sleep. I went there, got inside, and laid with him. He... he allowed me, Aekeira," Emeriel revealed, his voice trembling. "He didn't just let me into his territory; I slept in his arms, cushioned by his soft, furry chest and strong thighs. I buried my fingers in his mane-like hair, and he let me."

"By the gods..." Aekeira swallowed hard. "Oh, Em, you are in deep."

Emeriel hugged his knees. Yeah, tell me about it.

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GRAND LORD VLADYA

Grand Lord Vladya stood in his study, a lone figure outlined against the moonlit window. His gaze swept across the training grounds, where the obsidian sky met the jagged peaks of the distant mountains.

He had nearly lost himself that evening. Long after the court session ended, he remained in the back room, locked in a battle against his savage instincts. The only reason he made it was Ottai, that stubborn male, refused to let him do otherwise.

As Vladya's form began to warp and shift, Ottai had partially shifted, restraining him with surprising strength. Vladya had raked him with his claws, leaving deep furrows in Ottai's flesh, but the male wouldn't give up, filling the air with stories of Tiara and Daemonikai, and how they would not have wanted this.

Vladya had been consumed by rage, but it was not Tiara's memory that pulled him back from the brink. It was another face that flashed before his eyes. Aekeira.

As Ottai spoke of Tiara, Vladya saw the human princess instead. Her wide eyes, filled with a mixture of fear and defiance, had somehow pierced the haze of his anger.

The confusion, the sheer strangeness of the experience, was enough to pull his mind away from the shift. Why, in the name of all that is cursed, would he think about that girl in a moment like that?