

## Chapter 106

Emeriel stared at him, her mind reeling. Her jaw slack in disbelief.

"I-I don't know what to say. Th-Thank you, Your Highness," she finally managed to stammer out.

"Do not thank me." He picked up a jeweled goblet from the desk, staring at it distractedly. "Let's be clear. This is a temporary reprieve. I will not intervene on your behalf, nor will I appeal to the court. I will only pretend tonight never happened. As long as the court, as long as no one else discovers your secret, I will turn a blind eye."

He dropped the goblet back with a clink, looking up at her. "But the moment your deception is revealed, all bets are off."

She lowered her eyes to the floor.

"As for you being Daemonikai's Soulbond." He tapped a silver letter opener rhythmically against the desk, his gaze fixed on her. "My first thought is to move you to one of our territories in the mountainside. As far from Daemonikai as possible. He does not need this right now. He has lost his entire family—his bondmate and offsprings. After centuries of madness, he is forced to confront that loss. To truly feel it. He does NOT need this right now."

Emeriel swallowed the lump in her throat, refusing to let lord Vladya's words wound her.

She had never harbored any illusions of acceptance once the truth was out. But the mere thought of being so distant from Daemonikai sent a wave of nausea through her.

"But if I do that—keep you so far away from your Soulbond after your entire being has recognized him—your soul will begin to yearn and wither away. Eventually, when your soul cannot take it anymore, you will die. He does not know you yet, so he would be fine, but you? You will die."

Lord Vladya's brow furrowed, his head tilted in thought. "I might not have any love for your kind, but I will not do that to you. To Daemonikai. He may not be ready for this now, but that does not mean he will not be in the future."

"Once he has grieved, once he's had time to process and accept that tiny little detail that your people literally turned his entire world upside down, he might come around." Lord Vladya's gaze bore into her. "Let's say, in nine-hundred years. Maybe a hundred years sooner."

Emeriel averted her eyes, the meaning he was implying crushing her.

He clicked his tongue. "Anyway, since I do not want your soul to wither away, you may remain here, close to him. But, as of today, I will put you on scent suppressors. Do you understand?"

Emeriel did not like the sound of that. At all.

Tears prickled the back of her eyes, but she blinked them away and gave a nod anyway. It wasn't like she had any other choice.

"That is the only role I will play in this matter. I will not actively interfere to keep you two apart—no one meddles with that son-of-a-gun fate. I have no idea what game she is playing now, but I suppose we will all have to wait and see, will we not?"

Emeriel bit her lips not to say a word.

"Rise."

Rising unsteadily, she hastily wiped away the tears that had escaped her eyes.

For a moment, Lord Vladya studied her intently. His stern features finally softened. "It may not seem like it, but I am also doing you a favor. Perhaps, if five hundred years ago hadn't happened, if your kind hadn't played a role in the death of his family and his descent into madness, this wouldn't be such a disaster waiting to unfold." He sighed.

"But you are human, and he is the Urekai's grand king. Our people will never accept this, accept you. And Daemonikai himself... You are too small for all that rage building inside him, Emeriel. He will crush you, before you get close enough to attempt replacing all he lost."

"I didn't wish for this," Emeriel whispered, her gaze fixed on her trembling hands. Tears blurred her vision. "I didn't wish for any of this, Lord Vladya."

"Fate is a cruel bastard, Emeriel," he said, a hint of weariness in his voice. "I, more than anyone, know that to be true. As for your gender, you can either go to the grand high court and reveal the truth, or you can continue living as you have. The choice is yours."

Lord Vladya drummed his fingers on the armrest. "My advice to you? Continue living the way you are now. It will solve all your problems. Simply ensure you do not get caught, and stay away from Daemonikai."

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That night, Emeriel lay upon her bed, her heart a heavyweight in her chest. The tears had ceased, leaving behind a hollow ache that permeated her entire being.

Her gaze fell upon the scent suppressants neatly arranged on the nightstand. Lord Vladya had sent a generous supply.

His final words echoed in her mind, replaying like a haunting melody.

"I could still send you to the mountainside. No one knows you there. You could live as a female, become a servant, and work for a household. Our people may despise humans, but we hold Syrens in high regard. Every unbonded Urekai yearns for a Syren, hoping that maybe, just maybe, she might be their bondmate."

"You could spend your heats with other males there. Who knows, you might even find someone you're compatible with. He may not be your Soulbond, but if a bond forms after the ritual, you will have a new life. Your soul will not wither if a new bond takes root. You will have a bondmate who loves you, offspring, a sense of belonging, a new home."

"No one will notice or care that you're gone. Zaiper will be overjoyed to hear of your departure. If you agree, I will make it happen. Think it over carefully and give me your answer when you have made up your mind." He leaned back in his high-backed chair, his gaze lingering on her for a moment. "Consider it my final gift to you."

Emeriel exhaled slowly, a long sigh escaping her lips as she rolled onto her side. The offer was tempting, a life free from fear and deception. A glimmer of hope in the darkness that had enveloped her life.

To live as a female, free from the shackles of slavery, with no fear of discovery or retribution. To live a simple, peaceful life, far removed from the cruelties of Ravensshadow. It was a dream come true.

But that dream would not include Aekeira. Any life without her sister would not be worth living. And the thought of never seeing her Beloved again made it difficult to breathe.

Just the idea of it brought fresh tears to her already swollen, tired eyes.

Why is my life so complicated? What do I do now?