

Chapter 110

EMERIEL

Emeriel forced herself to step back from the grand king's embrace. "Thank you, Your Grace."

As they resumed their walk, a tingling sensation spread through her body, her heart pounding in her chest. Why did the universe seem to delight in her suffering? Why was she constantly subjected to these trials?

No, Your Grace, we have not met before.

Another lie to add to the growing list of deceptions weighing heavily on her conscience. It was necessary for her survival, but it still stung.

She was no longer Prince Emeriel, nor was she simply Slave Emeriel. She was Princess Galilea, a betrothed to a Urekai high lord.

She needed to start acting the part, instead of yearning to be back in those strong arms, safe and protected.

"Why are you so nervous around me, Princess?" King Daemonikai questioned, in that rich voice that made her jittery on the inside.

How to answer that question? Emeriel opted for a half-truth. "Well, you are the grand king," she said, her voice holding a slight tremor. "I have heard many stories about you, and frankly, they are enough to make anyone nervous. I am sure I am not the only one who feels this way."

For the first time, the corners of his lips twitched upwards, hinting at a smile that never fully bloomed. "You are not," he admitted. "You may relax, Princess. I assure you, I will not harm you."

"Not even because I am human? I know you don't like my kind." The words fell from her lips before she could stop them.

Daemonikai's stride faltered, and he stiffened beside her.

"Please forgive me," Emeriel pleaded, mortified. "I have no idea what came over me."

He continued walking, his hands clasped behind his back, the tension gradually easing from his shoulders.

Silence enveloped them, broken only by the sounds of nature and the rustling of leaves beneath their feet.

They reached the garden, and Emeriel couldn't suppress a smile. This tranquil oasis had always been her favorite part of the estate, even back in Ravenshadow.

"Would you like to see the garden, Your Grace?" she offered, hoping to steer the conversation away from her earlier blunder.

His eyes met hers, and once again, Emeriel found herself trapped in his intense gaze.

He was doing it again, staring at her with a concentration that thrilled and unnerved her. There was no shyness, no pretense of gentlemanly decorum in his gaze. Grand King Daemonikai stared, his eyes penetrating her very soul.

Emeriel flushed under his scrutiny, her insides burning. She had never been looked at in such a way before.

"Your Grace?" she asked, her voice husky and uncertain.

"Lead the way, please," he said, his deep voice a velvety caress.

Emeriel obeyed, her heart racing as she guided him through the garden. All too happy to break the eye-connection.

She could feel his heat behind her with every step, a constant reminder of his potent presence. They strolled leisurely along a winding stone path, the garden unfolding before them like a vibrant tableau of color. Tall, ivy-clad walls enclosed the space, creating an intimate haven that seemed to shut out the outside world. The garden was carefully arranged, with symmetrical beds overflowing with medicinal herbs, fragrant flowers, and useful plants like lavender, chamomile, and rosemary.

Emeriel pointed to a bed of vibrant blue blossoms. "These are borage flowers, Your Grace. Not only are they beautiful, but they are also known to uplift the spirit. According to folklore, they instill courage and comfort the heart."

Why was she telling him this? Perhaps it was because she hoped by engaging him, she could prolong their time together.

This was a stolen moment. A precious encounter she had never dared to imagine. In its wickedness, fate had somehow found a way to bring this male to her.

The grand king seemed intrigued. He leaned closer, examining the star-shaped blooms with a curious gaze. "Courage from a flower, you say?" he mused. "That is indeed fascinating. And they are quite pleasing to the eye."

"Yes, indeed," Emeriel agreed, a smile gracing her lips as she led him towards another garden section. Rows of lavender stretched out in a soothing purple wave. "And here we have lavender. Its uses are numerous. Aside from its calming fragrance, believed to aid sleep, it is also used in remedies for skin ailments and added to teas for its relaxing properties."

King Daemonikai brushed his fingers against the lavender, releasing its distinctive aroma. "Ah, I am familiar with this one," he said, a shadow passing over his face. "My bondmate was quite fond of its fragrance. We used to keep sachets of dried lavender in our chambers."

Oh... Dangerous ground.

Emeriel bit her lips. "I am sorry for your loss," she whispered.

He said nothing, only walked away from the lavender, his steps measured and deliberate. As they moved deeper into the garden, the silence lingered, heavy with unspoken tension.

"Even the lavender does not help with sleep," he finally spoke again. "Nor do any of the medicinal herbs."

"You do not sleep well?" Emeriel asked.

"I do not sleep at all," he corrected, his tone flat. "Perhaps it is for the best."

He stopped abruptly, turning to face her, his piercing gaze locking onto hers.

"You asked if I hate humans. The answer is yes. Some days, I feel as though I cannot breathe for the sheer hatred that consumes me towards your kind." He spoke calmly, but his words carried a chilling weight. "I spend countless hours, time I cannot afford to waste, lost in thoughts of vengeance. Visuals of retribution. I wonder how I can possibly alleviate this pain. To make it even a fraction less unbearable. Should I burn the world down? Set it ablaze and watch it crumble to ashes?" His head tilted to the side. "I could do it, and I would not feel a shred of remorse."

Emeriel shivered, the hairs on her arms standing on end.