

## Chapter 2 Urekai

PRINCE EMERIEL

Stepping outside the next morning, two warriors stopped before Emeriel. "The king summons you, my prince," One of them said. "Your presence is needed in the courtroom."

Shit. That foolish minister wasted no time ratting on him.

Emeriel let the way to court. It's just whipping, he will be fine.

But, as he walked down the hall towards the door, it was eerily quiet.

Something was wrong.

The court was always noisy from the outside. Mutterings, murmurs, arguments were always expected.

His worry deepened when the door opened, and all eyes didn't turn to gaze at him condescendingly. Instead, everyone's eyes were fixed at the center of the king's court.

Emeriel's eyes followed theirs.

Two men dressed in all-white apparel robes, with long, straight, waist-length black hair stood, appearing harmless.

But a longer glance had Emeriel noticing muscles barely concealed under their robes, their slightly tipped ears, and their incredibly unnaturally handsome faces that were completely unreadable.

He froze.

Urekai.

These ones looked expensive and aristocratic.

Emeriel's throat went dry. No one prays to meet a Urekai face-to-face.

"What do you say, King Orestus?" the Urekai with the long scar running from his cheek spoke. He looked the most intimidating.

"No, this cannot happen," King Orestus protested, looking terrified, and doing a poor job of hiding it.

The frown on Scarred Urekai's face deepened. Clearly, this was a being that did not take no for an answer.

"You are mistaken if you think we are giving you a choice, human king," he said, taking a threatening step forward.

The ministers of the court gasped, shrinking back into their seats.

"Easy, Lord Vladya," the other Urekai spoke, his voice gentler. Imploring rather than commanding.

The scarred Urekai, Lord Vladya, gave the king a hard look that would make any man tremble. "It is the least you can do, human king. Give us the princess, and we will leave quietly."

"We are ready to pay for her," the other Urekai added, reaching into his robe and withdrawing a large bag of coins.

Fear receded. The king's ears perked up with interest. "Money?"

"Not just money, there are gold coins too," The non-scarred Urekai said.

Everyone gasped, including Emeriel. Gold coins were rare and highly valuable.

The Urekai continued, "All you have to do is hand the princess over, and this bag is yours."

Wait...

Princess?

They couldn't possibly mean...

The grand entrance opened again as two guards led Aekeira into the court.

No, no, no, not my sister.

Emeriel moved forward, but the guards who had escorted him stopped his movement. He bit his lip hard, trying not to draw attention to himself, but it was incredibly difficult.

Surely, this couldn't be what he thought it was. It had to be a dream.

There was no way the Urekai were here to buy his sister as a slave...!

The two guards leading Aekeira to the center of the court, stopped a few feet from the Urekais.

The terror on Aekeira's face mirrored Emeriel's feelings.

"So, let me get this straight," King Orestus began, "All I need to do is sell her to you, and all this money is mine? There are no other conditions? Nothing else?"

"Yes," the non-scarred Urekai responded.

Lord Vladya moved forward, closing the distance between him and Aekeira, who was visibly shaking now.

Cupping Aekeira's cheek tilting her head to the side to get a better look. He appeared utterly disgusted. "She'll do."

King Orestus picked up his gavel and struck it hard on his desk. "Sold! From this moment on, Princess Aekeira belongs to the Urekais."

"WHAT!?" The shout escaped Emeriel's lips before he could stop it.

He ran toward the center of the courtroom and fell to his knees. "Please don't sell my sister to them. Not to the Urekais! Please, Your Majesty."

The king gave him a bored look. "It's out of my hands now, Emeriel."

It's out of his...

Emeriel couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You can't let this happen. She's your niece too! How could you do this!?"

He wasn't proud his voice turned the high-pitch of a girl's, as he practically screamed. But he didn't care. "You know a fate worse than death awaits her beyond the great mountain! How could you agree to sell her to them?"

"As if he has a choice," Lord Vladya scoffed, his deep baritone filled with cynicism.

Emeriel whirled around to face them, anger blanketing his features. But as he stared into those intimidating gray eyes, he couldn't bring himself to give in to his rage.

He had read in one of the books that an Urekai had the power to take a life without physical contact. It might just be a rumor, but with his sister's life on the line, he had no intention of testing that theory.

"I will go too. Where Aekeira goes, I go," Emeriel said, lifting his chin defiantly.

Aekeira snapped her head toward Emeriel, her eyes widened in terror. "No! What are you doing, Em?"

"I'm going with you," Emeriel stated firmly.

Lord Vladya arched a perfectly shaped brow. "No. We have no need for you; we only need your sister."

Emeriel stood. "I don't care. Take me too. If you leave me here, I will always try to come to her. I will cross the great mountains if I have to!"

Lord Vladya laughed. There was no humor in the cold sound. "Without the rite of passage, the great mountain will swallow you whole. You'll never make it to the other side."

"I'll take my chances," Emeriel vowed.

"No! My brother is not coming," Aekeira interjected, before turning pleading eyes to Emeriel. "Don't do this, Em. I'm already doomed. I don't want you to face the same fate!"

"If you come with us, you will be taken as our slave." Lord Vladya stated, pinning Emeriel with a stare. "Urekai do not care if you're male or female; you will serve in any way your master wants you. Whether it's in the mines or the cellar, on your back, bent over, or on your knees. If you agree to be our slave too, your freewill ends today."

A shiver ran through Emeriel's spine.

"Do you know what it means to be an Urekai's slave, little human? You're a pretty boy; you will not lack masters to service."

Fear seeped through his core. If everything he had heard growing up and read in books were true, being an Urekai's slave was worse than being a human's slave.

And my dreams...

I should be running in a different direction...!

But he steeled his spine. "Where my sister goes, I go."

"We did not agree to get two slaves," the second Urekai said.

"That is settled then," Lord Vladya continued as if he never spoke.

Reaching into his robe, the scarred Urekai pulled out another bag of coins, throwing both on the floor towards the king. "We will take both."

"Sold!" King Orestus banged his gavel again.