

## Chapter 24

"Yes, my Lord," Aekeira avoided his gaze, keeping her head lowered. Something in this grand lord's eyes made her feel apprehensive and nervous.

Something strange happened the previous night, but Aekeira abruptly shut the door on it, refusing to dwell upon it.

Emeriel finally woke during the night. After Aekeira fed her, Madam Livia had Amie prepare a basin for her to bathe in the room. Following the bath, Emeriel appeared better than she had been all day.

"How do you feel now?" Aekeira asked, once they had settled Emeriel back onto the bed.

"Better," Emeriel replied with a soft, sad smile. "For a moment there, I was beginning to think I would not make it."

Guilt filled Aekeira's eyes. "I am so sorry about—"

"Do not blame yourself, sister," Emeriel said, grasping her sister's hands. "It was not your fault. Do not punish yourself for something beyond your control."

Madam Livia entered once again, her expression softening as she looked at Emeriel. "You're awake."

"Yes, madam. Thank you so much for taking care of me. I do not know what I would have done without you," Emeriel smiled.

Madam Livia waved her off. "Do not fret over it. How do you feel now?"

"I feel better, madam. Thank you."

"I do not understand why that beast is so interested in you, Em," Aekeira pondered. When all eyes turned to her, she averted her gaze. "I had my suspicions the first night I was sent to him. You touched my arm before I went in, and the beast was particularly fixated there."

, "Those vicious scratches," Madam Livia interjected. "I wondered what caused them."

"I have no idea, Keira," Emeriel exhaled shakily. "None of it makes sense to me. Not the heat, not the beast's actions, and not the syren thing. Nothing at all."

Aekeira was confused. "What are you talking about?"

Emeriel gave Aekeira detailed explanations of her ordeal, beginning on the first night they entered the fortress. By the time Emeriel finished recounting everything, Aekeira's ears were ringing, and her hands felt cold and sweaty.

"You go into heats? Is that true?" Aekeira looked ill.

Emeriel nodded slowly, her expression wary. "Twice now."

Aekeira's face drained of color as she stared at Emeriel intently. "What if you're his Soulbond? That would explain his fixation, wouldn't it?"

Emeriel vehemently shook her head, looking just as pale as her sister. Considerably more terrified. "That is impossible, right, Madam Livia?" she asked in a tiny voice.

Madam Livia remained silent, lost in thought.

.....

EMERIEL

Emeriel felt a surge of panic as Madam Livia's silence continued, amplifying his fears. Aekeira's ridiculous explanation could not possibly be true, right? He desperately hoped not.

"Please, say something, Madam Livia," Emeriel pleaded, his voice tinged with anxiety. The mere thought of becoming someone's bondmate, especially the beast's, sent shivers down his spine. The prospect was enough to induce a heart attack.

Finally, Madam Livia let out a sigh, leaning against the wall. "I believe you all may be jumping to conclusions here," she spoke softly. "Perhaps the beast is simply fixated on your scent. It could be that you smell so good that it wanted more from where that scent came from."

But Emeriel could see her eyes held concerns. "You don't truly believe that, do you?"

"I cannot say for certain, Emeriel," Madam Livia replied, but seeing the panic in Emeriel's widened eyes, she quickly added, "What I do know is that a feral beast does not differentiate between friend, foe, bondmate, or offspring. To them, everyone is either a threat, prey, or an enemy. A feral lacks the ability to recognize a Soulbond."

Her words provided some measure of relief.

"You were fortunate to be in heat during your first time. Otherwise, the beast would have caused significant harm when it entered you," Madam Livia explained. "Heat sex is different from regular intercourse. With your syren gland and the changes it has brought to your body, your channel is now quite different from ours. It can stretch with enough elasticity to accommodate your Urekai male partner in any form, yet shrink back to its original size shortly afterward. Nature was thorough and remarkable in that way—"

A loud shout pierced the air. "All hail His Majesty the Second! The second sovereign ruler of Urai and the sole leader of the northern wings. All hail Grand Lord Zaiper!"

Madam Livia's eyes widened comically as she whispered sharply, "Bow your heads, both of you." Immediately, her own head was almost touching the floor in a deep upper-body bow.

Without hesitation, Emeriel and Aekeira followed her lead, their bodies bending into a deep bow. Despite the discomfort it caused, Emeriel ignored the soreness in his muscles.

"Rise," a deep voice commanded.

As Emeriel straightened up, he finally gazed upon the infamous Lord Zaiper. He...didn't look like the monster they claimed he was. But then again, monsters rarely do.

He appeared just as young and handsome as Lord Ottai and Lord Vladya, radiating masculinity and intimidation.

Lord Zaiper casually stopped at the center of the chambers and crossed his arms, his scrutinizing gaze locking onto Emeriel and his sister. "So, you two are the human slaves Vladya acquired?"

"Yes, Your Highness. My name is Aekeira, and this is my brother, Emeriel," Aekeira responded meekly.

"Such beautiful creatures. Are all royals as lovely, or are you two the exceptions?" Lord Zaiper remarked, catching them off guard. They exchanged glances and swallowed tightly, remaining silent.

"I expect to hear words," Lord Zaiper pressed, eyes darkening as he focused on Aekeira.

"We do not know, Your Highness," Emeriel quickly interjected, redirecting Lord Zaiper's attention to himself.

"Interesting. Perhaps I should acquire all the human royals to judge their beauty for myself." He tilted his head, seeming to genuinely consider the idea before refocusing his gaze on Emeriel.

"You are the one the beast mounted last night."

Emeriel noticed the barely concealed resentment with which Lord Zaiper spat out 'the beast'.

"Yes, my Lord."

"How in Tartarus are you still alive?" Lord Zaiper furrowed his brows, sparing a glance at Aekeira. "You were mounted before him, how are both of you still alive?"

You would wish us to die, would you not? "We do not know, my Lord." Emeriel said.

An uncomfortable silence, filled with tension, ensued.

Then, Lord Zaiper locked eyes with Emeriel. "Undress."