

## Chapter 34

EMERIEL

Emeriel was assigned the task of cleaning the floors of the annex.

It was a monotonous job, but he was grateful, nonetheless. It was far preferable to spending his time at the tavern.

After completing the first and second floors, Emeriel found himself on the third floor.

Having not yet familiarized himself with all the corridors and their destinations he was taken aback when he discovered where the floor he was cleaning led to.

He recognized the familiar paintings and the foreboding hallways.

The fourth wing.

The forbidden chambers lay within that second hallway. Goosebumps prickled his arms.

Just clean that hallway as quickly as possible and be done with it. The sooner, the better.

Emeriel tightly grasped his broom crafted from bundled twigs and resumed his work. The bristles swept across the cold stones, stirring up clouds of dust. As he progressed, he used pieces of clothing to dust and clean as he went along.

Upon reaching the forbidden chambers, he halted noticing the absence of soldiers and trays of untouched food strewn across the floor.

Why is this place so deserted? It was morning, Grand Lord Vladya was in court, so there was no reason for the soldiers to be absent. Perhaps the beast had been relocated?

Emeriel couldn't resist. His legs moved instinctively until he arrived at the imposing metal gates. A gasp escaped him, and he took two steps back.

The oak door stood wide open, behind it, the beast's eyes locked onto Emeriel.

"I could leave," he whispered aloud. "I could depart from this hall and pretend I had already completed my cleaning."

Shaking his head, he surveyed his surroundings, and any hope of leaving vanished.

The two paintings hanging on the walls were coated in dust, and the stone wall required thorough wiping. The lion head at the end of the hallway appeared equally neglected. And the floor itself...

He nervously bit his lip, stealing another glance at the beast.

It remained motionless, its gaze fixed on him. Its once-lazy yellow eyes now wide open.

Emeriel waited and waited, and when it became evident that the beast would not attack him, he started to relax and commenced his cleaning.

He intermittently stole glances at the beast. Apart from those piercing yellow eyes tracking his every move, there was no other movement.

It reached a point where Emeriel nearly forgot about the ferocious creature behind the gates and became engrossed in his work. The swishing of brooms and the occasional clink of metal against stone filled the air.

"What are you doing here, slave? Do you have a death wish?"

Emeriel's head snapped up to a Urekai soldier standing before him, glaring. "I was assigned to clean this hall."

"Foolish humans wanting to die," the soldier muttered under his breath. "Fine. But be quick and leave immediately."

Not a problem, you fool. "Understood. What are these plates for?"

"Food for the grand king. Orders from the third ruler. Once he is finished in court he will come to attend to it. Do not touch any of it."

Grand Lord Vladya feeds the beast? "Why does he have to be present for the beast to eat? Can't the food be taken in, and let the creature devour it?" Emeriel was certain there was raw meat among the offerings it could enjoy.

"Sometimes the feral refuses to eat. A few soldiers have perished attempting to get it to feed." The soldier stared at Emeriel with authority. "Disregard the trays and focus on your duties, slave."

"As you command." Emeriel inclined his head, then resumed his cleaning as the soldier muttered walking away.

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IN THE GRAND HIGH COURT.

GRAND LORD OTTAI

"With The Banquet only being three days away, I propose that on that day, we have a presentation of a new slave," declared Grand Lord Zaiper.

"Must there be a presentation? I do not fancy that ceremony at all," Grand Lord Ottai replied, seeking support from the third ruler.

However, Grand Lord Vladya appeared utterly bored, completely uninterested.

"Why? Our people need all the happiness they can get. The Lords love that ritual, and most of them eagerly anticipate it. There is no good reason to forgo that ceremony," Zaiper insisted.

"Lord Vladya, what are your thoughts?" Ottai looked to Lord VLadya.

"I do not care either way." Vladya opened the scroll a soldier had just brought in. Another soldier took it as his cue to approach quickly, carrying an inkpot and quill. Vladya took the quill, dipped it into the open inkpot, and began scribbling on the parchment. "Do as you wish."

"You see, even Lord Vladya is in agreement," Zaiper continued. "I mean, the male needs some downtime and fun. When was the last time he enjoyed himself? With his bloodhost bonded to another and heavy with child, he may not even be indulging in her body."

"Please do not tell me that you still mount Adissa," Ottai reproached Zaiper with a stern look.

"My bloodhost?" Zaiper smirked, crossing his arms. "What do you think?"

"She is bonded to another. She has two offspring." Ottai shook his head.

"And so? There is no law against it. It is not like we can help it. It is difficult to be rational when one's body craves desperately," Zaiper drawled. "Besides, she practically begs for it."

"You get her drunk on pheromones; she does not have a choice," Ottai admonished. "You can choose not to pump her full of your elixir while feeding from her."

"Mmm," Zaiper feigned pondering the idea before another smirk emerged. "And where is the fun in that?"

Ottai sighed deeply, resigned. "You are beyond redemption, Zaiper. You think only of yourself."

Zaiper dismissed him with a wave. "As for the upcoming presentation, we shall be holding two sessions. The first will take place at the banquet. It's possible we won't be able to introduce all the slaves on that particular day. Therefore, the second introduction is scheduled to take place four nights after the initial presentation."

Ottai shook his head. "Every year, we lose what remains of our soul. We, the grand lords, should be striving to unite our people, to set them on the right path again instead of remaining in the depths of our despair. Daemonikai will not be pleased with what has become of us."

Vladya's elegant hand, moving rhythmically against the scroll, paused. He did not look up or acknowledge Ottai's statement, but his hand remained still for several long seconds before he resumed his scribbling.

Meanwhile, Zaiper waved Ottai's concerns away. "Well, it is unfortunate that the grand king is dead, but the living must move on. There is absolutely nothing wrong with our lives now. This is the way our people were always meant to live."

Ottai stared at him.

"The humans are not only evil, they are beneath us. They will serve us for all eternity." He smirked. "I eagerly anticipate this presentation." Grand Lord Zaiper's eyes gleamed. "There is a particular slave I am interested in."

"Let me guess, the human royals we brought in? The siblings?" Ottai questioned.

"You guessed right, Ottai. The boy is quite attractive, but the girl... she is a sight to behold when she is unclothed."