

Chapter 4 Your Purpose Here

PRINCE EMERIEL

Emeriel was horrified. I must rescue Aekeira! We need to escape!

"I know you are there, pretty prince. I can smell you," Lord Vladya's voice rang out.

Emeriel gasped, frozen in place as Lord Vladya's imposing figure emerged from the door. His cold, lifeless gray and yellow eyes fixed upon Emeriel.

Instinctively, Emeriel took a step back. Then another.

Lord Vladya smirked. "I would advise against whatever thoughts are brewing in that little head of yours. You have no inkling of where you are, do you?"

Emeriel could only discern they were in the tallest, most fortified fortress he had ever seen. He shook his head, his fear palpable.

"You are in Ravensshadow," Lord Ottai said, coming up behind the scarred Lord.

Ravensshadow?

The Ravensshadow!?

No, by the Light, this cannot be happening.

"R-Ravensshadow Citadel? The home of the f-four grand rulers of the Urekais. The Whispering Abyss of great power?" Emeriel blurted out, unable to contain his terror any longer.

Lord Ottai snorted. "That is what humans call it. We do not. But yes, you are correct. You are in the Ravensshadow Citadel, Prince Emeriel."

"You do not need me to inform you that this is the most secure place in Urai, with vast lands in which you could get lost in if you attempt to escape." Lord Vladya smirked. "A vortex that would swallow you, never to be seen again. There is no escape from Ravensshadow."

Emeriel heard their words, but his mind was consumed by a far greater fear.

"The four grand rulers of the Urekais reside here?" Emeriel mused, dreadfully.

"They do." Lord Ottai sounded mildly amused, drawing Emeriel's attention.

Emeriel had no idea he'd said that out loud.

Inching closer to Lord Ottai—He seemed the less intimidating and a preferable choice in that moment—Emeriel threw weary glances at the scarred lord. "I have heard rumors about Urekai."

"What exactly did you hear?" Lord Ottai asked.

"They are said to be deadly, unpredictable and almost feral in their actions." Emeriel listed off on his fingers as he rambled. "Their mating habits are said to be as brutal as their killings, and while they have bloodhosts, they prefer to drain humans' blood. And, after their king ran wild, they—"

"Terrific. Just what I needed to hear," Lord Vladya added in a dry tone.

Lord Ottai, still somewhat amused, spoke up, "I will leave the briefing to Lord Vladya. I need to attend to the council."

What!? Please do not leave me with him! Emeriel almost shouted. But he bit his lips hard, restraining himself.

Lord Vladya, however, did not hold back. "Think again, Lord Ottai. There is no way I will—"

"Would you prefer Lord Zaiper handle the briefing then?" Lord Ottai asked quietly.

A muscle twitched on Lord Vladya's jaw and he gave Emeriel a hard look, as if actually considering the option.

Lord Ottai must have picked up on that, quickly adding, "You know you don't want that to happen. Besides, let us not forget the favor you owe me. Remember that?"

Lord Vladya glared at him, and Lord Ottai offered a wolfish smile. "I believe it's time to collect. You do the briefing. Off I go." With that, Lord Ottai strode away, exuding an air of sophistication with every step.

Finally, Emeriel and Lord Vladya stood facing each other.

"Come." Lord Vladya began walking, and Emeriel fell into step behind him.

"Forget whatever rumors may have spread in the human realm. Some may hold a grain of truth, but most are truly bizarre." Lord Vladya looked mildly annoyed. "However, I will not delve into the vast knowledge of our kind, for it is too extensive to cover. Instead, I will share the parts that pertain to your sister's presence here."

Emeriel braced himself.

"Five hundred years ago, and even before that, my people and humans coexisted peacefully. Grand King Daemonikai made sure of that."

Grand King Daemonikai.

The mere mention of the name had goosebumps spreading on Emeriel's skin, knees quaking in barely-concealed fear.

One of the oldest Urekai to have ever existed, his reputation was known throughout the world, even to a child born in present times.

He wasn't just one of the four rulers, he was the very first. The ultimate ruler.

His power and strength were legendary. Some even suggested he couldn't be killed.

That name, Daemonikai, was one that struck terror into the hearts of every species existing in this world.

"His son, Alvin, made friends with a human prince." Lord Vladya continued. "During a conversation over a glass of champagne, Alvin, in a drunken state, told the prince the secrets of our people. The Eclipse Moon night."

"A night when the Urekai were naturally stripped of their power and strength by the moon, right?" Emeriel asked, wondering if the rumors were true. "It comes every five hundred years, rendering you lots incredibly weak. Weaker than a newborn baby. Vulnerable to attack."

The scarred Urekai stopped and eyed Emeriel, nodding before walking again. "What Alvin didn't know was the prince's father used his son to gather information about us. King Memphis had his eyes set on our land. To make a long story short, the humans breached our defenses and attacked us on the Eclipse Moon night, inflicting significant damage upon our kingdom."

A shadow crossed Lord Vladya's eyes. "Many of our people were killed. The survival of the Urekai was largely due to the efforts of the four rulers, particularly Daemonikai." He looked distant, as if he could see that night playing out before him. "Daemonikai exerted every ounce of his strength to save his people. Sacrificed everything he had...knowing the consequences it would bring."

Consequences?

Emeriel suddenly felt bad. The humans regarded that night as a victory. Talked about it as a great achievement. But hearing it now, it was nothing short of barbaric.

"After that night, everything changed," Lord Vladya said. "Many Urekai lost their bondmates and children. Those who remained were hardened by the loss. Even our revenge did nothing to ease the pain in our hearts."

"Your kind almost decimated the human population, forcing many into hiding." Emeriel couldn't keep the bitterness off his tone. "The Urekai took numerous slaves and nearly depleted the human lands of their females. And it did nothing?"

As those chilling eyes once again stared at him. Emeriel snapped his mouth shut.

"Then, Grand King Daemonikai gave in to his beast and went mad. His mind was completely lost, has remained so for the past five hundred years. The very people he sacrificed everything to protect are now in danger from him." Lord Vladya turned a corner. "The beast breaks free periodically, going on ruthless, brutal killing sprees. To prevent further loss, the beast is confined here in Ravensshadow."

Okay... that sounded like a good idea. What was the problem?

"But, confinement alone is not enough. Our inner beasts require two basic substance to survive: blood and sex," Lord Vladya surveyed Emeriel with a piercing gaze. "And that is where your sister comes in."

Emeriel grew unease. He did not like where this was going.

"Princess Aekeira will fulfill the beast's sexual needs. That is why she was acquired. As for you, since I have no use for you, both of you belong to the beast," Lord Vladya asserted firmly.

"What?" The disbelieving whisper tore from Emeriel. "Surely, y-you can't mean that."

"Tell Princess Aekeira to present to the beast. If she presents well, who knows? She might survive another day. I care little for the outcome."

Emeriel collapsed to his knees, tears blurring his vision. "Please, Lord Vladya, don't subject her to this. To be a sexual slave? To a beast...the king's beast? My sister will die!!" He screamed, his words tainted with anger.

Lord Vladya did not bat an eyelash. "Good luck trying to run away from Ravensshadow. For every attempt, you will be met with fifty lashes of the whip." With that, he turned on his heel, striding away.

Anger surpassed terror, and Emeriel surged after him, but the Urekai soldiers blocked his path.

"Who do you think you are!?" Emeriel screamed. "Do you consider yourself so all-powerful that you can dictate the fate of living beings!? You are nothing more than beasts! You're a monster, Lord Vladya!"

Lord Vladya halted at the doorway, casting a glance over his shoulder. "That is a compliment, human prince. And to you, it is Grand Lord Vladya."

Emeriel froze.

Grand Lord?

As in, one of the four rulers of the Urekai, that GRAND LORD!?

Holy light-gods, we're doomed.