

Chapter 205

PRINCESS EMERIEL

Emeriel was speechless, and it showed.

Every part of her arms was taken, held by Urekai hands, yet none of them made any move to harm her.

Two years ago, these same people placed bets on who would be quick enough to kill her. Now, their touch was gentle, as if she were made of delicate glass they feared might shatter beneath their fingers.

These proud beings, who held themselves superior to humans and all other species, were now begging her, imploring her for help.

Tension bled from Emeriel, replaced by something far more unsettling. Fear.

For the first time in a long, long while, it crawled up her spine, chilling her blood. How gravely ill was her beloved?

No, no, no. Don't do that. He's no longer your beloved. He was never yours. Think of him only as their grand king.

How ill was their grand king, for them to cast aside their hatred for humans and beg for her help?

Emeriel had spent years blocking their bond, fighting against it. And when it had gone completely silent years ago, she'd felt relieved. That battle, at least, was over.

But it was his dying soul, wasn't it?

The bond hadn't gone dormant, waiting to be triggered. It had weakened. Fading. Dying.

"Out of the way, everyone," Lord Ottai's commanding voice cut through the crowd.

Wegai appeared at Emeriel's side as the crowd parted. "We will escort both of you inside."

Wegai led Emeriel, while Yaz guided Aekeira.

Inside, they stopped at the intersection of passageways. "Your old rooms in Blackstone have been prepared for you, Aekeira. But I'll have a room made ready for you, Emeriel, in Frostfall, near the grand king's chambers." Lord Ottai said. "Rest assured, no harm will come to either of you within these walls. I've assigned my most trusted soldiers to keep watch. It's been a long journey for all of us. We will rest tonight. Tomorrow is a new day."

At midnight, while the rest of Ravenshadow slept, Emeriel stood alone in the corridor outside her chambers, staring into the darkness, letting the silence wrap around her.

How sick was he?

Emeriel hated how much it bothered her. She had worked so hard to rid herself of feelings like this. Submerged them deep until she was numb to them.

But now, here they were, creeping back to the frontline like traitors in the night, robbing her of sleep.

She was back in this accursed place. The source of so much pain...and yet it still felt like home.

Her shoulders lifted in a deep breath and fell. What could she even do for him? What if she could not help him?

The night crawled by. She stayed until her legs arched. What would tomorrow bring?

Eventually, when her legs could no longer bear the weight of her thoughts, she turned back into her room. Lying on the bed, she stared blankly at the ceiling.

That was the moment realization hit Emeriel with the force of a loaded carriage. Something crucial, she had forgotten to pack for this journey.

"My heat suppressants!" Emeriel sprang from the bed. Cold sweat broke across her skin.

How could she have forgotten to pack the most important thing? What if she went into heat?

Her throat seized, and panic came.

She did not want to go through that, not here, not now. If she could help it, not ever again.

What if the grand king triggered her heat?

Dread settled like rocks in her chest.

Emeriel gripped the sheets, forcing herself to stay calm. To breathe.

It's alright. You have never missed a dose in two years. Surely one or two missed doses will not hurt, right?

Besides, he cannot trigger your heat from a deathbed, and once he recovers, you will leave Navia with the speed of thunder.

You will be fine.

You will be fine.

She repeated it to herself, over and over again. Slowly, her pulse steadied. Wiping her sweaty brow, she lay back down. She would be fine.

The passage of time went unnoticed as her mind drifted far, far away.

Only as the first light of dawn edged through the window did her eyes finally close in sleep.

IN THE SPIRIT REALM

The river was peaceful. Tranquil.

Grand King Daemonikai sat cross-legged on the sandy shore, surrounded by the soft murmur of water and the breath of life.

This place was quickly becoming one of his favorites. Peaceful. Translucent.

"Oh, if it isn't my bondmate, running from reality."

He turned his head, and there she was.

Evie. His beautiful bondmate, her smile as warm as ever.

"Mate," he wrapped his arms around her waist when she got closer, pulling her close.

Evie chuckled softly, easing onto his lap. He widened his thighs to make room for her, his arms wrapped closely around her midriff.

"This place is so peaceful, dearest beloved," he murmured.

"You know I'm not that anymore, my love," she said kindly, her smile firmly in place. "I'm dead."

"Do not say that. No one is dead. Not here, not anywhere. We are both here, together."

"But this place isn't your reality." Her tone soft, patient. "Your spirit is wandering, beloved, and it's killing you."

"I can touch you, I can feel you," he buried his face into her hair. "That's enough for me."

But something was wrong. Her scent was...different.

He breathed in again, trying to capture the familiar comfort. But it wasn't there.

Wrong, his instincts whispered.

"Your scent has changed," Daemonikai pulled back slightly to look at her. "It's different."

"It's the same as always, love. You are the one that's changed." Evie pressed her forehead to his lips and he kissed it. "You want a different scent now. You crave it."

True. "Don't say things like that." Daemonikai pulled back again, frowning. "It's ridiculous."

"Guilt is a cruel companion, beloved. It taints even the most beautiful things."

"Explain to me, dearest."

"When guilt dwells, it speaks."

She confused him further. "What does that mean?"

But Evie only smiled at him. That bright, unchanging smile he'd known for millennia.

Daemonikai sighed and let it go.

He didn't want to fight. He didn't want to think too hard. He just wanted to stay here, in this sanctuary.

Here, where the world outside could not reach him.

Here, where she was still with him...alive in his arms.

This place, where his need for another does not haunt him.