

Chapter 76

Merilyn nodded, her eyes welling with tears. "No, it did not. We knew that bonds between a master and his bloodhost rarely formed, but we were so in love. So hopeful... As his bloodhost, our souls were already connected, so it shouldn't have been difficult, right?"

At that moment, Aekeira felt pity for this woman and for Grand Lord Vladya. Especially for him. Aekeira had never imagined she would feel compassion for that male.

Merilyn let out a shuddering breath, wiping her tears. "After that, Vladya withdrew from the world. Secluded himself. He became unreachable. Impenetrable. You can't imagine what it's like... to want something so deeply and have it forever out of reach. He longed for it so desperately, for over three thousand years, and yet, fate seemed determined to cast him aside. As if the stars themselves were mocking him."

Aekeira couldn't believe she was tearing up. Quickly, she dried her eyes with the back of her hand. "What happened afterward?"

"No one could help him. Not even I, his bloodhost and lover, could help him. But someone managed to reach him. Grand King Daemonikai. Only King Daemonikai kept him sane, anchored, preserving his sanity during those dark, dark times. Urekai Alphas are incredibly possessive of their belongings, fiercely guarding what they consider theirs. They are reluctant to allow another alpha too close, regardless of the strength of their friendship. However, the grand king integrated Vladya into his own family, making Vladya feel a deep sense of belonging. He was Vlad's best friend."

Merilyn's eyes, still glistening with unshed tears, locked onto Aekeira's. "Do you know why I'm telling you all this? Why this connects to his hatred of humans?"

Aekeira could only think of one reason. "Because of what happened to King Daemonikai and his family?"

Merilyn shook her head, her eyes brimming with emotion. "While that answer is not entirely wrong, it is only partially true. Six hundred years ago, after centuries of self-imposed exile, Vladya finally dared to open his heart to another woman. Her name was Tiara. She possessed incredible beauty and kindness, and she was adored by everyone. She was a child—barely eighty years old—but such a bright soul. It wasn't surprising she breached those walls and captured his heart. Initially, he fought it. Hurt her, badly, to try and push her away. The things he did, the words he used..." she trailed off, then added softly. "You must have noticed that Vladya knows how to wield words like a knife."

Slut. You whore. Oh, Aekeira knew that much. She nodded.

Merilyn sighed. "Tiara, stubborn, beautiful Tiara...Vladya would tear her down with words, leave her sobbing for days, screaming how much she hated him. And yet, she always came back. Couldn't help herself. She never gave up. Her light...it was too bright to be extinguished, even by someone as dark, as hardened as him."

The way Merilyn talked about Tiara sent a sharp pang through Aekeira's heart. For some reason, she envied this obviously incredibly female she had never met.

"It took fifty years, but he fell in love with her. And one thing about Vlad is that once his heart opens up, he loves with his entire being. Tiara became his entire world." A pause. A sniffle, "And you know what happened?"

Aekeira's heart was already aching. "The bonding ritual...it failed again?"

"Oh, it was successful."

"What!?" Genuine joy, a flicker of warmth filled Aekeira. "But that's wonderful news!" Despite the tragedy of this story, Aekeira found unexpected happiness in this good news.

"For the first time in his life, the bonding ritual succeeded. Their souls intertwined, becoming one. I remember that day like it was yesterday. The joy on Vladya's face when he announced that he could feel the bond. The sheer happiness in King Daemonikai's face. It was one of the happiest moments of our lives. The entire Urai rejoiced for the grand lord. Everyone." Merilyn's voice broke completely, a faraway look coming into her eyes. "That was a week before the Eclipse Moon night. "

"Oh no..." Aekeira's heart sank. Tears burned her own eyes.

Merilyn's tears flowed freely. "Their bonding ceremony was to take place after the Eclipse Moon. But that night...he watched her die. Murdered by the human King Memphis." The words were choked out, almost inaudible. "Right in front of Vladya."

Aekeira couldn't hold back the sob that tore from her throat. Grief for Vladya twisted within her. For what was given, and ruthlessly stolen from him. Her heart broke, a brutal force tearing it apart from the inside. By the gods, no wonder... it all made sense now.

Merilyn wiped her own tears, but her voice was thick with distress. "The screams he unleashed that night... His cries of anguish... It was a sound that pierced the hearts of all who heard it. But even that...was not the end of it."

There's more...!?

Aekeira didn't know if she could take more. She felt overwhelmed. It was simply too much for her to bear. All she wanted was to curl into a ball and weep until she fell asleep. A strong urge to find Grand Lord Vladya and give him a tight hug overwhelmed her, even if he might behead her for it. In that moment, Aekeira was willing to risk everything.

"As Vladya watched the life drain out of her, he grew desperate to save her. So, he chanted the Hav'zie de Baah," Merilyn whispered, the words like a curse in the air.

Aekeira struggled to even pronounce the words. "W-what does that mean?"

"The words translate to 'The giver and the taker.'" Merilyn's voice was barely above a whisper. "Hav'zie de Baah is a potent and dark spell. Its incantations are known only to a few. It is one of the forbidden magic of our people, deemed too dangerous to be practiced. Some have dedicated centuries to studying the book of spells, yet cannot master a single spell. But on that dreadful night, Vladya, consumed by desperation, uttered the incantations."

Aekeira attempted to comprehend the magnitude of it all. "So, this magic grants wishes but something is taken in return?"

"Yes, in a way, it's a bargain. If you are desperate enough, you must offer something truly valuable. However, the drawback of this spell is that it can take without giving what one wishes for. Which is one of the reasons it was forbidden. Vladya knew the risks, but..." Merilyn's fist clenched, knuckles whitening with the echo of old grief.

Dread washed over Aekeira like icy water. "What did it take from him?" her voice quivered.

Silence answered her. The river babbled on, oblivious. A breeze rippled the water, and Aekeira shivered despite the warmth of the day.

"His soul." The words fell like stones into the silence. "During the chanting of Hav'zie de Baah, Vladya offered his soul as a sacrifice. The spell claimed his soul, but Tiara did not return."

"Gods!" Aekeira gasped in disbelief, stumbling back. She had heard Grand Lord Vladya mention that he had no soul before, but she had assumed it was metaphorical, not literal. "He has no soul...!?"

Merilyn nodded, eyes filled with a haunted sadness.

"And do you know the most tragic part?" Her voice was raw now. "Our souls are...everything. The very essence of our being. They ground us, keep our beasts in check, maintain our sanity, and so much more. A bond is an intertwining of souls. without a soul, one has no hope of ever finding a bondmate. No hope of ever knowing that connection. One would never recognize their Soulbond even if she miraculously appeared, and worst of all..." Merilyn stopped, fresh tears trailing down her chin. "Without a soul, one will go feral eventually. There is no stopping it. It is only a matter of time."