

Chapter 83

GRAND LORD VLADYA

Vladya observed as usual in silence. Despite his blood boiling and the multitude of thoughts swirling within him, his demeanor betrayed no emotion.

For five centuries, this debate had raged on. Every lord in this court well aware of his stance regarding the feral creature. Yet, Zaiper always managed to twist the narrative, suggesting Vladya was indifferent to the people's welfare, motivated solely by selfish reasons to keep the beast alive. He was accused of valuing the memory of his deceased best friend over the very lives of his people.

Following Zaiper's accusation two years prior, Vladya ceased defending the issue in court. Not because he cared about Zaiper and the high lords's opinion of him, but because there was a sliver of doubt deep down.

Perhaps, just perhaps, there was a kernel of truth to Zaiper's words. Perhaps, in his heart, Vladya did prioritize saving Daemonikai over the lives of his own people. And that thought was unsettling, for despite his outward detachment, Vladya genuinely cared for his people.

"The time has come to do what is necessary," Zaiper declared, his voice carrying an air of finality. "We must kill the beast."

Lord Ottai looked at Vladya with a mixture of pity and sorrow. Vladya ignored him.

A heavy silence fell upon the court.

It was broken by the weary voice of Lord Henry, the overseer of domestic affairs, Marilyn's bondmate. "Even if we were to agree to this... drastic course of action, how do we accomplish it? Your previous attempts to kill the beast proved fruitless. Slaying an alpha zenith's beast is nearly impossible without careful planning and execution."

"Then, we plan, and we execute," Zaiper drawled. "We begin with the Chalice. On the night of the eclipse moon, we perform the ritual to draw the beast out. We will all be weakened, yes, but so will the beast."

The proposal was met with a chorus of disapproval. The ritual was dangerous. They would all be left exposed and defenseless to unforeseen complications that may arise during the elimination.

The trauma of the last eclipse moon was still fresh in their minds, and the people would undoubtedly resist any attempt to hasten its arrival. It was one thing to know the night of darkness and helplessness was coming; it was quite another to willingly summon it.

Arguments erupted, swaying back and forth in a heated and protracted debate.

Zaiper seemed to realize he was losing ground. "Very well. We will abandon the eclipse moon plan. Instead, we rely on the next best option. We shall use every weapon at our disposal to subdue the beast. Scented leaves from the forest of Abadin, daggers infused with dragonblood, iron shards, and firearms loaded with poisoned bullets. Combined, these will significantly weaken, if not outright kill, the beast."

Another wave of murmurs swept through the court. The overseer of military affairs rose to his feet once more, his voice heavy with doubt. "Are we truly to use such lethal poisons on the grand king? It seems... heartless, even for a noble cause."

"I agree with Lord Jakal," Grand Lord Ottai finally spoke. "We cannot go to such extremes. Not when it concerns King Daemonikai."

"It is indeed a harsh measure," Lord Zaiper admitted. "But we must make the tough decisions if we are to emerge from this battle alive. This is our best chance at success."

The debate raged on, a maelstrom of conflicting opinions and anxieties swirling through the hall.

Vladya, however, remained silent, a tempest raging beneath his cold features. His fists clenched so tightly his knuckles whitened, nails digging into his palms. The beast within him stirred closer to the surface, and not in the usual I-am-upset kind of way.

No, it was a dark rage. A deep, consuming black rage.

Vladya felt an overwhelming urge to shift and kill everyone in this court. The hunger for their blood so potent he could almost taste it on his tongue. He wanted to tear them limb from limb, starting with Zaiper. To challenge Zaiper to a duel, a fight to the death, and break every bone in his body. Then Vladya would adorn Zaiper's now vacant throne with Zaiper's remains.

This rage was not normal. This was the abyss beckoning...a descent into feral madness. Vladya knew it well. If he surrendered to this consuming darkness, there might be no coming back. He might not be able to shift back to his human form afterwards.

Yet, even with this knowledge, Vladya did not fight the encroaching darkness. Instead, he let the rage fester. To consume him.

He. Would. Kill. Them. All.

His claws extended, sharp and gleaming. Fangs descended, eager for the taste of blood. Judging by the way the room took on a yellow tint and Ottai's horrified gaze, Vladya's eyes must have also changed color.

"I'll be back," Grand Lord Ottai announced as he stood. He strode across the podium, grasped Vladya's arm, and steered him towards the back room.

Vladya could have resisted, but the unwavering resolve in Ottai's eyes made it clear that his friend was prepared to use force if necessary.

Ottai shielded Vladya from the prying eyes of the court as they made their way to the backroom. Once there, he shoved Vladya against the wall, his voice tight with urgency.

"Vlad, control it," he ordered, his eyes filled with a desperate fury.

Vladya's fangs lengthened further, a menacing growl rumbling in his throat. "No."

"Vladya, damn it! Reign it in!"

"I refuse." Vladya's voice was a guttural snarl. "I'll kill them all. Bathe in their blood." He flicked his tongue across a fang. Oh, he could taste it.

"Stop this madness!" Ottai grabbed Vladya by the shoulders, shaking him. "You will lose what's left of your sanity, you idiot!"

"Tell me, what are you going to do about it?" Vladya taunted with a smirk, a feral glint in his eyes. "You and I both know you are no match for me, Ottai. Even Zaiper would not dare challenge me directly. I will tear him apart and leave his bones for the vultures."

"You may be right," Ottai countered, his voice unwavering. "But don't think we would not band together and fight you, Vladya. Don't you dare think we will stand idly by and let your inner beast have its way." His gaze met Vladya's, unflinching.

"Then let's dance, Ottai." Vladya shrugged off the fourth ruler's grip, a predatory smile curling his lips. "Why are you trying to stop me?" He turned back towards the court.

"No!" Ottai lunged, desperation fueling his strength. He slammed Vladya back against the wall. "For the love of all that's holy, Vladya. Get ahold of yourself!"

Wrong move. In a blur of motion, Vladya's claws flashed, leaving a deep gash in Ottai's arm. Crimson blood welled up, staining the pristine white of his robes.

A wave of pure fury washed over Vladya's face, his eyes now glowing bright yellow. "Leave. Me. Alone. Try to stop me again, and it will be the last thing you ever do."

Ottai's grip tightened, refusing to yield. "You'll lose yourself to the beast, Vlad! I will NOT let that happen! I refuse to lose another friend!" His eyes filled with unshed tears, his voice hoarse with desperation. "You will have to kill me first, but I will NOT let you go feral!"

Outside the backroom, Zaiper's voice rang out with a decree. "The decision is made and now set in stone. In the forthright, we shall eliminate the feral beast." His proclamation echoed, followed by the decisive strike of the royal gavel.

Vladya saw red.

The beast within him roared, demanding release.

Vladya gave in.

His bones started to shift, his muscles contorting...