

## Chapter 99

GRAND LORD VLADYA

Four hours later.

The news spread like wildfire throughout the kingdom of Urai.

Sounds of jubilant revelry ricocheted through the streets as citizens celebrated in their beast forms, engaging in playful duels and hunts commemorating the return of their beloved ruler.

Within the fortress, however, the atmosphere was more subdued. The initial excitement had given way to a quiet vigil as the crowds in the grand king's bedchamber thinned.

Lord Vladya had dismissed the swarm of well-wishers, leaving only himself and the royal healer to attend to Daemonikai.

Although Daemonikai's body had fought off the worst of the poison, they had taken no chances. He had been administered healing herbs and potions and nourished with Sinai's blood.

"A few hours of rest should dispel the remaining toxins, Your Highness," the healer assured Vladya. "He will make a full recovery."

"Thank you, Faiwick. You are dismissed."

Left alone, Vladya gazed upon the sleeping Daemonikai, still marveling at the sight of him in male form resting so peacefully. It felt surreal, like a dream he feared might vanish at any moment.

He hadn't even gotten started with the ritual, then had this happened. Even now, the sigils floated in his mind, begging to be spoken, but Vladya shoved them into the knowledges-acquired-but-would-not-be-used-anymore box.

He did not want to leave. He longed to be by his friend's side, to converse with him once he woke. But Daemon needed rest, and Vladya had pressing matters to attend to.

With a final glance at the slumbering king, Vladya turned to leave. "Yaz, post three guards at the door. Anyone who leaves their post without proper relief will face immediate execution."

Unlike the jubilant masses, Vladya harbored no illusions. He knew not everyone shared in the kingdom's joy. Like Zaiper.

His ashen face, contorted in disbelief and horror when the beast transformed, flashed through Vladya's mind.

Reflecting on it now, he would have laughed if he were still capable of such things. Zaiper had gawked at Daemonikai like he had seen a ghost. A very unpleasant ghost he never wanted to see again.

"Also, Yaz," Vladya continued, catching the head guard's attention.

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Summon Emeriel to my chambers," Vladya instructed, his eyes narrowing. "First thing tomorrow morning."

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

"I'm sorry, father! I'm so sorry...!" Alvin's anguished cry pierced the chaos, as war raged around them.

The deafening clashes of steel.

Blood, so much blood. The marble floors have turned crimson.

His sword was a whirlwind of silver as he cleaved through the next two humans attacking him. "Myka, protect your mother!" he roared, calling out to his eldest.

He didn't wait for a response, exploding through the Vortex Hall in a whirlwind of fury, fighting valiantly, slashing and striking down the intruders. He needed to save as many of his people as he could.

He was not supposed to have any strength at all, and what little he had was fading. Ebbing away with each desperate lunge. The Eclipse Moon was bright in the sky, sapping his energy.

Stop. It was probably time to stop.

But he couldn't. His people needed him.

The air thickened with screams of anguish. All around him, his people lost their bondmates, their offsprings. Their wails of unbearable agony reverberated through the walls.

How could one survive such a loss? How does one live without their bondmate?

His heart broke for their loss. He could not imagine a life without Evielyn.

"Myka, get your mother out of here! Take her to safety!" His voice boomed with urgency.

"Behind you!" Vladya's urgent call cut through the chaos.

He whirled, sword flashing instinctively. The human soldier's head tumbled to the floor, his lifeless eyes staring into oblivion.

Blood. So much blood.

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Grand King Daemonikai's eyes snapped open. The familiar sight of his chambers greeted him with an unwelcome chill. Empty. Just like his heart.

He turned his head to the left, knowing what he would find even before his eyes confirmed it. The space beside him was cold, devoid of warmth. No Evielyn.

Five hundred years, he thought. The weight of the number pressing down on him like a tombstone. Five hundred years since the Cleansing War, since he had lost her.

The grief was crushing, tightening its grip around his chest. His heart felt hollow.

With a trembling hand, he removed the damp cloth from his forehead, its coolness a mockery of the burning ache within him.

He rose from the bed, drawn to the open window. Below, Urai pulsed with celebration, the sounds muffled by the vast distance separating him from his people.

Guilt consumed him, but he shoved it aside.

His eyes drifted upward, observing the stars surrounding the quarter moon. A part of him still expected the door to creak open at any moment, for Alvin to come striding in to complain about his inability to sleep.

"I need Mother to sleep beside me," Alvin would whine, his voice often interrupting a good sleep.

"Get your own bondmate, brat. She's mine," Daemonikai would retort.

Alvin would pout, his lower lip jutting out in childish defiance.

Evie would laugh, then lean over and press a kiss to Daemonikai's lips, which in turn would make him frown, knowing she was about to leave their bed to settle their fully grown son, who had no sense of boundaries, back to sleep.

Alvin would shoot him a triumphant smirk—the "I win" face of a child who had outmaneuvered his father—before following his mother out of the room.

A bittersweet smile tugged at Daemonikai's lips. Alvin might be eight hundred years old, but sometimes, he possessed the attitude of a thirty-year-old Urekai child. And now he was gone.

They were all gone.

Daemonikai's fist slammed against his chest repeatedly, hoping if he hit hard enough, the agony and grief would stop trying to suffocate him.

But the pain refused to stop.

It only intensified. Growing, spreading like a poison through his veins.

Throwing his head back, he let out a roar of raw anguish.

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EMERIEL

Emeriel bolted upright, heart pounding as a bone-chilling roar echoed through the fortress.

Another anguished roar, filled with sheer misery, pierced the air.

King Daemonikai.

Emeriel rubbed her chest, a wave of pain washing over her, mirroring the grand king's sorrow.

With each tormented howl, the agony intensified, leaving her gasping for breath, tears streaming down her face.

How was this possible? How could she feel his anguish as if it were her own when they were not mated? She couldn't explain it.

And the intensity...

It was the most excruciating pain she had ever felt. A raw, visceral torment that tore at her soul.

A terrifying realization dawned on her: if this was just a fraction of his pain, how could King Daemonikai possibly bear the full weight of it?

Hours ago, Emeriel had been awake when news of King Daemonikai's awakening had spread like wildfire.

The sheer happiness that had coursed through her was unimaginable. Emeriel had smiled like a happy drunk as Aekeira hugged her, and she had carried that same joy back to bed.

But now...

Another sorrowful roar ripped through the air, sending a fresh wave of misery through Emeriel.

"Oh, heavens," she sobbed, clutching her chest.

Would it always be like this?

Would she always feel King Daemonikai's sorrow?

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