

Chapter 135

Her voice trembled. "I am scared, Lord Herod. Terrified I won't be able to handle it."

Herod's heart ached for her and he reached out, his calloused hand hovering just above her arm, hesitant to touch her overheated skin.

"I won't let you get hurt. Trust me on that," he vowed, his gaze hardening with determination. "I will send for the grand king if I have to."

Emeriel's eyes widened in alarm. "No!" she cried, her voice rising in pitch. "He cannot find out! I would rather ride the waves alone!"

"I'm not saying it's my first choice, little one," Herod assured her, his expression softening. "But I will not let you suffer. Because of your scent, I won't be here when your heat begins, but I will always be near."

He reached out again, this time gently cupping her chin, ignoring her flinch yet again. "I'll make sure you're safe, no matter what it takes."

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

In the crowded court, Grand King Daemonikai recounted the ancient war against vampires to his rapt young audience, ranging from age thirty to two hundred.

Alvin had eagerly joined these gatherings.

Daemonikai's throat tightened. His eight-hundred-year-old son had delighted in these storytelling sessions despite the age restriction. Alvin had insisted on attending, much to the delight of the younger children who adored his company.

"As twilight fell," Daemonikai forced himself to continue, "the young grand king breached the vampire king's barrier, leading his soldiers into their hidden den. With swords raised high, they battled the vampires. Finally, Amphias the Conqueror, faced the young Urekai king, Daemonikai the Cruel. Amphias, confident in his power, sought to conquer Urai. Their brutal, bloody battle shook the earth."

Daemonikai paused letting his words sink in. "In the final moment, Amphias sank his fangs into the Urekai king's neck, but Daemonikai unleashed his beast form. And with a decisive strike, he pierced Amphias's heart, ripped it out, and devoured it."

Gasps and cheers erupted. A barrage of questions followed, and he answered them, unable to hide his smile at their wide-eyed admiration.

"How did you survive eating the heart of an ancient vampire, Your Grace?" young Erasis asked in awe.

Daemonikai chuckled, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "I am far too old, dear Erasis. Some poisons simply have no effect on me anymore."

Besides age, his body has developed a resistance to many things that would fell a lesser Urekai.

Smiling he answered all their questions.

Once done he emerged from the court, his head guard awaiting him. He had shared many battles with Wegai over the centuries, bearing scars of countless wars they had fought side by side.

He had retired following Daemonikai's descent into madness, but Daemonikai had reinstated him and all his most trusted soldiers upon his return. Wegai's loyalty was unwavering, his dedication absolute.

"Grand Lord Vladya is not in Blackstone, Your Grace," Wegai reported, his voice grave.

Daemonikai's brow furrowed. "Are you certain?"

"Positive, Your Grace. I spoke with his head soldier."

Vladya's recent behavior had been...odd. He'd been leaving the fortress frequently, his attention wandering during conversations, sometimes forgetting their discussions altogether. Something was amiss. But what?

And where did he vanish to when he left Blackstone?

Lost in thought, Daemonikai rounded a corner and came face to face with Ottai.

"Your Grace," Ottai greeted with a warm smile and a respectful bow.

"Lord Ottai," Daemonikai acknowledged, returning the gesture. They fell into step, exchanging pleasantries as they walked towards the Southern Wing.

"Have you seen Vladya?" Daemonikai asked, unable to shake the nagging worry.

"Not since this morning, no." Ottai's smile faded slightly. "Is something the matter?"

"He's been acting strange lately. I can't quite put my finger on it, but something is wrong."

Ottai averted his eyes. "Nothing I'm aware of, Your Grace."

Daemonikai's eyes narrowed, his gaze boring into Ottai. Ottai was closer to Vladya than Zaiper, and if something was truly wrong, Ottai would know.

"Are you certain?" he pressed.

A tense silence stretched between them. Ottai shifted uncomfortably, his eyes darting away from Daemonikai's penetrating gaze.

"I'm sure that if anything were wrong, Vladya would tell you," Ottai said at last, his voice carefully measured.

Ottai, the most honest and forthright of the grand rulers, was evading his questions. Worse, he was lying.

Daemonikai paused. If the situation was dire enough to make Ottai lie, then it was far more serious than he had initially suspected.

He would get his answers, and he would get them from Vladya himself.

EMERIEL

By nightfall, Emeriel bolted upright, ripped from a fitful, tormented sleep.

She was thirsty, her throat burning like a parched desert. So horny she was dripping like a faucet, the moisture soaking into the sheets beneath her.

Emeriel lurched towards the water pot, her movements clumsy and disjointed.

But an invisible force slammed into her, knocking the breath from her lungs.

Thousands of knives carved their way through her, searing her flesh, shredding her organs, and leaving behind trails of molten agony. The pain was unlike anything Emeriel had ever experienced.

A scream tore from her throat. Raw, pain-filled, and animalistic, echoing through the silent cottage.

Her vision blurred, the room spinning as she collapsed onto the floor. If the previous waves of heat had been storms, this was a hurricane.

Emeriel rocked back and forth, clutching at her burning flesh as though she could somehow extinguish the inferno raging within. Somehow extinguish the volcano erupting in her core, its molten lava burning her womanhood, consuming her entire being from the inside out.

She let out another scream. And another.

Tears streamed down her face, mingling with the sweat pouring from her pores. She clawed at the floor, her nails digging into the rough wood in a futile attempt to get away from the pain.

"Oh my God!" She screamed.

This was different. Nothing like she had felt before. It was a monstrous, all-consuming pain that shattered her very being.

This was her end.

There's no way I will survive this.