

Chapter 147

GRAND LORD VLADYA

"Your Highness," the healer packed his herbal bag, casting fleeting glances of concern at Vladya.

"What is it, Faiwick?" Vladya drank his tea casually, the bitter taste lingering on his tongue. "Your hesitation does not aid me, so you might as well speak plainly."

"Forgive me, my lord, but you must bloodfeed. Truly, you do. Not the meager portions obtained from mere feeders, but a real feeding from Lady Merrilyn. With the proper rituals from the Sacred Ways Of Old."

"That is a little dramatic, do you not think?" Vladya arched an eyebrow.

"No. It is..." The healer ran his hand through his black hair. "You are not taking this seriously, my lord. Your body is in dire need of bloodfeeding and sexual intimacy. You cannot keep ignoring them any longer."

"Calm yourself, Faiwick." Setting the glass down with cool indifference, Vladya met the healer's gaze. "I know I'm on the path to feral."

His eyes went wide. "Y-you do?"

"Of course I do, it's my body, is it not? I feel these things. I am the one who cannot remember events, feels the urge to go on a killing spree, and awakens in the woods on occasion. Of course, I know."

"Your Highness..." Faiwick's lips wobbled. He looked dangerously close to tears.

Vladya rolled his eyes, pursing his lips. "Please, do not."

The healer swiped at his eyes, attempting to regain composure. "Does the grand king know?"

"He does not. Nor will he find out." Vladya pinned him with a stern gaze.

"O-of course, you need not worry. I will not tell him."

No, Vladya was more worried Ottai would. He sighed, taking the pill on the nightstand. At least whatever was in the first concoction Faiwick had given him seemed to be working. Somewhat.

His head felt better. The headache persisted, but it no longer felt as if someone were practicing drum rolls on his brain.

"I will get in contact with the mages again. We need to purchase herbs and—"

"We will do no such thing. They do not work, remember? I purchased them for five hundred years for Daemonikai?"

"But the Grand King is here with us now."

Yes, and it is not because of them. "I do not want them. Do not contact the mages." Vladya's voice was firm, brooking no argument.

Fidgeting uncomfortably, Faiwick shifted from foot to foot. "Some of them are meant to calm our inner creatures, provide peace, reduce madness. We cannot simply give up, can we?"

Vladya bit back a sharp retort, instead rubbing his temple. Faiwick meant well. His family had served the grand rulers for generations, and Faiwick himself had been their healer for millennia. The male had a strong stomach for blood and treatment, but that was where his fortitude ended. If Vladya snapped at him, the healer would break down and weep. It had happened many times in the past, and Vladya was not prepared to deal with that now.

"Faiwick," Vladya said more gently, "I appreciate your dedication. Truly. But I do not need the herbs or the mages."

Faiwick nodded, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. "As you wish, Your Highness. But please, consider the bloodfeeding and the rituals. They will suppress your bloodlust appetite longer."

Vladya sighed. "You may go. I shall summon you when I need you again."

The healer bowed, swung his large herbal bag over his shoulder, and headed for the door. He paused, looking back. "The herbs will not stop the headaches, my Lord. At least bloodfeed and take a female to calm those instincts before they become uncontrollable. Please."

He is like a hellhound with a bone. Vladya watched him leave. The room was quieter, the flickering candlelight casting long shadows on the walls. Blessed silence, just the way he loved it.

But Faiwick was right. Reluctantly, he rose and the servants attended to his needs, drawing his bath and assisting with his garments, dressing him in one of the white robes.

Vladya made his way to Lord Henry's residence. Merry was still on bedrest and it had been some time since he last saw her.

He caught her scent before he saw her.

A low growl reverberated in Vladya's throat as the sweetness wafted through the air, capturing his senses. There Aekeira stood, a slave master berating her. The warm feeling that had ignited in his cold heart that night in the woods resurfaced, spreading through him.

"Have you no sense, you foolish human?" the master barked, his voice sharp as a winter wind. "How dare you sit in a corner resting when there is still so much work to be done!?"

Aekeira bowed humbly, her voice respectful. "I have completed my morning duties, Master Tyke. I merely took a moment to—"

"To do what?" he sneered, his eyes raking over her with open contempt. "Have you grown weary? Are your delicate fingers sore? There is still so much to be done in the scullery. The flagons are streaked with grime, the platters still bear the remnants of yesterday's feast. Do you expect me to attend to them?"

"But there are others assigned to—"

"Silence!" Tyke thundered. "Worthless human! I order you to enter and scrub those dishes until they gleam brighter than a knight's armor. Is that understood?"

"Aekeira," Vladya called.

She and the slave master jolted, whirling around in surprise.

Vladya crossed his arms over his chest, his gaze fixed on Aekeira.

She scanned his body thoroughly, drinking in the sight of him as if checking for injuries. Her eyes filled with unshed tears as they met his. Relief visibly washed over her face.

She had noticed your absence. She was concerned for your well-being. And now, she is relieved to see you unharmed.

Vladya's first instinct was to dismiss the notion. Impossible! A human concerned for me? Preposterous. But as he gazed into those wide, expressive eyes, he could not deny the sincerity etched on her face.

She cares.

Aekeira really cares.

Why, he had no idea. But he found himself believing it.

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