

Chapter 161

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

Grand King Daemonikai bolted upright, his chest heaving as he fought for breath.

The remnants of watching his son taking his last breath clung to him as he staggered to the window. He gasped for air watching the first rays of dawn paint the sky.

His chest ached, and his heart burned.

But the suffocating discomfort that woke him was something else. Someone else's pain. So vivid and real as if it were his own.

A long draught of water did little to soothe his parched throat. He returned to the window, his gaze sweeping over the fields below, painted in hues of gold and amber.

The misery that pulled Daemonikai from the dark hands of his nightmare, dragging him back to his fractured reality, was beginning to fade, leaving him with questions. Questions he could no longer ignore.

His family was gone.

There was no one else with such a profound, personal connection to him. So, whose pain had he just felt?

Dressing in his robe, Daemonikai strode out of his chambers.

Time to get answers.

And he knew exactly where to get them.

His guards snapped to attention, and Wegai approached, awaiting his command.

"Blackstone," Daemonikai ordered, marching forward. It was time to confront Vladya.

GRAND LORD VLADYA

You know you want to. Go to her.

Grand Lord Vladya squeezed his eyes shut, but the insistent voice refused to be silenced.

Spread her out on the bed, and fuck her with your cock. Hard, rough, make it hurt. Make her scream. Make her bleed.

Was it his soullessness, the feral madness, or simply the darkness festering inside him? Vladya couldn't say. The thoughts in his head grew more twisted each day. He fought them tooth and nail, knowing he could never do that to Aekeira again.

He wouldn't take her by force. Not anymore. She didn't deserve the dark desires he harbored.

Fine, forget her. Go hunting. Kill some humans. Ten? Fifty? What difference does it make?

His fingers dug into his arms, leaving crescent-shaped marks on his skin.

Tie her up here, in your territory. She can never get away. She'll look good wearing the mark of your whip. Red strips marring such perfect skin. Your marks, all of them. Because she's yours. No one else's.

What he needed was a good run. Rising abruptly, he donned his robes and headed for the door. "Do not follow me," he barked over his shoulder.

Leaving the royal residence, he forced himself not to glance at the narrow hallway beckoning him. All you need to do is walk through there, and you'll find her sleeping, spread out like a sacrifice on the bed... all for you.

Growling, he made his way out of Blackstone, past the fortress gates. Then he took off, running into the night.

Time lost meaning as he navigated the familiar woods. The forest breathed around him, a living, rustling entity under the midnight moon. His feet pounded the earth, his breath coming in ragged gasps. Branches intertwined overhead, their leaves like shifting shadows. The air was thick with the familiar scents of the woods, and the fragrance of flowers. It was liberating.

The sexlust that had plagued him all day receded as he soared through the woods, racing past gnarled oaks with ancient roots reaching out like skeletal hands, past shimmering birches. His legs burned, his lungs ached, but he couldn't stop.

By the time he returned to Blackstone, the first rays of dawn were breaking through the darkness. He felt cleansed. Rejuvenated.

It lasted until he had bathed and settled into his bed.

His thoughts returned with a vengeance, as sleep eluded him.

You should have sated your thirst out there. Enter the nearest village and drain them all. Take as many females as you desire. They may be a poor substitute, but they'll do. Make them hurt. No one will know.

Vladya pressed his palms against his temples.

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

Grand King Daemonikai entered Blackstone, bypassing the main entrance, taking the narrow passageway that led directly to Vladya's bedchamber. Yaz's eyes widened in surprise, and he offered a hasty greeting.

"He is inside, is he not?" Daemonikai asked, his voice clipped.

"Yes, your Grace, but—"

"Step aside, Yaz."

The soldier obeyed. Daemonikai raised a hand to silence the courtier who had appeared to announce his presence. Instead, he pushed open the door and walked inside.

The room was dark, the only light coming from a single flickering candle on a distant table. The air was thick with the scent of incense and something metallic. Daemonikai's eyes adjusted quickly, and there, in a corner, Vladya sat on the floor, his head buried in his hands. But as Daemonikai entered, Vladya's head snapped up.

Two things happened at the same time.

Vladya moved with lightning speed, shoving Daemonikai. His back crashed into the wall, the impact reverberating through the stone. Then, Vladya was in his personal space, pinning him to the wall. He had a wild look in his eyes yellow and gray eyes.

Why the hell would he let his beast this close to the surface when he's alone?

"Vladya, snap out of it!" Daemonikai hissed.

Vladya growled. Pain suddenly exploded through Daemonikai's senses, so blinding it would have brought a lesser man to his knees.

Pheromones.

Vladya had blasted him with pheromones, demanding submission. The scent rose in the air, musky and thick, it was choking.

"What the hell is wrong with you!?" Daemonikai spat, his voice tight with pain.

Claws dug into Daemonikai's side, causing another scorching jolt of agony. Blood stained his robe, warm and sticky. Vladya unleashing yet another burst of pheromones.

Daemonikai's own beast snarled in response, offended by the attack and the blatant disrespect. It began to shove itself up, clawing at the edges of his control, trying to force a shift. Daemonikai grunted, struggling to maintain his human form.

"V.D.?" Something was deeply wrong. Vladya's eyes... they held no recognition. "Vladya?"

With a supreme effort of will, Daemonikai forced himself to expose his throat. To submit.

His beast roared in protest, so outraged it banged its head hard against the walls of Daemonikai's chest. WE SUBMIT TO NO ONE!

It took everything in him to keep his head tilted.

Finally, the claws in his side withdrew. Vladya took a step back, snarling. "Who in Tartarus are you?"

He didn't know?