

Chapter 211

Daemonikai's heart clenched. He shoved down the feelings stirring inside him.

The emotions he thought he had buried long ago.

"I don't like it. Reality has no place here." he said. "I want to stay here with you."

"No, you don't." Evie stopped walking, turning to face him fully again. "Guilt is a cruel companion, it tarnishes even the most beautiful things."

"This is the second time you are saying that," Daemonikai noted, a frown creasing his brow.

"Guilt drives you, dearest. Not because of our deaths, but because you care for her." Evie raised a hand when he opened his mouth to protest. "Let me finish, please. You believe you dishonor me by acknowledging these feelings. You would rather remain here, not because you truly want to be here, but because reality is more tempting. You're not sure how much longer you can fight what you feel. And fight you think you should... because if you don't, you feel guilty for replacing us. Replacing me."

That was as preposterous as it was untrue. Daemonikai opened his mouth to voice the protest lodged in his throat...

But nothing came out.

His mouth opened and closed, yet no sound followed, because a horse was suddenly trampling on his chest.

She is wrong.

But is she?

Now, a whole herd of horses were stampeding over his chest.

"Don't be like that, Daemon," Evie said gently. "I love you. I will always love you. But I'm not your soulmate. You think I didn't know how hard it was for you to accept me? Your beast resisted, took his precious time. You wouldn't even go into rut when I went into heat."

Her eyes glimmered with sadness. "At first, I thought something was wrong with me, that I was faulty. But now I see. It was because I wasn't the one meant for you."

"Don't say things like that," Daemonikai rasped.

"Ukrai never intended for you to be alone, Daemon. He gave me to you, knowing your true mate wouldn't come into existence for another five thousand years. She's your special person. I was just meant to fill the space. You replaced her with me, not the other way around. You dishonor her by denying your feelings, not me."

She cupped his cheek. "She is your fated mate, dearest. The beginning and the end. Let the guilt go. Stop running from what you feel. Stop letting the bitterness and grief win."

Daemonikai gave a hard blink keep his eyes dry. "You shouldn't be so perceptive," he grumbled. "You are not real."

Evie laughed. "You wish."

That same soft laugh that used to stir him up inside. Now, there was nothing.

For the first time, he admitted the truth. The real thing he felt for the female he had spent the last four millennia with was no longer love, it was guilt.

Facing the truth hurt. He should know, he had been running from it for a very, very long time.

"She is yours, my dearest. Don't throw away something so beautiful, so fulfilling, so wholesome." Evie's eyes were filled with melancholic tenderness. "Why dwell in the past when the present holds such promise, a chance to shape a future that could be radiant and joyful? Stop hurting yourself. It hurts me to see you like this."

"It's not easy." He said, hoarsely.

"I know." Her voice grew stronger. "But, the Daemonikai I know is so strong, he's unbeatable. How can we rest peacefully, knowing our deaths pushed you this far into self-destruction?" She paused. "Why do you think our sons refuse to speak with you?"

Daemonikai's head snapped up. "What do you mean?"

Evie moved closer, placing her other hand on his cheek. "I only speculate, but if their feelings are anything like mine, then they are burdened with guilt, pain, and deep sorrow. Seeing their father—their strong, unbreakable father—walking every edge of destruction known to our kind, it's a heavy load to carry."

Daemonikai averted his eyes, his chest far too heavy.

"From the feral madness to a dying soul because of them. How do you think it makes them feel?"

Tears fell from his eyes.

"Your boys need to know their father is happy again. They need to see you thriving." Evie murmured, collecting them her fingertips. "You want to alleviate their guilt? Then perhaps you should start by addressing your own."

How can you tell them to let go, to absolve themselves of blame, when you cannot do the same? Our intelligent sons will see through your bullshit. Before you tell them, show them." Evie stated firmly. "Show them you have moved on, that you are in a happy place. Show them your life isn't on hold because of what happened, because of what they believe is their fault. Show them you are not dying from it."

"You are burning up. I'm trying to wipe you with cold water, I hope you do not mind, your Grace?" Emeriel's voice came in again. Soft like water, an ointment to the soul.

A feeling almost like happiness bloomed in him. If his heart could beat in this spirit form, it would be racing.

Heavens, he had missed that voice...

Evie is saying he should no longer feel guilty for wanting to hear more of it?

"For a male so observant, you are an expert at ignoring what you don't want to see." She wiped her own tears, her lips curving. "One of those is how deeply you care for Emeriel. That's her name, right?"

Daemonikai nodded, his cheeks going hot.

"You can't blame your beast, or the bond, anymore, my dearest. Your beast isn't here, and the bond is not only dormant, but dying, along with your soul. They are not the reason you hear her voice now. Or why you are so desperate to hear more of it."

"Evie, I'm sorry." His guilt, the guilt he could no longer hide, was plain on his face for her to see.

He couldn't pretend anymore.

He didn't have the strength to keep denying it.

"Don't be, you dumbass," Evie said with a light chuckle. She finally withdrew her hands and stepped back. "I'm rooting for you, Daemon. I always have been. I want you to be happy. I want to look back and know my dearest is alive again. Not just breathing, but truly alive. Anyone can breathe, but not everyone truly lives. I want you to live again."