

Chapter 240

Also, Ottai was utterly lost. Flowing in the sea of confusion, kind of lost.

"Uhhh, hello guys? I'm still here," he waved a hand to get their attention.

They turned in unison, eyes snapping to him. They'd forgotten he was even there, hadn't they?

"You two could at least clue me in on this 'solution' you're discussing," Ottai said dryly, curious.

"No," Daemonikai said at the exact moment Vladya added, "He plans to suck the poison out of her and take it into his own body."

"What!?" Ottai blanched, aghast.

But now that he thought about it, it made sense. That explained Daemonikai's sudden shift of mood. He had gotten a solution, no matter how unconventional.

Ottai couldn't believe this. "Your woman and I did NOT go through the fires of hell and that damned cold sea to save you, just to watch you throw your life away like this!"

"Tell him, Ottai," Vladya encouraged, casting an approving glance.

"It's human and mage toxin, not Urekai. I can bear it until the antidote is found," he said firmly, folding his arms with that familiar haughty stance of a king. "Besides, everyone seems to forget: I have a strong resistance to many poisons."

"Perhaps once you did," Vladya countered, sharply. "A fully recovered Grand King Daemonikai, yes. Not the sick, weakened king, barely recovered from walking the very doors of death. Let me do this."

"Says the Grand Lord Vladya with one foot in madness land," Daemonikai shot back.

Both Vladya and Ottai gasped. Vladya's jaw hung open in shock.

"A low blow, ancient one." But despite his words, a faint smile tugged at his lips.

Daemonikai was unapologetic. "And I can strike lower."

"Oh, you—" Vladya moved to grab him, clearly ready to brawl.

Ottai was struck by nostalgia, for a heartbeat The sight of them like this brought back memories of simpler times.

Seeing glimpses of their old selves. The carefree camaraderie they had shared before tragedy struck Urai. It was like a brief return to their carefree past.

"Um... gentlemen," Aekeira's soft voice cut through.

They all paused, turning to see her standing before them. She had left her sister's side, approached them, her face determined.

"Someone teach me," she said in a steady voice. "I would like to suck the poison out myself."

Vladya's body went rigid. "Absolutely not."

"She's my sister—"

"You will go NOWHERE near that poison," Vladya thundered, his voice ringing with the authority of a grand lord.

Aekeira's eyes widened and she took a step back.

Ottai couldn't help his chuckle. She likely hadn't heard that tone since her return.

"I don't know, Vladya. She does seem rather determined," The king's eyes gleamed with mischief. "Perhaps she would—"

"Perhaps she would do nothing. I am removing her from here," Stepping forward, Vladya took Aekeira's by the arm. "Do nothing reckless in my absence, old friend."

He cast a sidelong glance at Ottai. "And Ottai, ensure he does not go through with this. The poison will eat away at his organs, it's too dangerous. He's not fully recovered enough for this."

With that, he led Aekeira out from the room.

Though "led" was generous, he all but dragged her out while she protested, digging her heels in.

Silence settled over the room.

Then, the grand king's green eyes pinned him, "Do you believe you can stop me, Ottai?"

Ottai rolled his eyes, a faint sigh escaping him. "As if anything I say will sway you. You've already made up your mind."

He shook his head. "Still, I'd like you to reconsider. Emeriel would not have wanted this."

Daemonikai's gaze drifted to Emeriel's still form. So peaceful, so achingly beautiful, even as she lay there, slipping away.

"Perhaps," he conceded. "But she has to be alive to decide what she wants or doesn't want. And I intend to make that happen."

The earlier ease drained from him, as he growled. "I will not lose her too. I'd rather die than let that happen."

Ottai hid his surprise well. "I never thought I'd hear you speak words like that... for her," he said genuinely.

Daemonikai managed a faint, wry smile. "Neither did I, Ottai."

He settled on the bed beside her, his hand gently brushing through her hair.

"One never truly understands what they have until it's almost lost, huh?" Ottai mumbled.

"No, that's more fitting for Vladya and Aekeira." He still looked at Emeriel, his eyes filled with a depth of feeling Ottai hadn't seen in years. "More like...one doesn't accept what they have until they've freed themselves from the burden of guilt, confronting the pain of their loss rather than hiding from it. One must open their heart, no matter how empty it is, to truly feel something again."

His eyes lifted to meet Ottai's. "The truth is, there's still a void in my heart," he revealed, "Yet, I have never felt more alive. These past few years, I was just going through the motions of living, methodically. I have felt more whole these recent days than I have in so long."

Ottai was mesmerized. "Even without the bond?"

"Even without the bond," Daemonikai reiterated with a slow nod. "What does that tell you, Ottai?"

"That you genuinely care for her." Ottai was touched, and it made him so emotional. "I never thought I would see this day again. I'm... truly glad for you, Your Grace."

Daemonikai looked down at her, the gentlest expression on his face. "I want to learn what it means to love again. If she'll allow it, if she'll give us another chance, I hope to fill this hollow place within me... with feelings for her."

"Have you told her that?" Ottai asked.

Daemonikai shook his head. "I haven't had the chance. So far, I haven't been very lucky with talking to her. I'm not good with words."

His eyes drifted to the wound, shadowed and swollen. "But I want to relearn everything. Start from the beginning, just for her. I need her to live, Ottai. I cannot bear to lose her too."

Then, the grand king lowered his head, pressing his lips to the wound, drawing the poison into himself.

Ottai watched as a dark stain spread across his cheek. His face grew taut with pain, the poison seeping into him, his hand gripping the sheets so tightly his knuckles paled.

When he finally lifted his head, his face was white, a sheen of sweat dampening his brow.

"I... I got it all," he rasped, his voice hoarse, eyes unfocused. "Now... now she only needs to heal from the wound itself."

As he rose, his body swayed.

Ottai was instantly at his side. "Are you alright?"

Daemonikai held up a hand, stopping him from offering support. "Just a little... unsteady. The poison... it needs time to settle within me."

The door opened, and Vladya strode back in. As his gaze landed on Daemonikai's face, he hurried closer, lips pressed into a thin line. "He did it, didn't he?"

"I did," Daemonikai stated, faintly.

Ottai straightened, pulling away reluctantly. "Faiwick and his apprentice will set out at dawn," he said, resigned. "I'll go send word to Mysticaria, to expect our men. Just... take care of him, Vladya. Please."

"You know I will." Vladya deadpanned.