

Chapter 286

PART 4 {Final Part of this series}

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

He opened his eyes reluctantly to the bright rays of the morning sun. The warmth of light on his face clashed with the cold, hard ground beneath him.

He frowned. This... isn't my chamber.

Sitting up slowly, his gaze swept the dim, familiar space around him.

The dark walls and its small window near the corner allowing slivers of light to filter through.

The Forbidden Chambers? His frown deepened. Why the hell am I in the Forbidden Chambers?

And... why am I still wearing my training clothes?

Rising unsteadily to his feet, he palmed his head, bracing himself for his unwelcome companion of late—the hammering headache.

But he got... nothing.

No headache. No pain.

Huh.

Unease crawled along his skin as he surveyed the space again.

He remembered being on the training fields all day. Teaching the young recruits archery, pushing them harder than usual because he was eager to finish and return to his Beloved. But after that...

Nothing.

Stopping, his brows drawn further together, he tried to piece together the broken memories. He could recall the sun setting as he wrapped up training. The anticipation in his chest as he imagined Emeriel's face lighting up at seeing him. But beyond that?

Blank.

Not even a shred of memory.

"How does someone lose a whole evening?" he muttered to himself, running a hand through his disheveled hair. He huffed a dry laugh. "If this isn't old age, I don't know what is."

Making his way to the door, he pushed against it...only to meet resistance.

His confusion deepened as he rattled the handle, realizing the door was locked.

Not just locked, but barred with the thick metal gates outside.

Someone didn't just put me here... they made sure I stayed.

It was a slap to his pride. The locks were reinforced. The kind only used for a feral.

"What in Hades..."

Slamming his fist against the door, he called out the command. "Who's out there?"

No response.

"Soldiers!" he bellowed, irritation rising.

The silence that followed felt louder than it should.

Grinding his teeth, he shifted his hand. Claws lengthened, hand grew bigger and he slammed it against the locks.

A series of savage, powerful strikes shattered the locks one after the other.

The metal clattered to the floor, and with a single heave, he threw the gates open and stepped out into the corridor.

It was deserted.

The emptiness disturbed him. Making his way down the narrow halls, he saw no faces. No patrols, no servants, no chatter.

Where are the soldiers?

Only when he emerged into the heart of Frostfall, did he finally catch movement.

Townfolk saw him and scattered.

Their greetings was rushed and nervous, their gazes darting to the ground as they scrambled out of his way.

Nothing unusual there—he was accustomed to their reverence, their fear. Yet, something seemed different.

Some of his people looked relieved to see him. Others looked terrified.

Before he could dwell on it, a familiar voice broke through.

"Your Grace! You're awake!"

Turning, he saw Wegai hurrying toward him. His head guard's face was unusually flushed, looking surprised.

"Of course I'm awake." His tone was light but touched with irritation as he resumed walking, heading toward his Emeriel's chambers. "Were you hoping I wouldn't be?"

"Never, Your Majesty," Wegai fell into step behind him.

Daemonikai stopped before her chamber door, knocking once before pushing it open.

His brow pinched as his eyes swept the empty room.

"She's not here?" he glanced back at Wegai. "Is she in the garden?"

Wegai hesitated. "You... don't remember?"

"Remember what?" Closing the door, he turned to face Wegai fully. "What happened? I can't recall much of yesterday—just training the recruits."

"Yesterday?" Wegai went from looking surprised and... pained? He lowered his eyes. "That was three days ago, Your Grace."

Daemonikai stared. He must have misheard.

So, he waited, expecting Wegai to crack a smile. Or apologize for his poorly timed joke.

But the head guard's face remained somber.

"What the hell are you saying?" Daemonikai growled.

Wegai bowed his head low. "I believe Grand Lord Vladya would be in a better position to explain, my king."

A cold weight settled in his chest.

Dread pooled deep inside him.

Without another word, Daemonikai spun on his heel and headed to Blackstone.

By the time he reached the western wing, he was truly feeling highly uneasy.

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Vladya had just stepped out of his door when he caught sight of Daemonikai approaching...and froze.

"Daemon?"

The grand king scowled. "What is wrong with everybody? Of course, it's me. Who else would it —"

Vladya ran to him in a blur and slammed into him with such force that had Daemonikai stumbling back a step. Vladya's arms locked around him like iron.

"What the hell—"

"You're back," Vladya's voice had the faintest tremor, overflowing with relief. "You are back."

Daemonikai huffed, trying to free himself. "First, let up on the hug before you crack a rib or several."

Vladya didn't budge. Holding on as though letting go would undo whatever miracle had just occurred.

"Seriously, V.D, I get it. I'm glad you're starting to show emotions again, but you're overdoing it," Daemonikai grumbled, though there was a flicker of warmth in his tone.

At last, the male released him and stepped back, his features still uncharacteristically softened.

Studying Daemonikai in a way that made him uncomfortable.

"What?" Daemonikai snapped.

"You don't remember," Vladya's tone was resigned. It wasn't a question.

"No, I don't. And—" Something caught his eye.

His hand shot out, grabbing Vladya's arm. "Vladya... Your hand. It changed back."

The grand lord raised the hand in question, flexing it. Where once the flesh had been furry, paw-like, and bigger, now it was whole again.

"Yes. I woke up three mornings ago to this." Vladya flexed it again. "I wish to believe it means the madness is slowly losing its grip on me. And I also feel...more."

"No surprise there, you have been spending more time with a kind female such as Emeriel's sister, that hole in your heart is bound to start closing—wait." Something he missed from Vladya's words came to him. "Three mornings ago?"

His old friend looked away.

"What is going on here?" his tone reflected his rising anger. "I woke up in the Forbidden Chambers, wearing the clothes I had on yesterday at the training grounds. But Wegai"—he jabbed a finger behind him toward the head guard—"is saying three days have passed. And now you're talking about three mornings ago? Someone better start talking before I start throwing hands, damn it!"

Vladya tilted his head toward the door of his chambers. "Come. You need to sit for this."

Daemonikai opened his mouth to argue, then clamped it shut.

About damn time.