

## Chapter 56

His fingers released her neck, his wandering hand stilled, and he pulled back, a smirk playing on his lips. "Present for me, Merilyn."

What? "I can't. You know I'm bonded to another." Her eyes begged him. "Please, Vladya, don't do this."

His eyes darkened, as he took a threatening step forward. "I don't care. Present for me, now."

Helpless tears welled up in Merilyn's eyes as she silently pleaded one last time. But this cold, unrecognizable male who was nothing like her Vladya, had already made up his mind. He wanted her total submission, not as a grand lord, but as a lover.

Merilyn began to undress, while Grand Lord Vladya walked over to the bed and positioned himself upon it. His arms crossed as he waited.

Naked, she stood before him. Slowly, she lowered herself to her knees, struggling to assume the position due to her advanced pregnancy.

It was uncomfortable, to say the least.

She parted her cheeks, exposing her intimate area to his unwavering gaze. She fought to maintain her balance, finding it difficult. "Vladya, pl-please."

A pleased growl rumbled from his throat. Merilyn felt his heat behind her, knowing he was no longer seated on the bed but hovering close, about to mount her.

"Aekeira," he groaned, his breath tickling her ear.

She stilled. The human princess? "It's Merilyn, not Aekeira, my Lord. Please, snap out of it."

"Aekeira," another rumbling growl. A nibble on her neck. "Sweet, wicked witch."

You have to act quickly, Merilyn. Bring him back to his senses before he mounts you.

Then, an idea struck her.

"Do you remember when we used to go hunting? You, King Daemonikai, Tiara, and I would embark on hunting trips. Do you remember? Tiara adored those outings." It was unfair for her to remind him of his deceased bondmate, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

She couldn't think of any other way to snap him out of his trance. "Remember how Tiara loved climbing trees? She would shift into her beast form and leap from one tree to another."

He paused.

"Tiara?" his voice cracked.

The quiver in his voice... a single word filled with hope and uncertainty. Merilyn's heart broke for him.

"Yes, remember her? She had a fondness for rock climbing and those silly moments in the woods. We would hide and patiently wait for prey to scurry by. Remember how Daemonikai always caught the largest game, and you would sulk for days on end."

Silence followed. Gradually, he released his grip on her. Merilyn turned to face him, her gaze locked on his. For a brief moment, he appeared lost.

Then, he blinked several times. The yellow hue in his eyes dissipated, replaced by familiar gray eyes, and he focused on her.

"Merry?" he uttered her name softly.

Merilyn gave a teary smile, relief washing over her. "Hello, dear Vlad."

"What are you doing presenting in your condition? Here, let me help you up." His touch was gentle as he helped her to her feet. He glanced at her tear-stained face, and a shadow crossed his features. "What did I do?"

"Nothing truly harmful, yet," she answered, mustering a shaky smile.

He was not convinced. His frown deepened. "You're frightened. I have hurt you, haven't I? What did I do?"

Oh, Vlad. He was going to blame himself for this, wasn't he? But she knew better than to lie to him. "You simply asked me to present, that's all. You wanted to mount me."

He withdrew, pressing his hand against his forehead. "I apologize for that, Merry. You know I respect your bond with Henry, right? I don't know why I would do something like that." His voice was heavy with guilt and remorse. He averted his eyes. "I lost myself for a moment there."

It seems there were two forces at play tonight. One was the name Aekeira, a confusing trigger. Why would his mind be fixated on the girl? It was puzzling.

However, it paled in comparison to the second one. A horrible, painful one. Vladya was indeed fighting for his sanity.

Her Vladya had just displayed one of the primary symptoms of going feral: the ability to completely lose oneself. It starts out subtly before escalating.

And judging from his episode, this is neither the first nor the third time; it's an indication of an advanced stage.

And he has managed to hide it all this time. When did this start?

Fresh tears welled up in Merilyn's eyes and she embraced him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "I don't want to lose you, Vlad. Please, fight it. I beg of you."

He didn't pretend to misunderstand, stiffening in her arms, saying nothing.

"I beg of you. The people have already lost King Daemonikai. Losing you too will cause even more damage. To everyone who cares about you. To me. Fight this darkness, Vlad, please." She sobbed openly in his embrace.

Finally, he tightened his hold around her and relaxed into her embrace. "I am damaged, Merry. There's not much else I can do."

Merilyn vehemently shook her head. "Don't say that." Merilyn vehemently shook her head. "You can fight it! You're the strongest male I know! Grieve! Mourn! Shout to the mountains! Even hurt people if it helps, just do something! Anything!"

Silence.

Then, in a barely audible tone, he said, "But that's the problem. I no longer wish to do anything. I don't want to fight it. I am simply too tired."

Something within Merilyn shattered. She cursed the last eclipse moon night all over again and the humans who had brought disaster upon them.

Merilyn had never been a violent person, but times like this made her want to seek out a human and slit their throat.

It was a dark thought, and she wasn't that kind of person. But no one would truly understand until they experienced the damage caused by humans.

And any purpose was better than no purpose at all, right?

"There's someone you want, isn't there? That's what tonight was about. Your mind tricked you into thinking I was her. That's why you wanted me to present to you."

He did not answer immediately, but Merilyn waited him out.

"She's human," he replied at last, tension returning to his large frame. "I hate that I want her."

Now, she was even more intrigued by this human princess. "What exactly do you want from her?"

Vladya buried his face in Merilyn's neck and inhaled deeply. "Too much. Dark, dark things. I had her once, but it wasn't nearly enough," he spoke against her skin.

"Then why restrain yourself? You're Grand Lord Vladya. You don't hold back when you want something." Sorry, Princess Aekeira, but I have to give him a purpose to fight. "If you want her so much, perhaps she means something to you. Maybe she's special."

"She means nothing," he stated firmly. "I don't want her to mean anything."

Oh, Vladya. If only fate worked the way we wanted it to. It would have approved of our bond when we were so deeply in love.

"All I'm saying is, there's no need to hold back when you want her so much."

And if she truly is the one for him, then Merilyn pities her greatly. For she must tread a path of profound darkness to reach the damaged male within, mourning all that he has lost. And, he lost a lot.