

Chapter 77

AEKEIRA

"Grand Lord Vladya is going f-feral?" Aekeira was at a loss for words. Tears threatened to spill over. "Like...like Grand King Daemonikai?"

Merilyn nodded, the motion small and tight. "You've noticed...haven't you? Sometimes his behavior seems...off. Wicked. Crazy."

Instantly, Aekeira's mind flashed to the first time he'd mounted her. Those absurd accusations. His bloodhost eyes and the snarl on his lips. The twisted pleasure on his face as he inflicted pain upon her.

"So you see, Aekeira, that is the tale of Lord Vladya." Merilyn's voice was thick. "He lost everything on that horrible night. The only female who had ever connected with him as a bondmate, his soul. There will be no future bonding rituals for him. He is disconnected from his beast, among other things. In his long, long life, he will be alone forever. That is the root of his hatred."

Aekeira wept soundlessly, tears winning the battle, spilling down her cheeks. Her heart was in so much pain, Aekeira could barely breathe. The sheer enormity of what he'd lost was crushing.

Now it made sense. A terrible, heartbreaking kind of sense. Of course, hatred would consume him, burn hot like the sun itself.

She couldn't imagine enduring such devastation. She would have felt the same way he did. Hatred towards that species deeply rooted in her very being.

She never imagined someone as fierce, as mean as him, would have gone through something so heart-wrenching.

But then, she wondered why it never occurred to her. Suffering and painful experiences were what hardened people, were they not? And Grand Lord Vladya is harder than the toughest granite.

"Why did I share all this with you? He would sooner slit his own throat—or yours—than admit to anything he might feel towards you other than hatred." Merilyn warned, "Whether it's sexual attraction or any form of fondness. And because he felt them, he would hurt you in every way imaginable. It's his way of coping, his protection, And I want you to endure it, if you can."

Aekeira stared down at her hands, unable to meet the Mistress's gaze.

"Even if he inflicts unspeakable torture upon you, I want you to endure it anyway. It's unfair, cruel, and selfish of me, but your kind owes him, don't you think?" Merilyn's voice grew more intense. "If there's even the slightest chance there's something for him here, no matter how little, I will tear down the heavens to make sure he gets it."

"Why?" Aekeira finally whispered. "Why go to these lengths?"

"Because I don't want him to go mad. I refuse to lose him to insanity. His mind is deteriorating rapidly, and any glimmer of motivation that helps him hold onto his sanity is worth it to me," Merilyn stated passionately. "Why do you think I support his care for the grand king? King Daemonikai may be gone, but my dear Vlad still clings to his beast. And if taking care of the mindless creature gives him purpose... a reason to keep going, then I pray nothing ever happens to that beast."

In a way, Aekeira understood Merilyn on a deeply personal level. She understood the fierce determination to protect and preserve. She, too, would go to any lengths to protect Emeriel, no matter the cost.

"Now, he's fixating on you, even if he's not consciously aware of it. And though you have no other choice but to endure it, you must be careful not to provoke or exacerbate him. That could lead him to kill you," Merilyn cautioned. "Given the depth of his hatred and his current state of mind, he would truly end your life if he set his mind to it. It may be for selfish reasons, but I wish for you to survive, Aekeira. I wish for you to endure and hold on, no matter how hard it becomes."

Aekeira had no intentions of succumbing to death either. She had fought for survival for as long as she could remember, and she would continue fighting until there was no strength left within her. She gazed into the distance, her heart heavy with emotion. "So, you mean his...attraction for me works like an anchor, even one he hates, but it gives him something to hold on to?"

"Yes," Merilyn confirmed. "I do not care' has become his mantra for centuries. Yet for the first time in a long while, he wants something - even if he despises the wanting."

"Will it...will he go feral, like the grand king?"

Merilyn turned towards the river, her back a wall Aekeira could not see past. "It's likely. All signs and symptoms point in that direction. And unlike our people who panic and resist when they sense feral tendencies, he doesn't fight the change. He welcomes it." Her voice broke slightly on that last word.

Aekeira's heart broke for this male. She couldn't believe it. Yes, the male was always cruel and hurtful towards her, but she wouldn't wish such a condition upon anyone.

Not only had he lost the only female who had connected with his soul, but also his entire soul itself? It was a devastating fate.

"You're shedding tears." Merilyn frowned, perplexed.

Aekeira startled. "No, I'm not." She quickly brushed away the tear that had escaped onto her cheek.

"You're a strange human female. Why would you hurt for him?"

"Is there no other solution for him?" Aekeira asked. Because how does she answer that question? "Can't the spell be broken, the magic reversed?"

Merilyn shook her head sadly. "It cannot. Once the deed is done, it cannot be undone. That's the nature of most dark magics. He can never bond with another person ever again, and since finding one's Soulbond is not a miracle we can rely on, my dear Vlad will remain alone for the rest of his days." She paused, a heavy sigh escaping her lips. "And those days do not appear to be very long anymore."

Aekeira felt a profound weight settle upon her chest.

And it lingered long after Merilyn had departed.

Aekeira laid on her bed, and cried herself to sleep.