

## Chapter 98

LAST CHAPTER FOR PART 1.

GRAND LORD VLADYA

Vladya's fists, clenched in a white-knuckled grip, slowly unfurled as the soldiers secured the cage in the center of the arena. Zaiper's voice droned on, a meaningless litany of ritual and tradition, but Vladya barely heard it.

He had spent the night poring over ancient texts, the complex lines of the Xaa'l Tbeh Zeek spell swirling in his mind. Even now, he traced the sigils with his thoughts, a rehearsal for what was to come.

The air was thick with the scent of sorrow and anguish, threatening to suffocate him. The wails of the women cut through the night, a mournful chorus that made Vladya's gut clench.

Zaiper remained unfazed as he continued with the rituals. After the readings came the moment of execution, where Daemonikai would be killed forever.

But not on Vladya's watch.

Not if he had anything to say about it.

He could feel the power of Xaa'l Tbeh Zeek thrumming beneath his skin. The forbidden spell ready to unleash.

Vladya had no idea what he had been expecting after the beast drank from the boy, but as the hours passed and the time for Daemon to be eliminated drew closer, the feeling of disappointment was almost crippling.

It irritated him. They had agreed a long time ago that miracles did not happen. Vladya had been a fool to think that one might occur from a mere bloodfeeding.

"And now," Zaiper's voice boomed through the arena. "We proceed with the termination." He gestured grandly to the healers. "Bring forth the blades."

The healers emerged, their faces pale and drawn, bearing three ceremonial daggers on velvet cushions, their poisoned tips glinting in the firelight.

Each Grand Lord accepted their weapon.

With a synchronized movement, they rose from their thrones, their heavy robes swirling around them like cloaks. One by one, they descended the steps into the arena, each footfall a heavy drumbeat in the suffocating silence.

Vladya gripped the dagger's hilt, its cold metal a stark contrast to the turmoil raging within him. The execution was brutally simple. They would approach the cage, partially shift into their beast forms, and plunge the dagger deep into the feral's abdomen.

As they neared the cage, Vladya initiated the first step of the mind exchange ritual.

Opening his mind, he began to hum a low, resonant tune.

A deafening thunderclap ripped through the tense silence. Its echo boomed, shaking the very foundations of the arena.

Murmurs rippled through the crowd, growing into cries of mourning and grief.

As if in answer, a jagged bolt of lightning split the sky, momentarily illuminating the scene with an eerie glow.

Another thunderclap, even louder than the first, shook the earth.

Then, the beast stirred.

The grand lords froze. Their gazes locked onto the form within the cage. Despite the veil of darkness that cloaked the arena, the feral's movements were unmistakable.

"He...moved?" Ottai's voice cracked, his eyes widening as he turned to Zaiper. "I thought you said the darts had done their job?"

"Of course they did," Zaiper said, confidently. "Three vials of iron shards dissolved in a solution infused with scented leaves from Abaddin—"

The beast raised its massive head. The chains around its limbs clinked ominously as it slowly straightened.

A collective gasp rose from the audience. Those who had been slouching in their seats leaned forward, their eyes fixed on the feral.

Another flash of lightning illuminated the arena.

The first drops of rain began to fall. The gentle patter on the stone was barely heard over the hushed whispers of the crowd.

"What's happening?" Zaiper's voice was a growing panic, his composure cracking.

And then, before their very eyes, the beast began to shift.

Paws elongated into hands. Fur receded to reveal smooth skin. A wild mane smoothed into dark, flowing hair. The transformation was gradual, but undeniable.

A pin could have dropped in the stunned silence that followed.

Right there, in front of thousands of astonished Urekai, the beast completed its transformation.

Where the beast form had lain moments before, now sat Grand King Daemonikai, the tranquilizer darts scattered around him.

His emerald eyes languidly took in the chains that bound him. With a flex of his powerful muscles, they shattered like brittle twigs.

The crowd erupted in a cacophony of gasps, whispers, and exclamations.

"The beast...shifted!"

"The King has returned?"

"Holy Krae!"

Grand King Daemonikai appeared disoriented as he took in his surroundings, his gaze sweeping across the arena. His eyes passed over Vladya...then snapped back, locking onto him.

A strangled sound escaped Vladya's throat. The ceremonial dagger slipped from his nerveless fingers, clattering to the sand. Then, he was moving, his body acting on pure instinct.

He crossed the arena in a blur, his hands warped into vicious claws as he ran. The massive paws slammed against the cage locks, metal shrieking in protest before shattering. He ripped the door open, his hand human once more as he crawled inside, his eyes fixed on Daemonikai.

"D-Daemon?" The name emerged as a hoarse whisper, thick with a mixture of fear and hope.

Vladya's throat tightened with so many emotions he couldn't name. Trembling hands reached out, ghosting over familiar features unseen for five hundred years.

Emerald eyes that always held a fiery purpose, a mouth that was either set in a grim line or curled into a mocking grin. A face Vladya had thought was lost forever.

"Is it r-really you?" Vladya's fingers traced the contours of Daemonikai's face, his eyes filled with tears. "Please, tell me you are in t-there. Tell me you are back."

Daemonikai's eyes fluttered open again, green irises clouded with exhaustion. His throat worked as he struggled to form words.

"You're... still... the same... emotional... wreck, V.D.," he rasped, his voice rough and halting.

The familiar nickname, spoken in that familiar voice, shattered the last vestiges of Vladya's composure. A sob tore from his throat as he shoved himself into Daemonikai in a fierce hug.

A tired chuckle rumbled in Daemon's chest. He lifted a hand, placing it gently on Vladya's back, returning the embrace.

Tears spilled from Vladya's eyes, spilling onto Daemon's shoulder. "Please tell me you are here to stay."

"I am...here to...stay."

"Tell me you will never leave again." Vladya choked out, his arm tightening. His big body trembled.

"V.D...." his voice was a sigh.

"You bastard. You had no right. No right to leave the way you did. No right to—"

"I am sorry," Daemon croaked.

The world narrowed to this moment, this reunion. Thank Krae, thank Krae, thank Krae. Daemonikai was back. He was back.

"D-Daemon?" Ottai's voice, trembling with disbelief, filtered through the bars of the cage. "Y-Your Grace?"

"Ottai..." the grand king whispered.

"Holy heavens!" Ottai scrambled into the cage, tears streaming down his face as he embraced his king too. "You're back...you're back! Thank you! Thank you!"

A tidal wave of jubilation crashed over the arena.

The crowd surged forward, abandoning their seats in a frenzy of excitement. Soldiers formed a protective circle, holding back the eager throng, but the cheers were deafening.

The air crackled with unbridled joy, the scent of happiness, relief, and elation was overpowering.

"The grand king is back! The grand king is back! The grand king is back!" The chant echoed, growing louder with each repetition.

And then, as one, the voices of thousands rose to the heavens in a thunderous declaration.

"Long live the king!"

WATCH OUT FOR PART 2.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dearest Reader,

I'm beyond thrilled that you've made it this far in the story. Your support means the world to me!

If you've enjoyed the journey so far, please take a moment to leave a comment—I'd absolutely love to hear from you.

Sending you all my love,

Kiss Leilani