

## Chapter 100

GRAND LORD VLADYA

The door creaked open, and Grand Lord Vladya entered the chamber. Daemonikai did not turn, his back still to the room, but Vladya didn't need him to.

He crossed the space with silent steps, taking his place beside his oldest friend at the window.

Waves of sorrow and despair radiated from Daemonikai, grief hanging in the air.

How does one comfort a male who has awakened to the loss of everything he held dear?

Vladya had no answers, so he simply stood in silence.

"You shouldn't have brought me back," Daemonikai's voice was a low rasp. "Why did you?"

"You had no right to leave," Vladya stated casually, his gaze fixed on the moonlit field below.

Daemonikai whipped around, his eyes blazing. "What the hell, Vladya?"

"You had no right to leave like that!" Vladya's voice rose, the words torn from him in a torrent of pent-up emotion. "No right to run away. To hide. What happened to 'we are in this together'? You always told me so. What happened to 'I will always be here?'"

Rage ignited in Daemonikai's eyes, a green fire fueled by grief. He shoved Vladya, hard, sending him sprawling across the room in a tangle of limbs.

"I lost my entire family, you heartless bastard! Evie, Myka, Alvin... they're all gone."

Vladya rose with a fluid grace. "Then deal with it! That's what you do. You don't run and hide. You face the goddamn pain." His own voice shook with barely restrained fury. "I know it's not easy. I know what it feels like. And the worst part? It does not end." He stated bluntly.

"Every morning, you wake up and look for them... for a split second, before reality slams into you that they're gone forever. You will want to drown yourself in the nearest river. You will hate everyone, everything. And when you smile for your people, it'll feel like a mask. A hollow mockery. Because inside, you're torn apart. Broken. Shattered into pieces."

He closed the distance between them, their noses almost touching, Daemonikai only a few inches taller. "It. Does. Not. Get. Better. There is no magical solution. Living will feel like hell. But guess what? Living is the only option we have. Especially you, Daemonikai. Our people needed you. I needed you. You had five hundred years to wallow in blankness and blissful emptiness. Now, it's time to come back and face the wreckage. We all need you."

Silence descended, only Vladya's ragged breathing echoed across the room.

"You brat," Daemonikai's features softened. "You are still the same insolent, selfish, mouthy little bastard I met nearly four thousand years ago."

"Not a brat," Vladya protested weakly. The familiar insult warmed him more than he cared to admit.

It had been ages since Daemonikai had used that term for him, and hearing it now sent a fresh wave of emotion surging through him. Daemonikai is back. Emotion clogged his throat, and he swallowed tightly.

"The people need me," his best friend said softly. "But what about what I need?"

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GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

"If what you need is to die, then what you need does not matter." Vladya crossed his arms stubbornly, his gaze returning to the fields below awash with moonlight.

Daemonikai took a deep breath. "I don't know what to do with you."

"Don't worry. There's plenty of time to figure that out."

"What about Tiara?" Daemonikai's voice was barely a whisper, tinged with dread.

Stillness greeted his question. Vladya remained silent so long Daemonikai began to doubt if he would respond.

"Zaiper lost his brother. Ottai lost his son. I lost my bondmate." Vladya shrugged, his tone neutral. Eyes fixed on the horizon. "We all lost someone."

Daemonikai's heart plummeted further into the abyss of despair, growing heavier. Uriel was dead? Ottai would be shattered. That adorable boy was his only offspring in a union that was over two thousand years old.

And Tiara...

It was simply unfair to Vladya. Cruel. Twisted. She meant the world to him.

Vladya held the record for the highest number of failed bondings in Urai. Each failed bonding ritual was agonizing, and Vladya had experienced it so many times that Daemonikai had lost count. Watching him lose himself with every failed bonding had been utterly heartbreaking.

To finally find his compatible mate, only to lose days after a successful bonding... it was a wound that cut deeper than any blade.

"Come here," Daemonikai's voice was a soft command, his arms outstretched in a silent invitation.

Vladya did not budge. "I am not a child. I do not need hugs."

"Well, I do, V.D.," Daemonikai countered, closing the distance between them. He pulled his friend into a tight embrace. "I do. Indulge me."

Vladya stiffened in his arms, his body resisting the contact. But only for a moment. Then, the tension drained from him, and his arms tentatively returned the hug.

"If I stay, if I do not give up, then the same rules apply to you. You do not get to die, V.D. I won't let you." Daemonikai whispered, his voice thick with emotion.

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GRAND LORD VLADYA

Vladya remained silent, a lump forming in his throat. He could not mention the loss of his soul. Nor did he mention the creeping of feral madness, or the shadows that had begun to dance at the edges of his mind.

What his friend did not know would not hurt him.

And it was so good to have him back. Relief, joy, and a fierce possessiveness surged through Vladya. He tightened his arms around Daemonikai, pulling him impossibly closer.

"I thought I'd lost you forever," Vladya confessed in a whisper. "You have no idea what it was like. I..." He swallowed, unable to finish the sentence.

"I am deeply sorry, V.D."

Vladya sniffed, a wry grin tugging at his lips. "Only you would call me that ridiculous nickname. Stop it, you sound like a lovesick fool."

A low chuckle rumbled in Daemonikai's chest. "As if I ever would, Grand Lord Vladya."

Emotion swelled in Vladya's chest, threatening to spill over. "Thank you, Grand King Daemonikai, thank you for coming back."