

Chapter 177

"He should come out and face us first. We need to see his face," Jakal added coldly. "Human, leave our king's back and go stand at the center."

Emeriel made a soft, helpless sound, but finally, relinquished her grip on Daemonikai and stepped into the open, her body quivering like a leaf in the wind.

Daemonikai remained motionless, merely watching.

"Those truly are breasts," Zaiper said, awed and incredulous. "I should have seen this before... it was all right there. The missing piece of the puzzle."

Once that one piece falls into place, the other connections become glaringly obvious. Vladya saw Zaiper's mind turn, like the inner workings of a clock. Saw the exact moment the cogs clicked into place.

Zaiper went pale. His jaw slackened, eyes as round as a full moon.

He knows Emeriel is Daemonikai's Soulbond.

"You... you..." Zaiper took a step back, his breath out of control, composure crumbled to dust.

"Is everything alright, your Majesty, Zaiper?" Concern was etched on Gaff's face.

"All is as you can see, Gaff. We have a female who dared to live amongst us here in Ravenshadow under the guise and deceit, for months and months on end," Zaiper rallied, trying to mask how shaken he was.

How much he despised knowing Daemonikai's Soulbond stood within reach, yet he couldn't pick her up and snap her spine in two.

But he had plenty of reasons to execute Emeriel, and the thought clearly excited him. He was trying hard to curb it, but Vladya could see through it all. That glint in his eyes was one of anticipation. The crime of identity deception is so severe even the grand king might not be able to save Emeriel, and Zaiper knew that.

Vladya glanced at his old friend's inscrutable face. In moments like these, he wished he could peer into Daemonikai's mind and know what was going on in there. Was he contemplating intervention, or would he simply walk away, leaving Emeriel to her fate?

And he could leave.

Their kingdom held together because of the grand rulers' inflexibility of law enforcement. Daemonikai himself did not tolerate lawlessness. In a land where every male harbored a beast inside, one that could turn feral at the slightest misstep, strict laws were not just necessary they were essential.

Vladya sighed, his gaze drifting back to the girl who now stood in the spotlight, surrounded by angry Urekai like tiny prey among ravenous predators. He wished there was something he could do for her. The girl might truly meet her end on this day if her furious male did not interfere.

Vladya liked to believe he didn't care about what the outcome of today might be, but that would be a lie. The truth was, he... admired Emeriel.

The girl's survival instincts were top-notch, remarkable even. Everything she had done, every lie she'd told, was in the name of survival. Vladya could relate to that.

And she looked like she had been dragged through hell and back. How desperate must she have been to forsake everything and call out to her beloved for help?

"There will be no trial for this case, for a judgment has been passed," Zaiper's voice rang out, silencing the crowd. "By the power vested in me, I pronounce you guilty of Identity Deception, High Fraud, Monarchical Betrayal, and a multitude of other serious crimes we might have uncovered in a trial."

Vladya almost snorted. For someone so nonchalant about kingdom affairs, Zaiper's knowledge of the law was surprisingly extensive.

"You will be executed for your crimes," Zaiper continued, his tone merciless and final. "You will be locked up in the dungeons while the rulers deliberate on your method of execution. No food. No water."

"Choose the most brutal execution method!" someone shouted from the crowd, others echoing the sentiment.

"Humans are the scum of the earth!"

"Kill her now! Kill her now!"

"Silence, everyone!" Zaiper's gaze swept over the crowd. "Make no mistake, we shall punish the human accordingly. Soldiers, take her away!"

Emeriel's shoulders slumped in resignation as they marched forward, their heavy boots echoing on the cobblestones.

Vladya had seen enough. He opened his mouth to speak, but another voice beat him to it.

"Soldiers, you will do no such thing."

Daemonikai's words, low and authoritative, cut through the chaos.

Gasps rose from the crowd as he finally moved, stepping forward to stand in front of Emeriel.

"Get out, all of you," he ordered the soldiers. They bowed and retreated without hesitation.

"What is going on, King Daemonikai?" Zapier spoke with mocking disdain.

Daemonikai crossed his arms. "What does it look like, Lord Zaiper?"

"It looks like you are attempting to interfere with the punishment of a criminal. Surely, that cannot be, can it, Your Grace?"

Shock rippled through the crowd and murmurs of betrayal rose.

"I wonder if there is still a punishment, when there were no crimes to begin with, Zaiper," Daemonikai said smoothly, yet his voice carried an undercurrent of steel.

Zaiper's brows furrowed. "I do not understand."

"The grand rulers were aware of her identity," Daemonikai announced, finally meeting Vladya's gaze. "The third ruler, were you not?"

"I was aware," Vladya spoke aloud, stepping forward.

The crowd made noises, but he paid them no heed, standing beside Daemonikai. "I was aware. Even the fourth ruler was aware. Grand Lord Ottai, am I wrong?"

"Huh?" Ottai was completely befuddled, staring at both of them. "I was?"

"Of course you were. We authorized this together, did we not?" Vladya pressed.

Ottai regained his composure. "Y-yes. Yes, we did." Nose in the air, he came forward stopping beside Vladya. "I was aware too. I have always known Emeriel was a girl."

"That is preposterous!" Zaiper roared, his face flushed with anger. "None of you could have been aware, could have authorized this! None of you!"

"I do not know, Zaiper. Are you calling us liars?" Daemonikai's voice was dangerously calm, his gaze pinning Zaiper in place. "Are you implying something, Grand Lord Zaiper?"

The second ruler's confidence cracked. He took a shuddering breath. "No, Grand King, I am not. I merely cannot understand what is going on here."

"Allow me to enlighten you," Vladya stated. "Lord Ottai and I picked her from the human kingdom ourselves, and upon transportation, she revealed the truth to us. We have been aware of this human's identity right from the start."