

Chapter 288

The murmurs grew louder.

“And if his state of mind isn’t troubling enough, let’s examine his actions. Look at what he did to his own Soulbond! The one person in the entire world he is fated to protect above all else.” Zaiper shook his head, looking disgusted. “If he can harm her—the woman who is supposedly the other half of his soul—what chance do we have? What chance do you have, any of you, against his declining mind?”

“Grand Lord Zaiper, mind your tongue!” Ottai growled.

Ottai who was usually the level-headed one, had spent the past few days on edge. Losing his temper easily.

Today was no different.

He vibrated with anger.

Vladya too, was gripping his chair so tightly his claws extended, digging into the wood.

The effort it was taking him to restrain himself, to not leap across the room and punch Zaiper square in the face, was so great a stabbing headache split his skull.

“We cannot keep deceiving the people, Lord Ottai,” Zaiper turned briefly to address him before pivoting back to the court. “We have very strict laws in this kingdom to protect our bondmates—our women—from domestic abuse and violence. These laws have been upheld for centuries, without exception. The day we accepted the human princess as his woman, was the day she became one of us. And as one of us, she is entitled to our protection. We cannot turn a blind eye to this.”

Zaiper's words riled the court into a frenzy of murmurs and exchanged glances.

Vladya’s nails splintered the wood of his chair.

“That’s rich, coming from you, Zaiper!” Ottai shouted, rising so fast from his throne. “The grand lord whose name is whispered across the kingdom. And not for good reasons!”

Zaiper stiffened, turning to glare at Ottai. “I may mess around with slaves because I don’t see humans as living beings, but I do not hurt our females. I do not mount them without their consent, and I certainly do not keep going when it's obvious they are in pain, begging me to stop!”

“Lies! Lies from the pits of hell!” Ottai was so furious, he was on Zaiper in an instant. “Everyone in this fortress knows you are the worst of the worst. The king of depravity, the very embodiment of evil when it comes to hurting women and younglings! You should be the last person to stand here and talk about morality!”

“How dare you, Grand Lord Ottai!” Zaiper’s voice dripped with outrage. “How dare you accuse me of such baseless filth without concrete evidence!?”

“And how dare you stand here and slander Daemonikai?!” Ottai roared, undeterred, “Knowing fully well that he could never, ever intentionally hurt Emeriel?!”

“He hides behind righteousness, but in truth, he is nothing more than a sick, twisted, insane male!” Zaiper’s eyes flashed that of his beast, his pupils narrowing into yellow slits. “If there were an institution for the mad, he would be locked away in it for good!”

Vladya saw red.

Leaping to his feet, his fist flew before he even realized it. The punch landed squarely on Zaiper’s face, making a loud crunch sound as bone connected with bone.

At the same time, Ottai shoved Zaiper hard, sending the grand lord stumbling back.

The court went up in flames of uproar.

High Lords dove from their seats, scrambling toward the podium to break up the fight. Servants bolted for the exits, fleeing with the speed of light.

Zaiper roared and shifted. Bones cracking and elongating, his body transforming into his beast form.

Vladya didn’t hesitate, and with a snarl of his own, he let his beast take over too.

They clashed and collided in a blur of claws, fists, and snarls.

The fight turned bloody, brutal.

Blood sprayed across the floor, staining it.

Knowing he only had seconds before the High Lords pulled them apart, Vladya aimed strategically...going for vulnerable spots.

His claws raked across Zaiper’s shoulder, tearing into hard muscles. Flesh split apart, blood gushed in streams.

He drove his knee up and rammed it into his ribs. He didn’t aim to kill, but he did aim to hurt...and hurt badly.

Zaiper wasn’t holding back either, clawing Vladya’s arm, tearing through flesh.

His fangs came dangerously close to Vladya's shoulder before Vladya shoved him off with a bone-jarring strike to his ribs.

The fight was vicious...but short-lived.

As always in the court, it was only a matter of time before a group of beasts intervened, and a sudden surge of bodies overwhelmed them both.

Several High Lords in beast form swarmed the podium, their massive claws gripping Vladya and Zaiper, tearing them apart.

Vladya struggled for a moment, his beast roaring in defiance, but the sheer number holding him down forced him to revert back to his male form.

Panting heavily, Vladya spat out a mouthful of blood. His lip throbbled, and he could already feel the ache of a bruise forming along his jaw.

Fighting in court was no minor offense, and he hadn’t done this with Zaiper in ages.

Back then, Daemonikai was always there to step in. To throw them apart and bark orders until they cooled off.

But not today.

Vladya’s gaze shifted to Zaiper, who was also back in his male form, still being held down, snarling and snapping like a feral beast.

Looking at him brought satisfaction to Vladya’s bruised face. Zaiper looked worse.

Both of his eyes were swelling rapidly, the skin already darkening into bruises that mirrored the ones from three days ago. Only this time, there were more.

Zaiper's lip was split and bleeding, his chest heaving with the effort to breathe through the pain.

Cracking his jaw, the Second Ruler's face crumpled in rage as he registered the extent of his injuries.

His yellow eyes flashed, and his roar shook the court.

“How dare you, Vladya! How dare you!” Zaiper bellowed, struggling against the High Lords pinning him down. “How dare you attack me this way!”

Vladya flashed him a bloody grin. Lifted a hand...and gave him the middle finger.