

## Chapter 297

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

In the Grand High Court, Grand Lord Zaiper stood at the center with his immaculate robes, wearing a face of calm and authority. Everyday he tried to reason with them, yet the results were always the same. Today, he came with a different approach.

"It has been over a week since our grand king has been mad—" He glared at Vladya. "—unwell."

The court stirred with whispers.

"As you all know, over the past few years, His Grace has faced certain... challenges. They made it difficult for him to uphold his duties to this court and to the people. Perhaps it is time we revisit our sacred text, the Concord of Crowns."

At this, the murmurs grew louder. Uneasy growing.

Lords exchanged uncertain glances.

Lord Henry rose, brows furrowed. "Are you suggesting we place a vote to impeach the current Grand King and allow the Second Ruler to assume the throne?"

"It would be the right thing to do," Zaiper said, turning to him. "The Concord of Crowns, Chapter Twelve, states an ultimate ruler is always required, as he is the cornerstone of the kingdom." He paused. "Our kingdom is defenseless against attacks. So much unrest brews at our borders, and yet here we are—leaderless. We need steady hands to guide our people, to rise and stand firm as we have always done. But we have abandoned our sacred laws. It is time to return to them."

Scattered voices of agreement and dissent rose.

Some nodded gravely. Others frowned harder.

"There will be no need for that, Grand Lord Zaiper."

That voice of order cut through the court's clamor like thunder.

Every head turned toward the grand entrance.

Daemonikai stood there.

Zaiper's joy fizzled out.

He looked...well. Striking and magnetic.

Fully dressed in his ceremonial attire, the grand king's black robes today held a special design that set him apart from all. The gold embroidery gleaming in the light. His soldiers fanned out as he walked further in, going to the podium.

Seats creaked as everyone rose and bowed their heads in unison. "Your Majesty."

Daemonikai acknowledged them with a slight nod as he ascended to his throne.

"Your Grace," Zaiper inclined his head reluctantly, clenching his fists at his sides.

"Rise."

The court straightened, resuming their seats. Tension still hung in the air, but there was a real undercurrent of relief.

Some were even smiling.

Zaiper was trying to control his anger, he really was. But this was just too much.

Could he never have his moment without it being ruined?

Daemonikai should still be wallowing in misery. After what he did to his woman, he should be too broken to think of showing his face to court. What is he doing here?

Sweat gathered beneath Zaiper's robes.

Settling onto his throne, Daemonikai scanned the room before resting those eyes on him. Zaiper couldn't read him.

"I wish to apologize for my absence from court these past days," Daemonikai spoke in a calm, regal voice. "I was unwell, as many of you know. My bloodhost currently resides in the dungeon for her crimes against my female. Because of this, I have not been drinking from her as is customary. That was irresponsible of me, and I take full responsibility for it."

The court listened in silence, hanging on his every word.

"There have been rumors," Daemonikai's tone cooled further, "that my mind is fractured. That I am feral again." His gaze swept over the assembled lords and highlords. "I wish to debunk such nonsense. I was merely hungry. I am well-fed now and feel reborn. I am ready to resume my duties, if the court finds that acceptable."

Zaiper's head swam. What the hell was he saying? What's in the devil's crown was going on here?

Glancing toward Vladya, the male looked entirely at ease now.

Ottai was openly beaming.

Zaiper will not take this.

"Your Grace," he spoke up, squaring his shoulders. "Pardon me, but... Many in Ravenshadow witnessed the incident two weeks ago. I for one was present." Steel entered Zaiper's tone. "You were..."

"I was what? Mad?" Daemonikai remained calm, almost nonchalant. His head angled slightly. "Do I look like a male devoid of reason? A male without a mind?"

"No, King Daemonikai, but—"

"But what, Lord Zaiper?"

Zaiper gritted his teeth.

Daemonikai nodded firmly and looked away, visibly dismissing him. "I thought so. Now as I was saying—"

"We heard the princess's screams," Zaiper stated bluntly, raising his voice. "All through the night, her wails of agony bounced through the walls of Ravenshadow. It was clear you were hurting her." There, he said it.

The silence this time was deafening.

The lightness in Daemonikai's expression dimmed. Tension gathered in his shoulders, and a flash of pain crossed his eyes.

The grand king's hands curled tightly over the arms of his throne until his knuckles paled.

Yes, that's more like it. The one accusation Daemonikai could not deny.

The tightness in Zaiper's chest released. Oh, did it unwind like a coiled spring.

"If you are as mentally fit as you claim to be, Your Grace," Zaiper kept his voice full of concern and sincere curiosity. "why would you harm the very female you once stood in this court to defend? A female you implored us to give a chance—one you desperately wanted to protect you were willing to relinquish your crown for?"

The court held its collective breath as Zaiper pressed on. "If you were in complete control, why would you inflict such suffering upon her? A pain so great her screams rang through the night until dawn?"

He let the words hang, watching as whispers broke out again. They looked to their ultimate ruler for an answer.

The grand king did not have any.

Zaiper almost smiled, but held himself. Not yet, not here.

But he allowed himself the faintest satisfaction, seeing them anxious. Watching their reactions.

The best part was the stretch of the uncomfortable silence as they waited for answers... And got none.

"And how sure are you, Grand Lord Zaiper, that her screams were cries of pain?"

It wasn't Daemonikai who spoke. The voice was female.

Zaiper turned.

Emeriel stood by the door.