

## Chapter 92

GREYROCK, THE NORTHERN WING

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

Grand Lord Zaiper hummed a tune of triumph as he glided along the labyrinthine corridors. The cool stones beneath his feet echoed with each step, carrying the promise of a future hewn to his will.

All the hard work he had put in would finally pay off, and he would ascend to the grand throne of Urekai.

"My lord," a passing laborer gasped, bowing so low his sweat-slicked forehead nearly touched the floor.

"Good day to you as well," he replied, his grin stretching really wide.

Their flinches, the way their heads snapped back to their tasks like frightened sparrows, were a satisfying tribute.

On this blessed day, his heart was filled with sheer delight. Once he became the grand king, his next agenda would be to eliminate the law of the four rulers.

He would be the sole ruler of his people.

To achieve such a goal would undoubtedly take years—perhaps even centuries—as the people would resist him tooth and nail.

But Zaiper had all the time in the world. That was one of the perks of living a long, long life.

Eventually, they would submit. They had no choice; he would be their undisputed ruler, his word their unbreakable law.

Rounding a corner, the rhythmic clash of the training grounds abruptly ceased.

They were his finest warriors—his trusted hidden soldiers—specially trained for countless centuries. They stood at attention, their stances as rigid as the ancient stone of the fortress itself.

Their commander, Razarr, broke formation and stepped forward.

Zaiper gestured, leading him away from the others. When they were well beyond earshot, he turned. "Mobilize a select few of them. Tonight, we hunt to kill."

"Your command, Majesty. The target?" Razarr's voice was steady.

"The boy, Emeriel." Zaiper's eyes glittered with a cold light. That wretched boy must die. The beast's rampage last night... the way it protected the boy... fueled the gnawing unease within him.

He had tortured the information out of one of the southern wing's slaves.

The beast had torn the slave master to pieces for molesting the boy? For his scent lingering on the boy's body?

"Forgive me for prying, but won't the beast be killed tomorrow? Is there still a need to eliminate the boy?" Razarr asked cautiously.

Zaiper's eyes narrowed. "My instincts are rarely wrong, Razarr. There's something going on with the feral, something inexplicable, and it's all connected to that boy. It makes me uneasy. Before whatever that is goes any further, that boy needs to die." He took a step closer, his voice dropping low. "I need him gone."

"Very well, your highness. I will assemble a squad for tonight." Razarr inclined his head.

Zaiper nodded, a flicker of a smile playing on his lips before he turned to leave. "Choose our finest, commander. The best of the elite."

Confusion flickered on Razarr's features. "For a mere human boy?"

"Not exactly. The slaves convene at the square outside Ravenshadow, this evening. Strike after, when he makes for home. The forest offers perfect cover. If all goes according to plan, he should not be difficult to eliminate. However, have the elite soldiers on standby in case complications arise...as they did last time."

"You mean Lord Vladya? Even if we combine the prowess of all our men, they would still be no match for him," Razarr stated bluntly.

"I am aware. That is why the arrows will be coated with dragonblood." Zaiper smirked. "It may not kill that stubborn beast outright, but it will weaken him significantly. If he is struck by more than a few, it will surely be fatal. Hence, I require the elites for this task. I am not willing to take any chances. One of those arrows aimed at the boy will undoubtedly end his life."

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EMERIEL

The evening painted the sky in streaks of molten gold and fiery rose as the sun slipped behind the gnarled trees.

Lost in thought, Emeriel trudged along the familiar path back to the fortress, his footsteps soft on the packed earth.

That bloodfeeding... the sheer intensity of it had seared itself into his very being. Now he understood the mistress's reaction to it.

Her desperate, insatiable thirst. Emeriel doubted he could survive a real feeding – those tiny, little sips from the beast had been so overwhelming, a wildfire of sensation which had consumed him.

Even now, he could scarcely believe he had fed King Daemonikai, although the beast had taken barely a sip.

But that hunger... Emeriel had practically felt its intensity when the beast's unyielding body began to shake, yet it restrained itself.

As if being careful not to drain him.

A sharp sting snapped him back to the present. His foot had caught on a root, sending his body stumbling forward with a surprised cry.

Damn! His muscles, still tender from the previous night, screamed in protest. Emeriel pressed on, each step sending a fresh jolt of pain through Emeriel's sore muscles.

He longed to sink back into the comfort of his bed, but such luxury was not an option for a slave like him.

"There he is," a voice echoed up ahead.

Emeriel stopped in his tracks. Two Urekai soldiers materialized from the shadows, clad in the outfit of assassins.

Hoods masked their faces, arrows nocked and aimed. His heart pounded like a drumroll before battle.

His gaze darted around. Another came into view, then another. His gut twisted as he spun, counting at least ten assassins closing in on him. Maybe more.

"Shoot him!"

Instinct surged through Emeriel. Sore muscles were forgotten. He couldn't fight, but maybe, just maybe, he could outrun them. He bolted.

The assassins, with their bestial pace, closed the gap with terrifying speed. Arrows whizzed past, their sharp tips a breath away from tearing his flesh.

A surge of adrenaline coursed through Emeriel - thank the gods for those harsh days in Navia, spent training hard in his attempt to gain muscles.

Who knew it would actually come in handy someday?

Every sense flared alive; his ears twitched, straining for the near-silent hiss of arrows in flight as he twisted and juked around trees with the fluidity of a cat.

"The little shit runs as fast as a cheetah!" The assassin's snarl cut through the air, his voice uncomfortably close now. "He must not escape! More arrows!"