

Chapter 78

EMERIEL

That night, after a grueling shift, Emeriel was trudging back to his chambers when a breathless slave intercepted him. "Emeriel, have you heard?"

"Heard what?" Emeriel asked.

"Your sister – they took her to Greyrock. Guards dragged her away!"

The words hit Emeriel like a physical blow. "What!?" Blood roared in his ears, drowning out everything else.

In a hurry, he sprinted towards the southern wings, directly towards Aekeira's room. But she was nowhere to be found.

"Aekeira?" his voice echoed in the hollow space, each unanswered call tightening the knot of fear in his gut. Panic welled up inside him as he rushed out, determined to find his sister.

Perhaps the slave was mistaken? Aekeira couldn't have been taken to the northern wings so abruptly, could she?

Yet, despite his attempts to convince himself otherwise, a knot of dread coiled in his stomach. Lord Zaiper desired Aekeira, and this was the perfect opportunity to get to her, especially with Lord Vladya away until tomorrow.

"Gods, what do I do?" Emeriel choked out the words, trying desperately to quell his rising panic. What would be the rational course of action? He shouldn't just rush into Greyrock domain, right? Reason screamed at him to stay put. Lord Vladya had been clear that he shouldn't leave Blackstone.

But this was Aekeira they were talking about. Zaiper wasn't just cruel, he was a monster. He would subject his sister to untold suffering. A grand lord who was notorious for not only hurting slaves but also killing them.

Every instinct to protect his sister urged him forward, and despite the terror clawing at him, his feet obeyed. Emeriel sprinted towards the northern wings, knowing he was running towards the heart of danger.

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

Grand Lord Zaiper stood near the dungeon entrance, his gaze locked on the girl huddled within. Even in her fear, she radiated a fragile beauty.

The prettiest little thing he had ever laid his eyes on – a ripe fruit ready for his taking. It was no wonder Vladya was smitten with her. Zaiper could clearly see her appeal.

He had deliberately goaded Vladya, plucked at his strings, just to see that flicker of desire ignite in those cold eyes. And Vladya had never failed to deliver, all because of her.

"You're the first human he has ever touched, you know," Zaiper's mused, savoring the tremor that wracked Aekeira's body. "I guess if any human is capable of tempting that male to the dark side, it would be you."

Aekeira whimpered, her gaze fixed on the damp stone floor.

A dark thrill coursed through Zaiper. Perhaps a slight detour from the plan wouldn't hurt. Perhaps he would kill the young prince and still mount the beautiful princess.

"Your Highness." Razarr approached, his voice a low whisper. "The boy is in Greyrock."

Zaiper's grin widened. "Excellent. Fetch him. Bring him to my chambers... and the princess as well." He was already imagining the cries he would wring from her.

"Your Majesty, the plan..."

"I have changed my mind, Razarr. The plan remains intact, but I've come to the realization that I no longer care if the girl witnesses her brother's death." His voice, cold and sharp as a blade, sliced through the heavy silence. "Her life dangles from my fingertips. One whisper of defiance, and I will gut her... but not before I subject her to agonies she cannot begin to fathom." His eyes pierced her, savoring the way her skin paled to a sickly gray. A smirk twisted his lips. "She won't dare cross me."

With a dismissive flick of his wrist, he strode away. "Bring them both to me."

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Outside the dungeon, Emeriel's stride quickened through Greyrock's maze-like corridors. He was surprised to see how the sentries merely glanced at him, making way for him to pass.

As he neared the passage leading to Grand Lord Zaiper's chambers, a squad of soldiers materialized, blocking his path.

"The grand lord commands your presence," they declared, their voices devoid of warmth. Their hands gripped his arms, firm and unyielding, as they marched him away.

The soldiers led him through a discreet side door, into the heart of Lord Zaiper's abode. The grand bedchamber oozed wealth and power, every surface gleaming.

Lord Zaiper lounged on a throne-like chair, his reptilian gaze tracking Emeriel's every move as he was forced to his knees. Emeriel bowed his head, the thick silence pressing down on him.

The soldiers left, leaving him alone with the devil himself.

"Emeriel, is it not?" Lord Zaiper's voice slithered through the room, smooth and dangerous.

"Yes, your highness."

"Tell me, what brings you to Greyrock? Surely you know slaves are not permitted to wander territories without express invitation. Why break such a simple rule?"

"I apologize, your highness. I was... I was searching for my sister," Emeriel's reply was barely above a whisper.

The door creaked open, and Aekeira was shoved inside.

Emeriel's heart leaped. Aekeira was alive. A flicker of hope ignited in his chest.

Aekeira knelt beside him, her eyes wide with a silent question – are you alright?

He gave the slightest nod.

"Save your tender reunion for later." Lord Zaiper's tone was dismissive. A soldier stepped forward, hauling Emeriel to his feet, dragging him closer to Lord Zaiper. The ruler leaned forward, a predatory gleam in his eye, forcing Emeriel to jerk his head back. "There's something about you, boy."

Zaiper pressed his nose to Emeriel's neck, inhaling deeply. "You have a pleasant enough smell, but nothing particularly remarkable. So, what could it be?"

"I-I don't understand, my lord," Emeriel stammered, fear tightening his throat.

"Was your mother a witch? Do you dabble in black magic?" Lord Zaiper's voice dropped to a near hiss.

"What are you not telling us, boy?"

"Nothing, your majesty."

"Tonight, you've broken rules, and according to the laws of the land, I must punish you severely. But first..." Lord Zaiper's hands closed on Emeriel, slamming him against the wall. The impact jarred Emeriel's bones, forcing a gasp from his lips. Lord Zaiper's body pressed against his, hot and suffocating. A heavy hand dug into Emeriel's waist, fingers kneading his flesh.

"Soft," Lord Zaiper hissed, the word scraping against Emeriel's ear. "No wonder Daemonikai's beast mistook you for a female. A bitch."

He paused, the smile fading from his lips. "Or wait..." His voice took on a calculating, suspicious edge. "Are you?"

Then, his hands began to wander.