

## Chapter 233

Emeriel kept her suspicions to herself. She was beginning to understand how Urekai society worked.

An accusation of this magnitude, even in casual conversation, could have serious repercussions.

"Did he... lose anyone on the night of the eclipse moon?" she asked cautiously.

Daemonikai stiffened, his hand pausing. He looked up at her, his face unreadable.

There it was – the shutting down.

Emeriel had almost forgotten how sensitive the subject was. "I apologize for overstepping—"

"No," he squeezed his eyes shut. Taking a deep breath. "No, it's alright. Yes, he lost Kristof, his elder brother."

"Elder?" she echoed, surprised. "I thought every kingdom chose heirs by birth order. How did Zaiper become Grand Lord if he had an elder brother?"

"Kristof was never interested in the throne," A hint of a smile crossed King Daemonikai's face again. "Even as younglings, it never appealed to him. His dream was to be a high-ranking soldier—the best. And that was what he became. He was different from the rest of the Dragaxlovs."

Emeriel saw the fondness in his voice. "You sound close."

"We were, once." His voice softened with nostalgia. "We fought side-by-side in countless battles. He was the general commander of all our clan's armies."

"Wow," Emeriel breathed, impressed.

The grand king nodded. "Kristof was a force to be reckoned with. It's a shame he never wanted the throne. He could have made a strong ruler. But his loyalty was to the battlefield, not the court. Because of his stance on ruling, the throne passed to the second son, Zaiper."

His quill paused, and a shadow fell over his eyes. "Kristof fought beside me on that night, knowing the danger of using strength without the Chalice. He helped many of our people escape even when his own strength began to drain. He fought with everything he had. Kristoff was found dead in an alley near Greyrock..." His voice faltered for a moment. "Whether he dropped dead from exhaustion or was slain by humans, no one knows."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Emeriel said softly. "He sounds like he was a remarkable man."

"Perhaps that's why I can't judge Zaiper too harshly," King Daemonikai resumed writing, scratching against the parchment. "He lost someone too, and everyone grieves in their own way. Zaiper held it together, unlike Vladya and I, who completely fell apart."

He inhaled deeply. "Maybe he cries himself to sleep at night, or spaces out for hours like Ottai does. No one knows. But he did hold it together. He may be a lousy ruler, but he kept our people grounded when the rest of us couldn't."

In a way, Emeriel understood.

"I envy him at times, how well he coped. He and Kristof were close." His eyes rose, meeting hers. "I was supposed to be the strongest, yet I was the one who crumbled the most."

She hated seeing that flicker of shame in his eyes.

"Don't punish yourself for how you grieve your loved ones, Your Grace," she stated firmly. "You said it yourself just now...everyone grieves differently. When it comes to grief, every feeling is valid. Never beat yourself up for that. Ever."

He stopped writing again, and something fierce appeared in his eyes.

Her cheeks warmed under that stare. It made her feel seen.

Suddenly self-conscious and breathless, she buried her eyes on the ledger before her.

A moment passed. Tensed.

"So," King Daemonikai cleared his throat. "Ignore his records and work on the others. What right do I have to confront Zaiper about missing figures when I abandoned my own duties for over a year?"

Clearing her own throat, she said sincerely, "I understand."

"But I'm back now, everything will return to order." Authority dripped from his tone. "The kingdom has been unstable for five centuries. No more. It ends now," he picked the quill up again. "And if Zaiper oversteps from now on, there will be accountability. If he acts against the law, he will face the consequences."

Emeriel felt the weight in his words. The finality.

Moments like this reminded her who this man sitting across the desk really was.

The same male whose stories were told across human lands under the moonlight as horror tales. In legends, some even named him The Backbone of Urekai.

Now, after truly knowing him, Emeriel could finally admit: legends do not lie, after all.

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MISTRESS SINAI

"She's gone into heatstroke," Mistress Sinai observed coolly, watching as the young female retched on the floor. "Perhaps you should consider bringing in her male?"

"She'll get over it," Zaiper said, indifferent. He was sprawled naked across the bed, looking irritated.

All the places where the girl had scratched herself raw from being mounted by the Second Ruler were red and bleeding.

Her body rejected Zaiper's touch, which meant every moment with him was excruciating for her. Not that Zaiper cared.

The girl curled into herself, breathing heavily.

Sinai felt a slice of sympathy for her. Zaiper had been choosing nobodies—those whose absence would go unnoticed by society—for this new obsessive quest to sire an heir.

This youngling, barely one hundred and eighty years old, was his third. Zaiper bred them despite their lack of compatibility.

Sinai could imagine the unbearable pain they must endure, but it didn't move her enough to intervene.

Not that she could, of course. Zaiper would eat her for breakfast if she tried. In some ways, she actually found this show... entertaining.

Razarr, on the other hand, looked sick to his stomach, as always.

For someone who wouldn't bat an eyelash at killing, he turned pale whenever his master was 'at it' again. He'd excused himself a few times already, slipping out without waiting to be dismissed.

"Razarr, bring her back to the bed," Zaiper ordered, impatient. "I'm ready for another round."

His head soldier hesitated. "She's nearly passed out, Your Majesty."

"Doesn't matter. She's in heat." Zaiper waved a dismissive hand. "Heat doesn't sleep. Now bring her to me."

Razarr lowered his gaze, obeying, as he pulled the barely conscious girl back to the bed.

"No, n-no...please," the girl cried weakly, tears streaming down her cheeks. "It hurts really b-b-bad."

Zaiper positioned behind her, proceeding to bury himself deep.

The girl screamed in a distorted, agonized voice, clawing at the bedding.

The grand lord parted her legs even further, slamming into her over and over again.

The girl's fingers dug so fiercely into the sheets that she splintered a nail, leaving streaks of blood across the fabric.

Sinai winced. Poor girl.

Which reminded her... the mistress surveyed her own nails, frowning. "I really need to visit the salon; this chipped polish simply wouldn't do."

Razarr excused himself once more, his footsteps echoing as he left the room.

Walking to the vanity, her silken robe trailing behind her, Sinai retrieved a small knife from the drawer. She sat down on the armrest and began scrapping away the polish, the girl's anguished cries filling the silence.

"You really are an animal, dearest Zaiper," she mumbled, glancing at him.

The grand Lord didn't take offense, instead he smiled. "We're all animals, lovely Sinai." Thrust, thrust, thrust. "Besides, beyond the heir, an irritated male needs to work off a little steam every now and then."