

Chapter 303

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

Grand Lord Zaiper was trying hard not to freak out.

Trying being the operative word.

While the rest of the people had scattered, their voices a low hum of joy and dread, Zaiper had slipped away to the back of the fortress building. The cool air bit at his skin, but it did little to cool the racing of his heart.

The one person who could see his atrocities—every dark deed, every hidden sin—like a play acted out on stage was awake.

“Fuck,” he said under his breath.

His hands trembled.

He curled them into fists.

“Highness Zaiper, are you alright?”

Zaiper flinched at the sudden voice behind him. Without turning, he recognized it to be High Lord Jakal, the ever-concerned Minister of Military Affairs.

Why not just mind your own business, Jakal? But he swallowed the retort, forcing a calm he did not feel. He gave a stiff nod.

The silent dismissal worked, and Jakal’s footsteps echoed as he departed.

Zaiper breathed out shakily.

“My lord,” came a familiar voice behind him. It was Razarr. “The Grand King requests your assistance in calming the commotion.”

Zaiper waved a hand in dismissal. “Find someone else. I have no time for crowd control.”

Razarr did not move. “Are you worried about the Oracle?”

Zaiper’s teeth grinded audibly. “Why did she have to wake now? She should have waited a few hundred years more, damn her!” His fist struck the wall.

The impact reverberated up his arm, and he welcomed the pain.

“You have always known this day would come, my lord,” Razarr said, his tone even, calm. “She was bound to wake eventually.”

Zaiper spun around to face him. “Yes, but she was supposed to wake after I had achieved my goals. When Daemonikai was already dead, and I sat on the Grand Throne. By then, she would have been powerless to interfere. Now...” He clenched his fists again, shaking his head. “This timing could not be worse.”

Razarr moved closer, standing just beside him. “Even if she knows, my lord, she can do nothing. Her oath binds her. She cannot act against you.”

Zaiper knew that. Of course, he did.

And yet, the bad feeling in his gut remained.

“The old woman doesn’t need to interfere directly,” Zaiper hissed. “She can still speak in riddles, plant seeds of doubt, leave clues and hints. The world is far simpler when she sleeps.”

Razarr raised an eyebrow.

His calm at this point was almost infuriating to Zaiper.

“You worry too much, my lord.” The male went ahead to say. “The Oracle does not see everything, despite what the people believe. There is a chance she remains unaware of your... endeavors.”

Zaiper straightened, rolling his neck to ease the tension. “You are right. Perhaps I am overthinking this.”

His head soldier nodded.

Zaiper glanced around, taking in the nearly empty courtyards. The people had cleared quickly—some retreating to their homes, others simply moving to avoid being caught in the Oracle’s presence. He could understand their hesitation.

For all their reverence, the Oracle terrified them.

She was as close to the gods as anyone could come. A being who could look through people like glass, exposing their deepest, darkest secrets for all to see.

Who, in their right mind, would willingly stand in the presence of someone who could peel away every layer you had carefully built to hide your sins?

Zaiper would have been one of those people hightailing it out of her way, ensuring she never even glimpsed him. But the bane of being a Grand Ruler meant he had no choice. His presence was required to formally welcome the Old Lady.

As he turned to join the others, a faint relief settled in him. Razarr was correct: The Oracle can see, but she cannot act.

A small comfort, but one he clung to.

.....

GRAND KING DAEMONIKAI

Grand King Daemonikai observed the Oracle carefully as she walked through the grand entrance of Ravensshadow Citadel.

She looks the same as always.

Their kind did not physically age, but with the Oracle, it was different. One glance at her, and you could tell she was as ancient as time itself.

She leaned heavily on her wooden staff, her hand trembling faintly as she gripped it, silvery-white hair falling nearly to her knees. Tangled yet somehow dignified, giving her an almost otherworldly elegance.

She wore layer upon layer of garments—so many that at first glance, she appeared bulky, but her face... now that was where the trick comes in.

The Oracle of Urekai possessed one of the most beautiful faces Daemonikai had ever seen in his long life.

Her features were youthful, appearing no older than a human woman in her thirties. Her eyes were unlike any other. Black as the deepest void, they were streaked with veins of shimmering gold. Eyes that could see into the soul.

Many found it difficult to meet her gaze for long.

All four Grand Rulers waited at the entrance to formally welcome her. When she drew close, she bowed slightly, her voice scratchy and hoarse as she greeted them. “Great Rulers.”

In unison, they returned the bow. “Oracle.”

Daemonikai added, “It is an honor to see you again after so many centuries,” his tone formal but warm. “How does it feel to be awake again?”

She tilted her head as if considering the question. Then, rasped. “Like time has begun passing once more.”

Daemonikai nodded. “May we go inside?” He gestured to the citadel’s interior.

The Oracle inclined her head and began to walk. The rulers fell in step behind her, matching her slow pace.

.....

The court session was long and tiring, as Daemonikai had expected.

The day was spent formally reintroducing the Oracle to Urekai society. High Lords and council members were presented, each bowing deeply before her.

She was brought up to date on politics, rituals, and religious customs that had evolved during her centuries of slumber. The discussions dragged on, with a ceremony that was both tedious and weighty, but necessary.

When it came time for her to address the court, her words were brief, cryptic as ever. Yet every soul in the room listened carefully, hanging on every word.

By late evening, the formalities concluded.

As the rulers escorted her from the hall, she paused turning toward Daemonikai. “I wish to speak with you in private, Your Grace, if you do not mind.”

Daemonikai dipped his head. “By all means.”

The grand rulers hesitated before departing, with Zaiper walking away a little bit faster.

“Second Ruler?” The Oracle startled them all by calling.

Zaiper stiffened. Then, slowly, he turned.

“Await me in your home. I will pay you a visit once I am finished here.”

Zaiper did not like that. In fact, for a brief moment, he looked downright scared.

Then he blinked and his expression closed up. “That is a shame, Oracle, for I have an important engagement later tonight,” he said coolly. “I’m afraid I will not be available.”

The Oracle merely watched him. Long. Unmoving.

It was uncomfortable, to say the least.

“I shall pay you a visit. Expect me.” she spoke with finality.

Zaiper hesitated only a fraction of a second before turning sharply on his heel. The Second Ruler could not walk away fast enough.