

## Chapter 326

GRAND LORD ZAIPER

"You return too soon, Second Ruler of the great Urai." The dark mage emerged from the shadows. "It usually takes centuries. To what do I owe this visit?"

Grand Lord Zaiper stood tall and tensed in the dark cave. Beside him, Razarr remained silent.

"I need you to kill our Oracle," Zaiper said flatly.

The mage tilted his head. "The Oracle of Urai?"

Irritation flashed across his face. "Which other Oracle would I—Yes, the Oracle of Urai." Begging the gods for patience, he added. "I know it will be difficult, but I'm prepared for whatever price."

"Difficult, no. Impossible, yes."

"Nothing is impossible," Zaiper snarled.

"Ah, how living beings love to believe that. But there are things that cannot be done. Killing one of the most powerful beings to have ever existed is one of them."

Restless, Zaiper started pacing. "Everything has a price."

"Calm yourself, Grand Lord Zaiper. I have never seen you so... troubled before."

He halted abruptly, turning on the mage. "She knows. The Oracle."

"Oh." The mage's tone remained calm. "So she wakes, then."

"Yes, she has. Over a month ago, and since then, I have not had a single night of peace. Not even a breath of ease." His fingers dug into his temples, trying to press away the ever-growing headache. "No rest. No calm."

"Why such distress?" The mage sounded unbothered. "Oracles do not interfere. They see, but they do not act—for to do so would alter the course of the future."

"This one said she would!" Seizing a loose stone, Zaiper hurled it across the cave. It clattered against the rough walls before rolling into silence, but his anger did not abate. "She looked me dead in the eyes and told me she would act if I did not come forward."

That was after she used that godsforsaken staff to brutalize me.

He swallowed back the words. Shameful enough without voicing it aloud. Just the memories of the incredible pain alone made him more enraged. The healing had been agonizing.

"Hmm." The mage's response was still devoid of emotion. "Unfortunate."

Zaiper glared daggers at him.

"And as for her threat—she truly cannot interfere." The mage went on, unfazed. "A mere mention sends their ribs shattering and bones breaking within them. Your secrets are too vast. Speaking all of it will kill her."

"Exactly! But guess what? She is still determined to spill them anyway, even if it kills her." Zaiper raged. "In fact, I suspect the only reason she has not done so already is because she is occupied. Tending to the duties she left unattended for seven hundred years. Even now, she is not in Urai but in Werewolf lands. But she will come for me."

Zaiper tried to control his loud breathing, to better hide his fear. He was unsure if he was succeeding.

"Once she returns to Urai, she will come. I must have a solution. I must kill her."

With a noncommittal sound, the mage stepped forward, his long fingers trailing idly across the worn stone of the cavern walls. "To perform a ritual dangerous enough—powerful enough—to kill an Oracle... one does not merely need the blood of loved ones. One would have to raze an entire village to the ground. And even that may not be enough."

Zaiper clenched his fists, eyes blazing.

"I do not doubt your ability to burn an entire village," the dark mage continued in that annoying monotone. "What I do doubt is your willingness to sacrifice those you care for. Considering how very few of them exist."

Zaiper scoffed. "Very few is putting it mildly. I care for no one."

"He stands beside you, the one male you care for."

Zaiper stared. Too stunned to respond.

Then he roared with laughter. For a whole moment, his entire problem vanished, overshadowed by the ridiculousness of that statement.

"Wait. Are you implying that I love Razarr?" He turned to glance at his head guard, who, for once, looked just as bewildered. "Your voodoo must be malfunctioning, because I do not."

"Mm."

Zaiper rolled his eyes. "Big guy here is the one with feelings for me. But to me, he is merely a servant. A means to an end. A hole to fuck whenever I see fit." His lips curled into a smirk. "He may be more of a friend than most, but I do not have such feelings for him. I do not have such feelings for anyone." Why was he over-explaining?

Was the silence awkward, or was it just him?

"Can you believe this male, Razarr?" Zaiper huffed, pointing a finger at the mage. "Tell him I do not have such feelings."

"My master does not have such feelings." Razarr parroted in a perfectly emotionless tone.

Zaiper squinted at him.

"Of course. Forgive me, Your Majesty." The dark mage inclined his head ever so slightly.

"And for context," Zaiper added. "I am clarifying because I do not like the insinuation or the misunderstanding."

The dark mage hummed again, as though filing the information away. Then, tilted his head. "So, would you sacrifice him for a spell?"

Zaiper's entire body went still. "What the hell?"

"You just said you do not care," the mage pointed out, devoid of judgment, merely stating facts. "So, would you give him to me in exchange for a spell? He is not enough to perform the ritual needed to kill an Oracle, but for something lesser... an exchange could be made."

Turning sharply, Zaiper's gaze locked onto Razarr. His soldier's face remained blank.

"No, Razarr is not an option." Zaiper waved a dismissive hand. "And it is not up for debate."

"Sure," the dark mage echoed.

Clearing his throat, Zaiper forced the conversation back on track. "If killing the Oracle is this impossible, then what can I do?"

"I'm afraid that is for you to figure out, Your Highness. If you require a spell, you know how to summon me." With that, the dark mage turned away, his figure already melting back into the shadows.

"Wait."

The mage halted but did not turn.

"They cannot unweave the dark magic on Daemonikai's mind without you," Zaiper said. "Remain in the shadows. Hide better. Never let yourself be found."

At that, the dark mage's head swiveled slightly, the faintest glimmer of amusement in his voice. "I am never found unless I wish to be. You should know that by now."

Zaiper did. That much, at least, gave him a bit of relief. Knowing the threads tangled within Daemonikai's mind would remain intact, unless he undid them. And that would never happen.

The comfort did not last.

As he left the dwelling, the restlessness crept back in, seeping into his bones, wrapping around his ribs like unseen chains.

Why does it feel like doom is coming?