

HERALD OF STEEL

Chapter 12 Shelter

Alexander fought off the crippling exhaustion lulling him to sleep on the muddy ground and with a herculean effort sat up, his entire body screaming in pain.

Then, with a painful grunt, he yanked off his helmet, shoulder guards and arm and leg greaves and with fumbling hands untied the side and shoulder straps of his cuirass, finally throwing off the hunk of metal.

"Dammit." Alexander cursed loudly, still indignant at the loss.

They were so close, yet so far.

Afterward, he turned his head to check the state of his two mates and found one snoring and panting on the ground.

"Camius get up. You will freeze to death if you fall asleep out here." Alexander lightly shoved the black-haired boy laying on the ground

"Uggghh." The young man only groaned in reply, unable to move or properly reply.

"You stupid loudmouth! Get up!" Alexander shoved again, this time much harder.

Still nothing.

There came only the groaning of a dying man.

Seeing no other option, Alexander with great reluctance pulled Camius up and made him sit up like him.

"What do you eat, idiot? Lead?" Alexander cursed.

Somehow Camius felt ten times heavier.

Then with much difficulty, he helped him take off his armor, finally freeing the boy of his heavy gear.

"Now get up! We need to get out of this rain, quickly." Alexander pulled on Camius to stand up as he himself used his spear as a support to get up.

"Uggghh. Leave me. Take Bartho instead." Camius whispered out of his mouth, exhaustion dripping out of his voice.

Alexander ignored the man and put his arm around his shoulders as he tried to drag him up to his feet.

It felt like dragging up lead.

"Bartho is already asleep. I can't drag that lumbering hunk. Now shut up and move those legs if you want to live." Alexander replied with panted breaths.

"Ugggh, but what about our armor? Are we just leaving it out here?"

"Forget the armor. Tens of thousands of them are littered all across the field. Now shut up and move those damned legs, you blathering fool."

"Sorry but I can't. Can't feel....*panting* feel my legs anymore."

"Motherf**ker, I didn't stitch you up just so you could die in a shitty rainstorm. Now use that spear and walk."

" *Panting*"

Camius silently listened to Alexander's tirade as he leaned on his spear and summoned all his willpower just to get his two useless hunks of meat to move.

It seemed the battle had managed to knock the breath out of even the eternal blatherer.

As they moved across the camp, supporting each other by the shoulder, they passed hundreds of bodies strewn across the field, all soaking in the cold rain.

Many were like Bartholomew, simply asleep, while others had succumbed to their injuries and just laid on the ground, waiting for mother earth to reclaim them.

A few medical staff frantically ran to and fro to get these wounded to the medical camp, but they were far too few.

"Get all the soldiers out of the rain and feed them warm sweet water."
Alexander barked the same order to the all medical personnel he came across.

He was the one in charge of the medical camp after all, having come up with the idea and then introducing many of its practices.

The reason why he told them to do so was because these soldiers were all in danger of hypothermia, which happens when the body cools down too much.

They had fought a grueling battle while being baked under the hot, humid, 40°C sun. Then they got soaked by the freezing rain and had to run through knee-deep mud to escape.

All this had sapped every ounce of strength out of their body, making them unable to generate enough heat to keep them warm.

The best thing that can happen to them is catching a cold. Most likely half of them will get a fever, and an unlucky few will die. Every second they spent under the rain, they came closer to death.

"This fucking rain destroyed us, doc. Maybe the gods are really against us..."

"*Panting*."

"Hey doc, do you think Ramuh is real?"

The banter bus had returned.

"Shut up and move," Alexander replied grinding his teeth, clearly exasperated.

Camius sensing his partner about to blow wisely decided to stop talking.

For a while.

"By the way, where are we going? That's not the way to our tent." Camius broke the silence once again. He finally took the time to notice where they were going.

" Nestoras's tent." Came Alexander's curt reply.

"What! We can't enter there. Well maybe you can but not me."

Alexander completely ignored Camius's objection and soon dragged him to the entrance of a huge tent at the back.

The tent that usually bustling with activity was now eerily empty of any soul, save a sole lonely "guard" left behind.

"Alexander, thank goodness you are alive. Are you hurt?" Shouted a young voice.

"Romeus, go find Bartho and get him to the medical camp. He fainted near the edge of the camp over there." Alexander pointed his finger. "Also both our equipment is next to him."

Hearing this, the short boy suddenly closed his mouth and exaggeratedly shook his head, "But Alexander, I am the only one left guarding the leader's tent. Cambyses has already taken Remus. I can't leave my post."

"Romeus, our brothers are injured and need urgent help. I am too tired. Now go, Camius and I will guard the tent." Alexander tried to convince the boy.

"But...but, I have been ordered by leader personally to not leave my post."

Alexander slightly frowned, seeing the boy being reluctant to leave. Then Alexander decided to play his trump card.

"Romeus you should act according to the situation. We are too short on men. Your brother understood it, that's why he followed Cambyses." Alexander said in a persuasive tone.

This statement got the boy riled up.

Romeus always had an inferiority complex towards his twin brother and shouted, "Okay, okay, I will go help Bartholomew. But just be sure to not let anyone in."

As the boy walk away, Camius chuckled, "Too easy."

Romeus and Remus were raw recruits who had joined the group just two years ago. These two had moved out of their orphanages just as Nestoras was finishing a contract nearby and both took the opportunity to join the group.

Very soon, Remus proved himself to be a prodigy and was taken under Nestoras's tutelage. He was so good that he finished the six-year training course in less than two.

Nestoras had half a mind to debut him in this very battle but reconsidered as there were too few left to guard the camp.

On the other hand, his twin brother Romeus was the exact opposite-charitably described as average.

While Remus was smart, strong, quick on his feet, and very personable, Romeus was introverted, slow, timid, and weak.

In terms of ability, they were like chalk and cheese.

Two identical-looking people with vastly disparate skills of course drew many comments.

Naturally, comparisons were made between the two, with only praising one brother and ignoring the other. This hit the young boy hard, causing him to lower his self-esteem even more.

"Let's go in." Alexander urged Camius and hurriedly entered the huge tent.