

Civilization 144

Chapter 144 Reconciliation and Transformation

Clouds cloaked the moon, leaving only the shifting constellations. On the starry night, a breeze stirred, flickering the bonfire in the fire pit, casting alternating patterns of light and dark across the faces and hearts of those gathered. Desire undulated within this interplay, one moment shining with the brightness of ideals, the next revealing the seductive glimmer of temptation.

Aweit's gaze rested on the figure of Kapana, clad in black. The firelight highlighted her graceful purity and the black garment accentuated her enchanting figure. A fleeting flutter touched Aweit's heart, seeing in the fireside Kapana a resemblance to his late wife.

Two years ago, his principal wife had passed away shortly after giving birth to Chimalpahin due to unstoppable hemorrhaging, leaving for the Divine Kingdom to his great regret. Alisa had wept herself into a figure of tears, and in the depths of the night, so had he.

She had been a tender and beautiful woman, dressed in the mature elegance of black, as if peacefully asleep. He had personally buried her by the Ahuehuete tree on the shores of Lake Texcoco, and on its trunk, he had engraved his own symbol. He had left the warmth of his heart in that symbol, giving the place beside his pillow to his memories, then plunging into the bitter and prolonged war. In the blink of an eye, two years had passed.

Gillim, in silent reverence, bowed his head to show his stance. Aweit pondered in his heart.

He clearly understood the meaning behind Quetzal's word "absorb." It was an offer of total allegiance, presenting a noble granddaughter for marriage without the stipulation of her becoming the principal wife. In doing so, the line of the Chief Priest and the line of the King would once again be deeply united, indistinguishable, hastening the integration of the Capital's political power. For now, it seemed, Uguel was not a hopeful, Quetzal's position remained solid; this appeared to be a win-win choice.

Aweit's eyes flickered. He looked around at everyone, Quetzal smiling like the spring breeze, Gillim solemnly saluting, Kapana trembling slightly, Acap softly chanting. Lastly, there was Xiulote in white. His face showed concern, as if remembering someone.

A shift of thought, and the image of his daughter dressed in wintry white gentleness softened Aweit's heart. Sighing gently, only light remained on his face. He looked around once more, his mind made up, and he made his decision.

"Honorable Chief Priest, thank you for your deep affection," Aweit said with a smile. This was his first greeting to Quetzal that evening.

Quetzal's smile faltered, sensing something amiss.

"I am of samurai birth, not deeply learned in priestly knowledge. Yet this Priest Acap by my side is from the Holy City of Teotihuacan, well-versed in scholarship, with both good character and appearance, and also unattached.

As my trusted general, I take the liberty to propose on his behalf: Might the egret of Teotihuacan be so fortunate as to meet with the swallow of Tenochtitlan?"

With that, Aweit first pointed in Acap's direction, then nodded his head slightly in salute, his demeanor both formal and solemn.

Quetzal paused a moment in deep thought. A priest from Teotihuacan? He shook his head inwardly, not hesitating, yet it was inappropriate to reject the offer outright. As thoughts whirled through his mind, he smiled once more and returned the nod.

"Your Highness has made a fine proposal. However, my granddaughter has always admired only you. Allow me to consult her own wishes," Quetzal said, then turned his head. He looked at Kapana, who seemed to be daydreaming, his gaze serious.

"Kapana, is what your grandfather says correct?" the Chief Priest asked slowly, emphasizing the latter half of his question.

"Ah!" Kapana snapped back to her senses. She boldly and quickly glanced at Acap's ethereally handsome face, her heart inexplicably racing, her cheeks turning a slight red.

"Yes, I am willing!" Kapana nodded firmly, her smile radiant.

"You..." Quetzal was taken aback, a rare loss of composure.

He opened his mouth, looking at his beloved granddaughter, at a loss for words, his copper-plated Divine Staff instinctively raising.

"Wonderful! The cardinals meeting under the Goddess of Spring's blessing, their voices mingling in mutual delight—truly a joyous event!" Without waiting for Quetzal's response, Aweit laughed, concluding the matter. He stood up, taking hold of Quetzal's hand and his Divine Staff.

"Thank you for your deep affection, Chief Priest! Acap, will you not bow in thanks?"

Acap looked bewildered, his fate decided so suddenly? He instinctively followed orders and bowed.

Then, Aweit turned his attention to Gillim.

Gillim too nodded and saluted. First to express affirmation, second to take on the duty of facilitation.

The union of Acap and Kapana would greatly benefit the King's endeavor. This would not only soothe relations with the Chief Priest but also avoid too close a connection, making certain future actions more convenient.

Furthermore, since the King held Acap in high regard, it would be well-timed to draw him into the central fold. It was also time to reduce the influence of the Teotihuacan line, to prevent any one faction from becoming too powerful. Lastly, when the time was ripe, they could elevate Acap, using Kapana's status, to replace Quetzal's position.

Gillim swiftly computed in his mind, weighing the benefits, though none of it showed on his face. He rose from his seat, pulling the still-distracted Acap to his feet with one hand and taking hold of the beaming Kapana with the other.

Kapana felt a chill in her hand, a cold, hard sensation, like the metal of the Tarasco people from the west.

Then her hand was placed in a warm, large one. She looked up at its owner, at his jade-like countenance, his uninhibited spirit, and smiling, she clasped his hand tightly in her own.

Gillim nodded internally, then saluted again, proposing to those in the hall, "Respected King, noble Chief Priest. As we are here discussing worldly matters, why not allow the two young priests to retire to the side chamber to discuss the knowledge of the deities?"

With that, Gillim subtly gestured to his chest with a finger.