

Evil 271

Chapter 271 - 271: Young and dangerous.

Rasmus stayed by Astrea's side until she fell asleep with a peaceful expression. He looked out the window, and he didn't realize it was nighttime already. He then looked at the empty bottle of wine on the bedside table and took it with him.

After Rasmus left Astrea's room, he walked the quiet and empty hallway, staring out the windows at the snow. The sound of his cane echoed throughout the hallway, and then Lenin came out of the corner when she heard it. They both stared at each other with stoic expressions for a while until Rasmus stood in front of her.

"How is Her Holiness, Count?" Lenin asked as she looked at the door to Astrea's room.

"She's living, that's what matters," Rasmus answered as he leaned his shoulder against the wall to help him stand easily.

Lenin looked at Rasmus's legs and she wondered about why he had become a cripple so suddenly. She could ask Aris about it, but she knew that Aris wouldn't even bother to speak to her. However, she noticed a big difference in Rasmus's Mana, and how it gathered around him like a magnet.

"Would you care for some drinks with us, Count?" Lenin asked as she pointed at the end of the hallway with her thumb.

"Us?" Rasmus raised his brows slightly.

"Archduke Thalior, Lady Agnesia, Novia, Carrion, and Garret. Everyone is currently at the dining hall, having a conversation with Saint Serena," Lenin nodded.

"Please lead the way, Great Sage," Rasmus nodded as he pushed himself from the wall. "Javi, find Aris and Daryus. The three of you should come as well," he looked over his shoulder in the empty hallway.

Lenin glanced at the empty hallway and already knew that someone was in there, hiding their presence. She still couldn't believe that Rasmus could get someone like Javi after Uriel told her that Javi was one of the best assassins that The Tower had ever produced.

They went to the dining hall and found Aris, Daryus, and Javi waiting for Rasmus at the door. Lenin looked at each individual who followed Rasmus, and so far, the only person that she hadn't expected Rasmus to recruit was Daryus. A scholar-like young man with great talents in medicine and a heart of gold.

"(Why did you recruit him, Count? What is it that you want from someone like him?)" Lenin thought as she entered the dining hall. "(How can you be so honest and yet so hard to understand?)" She glanced at Rasmus, who walked beside him with Aris, Javi, and Daryus following behind him.

Rasmus looked at Carrion and Garret, who were sitting across from each other while Thalior was sitting across from Agnesia. Lenin decided to sit beside Novia while Rasmus sat beside Serena, with Aris beside him. Javi and Daryus sat across from each other.

There was only silence at the table while the maids poured tea into Rasmus's and the others' cups. Rasmus, Thalior, Agnesia, and Lenin were the only ones who weren't bothered by the deafening silence. They were so used to it that they found the silence quite peaceful while Novia, Carrion, Garret, and Daryus were sitting on the edge. Aris, Javi, and Serena were an exception.

"Have you decided what to do now, Count?" Thalior asked, breaking the silence.

"Yes," Rasmus nodded as he held his teacup. "I'm going to Central Neva, accompanying Lady Astrea," he answered and took a sip of his tea.

Hearing Rasmus mention Astrea's name without her title caught everyone off guard. However, they were more surprised that Rasmus was going to accompany Astrea back to the Holy Nation. Lenin found the opportunity of Rasmus coming along to Central Neval to align with her agenda.

"I see, that's good to hear, Count..." Thalior nodded his head, his expression looked relieved as if a few weights on his shoulders had been lifted. "When are you leaving, Count?" He asked with his brows furrowed as if it bothered him.

"It depends on Lady Astrea. She's the one who decides when to go back, but I believe it will be sooner than you thought," Rasmus answered as he put the teacup down. "What's the matter, Your Grace?" He asked, his eyes staring right into Thalior's eyes.

Thalior glanced at Carrion, signaling him to tell Rasmus about it.

"There are two guests that want to meet you, one of them is Erlina," Carrion said as he looked at Rasmus. "The other one is Princess Anastasha Asghar," he continued.

Rasmus was about to breathe, but then he held his breath when he heard Anastasha's name. He didn't expect her to be in the same building as him, but knew nothing about her being there. He then glanced at Javi, but Javi shook his head, not knowing about it as well.

"She wanted to meet you when she heard that you had arrived earlier this morning. However, knowing that you had a plan to visit Her Holiness, she decided to wait until the morning," Garret said as he enjoyed his cup of tea. "She has an eye on you, Count," he added as he stared at Rasmus.

Rasmus had been keeping Anastasha in the back of his head ever since his encounter with her for the first time a while ago. She had a similar way of thinking to his, and for someone like him, to find someone similar to him would only mean she was dangerous. Although he managed to find out the reason she left East Neva, he didn't know anything else about her. She moved like a ghost, and her purpose of staying in South Neva indefinitely was bothering him.

Thalior and Lenin noticed how bothered Rasmus was, and that was something they had never seen before. For someone like him, who took the whole war against demons so calmly was surprising that he would be bothered by a single woman. Lenin and Thalior shared a look, thinking the same thing.

"Is something the matter, Count?" Lenin asked.

"No, it's nothing," Rasmus shook his head.

"She was in Bastios Kingdom, and if you didn't tell me about her, I couldn't imagine what would happen to her if she stayed there when the demons obliterated that nation. We just saved an important figure from East Neva," Thalior answered.

Rasmus believed that even without their interference, Anastasha would be able to walk away from danger so casually. He believed that she had so many tricks up her sleeves, and the way she let things flow like he did made it both intriguing and unnerving. Compared to Anastasha, Rasmus had a second life, and in his first life, he spent his entire life learning and conquering the world through sweat, blood, and betrayal. However, Anastasha was a young woman who had the same way of thinking as him at that young age, which was terrifying.

Thalior thought that to have Anastasha would be a great addition, and to put a wall around Rasmus. He knew that Anastasha was capable of doing so since she was an Asghar, the most infamous family that profited in wars decades ago in East Neva. Asghar could be said to be the true ruler of East Neva because of their influence, their ability, and their will to either make a nation disappear or rise in a single night.

"(Out of all people, why must it be an Asghar...)" Thalior thought as he took a sip of his tea, disturbed by the situation.

Lenin glanced at Thalior, knowing what he was thinking, but she knew if she brought Anastasha into their board, they wouldn't be able to use her, they would be the ones who were being played by her in their own game. Thalior also thought the same way when he glanced at Lenin with a worried expression. They both knew it would be wise to let a beast walk away rather than tame it and make themselves the beast's meal. The right thing to do was to let the two beasts fight each other while they watched, eliminating a threat without doing a thing.

Rasmus sighed, and that was enough to make everyone look at him. His sigh wasn't subtle, but rather showed it to them on purpose or unconsciously. He then looked at his wristwatch with a stoic expression, and then emptied his cup of tea.

"You're leaving already, Count? We haven't even talked," Lenin said with her brows raised.

Rasmus looked at Lenin and Thalior, showing a cold smile on his face.

"I might need to get some rest before I face her. The journey was quite tiring for my current condition," Rasmus said as he stood up, using his cane as a support. "Who knows, maybe she and I would work together for future plans. Good night," he said, and then walked away.

At that moment, Thalior and Lenin's faces turned pale, realizing there was a high possibility of those two working together. They realized how realistic and logical Rasmus was, and how Anastasha might share the same interest as him. If they both decided to work together, the board became bigger while Thalior and the other figures would become less insignificant on the board.

Carrion, Aris, Javi, and Daryus suddenly got up from their seats, following Rasmus. Serena on the other hand stayed, finding the whole thing interesting, hiding her smile beneath that gentle expression she wore.

Chapter 272 - 272: Clash of wits.

When the morning came, Rasmus was already sitting on the edge of his bed before the sun had risen. He could barely sleep, not because of Anastasha, but because his body was a bit feverish and felt like it was boiling from within. The worst part was that he didn't sweat at all, which made his body achy and heavy.

"How uncomfortable... to be like this indefinitely..." Rasmus muttered as he got up and walked to the mirror.

Rasmus looked at his tired and pale skin in the mirror. The blood vessels in his eyes became redder and visible to the naked eye. He then looked at his right hand, clenching it, and felt numb.

"The numbness has worsened too..." Rasmus muttered and tried to stretch his hands. "Stage two is undergoing..." he said under his breath.

During Rasmus's journey to headquarters, Aris mentioned the symptoms during his awakening. The first stage was losing control of the body, and the second stage was losing senses. Based on Aris's explanation, he was similar to being reborn, losing his senses and control over his body until his body grew accustomed and overcame the condition.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door without saying a word. Rasmus opened the door, and it was the man whom Aris encountered when they were about to infiltrate the Royal Palace back in the Bastios Kingdom, the man who wielded a quarterstaff. He was Anastasha's personal guard and the leader of the guards.

"Good morning, Count Blackheart. I apologize if I'm bothering your resting time, however, my Master wishes to have breakfast with you in her chamber," the man said, realizing how exhausted and unwell Rasmus's condition was.

"Alright, bring me to her," Rasmus nodded.

The man guided Rasmus to the other side of the building, where there were barely any maids and servants. The left wing of the building had been completely occupied by Anastasha, turning it into her private quarters.

Rasmus entered Anastasha's chamber, and she was already sitting at the table with her personal maids. She tilted her head when she saw Rasmus's condition and his current state. She slowly got up from her chair and pointed her hand at the chair across from her.

As Rasmus walked to the table, all the maids left the room, leaving the two of them alone. Anastasha stayed standing until Rasmus took a seat and made himself comfortable in the chair.

"You shouldn't have come if you're not feeling well, Count," Anastasha said as she poured tea into her cup.

"I was thinking the same thing, but here I am," Rasmus answered as he looked at the food at the table. "I didn't expect you to stay here, Princess," he looked at Anastasha with a stoic expression.

"Why not? Wasn't it your plan to bring me here in the first place? You told Archduke Thalior about my location even though I was doing fine back there," Anastasha responded and took a sip of her tea as she stared into Rasmus's eyes. "I don't mind being here, and the fact that he didn't reveal my whereabouts to anyone else, that's better," she continued and put down her teacup.

Rasmus looked at the teapot and noticed there were two holes in the handle. He glanced at Anastasha and back at the teapot, noticing that she did cover the top hole with her thumb.

"Please, Count, help yourself," Anastasha smiled as she pointed her left hand at the teapot.

Rasmus grabbed the teapot and covered the top hole with his thumb as he poured the tea into his cup. Anastasha saw him do the exact same thing as her, and how he was aware of every movement she made, it made her smile even wider. She expected him to be sharp, and it made her excited when he met her expectation.

"So, Count..." Anastasha said after Rasmus took a sip of the tea. "What made you do that? To tell my location to Archduke Thalior?" She asked with her eyes narrowed.

"Last time we met, you made me guess of your intention of staying in South Neva. It would be fair if you made a guess of my intention, Princess," Rasmus answered as he leaned back and stared back at Anastasha.

"Fair enough..." Anastasha chuckled as she leaned back, mirroring Rasmus.

Anastasha rested her right elbow as she rubbed her right thumb against her index finger. She was deep in thought as she stared blankly at nothing until she suddenly stopped rubbing her thumb and stared at Rasmus. Rasmus could see the way she posed and her thinking behavior was that of someone with an extreme intellect.

"Are you worried that the demons would take me and turned me into their pawns, Count?" Anastasha asked with her head tilted. "You're thinking it would be great if I didn't fall to your enemy's hand, right?" She added.

Rasmus nodded, knowing that she already knew the answer before she even boarded the ship. She already knew what he was thinking, and yet she was being polite enough to give it another thought in front of him.

"Yes, you're correct, Princess. It would be bad if the demons took you in because I knew you wouldn't be able to do much if you got caught by them," Rasmus answered.

"But why, Count? Weren't you playing with the demons before? With Kiel, to be exact," Anastasha smirked as she stared at Rasmus. "You schemed to bring war against humanity with Kiel's help, and then you stabbed him in the back. What makes you think that I couldn't do something similar?" she added as her smirk grew wider.

Rasmus didn't expect Anastasha to know about his deal with Kiel because not even Thalior or anyone else knew about it. However, Anastasha, the one who held no power in South Neva to had information and connections to dig up that kind of information. However, the way she used her words, it was the classic way to make someone feel guilty.

"Princess, you're the one who decided to board the ship and came here to enjoy your time. If you have decided to play with the demons or the emissaries, you would have already done it," Rasmus said calmly as he stared Anastasha in the eye. "But I'm more curious how you know that, Princess. The only ones who knew that were Aris and a few of my men, and Kiel himself. My people didn't know you or have met you, that means you have met Kiel in person as well," he continued and calmly took a sip of his tea.

Anastasha smiled as she placed her index finger on her lips. That gesture alone was enough to answer Rasmus's question, however, the fact that she didn't deny it was made it even intriguing for him. They both didn't try to deny the accusations, and that put them on the same level again. The only issue was why she didn't deny it when she could easily do that and put herself on higher ground than him.

"Let's just say we both have something from him," Anastasha answered as she took a sip of her tea. "You want to use him and make him fall, while I want something else..."

Rasmus was convinced that Anastasha was bold and fearless, which meant she had something that Kiel and the demons wanted. He wondered if it was her influence and power on East Neva that might have helped the emissaries conquer East Neva. However, he didn't want to believe if she had a shallow goal like that because she wasn't in the line to become the next head of the Asghar family. The emissaries would have used her older siblings for that, and not her.

"(Unless her goal wasn't to conquer East Neva but to get rid of her siblings with the help of the emissaries...)" Rasmus thought as he took a sip of his tea. "(However, I got rid of Kiel and Yaza from South Neva, meaning she wasted her time here, and couldn't get what she wanted. That shouldn't be the case because she's still here...)" he thought and put down the teacup.

"Out of curiosity. Was my action put you in a bad spot, Princess?" Rasmus asked.

"Getting rid of Kiel? Yes, it did. It was a mistake to come here out of all continents because you were going to get rid of the demons," Anastasha smiled coldly at Rasmus. "But, thanks to that, I found out that you were more capable than Kiel," she continued.

"Is that so? So now I'm next in line?" Rasmus asked as he rested his arms on the armrests.

"Oh, don't put it that way, Count. I'm not going to use you for nothing," Anastasha chuckled as she rested her chin on her fist. "Whatever you want, I can give it to you. I'm willing to be used by you as long as it's worth the price," she offered.

Rasmus thought about it for a moment about whether he should consider her offer or not. Suddenly, Anastasha clapped her hands, snapping him back to reality and making him look at her.

"Count, we are here to have breakfast together. Why don't we eat first and talk later? I'm quite famish," Anastasha smiled at Rasmus.

"Of course, Princess," Rasmus nodded as he straightened his back and watched Anastasha grab the food from her plate.

Chapter 273 - 273: Maturity.

"Count, there's something that I would like to ask," Anastasha asked after she chewed her food. "Your battle, I heard you were the ones who made it possible. You planned everything from the moment you raised the conflicts between people from distrust to the point you defeated the demon army and the revolutionary parties," she continues and wiped her mouth with the napkin.

"You did all that in a span of a year. You brought the whole continent into chaos and managed to conquer it in just a year. How did you do it?" Anastasha asked as she tilted her head.

Rasmus chewed his food, and he could barely taste anything because he was losing his sense of smell and taste. He noticed the curiosity in Anastasha's eyes, and there was something else in them.

"Do you think it's possible? For someone who came to a new continent with no power and wealth to do something like that?" Rasmus asked and looked at Anastasha.

"I would say no, that would be impossible. A year would only make them know enough about the place they were living in, and a few people in it," Anastasha shook her head. "But here you are, the man himself who could achieve that," she pointed her hand at Rasmus.

"If I have to be honest, Count. I wouldn't be able to do it in a year, perhaps three years," Anastasha said as she clasped her hands together in front of her mouth. "Was it even a year? The appearance of the emissaries wasn't even a year ago, so you did it in less than a year," she continued.

Rasmus took a sip of his tea and looked into Anastasha's expression. The curiosity and confusion were written all over her face.

"It wasn't me who did it, Princess," Rasmus shook his head. "It would be possible if there was no momentum," he revealed.

"It doesn't matter, Count. Even with the appearance of the emissaries of evil, the distrust, and the fear, a year wouldn't be enough to do what you did," Anastasha responded with a serious expression. "You

fooled Kiel, a being who could see through your mind. That alone is bothering me," she added, and how she remembered her encounter with Kiel that made her sit on the edge of the seat.

"I wasn't fooling him, Princess. I do want to destroy humankind. I told you, I'm only using the momentum. I only hit the cracked ice and made it shatter, that's all," Rasmus answered calmly as he continued eating. "I used the information I had, the people I needed, and places to be. That was all," he continued and chewed his foot.

Anastasha sighed as she leaned back, showing a bit of disappointment that the answer was so simple. She hoped that Rasmus would tell his methods because the mood was right. She was wrong that Rasmus would lower his guard, but at the same time, it baffled her because she didn't know if he was telling the truth or not.

Based on the reports Anastasha got about Rasmus, she knew a lot about him from the moment he set foot in Eddenvilla. She knew about his schemes against the trading and shipping companies, his involvement with the Corrupted faction. Every small detail of him, she knew all of them, and that included his personality.

"(A man who never speaks lies...)" Anastasha stared at Rasmus with a sharp gaze. "(No wealth and no power? You don't desire them in the first place. You want destruction of humankind, but you fight against the very thing that shares the same goal as yours...)" she continued.

"You played with both sides and yet you chose against both of them. You don't want humanity to fall to those demons because you would lose your ground in the end. But why does it matter?" Anastasha asked the thing that had bothered her for a while.

"Peace of mind, Princess. What's the point of achieving what you want but don't have peace of mind?" Rasmus asked back as he glanced at Anastasha.

At that moment, Anastasha realized the gap between her and him. She was trying to think like Rasmus and went far ahead with her thoughts. However, when she got the answer, she found out how mature he was. There was no ego behind his reasoning, only clarity.

The moment she realized that, the more it opened her eyes. She tried to recall conversations she had with him, and she noticed that he never pried on her. He only asked questions and accepted the answers as is. On the other hand, she kept prying on the answer, trying to dig more and more from him.

Anastasha sighed quietly as she clenched her jaw, feeling like a child who stood in front of an adult. Her level of maturity was nowhere near Rasmus's, and she only found out at that moment. She thought she was level-headed and could suppress her ego, but she was wrong because she had never met someone that was on her level.

"Have you ever thought that, Princess? That every goal and achievement are basically to achieve peace of mind?" Rasmus asked as he took a sip of his tea.

"No... I have not..." Anastasha answered, and there was a bit of shame in her voice.

"Do you agree with me in that, Princess?" Rasmus asked as he glanced at Anastasha.

Anastasha couldn't answer that question so easily because she felt like the answer would define her. She shouldn't have been bothered by it, but she did. She knew the answer wouldn't change anything or affect anything, and yet she hesitated.

"Somehow... I disagree, Count," Anastasha answered as she looked at Rasmus with a straight face. "But I could be wrong..." she averted her gaze and stared at her plate.

"It's not what's right or wrong, Princess. It's a question that differentiates who we are," Rasmus put down his teacup. "You have a burning ambition within you. The thrill when you achieved the impossible, it felt really great, wasn't it?" He asked.

"Yes, it did. But that's how everyone should feel, no?" Anastasha furrowed her brows as she stared at Rasmus. "Goals and achievements are important to us. If you don't feel anything, I don't believe you're living a life," she continued.

Rasmus smiled as he poured tea into his cup while Anastasha found his smile unnerving.

"You're wondering how I could achieve something impossible in less than a year. Then here's my question. If I wasted my time to be thrilled or euphoric about it, clouding my senses whenever I achieved anything, you think I could achieve this in less than a year?" Rasmus asked as he stared into Anastasha's eyes.

Anastasha narrowed her eyes, finding out how unnerving it was to know that Rasmus didn't even think his achievement was worth thinking about. She had never seen anyone like him other than those who had already lost everything and lost the purpose of living. She then wondered if it was the case? But if that was the case, he wouldn't bother to find peace of mind.

"Perhaps not..." Anastasha answered as she shook her head. "So you're saying that all you feel right now is peace of mind after you manage to defeat the demon forces?" She asked.

"That's why I'm here, princess, having a casual conversation. You on the other hand, invite me here because you have ulterior motives. There isn't a glimpse of peace in your eyes, Princess," Rasmus answered and took a sip of his tea.

"It's better than pretending nothing bothers me, Count. I would never live in an illusion, pretending to be someone I'm not," Anastasha responded with a serious expression.

"That we both can agree on, Princess. We both live in a different reality, however, maturity is beyond realities. One day you'll find the peace of mind to be the most important thing to have," Rasmus said with a soft smile.

"Maybe you're right, Count," Anastasha smiled as she stared Rasmus in the eyes.

"And maybe you're not wrong either, Princess," Rasmus responded and took a sip of his tea.

"You sounded like an old man, Count. Terrifyingly, you remind me of my father," Anastasha looked at Rasmus as she took a sip of her tea. "Not something that I would like to see in anyone," she muttered.

The moment Rasmus heard Anastasha's father being mentioned, it piqued his interest. He wondered what the head of the Asghar family would be like if his children were all so cunning and smart. Seeing how Anastasha wasn't fond of her father and the look in her eyes that showed a bit of fear in them made him even more curious.

"Princess, let's not use each other as you wanted," Rasmus suggested as he looked at Anastasha. "How about we help each other in the future, without asking for anything in return. Something that only friends would do," he offered as he leaned back.

Anastasha was surprised when she heard Rasmus's proposal, and somehow, it assured her and intrigued her at the same time.

"What a nice offer, Count," Anastasha smiled as she put down her teacup. "Yes, I would love that. As a friend," she nodded in agreement.

Chapter 274 - 274: Optimistic, Pessimistic, and Pragmatic.

Rasmus sat at the table under the gazebo, enjoying the silence and alone time after he had spent the morning with Anastasha. He was deep in thought, thinking about what she said to him, and the goal that she wanted to achieve.

He thought that Anastasha wanted to take over the Asghar family, but he was wrong. She had a grandiose plan, and that was to reshape the north side of East Neva. She wanted to get rid of all the powerful families that supported the Asghar family, making the Asghar family's status weaken.

Anastasha didn't plan on destroying her family or didn't care about it like Carrion did. She wanted to get rid of the leeches that had been living under the Asghar family's protection.

At first, Rasmus was a bit confused when he heard her goal because it didn't make any sense at all. When Anastasha revealed that she wanted to put the Asghar family to rest, away from the tangled mess of politics in East Neva. It turned out she did it for private and personal matters, to unite the Asghar family.

"(The conflicts between siblings, planning to cut each other's throats for the seat that their father was about to get up from...)" Rasmus thought as he stared blankly at the vast garden in front of him. "Who would have thought she used her power and ability not for herself. To put a tough shell because she has to protect something that matter for her, how noble," he muttered as he looked down at the cane on his lap.

Anastasha also revealed that she asked Kiel for help, to inform the emissaries in East Neva to weaken the Asghar family. However, because Rasmus defeated the demon forces in South Neva and made Kiel run away, she couldn't get what she wanted. It was both a fortune and a problem because she didn't have to make a deal with the demons. The problem was that the longer the Asghar family held power, the higher the chance for her siblings from killing each other.

Rasmus had heard of Anastasha's detailed plan for distracting her older brothers and sisters. It was quite interesting, and he also gained something from it, which was a win-win situation for both of them. However, the risk was quite high, and they both needed to tread it carefully.

"I hope I didn't bother your time alone, Count Blackheart," Agnesia said as she walked toward the gazebo.

Rasmus looked at Agnesia and immediately pointed at the empty chair across from him. He had been wanting to speak with her, and it was perfect for her to approach him.

"The true hero of South Neva," Agnesia smiled as she sat down and stared at Rasmus. "Soon they will know about you, Count. Are you ready to be seen by the whole world?" She smirked as she leaned back and tilted her head.

Rasmus recalled that when he left the dining hall last night, Carrion told him about the White Flower festival. Anastasha also mentioned it when she explained her plan. It was to commemorate the fallen and to celebrate their victory in getting rid of the demonic army and preventing humanity from doom. That moment would be the main stage for Anastasha, and he would be involved directly in it.

"They put me in a troublesome spot," Rasmus answered as he looked at the tulips next to the gazebo. Thinking it was Lenin and Thalior's idea to put me in the spotlight, making it harder for me to make a move because of the image they depicted of him as a hero.

"People who only know how to do politics, they believe they're righteous when their methods are as cunning as those who aren't," Agnesia chuckled as she nodded in agreement. "But it seems you don't mind it at all, Count," she tilted her head to the other side and kept staring at Rasmus.

"Because there's always an opportunity in every choice and path," Rasmus answered and glanced at Agnesia.

"Huh? I didn't know you're quite the optimist type, Count," Agnesia smiled, but her brows were raised, surprised by Rasmus's answer.

"It's not about being an optimist, Lady Agnesia, it's about knowing where to look," Rasmus smiled softly at her. "That's enough about me, Lady Agnesia. What do I owe the pleasure of your visit?" He asked as he leaned back, making himself comfortable.

Agnesia cleared her throat as she made herself comfortable as well, crossing her legs and putting her hands on her thighs. She took a moment to admire the scenery before her focus went back to Rasmus.

"You're undergoing an awakening, right?" Agnesia asked as she looked at Rasmus's body, seeing Mana lingered around his body and yet unable to enter his body as if the body had rejected them. "As a Sorcerer, I learned a lot about Orthias race. I heard about their awakening process when they got personified from a lump of Mana. Seeing you like this, with similar characteristic of an Orthias undergo an awakening, I believe Lady Aris has decided to open up your bloodline as an Orthias," she continued with a calm gaze, observing Rasmus's body.

"Yes, and right now I'm losing my senses. I don't even feel cold in this weather or can I feel the heat in the tea I'm drinking or taste the sweetness of it," Rasmus answered as he stared at the cup of tea at the table and the snowfall around the gazebo.

"Seeing that you can still walk, it seems like the process went well. I'm here to congratulate you, Count. You have finally reached the pinnacle of a living being," Agnesia smiled at Rasmus. Her smile was genuine and her happiness was written all over her face.

"Thank you, Lady Agnesia," Rasmus nodded.

"Well, I'm also here because I want to complain. I was hoping for you to visit us in West Neva, but when I heard you were going to accompany Her Holiness back to Central Neva, I was deeply disappointed," Agnesia said as she crossed her arms. "But I believe you have a different agenda as to why you agreed to go to Central Neva," she continued as she sighed.

"As I said, there's always an opportunity if you're looking for one," Rasmus smiled as he rested his arms on the armrests. "I might pay you a visit, but I can't promise you when it will be. I have a lot of things to handle and to prioritize," he continued as he stared at the ceiling with a calm and relaxed expression.

Agnesia didn't say a word, and her demeanor suddenly changed into a concerned one. Her gaze was cold and her expression was stiff when she looked at the beautiful scenery around her, unlike before. Rasmus noticed that, and it appeared that she was waiting for him to ask about it.

"How's the situation in West Neva? The news about Kiel and the demon forces got defeated in South Neva would make the emissaries of evil in West Neva to be cautious and perhaps chose to make a frontal act," Rasmus asked as he took a sip of his lukewarm and tasteless tea.

"Barely managing. The crack is already visible, and the tension is worsen..." Agnesia answered in a muttered voice, loud enough for Rasmus to hear her clearly. "Unlike here where demonic beasts barely exist, West Neva is basically has hundreds of nests for them, breeding uncontrollably. We lack manpower, and the moment the peace is shattered... our fall would be worse than what's happenin in East Neva," she continued.

"I realized the moment you stayed here in South Neva and not immediately went back to West Neva that you wanted to ask for support from Archduke Thalior, correct?" Rasmus asked.

"To be fair, Count. All of us had seen how powerful the emissaries were, how they could kill thousands of lives with a simple glare, and how they could create such a monstrosity like Nephia, a colossal monster with the power of an immortal. Do you believe that he can help when he and the hundred thousand soldiers under his command couldn't even do a thing to the real threat?" Agnesia asked as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"Kiel and his demons had underestimated humans, and they paid the price. You're right for being skeptical, but there's no point of being one right now," Rasmus said as he held his cane and stared at it. "If those emissaries saw how united you were, and how they were ready to fight against them, they would think twice before they made a move. We have momentum, don't waste it. Once you have accepted that, now find opportunities along the way, look for it, don't only focus on what's in front of you in this kind of situation," he continued and stared at Agnesia.

Agnesia was deeply shocked and speechless when she heard Rasmus's eye-opening words. She then laughed and shook her head, staring at Rasmus in disbelief.

"You said you're not an optimistic person, Count. I still believe you're one," Agnesia said, her bright smile coming back to her face.

"Being optimistic and being pragmatic aren't that different. Being pessimistic and skeptical are similar to being pragmatic as well, but it's still different," Rasmus said with a soft smile on his face.

"I have lost for words, Count, truly," Agnesia shook her head, and then enjoyed the peaceful moment of silence with Rasmus.

Chapter 275 - 275: All eyes on him.

Rasmus walked in the long hallway with Aris beside him and Javi behind him. He approached the door at the end of the hallway based on Javi's guidance. However, before Rasmus could reach the end of the hallway, a few high-ranking nobles from different nations came out of the corner and decided to speak with him.

Javi and Aris went ahead and entered the room without Rasmus because the nobles were terrified of those two. Although they were inside, they were on guard in case those nobles tried to harm Rasmus. They were a bit on the edge because Rasmus couldn't protect himself in his current state.

The nobles were showing their gratification because their sons were among the soldiers during the war against the demon. Their sons survived because of him when the chance of surviving was close to none based on what their sons said. Not only did their sons survive, they became mature and changed into better men because they knew how precious life was and how important bravery, kindness, and empathy were.

"Lords, life is the best teacher, and I have nothing to do with their changes," Rasmus answered with a gentle smile on his face. "Sometimes, a single death is more significant than the survival of thousands. The ones that carry that burden are Archduke Thalior, Great Sage Lenin, and Lady Astrea, and I hope you can convey your gratification to them as well, lords," he continued.

"Of course, Count. We will do our best to support them," one of the lords answered with a serious expression as he nodded in agreement.

"I believe you have somewhere else to be, Count. We will take our leave," the other lord said as he bowed his head at Rasmus.

Rasmus bowed his head as well, and then he watched the lords leave to meet with Thalior and Lenin to convey their gratification. Once he saw them turn to the corner, he decided to enter through the door at the end of the hallway.

As soon as he entered the room, he saw Erlina sitting on the couch next to Carrion, enjoying their tea and their time together. Across the coffee table, Daryus and Serena were discussing a book on medicine. Javi stayed next to the door while Aris was standing at the window, staring out at the garden. Videl was standing behind the desk as if he was waiting for Rasmus to sit on the chair beside him.

"My my..." Erlina smirked as she stood up and looked at Rasmus. "I miss you, my patron," she chuckled as she walked toward Rasmus.

Rasmus observed Erlina's dress, and there were barely any expensive accessories on her, even though she had become the most powerful and well-known figure in eastern South Neva. He hadn't heard much about her ever since the last time he saw her which was almost half a year.

"You haven't changed a bit," Rasmus said as he looked at Erlina.

"Why should I?" Erlina straightened Rasmus's shirt collar and carefully wiped off the dust on his shoulders. "You know me well. I am who I am, and I will never become someone else. However, I tricked a few people, but not to the point of pretending to be someone that I'm not," she continued with a soft smirk on her face as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"I believe you have done that long before you even stepped your foot into politics," Rasmus raised his brows.

"Right, but not in this grand scale though," Erlina chuckled as she placed her hands on Rasmus's chest. "Welcome back, Count. Everyone is here now, so why don't we listen to what you have to say? For the next grand plan of yours?" She tilted her head as she pulled her hands away from him and took a few steps back. "We are all yours to command..." she smirked as she bowed down gracefully.

All eyes were on Rasmus as he walked toward the desk and sat on the chair. Everyone stayed in their places, but their eyes were on him.

"Serena, what are you going to do now?" Rasmus asked as he looked at Serena.

"This morning, I met with Astrea and had a talk with her. She knew about my death, and she was petrified when she heard about what had happened to me seventy-six years ago," Serena answered with a calm expression. "With that being said, she asked me a favor, to come with her to Central Neva. I'm going to follow you there," she answered.

Daryus, Carrion, and Erlina were dumbfounded to the point their eyes and mouths were wide open. They didn't know about Serena's past yet or her origins since they hadn't gotten a chance to ask about her past, and they didn't want to ask about it in the first place because she was a Saint and they didn't want to be disrespectful.

"Your Holiness is almost a hundred year old?" Daryus asked in a muttered voice.

"Yes, I was killed because I had the power of a Saint. I found out that if a third Saint existed, it was a sign of doomsday. During the civil war here in South Neva, the Holy Nation heard about my existence, and they funded a certain nation to hunt me down and killed me because they believed I was a false prophet," Serena answered as she looked at Daryus, Carrion, and Erlina. "They threw my body into a lake, along with dozens of people who followed me and on top hundreds to a thousand bodies of knights..." she continued, her expression sorrowful as she stared blankly at the coffee table.

"If it wasn't because of Rasmus..." Serena paused to look at Rasmus. "I wouldn't be here right now. He found my body, and then Lady Aris kept my body safe. Then, here I am, came back to life," she smiled softly as she stared out the window.

The three of them looked at Aris and Rasmus back and forth, thinking about how they had brought back a Saint from the dead. They knew Aris wouldn't give them an answer, and Rasmus on the other hand would only answer half of the whole thing. However, their curiosity bested them, and Erlina asked Rasmus about it.

"How did you bring Her Holiness back to life, Count?" Erlina asked.

"I didn't, and I don't know how it happened because I wasn't there when it happened," Rasmus answered as he shook his head.

"Videl?" Erlina looked at Videl, who was standing beside Rasmus.

"My job is to be Her Holiness's personal knight. That's all the order from my master, nothing else. I'm not the one who brought her to life," Videl answered as he smirked and stared at Rasmus. "Does miracle need an explanation?" He asked back as he stared at Erlina.

Erlina narrowed her eyes, staring at Rasmus and Videl, knowing that they both were hiding something from them. However, she didn't pry on it because she knew her boundaries, and she was always like that. She didn't want to get involved in something that she shouldn't have.

"Please, everyone. I'm here standing equally with all of you. You may respect me as a Saint, but we are following the same person, and that's Rasmus," Serena said with a gentle smile. "I know he's nowhere near the frame of righteousness, and all of you must be thinking that it would be suspicious of me following that kind of a man, but we know he's not forcing us to follow or forcing us to see the world like he does. We follow him because we either have something we want or because he allows us to be who we are with no restraint," she continued as she looked at Daryus and Carrion, the only ones who had a righteous mind.

Carrion and Daryus resonated with Serena's words, and they couldn't agree more with her explanation. In the end, everyone followed him because he was useful in achieving what they were looking for. He never complained, and he didn't mind if they had their own agendas to follow as long as they didn't try to stab him in the back.

"So..." Carrion cleared his throat to break the silence. "We are going to Central Neva now?" He looked at Rasmus.

"We? All of you will follow me?" Rasmus asked with his brows raised.

"Yes. Remember that I secured the mines that were owned by noble families across South Neva, and they fled to West Neva and Central Neva for protection. It's time for them to pay up and collect my shares," Carrion answered as he nodded. "For Erlina. She wants to spread her influence to Central Neva as well. She already have a lot of trusted aide to keep things under her control in eastern South Neva," he continued as he looked at Erlina.

Rasmus hummed as he nodded, and then he looked at Daryus.

"What about you, Doctor? Do you want to stay here?" Rasmus asked.

Daryus looked at the others, realizing that everyone was going to follow Rasmus. He wanted to stay, but he already achieved enough in helping people during the war back then. He had tried his best, and his actions were fruitful, spreading kindness and knowledge about medicine to those who were in need.

"I would like to follow you, Count. I'm worried with Saint Astrea's condition, and I want to try to help her in any way possible," Daryus answered with a serious expression.

Rasmus nodded with understanding.

"Then..." Rasmus said as he slowly got up and used his cane to support his body. "Let's enjoy the time we have left here, and we should enjoy the White Flower festival that will be held in two weeks. Everyone has done a great work, and all of you deserve to let loose once in a while," he said with a gentle smile.

Everyone nodded with understanding as they continued with their own discussions while Rasmus watched them from the desk. He decided to stay and listen to everyone's achievements in the past few months when he was busy waging a war against demons.

Chapter 276 - 276: To fight.

Two weeks flew by quickly, everyone had prepared the capital city for the White Flower festival. The spacious and big town center, surrounded by tall trees and long square fountains around it had become a gathering place for everyone. Nobles from across South Neva came to attend the festival to honor the fallen and to celebrate their victory against demons.

Not everyone felt the past two weeks had moved quickly, some felt it was like an eternity. Some weren't ready for the day of the festival because of the fallen sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, mothers, or fathers. They didn't want to feel the grief, regrets, and the pain again, but at the same time, they were grateful for the festival. They were grateful that their loss, pain, and sadness would be remembered around the world.

In the past two weeks, Rasmus had been talking with everyone, including Anastasha and Garret. He discussed with Anastasha about her future plans while he discussed with Garret for their business and Garret's status as the bridge for South Neva Union and the Alliance.

Garret had gained recognition from the Alliance faction because he helped them to keep their position high in South Neva. He became a mediator for both the South Neva Union and the Alliance, satisfying both sides. It wasn't an easy task if Rasmus didn't show him the right path to tread.

Astrea had finally allowed everyone to visit her chamber after talking with Rasmus a few times in the past two weeks. Although they didn't know her condition, they could tell that her health had worsened day by day. Their pities for her, it only discouraged her to accept her condition and to show the world who she had become.

However, Astrea had steeled her heart and kept Rasmus's words deep in her head and heart. She managed to convince herself that she lived only for Aurelia, and nobody else. She was grateful that Rasmus kept visiting her when she needed someone to talk to. She never thought she would feel at peace and comfortable in front of a dangerous man.

"How is it, Doctor?" Astrea asked weakly as she looked at Daryus trying to feel her pulse on her left wrist.

Daryus wasn't great at hiding his expression, and that was both a bad and a good thing to have. He respectfully lowered his head and pulled his hands away from Astrea's wrist.

"Your health is declining, Your Holiness..." Daryus answered with regret and frustration in his voice because he still couldn't find a way to help her condition. "You're losing too much blood, and the wounds are barely closing even though it has been two weeks, Your Holiness..." he continued, his voice quieter.

"It's okay, Doctor. I have accepted this fate of mine the moment I prayed to God that I would sacrifice myself for the life of the thousands..." Astrea smiled, her left eye barely open while the rest of her body was still covered in bandages.

Daryus didn't want to hear something like that as an excuse. He wasn't the religious type, and he never dwelled on it to begin with, but he believed in spreading kindness. The reason that he wasn't the

religious type was because he believed that his life wasn't determined by fate, it was determined by his own actions.

"If that's what it's called fate, then what's the point of living if everything is to be set in stone? Please, Your Holiness. It has nothing to do with fate, it's because the lack of knowledge and skill for people like me and the other physicians that prevents you from regaining your health," Daryus said with a serious expression, this time he dared to stare right into Astrea's eyes.

Astrea smiled weakly when she heard how frustrated Daryus was, and how he was genuinely wanted to heal her. However, she knew that even a divine power couldn't heal her wounds, then that meant nothing else could because a divine power could be said to be God's will. She thought that Daryus sounded like Rasmus, but there was something that differed him from Rasmus, and that was how to use his logic.

Suddenly, Daryus sat straight with his brows furrowed, deep in thought. Astrea was curious about the expression he made, and couldn't help but ask.

"What's the matter, Doctor?" Astrea asked.

"There's a legendary physician in East Neva, he's called the God's Hand because he can heal any kind of sickness and wound. I believe, if I could ask Princess Asghar, she could help us to arrange a meeting with him," Daryus answered as he clenched his fists.

"God's Hand? I recall his name is Sima, correct?" Astrea asked with her brows furrowed.

"Yes, Your Holiness. Sima is his name, and he can be said to be a divine physician because of his knowledge about medicine. What do you think, Your Holiness? Would you give up and accept it as fate, or fight the fate and live?" Daryus asked with his serious and determined expression.

Listening to how determined Daryus was to heal her, Astrea felt moved and didn't want to disappoint him in the slightest. She gave a small nod to Daryus, agreeing with the latter.

Without wasting a second, Daryus got up from his chair and hurriedly left Astrea's chamber. He knew that he couldn't meet Anastasha in person without any invitation, however, he had someone who could enter the left wing of the headquarters, and that was Rasmus.

Daryus ran around the headquarters, looking for Rasmus. He asked Lenin, Thalior, Agnesia, and Novia, but none of them knew. He then went to Rasmus's chamber, but there was nobody inside. When he was about to curse, he saw Rasmus in the garden with Serena, Videl, and Aris through the window. He immediately ran as fast as he could because every second mattered in that moment.

"Count!" Daryus said as soon as he stood in front of Rasmus while catching his breath. "I need your help..." he frowned as he stared into Rasmus's eyes.

Rasmus didn't question him and nodded with understanding.

"Can I meet with Her Highness the Princess? Princess Asghar?" Daryus asked as he kept catching his breath. "This is for Her Holiness's sake. Can you do it?" He added.

"I'll see what I can do," Rasmus nodded as he got up slowly and guided Daryus to the left wing of the building.

Daryus looked at Rasmus's condition as well, and he noticed a high temperature around Rasmus's body. He could see the paleness in Rasmus's face and the discomfort his eyes showed. He tried to understand the symptoms of awakening, but he knew nothing about it or how it was possible in the first place. It was just like Serena had observed that Rasmus's body was slowly changing gradually.

"You're not going to ask me why do I need to meet with Her Highness, Count?" Daryus asked to break the silence.

"Do I need to know?" Rasmus asked back as he looked at Daryus. "I told you. I wouldn't interfere with whatever you want to do, and I wouldn't question your decision. I only give you the stage, it's you to decide what to perform," he continued.

Daryus nodded without saying a word, still confused with Rasmus's mind.

When they arrived at the hallway to the left wing, the knights didn't say a word and let them in. As soon as they entered the left wing, it was when Daryus realized how Anastasha took the whole side for herself. The kitchen, the hall, the rooms, everything were used by her maids, servants, and warriors. He was shocked how powerful someone could be to be able to use a South Neva Union headquarters to be like an inn for her and took over a third of the place as well.

"Count..." Shavi lowered his head to respect Rasmus. Shavi was Anastasha's personal guard, the man that wielded a quarterstaff.

"Is Princess Anastasha free? Can I borrow some of her time?" Rasmus asked.

Shavi nodded and then glanced at Daryus for a split second, and that split second was enough for Daryus to feel threatened. He had never seen someone with a murderous intent when the gaze was just a simple glance.

Shavi guided them into the dinning hall where Anastasha was enjoying her lunch on her own. Anastasha was a bit surprised by the sudden visit, and not to mention that Rasmus brought someone else with him. She already knew what it was all about, and gave them a soft smirk as she pointed her hands at the chairs to her left and her right.

Rasmus sat down at the table across from Daryus, and he shook his head to the maids that was about to pour him a cup of tea. Daryus on the other hand was overwhelmed by the other maids that prepared the plates and cups for him before he could say anything. It a matter of seconds, Daryus's plate was filled with food, dumbfounded by what had just happened.

"So, Doctor. I know your purpose to visit me," Anastasha said as she put a grape into her mouth. "You want to find the Divine Physician Sima, correct?" She asked with her brows raised and a smirk on her face.

Daryus's eyes widened when Anastasha knew his intention before he could even utter it. He was so confused and terrified how it was possible for her to know when he didn't even tell anyone about it yet, not even Rasmus.

"Yes, Your Highness..." Daryus nodded as he lowered his head. "Can you help me with that?" He asked.

"Hmm... since you're Rasmus's people, I guess I can arrange that," Anastasha smirked as she stared right into Daryus' eyes like a snake preparing to devour its prey. "I'll decide once you finish your food, Doctor. Don't waste it since there are so many kids that are starving out there," she continued.

Chapter 277 - 277: Stage Performance.

Rasmus stayed quiet while Anastasha tried to dissect Daryus's personality and character. He didn't bother to stop her because it was none of his business, and it wouldn't affect him in any way.

"Sima isn't someone you can ask to come when you tell him to, Doctor. Do you know how many wagons filled with gold he had rejected because he didn't want to treat an Emperor?" Anastasha asked as she crossed her arms and unfolded her folded fan, covering her lower face.

Everyone in East Neva knew about that story, and how Sima rejected a patient who almost broke a war between nations. There was a saying that if Sima flicked his hand, a storm would happen somewhere in East Neva. That showed how influential he was in East Neva and how much everyone treasured him for his amazing skills that could cure anything.

Daryus knew that Anastasha was trying to understand him through questions. It was nothing like how Rasmus did to him the first time. Anastasha used questions to find out someone's mind, while Rasmus challenged someone's view to see how their minds work.

"Now, tell me, Doctor..." Anastasha paused as she folded her fan. "What makes you think that he would answer my request? What kind of message should I write to him so he will agree to help?" She asked as she swirled the fan between her fingers and kept staring into Daryus's eyes.

Daryus was about to open his mouth when and answered it with the identity of the patient, which was Astrea. However, he knew it would be too shallow and wouldn't be enough to convince the Divine Physician. He thought for a moment to find the perfect answer, and not once did he look at Rasmus.

"I want him to test his knowledge and ability against God's will," Daryus answered as he stared into Anastasha's eyes. "Her Holiness is ill and has lost her divine power to save thousands of lives. Her body is slowly weakening and worsening. She has to pay the price, and now God is taking her away as the price. If he can't heal her and decline the request, then he should get rid of his title," he continued with a serious expression.

"Let's see which side the people would take, the Divine Physician or the Saint of Neva," Daryus added as he clenched his fists.

Anastasha unfolded the fan and hid the lower half of her face as she glanced at Rasmus. At that moment, she knew that Daryus was naive and how simple-minded he was. Rasmus didn't say or react at all, sitting there in silence and listening with a stoic expression.

"First of all, Doctor. Sima doesn't care about his title at all, and your provocation only increases the chance of him ignoring your request," Anastasha stared coldly at Daryus and kept hiding the lower half of her face. "Second of all, it doesn't matter which side the people will take. What matters is who can heal them, Doctor. If you starve, would you go to where the food is or not?" She asked.

At that moment, Daryus was speechless, not knowing what to say. He thought he had thought it through, but it appeared that his answer was as shallow as the answer he didn't want to give.

"Oh? You're lost for words already, Doctor? I was hoping for you to challenge my view," Anastasha said as she folded her fan and leaned back, making herself comfortable. "Is your will to help Her Holiness as bad as this?" She asked as she tilted her head.

Daryus gritted his teeth and wanted to hit the armrests of his chair out of frustration. However, he didn't know to whom he should be frustrated, himself or Anastasha. He then closed his eyes and took a deep breath, realizing it was pointless to think about it at that moment.

"Your Highness..." Daryus said in a quiet voice. "I know I'm naive, I know I'm weak, and I know I'm powerless. But don't ever question my will to help others..." he gripped the armrests tightly as he stared into Anastasha's eyes.

"Then why don't you go down to your knees and beg, Doctor?" Anastasha raised her brows as she stared back into Daryus's eyes. "If you believe your life is worth less than those you want to help, go down and bow down to me," she continued, her expression turned cold.

Daryus slowly got up and went down to his knees without a sign of hesitation. He slowly lowered his head until his head touched the floor toward Anastasha. He didn't say a word because his action was more than enough.

Anastasha stared down at Daryus, and then she glanced at Rasmus to check his reaction. However, she didn't get any from him, not even a disgusted or disappointment look in his eyes. She thought he would feel offended because Daryus was one of his people, but it turned out she was wrong. She should have known that Rasmus wasn't like those leaders she had encountered before.

"What do you think, Count? Seeing him bowing down like this," Anastasha asked as she pointed her fan at Daryus on the floor.

"It looks like to me that he has shown his resolve. You can play with his emotions all you want, Princess. But you'll gain nothing from it unless you're bored," Rasmus answered calmly.

Anastasha chuckled as she unfolded her fan, once again covering her lower face. She turned her head and looked down at Daryus, still with his face on the floor, not moving or saying a word.

"You can get up, Doctor," Anastasha said.

Daryus didn't lift his head from the floor, he kept his head down, unmoved. It made Anastasha curious until she noticed that he wouldn't get up unless she kept her words from earlier.

"I'll write him a letter, and you don't have to worry if he will accept my request or not. I'll make sure he will come to help Her Holiness," Anastasha said as she kept staring down at Daryus. "Although you're willing to get rid of your pride and act selflessly, at least you need to have some dignity. What's the point of humility when you're worth nothing?" She asked.

Daryus slowly lifted his head and got back up on his feet. He then lowered his head to show gratitude toward Anastasha for helping him. Anastasha gave a simple nod as a response, and it surprised him because he never thought she wasn't truly cruel or heartless. That simple gesture was good enough for him to see the depth in her personality.

Daryus sat down and glanced at Rasmus, who stared at him with a stoic expression. He then remembered what Rasmus said to him earlier, that Rasmus was the one who set the stage, and it was he who decided what kind of performance he would do on the stage. He realized that he had just performed on the stage that Rasmus had set for him.

Daryus felt assured and grateful because Rasmus kept true to his words, not using words as deception and manipulation. He had heard a lot of things about Rasmus from Carrion and Erlina, and what stood out was when they said Rasmus wasn't the type to lie, never belittle others, and acknowledged those who tried.

Those things made Daryus feel seen and appreciated, even though the one who did was someone as dangerous as Rasmus. There was no judgment in Rasmus's eyes, only recognition, and that made him believe what he did was the right thing to do.

"Is there anything else you would like to request from me, Doctor?" Anastasha asked as she put down her folding fan on the table. "If there's none, I would like to have my peaceful time back," she smiled at Daryus.

Daryus looked at Rasmus once again and then back at Anastasha.

"No, Your Highness, that's all I wanted to ask," Daryus shook his head as he lowered his head.

Rasmus slowly got up from his seat, realizing it was finally over and he could go back to the garden to discuss some matters with Serena. Seeing him stand up, Daryus also stood up and bowed his head at Anastasha once again.

"Count? You're leaving as well? I don't mind having you around," Anastasha raised her brows as she looked at Rasmus.

"I'll come back when I have something to discuss, Princess," Rasmus bowed his head, then walked toward the door with Daryus following him from behind.

Anastasha only smiled and then continued to enjoy her alone time as she read the documents on the table. She glanced at them for one last time before they left the dining hall.

On their way back to the garden, Daryus suddenly stopped walking and stared at Rasmus. Rasmus glanced at him from over his shoulder and decided to stop as well as he turned around to look at him.

"Count, thank you..." Daryus said with a serious expression. "That's all I can do at this moment, a simple word, but I mean it," he continued.

"If I cared so much about validation and attention, I would be out there spouting nonsense, Doctor. No need to thank me for anything, it serves me nothing," Rasmus said with a straight expression. "Now you should go back to Lady Astrea's side and tell her the good news," he continued as he turned around and continued his walk to the garden.

"But we don't know if Princess Asghar really can bring Sima to help Her Holiness?" Daryus furrowed his brows.

"Well, if she couldn't do what she promised, that means we both know that we shouldn't depend on anything from her anymore. However, I don't believe she would risk her credibility, so trust her words," Rasmus answered as he kept walking away.

Daryus watched Rasmus leave, and then nodded his head before he head back to Astrea's chamber to deliver the good news.

Chapter 278 - 278: Joy and Grieve.

The day of the White Flower festival finally came, everyone from across South Neva and from the other continents came to celebrate it. They wanted to show how happy they were for defeating the demons and to grief with the families who lost their loved ones.

Rasmus walked out of the carriage with Carrion and Aris, guarded by dozens of knights because the people wanted to shake his hands. Rasmus didn't bother to look at those who were screaming his name and title. He didn't even glance at those who were hysterically crying out of gratitude.

"The others are waiting," Carrion looked at the hundreds of people around him. "Should we wait for Her Holiness?" He asked as he fixed his attire.

"We will wait for Lady Astrea. The others can wait," Rasmus answered as he stood still, resting his hands on his cane.

Rasmus stood there for a few minutes, not moving a muscle as his gaze was pointed at the monument. The place used to be a massive park for everyone to use in the center of the capital city. The place was turned into a vast space with hundreds of long tables made of stone, surrounded by tall trees.

The people kept observing Rasmus, and they believed he was standing there to mourn for the fallen soldiers. The names of the fallen soldiers were engraved on those tables, to remind everyone of their sacrifice. It only made them admire him even more, and began to focus on those who died, and not those who survived.

Not long after that, three carriages from the Holy Nation arrived. The people went silent because they wanted to see Astrea's condition, which was said to be severe. They were waiting for the carriages doors to open and to see Astrea's condition with their eyes.

Rasmus walked toward the second carriage since he knew which carriage that Astrea, Serena, and Daryus were in. The first and third carriages were used by the paladins and Videl to protect Astrea and Serena.

Once the paladins stood around the second carriage, the door slowly opened. The first one that came out of the carriage was Serena. It was the first time the world saw her face, the identity of the rumored Saint that helped them win the war against evil.

Serena watched the paladin put the wheelchair in front of the carriage for Astrea to use. She then lent her hand to a woman in a white silky robe with the Holy Nation emblem on it. The people saw nothing but a person covered in bandages, even most of her face was covered by it.

Astrea struggled to even stand on her own, and how she looked in pain when she sat down in the wheelchair because of the open wounds all over her bodies. She tried to hide it as best as she could, but she couldn't fool the people at all.

The people covered their mouths, their tears began to fall uncontrollably. Nobody moved their gaze away from Astrea, they began to think that it was their fault, and it was them who caused her pain and suffering. They thought if the people of South Neva were united, the evil wouldn't have grown and they could get rid of it a long time ago.

Astrea could see the sadness in their eyes, but then she responded with a gentle smile. Her smile didn't show any pain, regret, or even sadness, it was purely a smile of kindness without any layer behind it.

"Your Holiness! Thank you for your sacrifice!" A scary-looking big guy shouted and immediately bowed down. "I'm willing to die to fight the war Your Holiness is fighting!" He continued as he pressed his right hand on his chest.

His voice echoed throughout the street, and one by one people began to bow down and put their right hands on their chests. It became a complete silence, a moment of silence for Astrea and to show her that they would stand against evil.

Astrea couldn't hold her tears, and so she put on the hood and hid her face from them. She had to endure the pain in her eyes when she cried since the open wounds around her eyes stung when tears entered the wounds.

"Was it worth it, Lady Astrea?" Rasmus asked as he stood in front of Astrea. "The pain that you're enduring and the future you should have is no longer possible. Is it worth it?" He asked.

Astrea chuckled quietly and the tears instantly stopped coming out of her eyes. She didn't know if Rasmus asked those questions on purpose to distract her or purely curiosity.

"Thank you, Count..." Astrea slowly lifted her head and stared at Rasmus.

Rasmus stared back at Astrea with a stoic expression. She was unable to decipher whether he was confused by her answer or if it was something else. However, when Rasmus moved to stand beside her and didn't say a word, she believed she was right when he just wanted to distract her, or she could still be wrong about it.

Daryus began to push the wheelchair when Rasmus glanced at him. They all walked on a long street toward the monument where the Emperors, Kings, and all high-rank nobles had gathered, including Lenin, Agnesia, Novia, Uriel, Xena, and Garret.

People began to bow at Astrea when she walked past them. There was only silence and the sound of birds in the sky, the sound of the wheels rolling, and Rasmus's cane.

Once they arrived at the monument, they saw all the rulers of nations in South Neva standing around the stone tables. They read the names of the fallen, the sons, brothers, or fathers of the nobles from their nations. They all wore an invisible mask, an expressionless one because there was more than a face could make.

Everyone's eyes were on Rasmus the hero, Serena the fourth Saint, Astrea the former Saint, and Aris the Orthias. The four figures that changed the fate of the whole continent and saved millions of lives. They all bowed their heads down at them, showing their utmost gratitude and respect. The four of them bowed at the rulers back, and then joined them to begin the festival.

The rulers were curious about Serena, the mysterious Saint that appeared out of nowhere and helped them defeat the demons. They looked at the paladin behind her, which was Videl, wearing a full helmet to hide his face since nobody should know the man behind the helmet.

"Should we begin, Uncle?" Thalior asked as he looked at the emperor of the Suvistan Empire, Dasmont Ardantis.

"Yes, I believe you should announce it, Thalior," Dasmont nodded as he pointed at the podium in front of the hundreds of stone tables. "Your words hold more credibility because you were there at the front line, fighting demons," he continued.

Thalior looked at the other rulers, and they all agreed with what Dasmont said. He nodded with understanding and went to the podium with thousands of eyes on him. He looked at the thousands of knights and mages, wearing the crests from which nations and nobles they were from. He didn't know what to say because words wouldn't be able to express or describe what he felt.

When Thalior stood at the podium, there was only silence and the sound of leaves brushing against each other because of the gentle wind. It was cold, the snow was still falling a bit, but his hands were sweaty when he gripped onto the edges of the podium.

"Is there a right word to describe of this day? Joy? Sorrow? Both? Or something else?" Thalior asked, his voice was loud even though his expression was calm and his eyes were empty. "Should we celebrate what we have achieved, or should we grief for those who had sacrificed their lives for all of us to live peacefully?" He added, and began to look at the eyes of the knights who had lost their comrades and the people who had lost their loved ones.

The knights and the people didn't say a word nor did they react to Thalior's words. Their faces were expressionless, but their thoughts were aligning and resonating with his words. Some still couldn't accept that they had lost their friends and family from what had happened in the past six months.

"People tried to understand, and we are grateful for that, truly..." Thalior continued as he stared blankly at the stone tables. "Some of us might have moved on, finding a light to reach while the rest of us might are still standing still as if the world moves without us, feeling left behind," he continued as he tightened his grips on the podium.

"For today, brothers and sisters. Only for today we all look back and express our feelings toward those who had left us," Thalior said with a serious expression. "Speak to them as if they're still here with us for one last time. Release the guilt and pain, but never forget about it," he continued as he looked everyone in the eyes.

"Raise your bottle! Brothers! Sisters! Sit down at the tables, reminisce and enjoy this sacred moment!" Thalior said.

As soon as Thalior said that, thousands of knights and mages walked into the monument and took a seat on one of the stone tables. They all held their liquors and stared down at the names of the fallen soldiers during the final war against the demon army. They began to remember the moments they had with those names that were engraved on the tables.

Their armor and crests didn't matter, everyone talked to each other to remember the fallen with a laugh and a smile. The simple and silly moments during their time together with the fallen were the funniest stories at that moment. Tears were visible, but none of them hid it, they cried with pride and nobody shamed them for it. They could become themselves at that moment, sharing the pain and joy with the other knights and mages, and the fallen soldiers.

The people cried when they witnessed the pain and how hurt the soldiers were when they all laughed and cried at the same time. They wondered if their lives were worth saving when those soldiers had to endure the pain to themselves because nobody could understand their pain at all.

Rasmus decided to take a seat at the last step toward the podium, staring at the scenery of the bond between soldiers. Lenin decided to join him, sitting beside him as she smiled weakly at the overwhelming and sacred atmosphere.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Lenin asked.

"I don't see suffering and pain to be beautiful, Great Sage," Rasmus answered with a stoic expression. "It's something worth to remember, but it's not beautiful," he continued.

Chapter 279 - 279: Innocent.

Once all the knights and mages had emptied their bottles and tears no longer came out of their eye sockets, the pain, guilt, and suffering lifted off their shoulders. The soldiers felt lighter because they thought they were on their own to deal with those emotions, but they didn't expect everyone to have the same pain as them. They didn't feel alone anymore, and they were seen by their lords, kings, and emperors without any judgment.

Rasmus was sitting at the table with Aris, Lenin, Thalior, Serena, Agnesia, Uriel, Xena, Novia, and Astrea. The table was occupied by the leaders that led thousands of soldiers to victory against the demon army.

Rasmus was the only one who hadn't touched his drink or food because of his condition. His senses had worsened, he couldn't taste, feel, or smell anything, not even pain. Aris knew his condition, but there was nothing she could do since it was the process of awakening. Every stage of the process, there was a chance of failure, and it made her a bit concerned, however, she believed that Rasmus could get through all the process.

Everyone at the table knew about Rasmus's condition to awaken from his bloodline as Orthias. However, the people and all the soldiers only knew that his condition was the result of the war against the demon and the emissaries of evil. It was the scenario that Thalior and Lenin orchestrated to put Rasmus in check, however, it was as Rasmus said, it wasn't a bad idea because if he died, the world would lose its pillar. That orchestrated plan acted as a double-edged sword, but that was worth the risk.

Aris kept her eyes on Rasmus, the food, and drink of his that were untouched. She had the same cold and stoic expression, but underneath it, Rasmus could see the concern in her coldness.

"Count, your question earlier when you asked me was it worth it," Astrea looked at Rasmus, taking everyone's attention to her and Rasmus. "No, it's not worth it at all. It's necessary, just like the way you think," she answered as she stared into Rasmus's eyes.

"Necessary? So dying is necessary? I don't think our way of thinking is the same, Lady Astrea. I prioritized my life over everything, not the other way around," Rasmus responded as he stared back at Astrea. "If you try to think like me, but you still prioritize others, you're only fooling yourself. I don't have a morale compass, but that doesn't mean I don't respect it," he smiled at Astrea.

"So you're an egoist, Count?" Astrea smiled, bantering playfully at Rasmus.

"When it comes to my life, I believe it's not being egoistic, My Lady, it's called self-respect," Rasmus answered with a soft smile on his face. "We can argue as long as we want about this, My Lady. But do you think you want to waste your time on this matter and not the moment?" He asked as he leaned back.

"Fair point, Count..." Astrea chuckled softly.

Everyone looked at Astrea and she had never seen her smile or laugh like that. They had never seen her with a bright face, but somehow Rasmus was the only one who could do it for her even though they had tried to cheer her up.

When everyone was looking at Astrea's bright face, suddenly they heard a commotion in front of them. They saw a little girl with long black hair running toward their table when the mother was trying to call her to come back. Everyone at the table was shocked when the little girl hugged Rasmus's leg.

"Mister!" The little girl said with a huge smile on her face. "My dad said that you saved his life! Is that true?" She asked.

Rasmus looked down at the little girl and immediately put a soft and gentle smile on his face. He gently caressed the girl's hair and without hesitation he went down to his knees and used his cane to support his weight.

"No, little girl. I'm not a hero..." Rasmus shook his head and chuckled softly. "Everyone at the tables are all the heroes here," he pointed at the tables around him.

The little girl was too small to see everyone's faces even though she was doing tiptoes. Seeing how she struggled to look at the soldiers' faces, Rasmus carried her in his left arm so she could see the faces of the soldiers.

The father of the girl was one of the soldiers at the tables. He hurriedly walked toward Rasmus and bowed his head at him repeatedly.

"Count, I apologize for my daughter's rudeness! Please, allow me to bring her back to my wife," the knight said as he kept his head lowered.

The little girl looked confused and worried when she saw how terrified and anxious her father was. She then looked at Rasmus who kept putting a gentle and kind smile.

"Rude? She's not being rude, Sir knight. She's just being a kid, an innocent kid. Let kids be innocent because it's a gift that they will never be able to get again once they reach adulthood," Rasmus answered as he looked at the knight. "Don't take away their childhood, don't let them know about the harsh reality yet. Let them be innocent and become someone that will have a healthy mind that spreads kindness and righteousness later on," he continued as he smiled at the little girl in his left arm.

"Childhood is the only time in a person's life where they are allowed to dream freely without fear or consequence. If we force children to bear the world's cruelty too early, we risk raising not heroes, but hollow beings," Rasmus continued as he stared at the knight with a serious expression. "Treasure her innocence, not change it. Preserve her way of thinking and develop it to the right path, not change it. Once she has reached adulthood, that's when she becomes an amazing child that you can be proud of," he added.

The knight, Thalior, and the others at the table were dumbfounded when Rasmus spat something that not even they could say. They were amazed at how profound his way of thinking was, and they almost forgot that he was a man of wisdom with a dangerous mind.

"Now, go back to your table and enjoy the festival. Let your child stay with us," Rasmus said with a serious expression.

The knight felt honored to allow his daughter to stay with the most amazing and prominent figure in Neva. The knight bowed his head toward Rasmus and everyone at the table, and then walked away to go back to his table.

"I think it's time to let the children join this moment, Your Grace," Rasmus looked at Thalior who was still dumbfounded by Rasmus's words.

Thalior cleared his throat and then looked at Rasmus with a confused look as to why he suddenly suggested letting the children join in the moment. He wanted to question him, but then he noticed how the other children wanted to be there like that little girl. He then looked at his knights and ordered the children to join in the moment, to be with their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, or even to meet their heroes.

Once all the children ran around the tables, at that point everyone realized how innocent children could heal something that no experts or wise people could do toward the broken and pained soldiers. They realized what Rasmus said was right when innocence was a gift, and something that they should preserve, not change. They watched how the soldiers's faces brightened and there wasn't a single pain that lingered in their eyes or faces.

At that moment Thalior and the others began to introspect themselves. They believed to be righteous and upheld it, however, they couldn't even heal the people that followed their leads and views. They might be able to understand their pain, but they couldn't heal the pain, and that made them feel like they weren't as good as they believed they were.

They looked at Rasmus once again and realized if he was ever to think of becoming a righteous, he would be able to lead not only soldiers, but leaders for his cause because he knew what to do. That thought terrified them because the one person that could open their eyes was the same person who didn't feel a thing about death and destruction.

"Ah, am I late for the celebration?" Anastasha said as she casually walked in between the tables. "I apologize, because I had trouble to pick which dress I should wear," she continued as she stared at Thalior and the others.

The knights and the people didn't know who she was, especially with her unusual dress that didn't fit with the South Neva culture. Rasmus and the others realized that she came late on purpose so she could attract more attention.

"Princess Asghar, welcome..." Thalior said as he stood up and pointed at the chair.

The moment her name was heard, a Princess from Asghar family, everyone began to murmur. They heard so many rumors about the Asghar family, both good and bad. Seeing their reactions, it only made Anastasha more confident about the plan that she was about to pull with Rasmus.

"What a lovely festival..." Anastasha smiled as she looked at the little girl in Rasmus's left arm. "And a lovely child as well..." she chuckled softly and gently pinched the little girl's cheek.

"So, Count? Shall we?" Anastasha tilted her head so she could see Rasmus's face behind the little girl.

"Of course," Rasmus nodded and carefully put down the little girl. "We shall..." he continued as he looked at Anastasha.

Chapter 280 - 280: Rise!

Anastasha and Rasmus walked up the stairs toward the podium, and that took everyone's attention. Seeing both of them walking side by side, it put Lenin and the others on edge. They were worried about the things those two would say in front of the public.

"I have to apologize for ruining the moment and taking your time, but there's something that we would like to convey," Anastasha said with a serious expression. "It's about the future of mankind..." she continued, her brows furrowed as she looked at everyone at the tables, especially the nobles and the royal families.

Everyone began to murmur, wondering about the purpose of Anastasha standing at the podium, especially with Rasmus by her side. They didn't want to speculate, but deep down, they knew that what Anastasha was about to say, they wouldn't like it.

"I can see it in your eyes, most of you..." Anastasha paused to clutch onto the edges of the podium. "And no, I'm not asking you to fight someone else's war. No, I won't try to persuade you to do anything like that," she shook her head with her eyes closed.

"All of you have done a lot for the people, and your sacrifice will only bring more pain to them. If these figures could speak, they would say that you should enjoy the rest of your life without having to raise your weapon and shed blood anymore, but they couldn't," Anastasha said with a troubled expression. She frowned as she shut her eyes tightly. "The world is not safe right now, and even if they wanted you to get rid of your weapon, soon enough, you would take your weapon again to fight..." she continued.

"How much blood is needed for this world to find its peace? How many lives does the world have to take to make it understand that it's enough? How many tears, screams, and pain until the world realizes that we can't take it anymore?" Anastasha asked as she stared at the soldiers' darkened expression, resonating every word that she said.

"That's why... I'm here," Anastasha said as she straightened her back and put on a serious and determined expression. "All of you must be wondering, how did I end up here in South Neva? The answer is because I need to find the solution to this chaos that's happening across Neva," she continued as she looked at Rasmus.

The soldiers' minds were no longer lingering with their emotions when they heard Anastasha's revelation. As an Asghar family with the power like a spider that had spread its web around the whole tree, it made them curious about the solution she was talking about.

"What you have achieved, the victory that you attained, it was all Thanks to this man," Anastasha pointed at Rasmus. "But do you know what things he has gone through to make it possible?" She asked with her brows raised.

Everyone, including Thalior and the others were curious about it as well. They never knew what Rasmus did behind the scenes, and they knew that he was the key figure who made the victory achievable. If it wasn't for Rasmus, South Neva would have become a continent where demons enslaved and devoured every living being.

Rasmus carefully got onto the podium and stared at the eyes that were pointed at them.

"All of you must have heard the phrase of making a deal with the devil," Rasmus said, his voice wasn't loud, and yet not too quiet. "I made a deal with the devil," he revealed with a straight face.

Gasps were heard from the tables and even from the people on the sides. They couldn't believe what they heard; the hero that they looked up to was nothing like what they had expected.

"Not only him, I also made a deal with the devil," Anastasha revealed with a loud voice and put on a serious expression. "But there's more to it than what you think," she continued, clearing the doubts in everyone's minds.

The moment the silence returned, Rasmus looked everyone in the eye without a single remorse or regret in his eyes. He let the silence grow a bit more before he decided to open his mouth.

"Making a deal with the devil, all your wishes would come true, but they're just an illusion. That's why we pretended to make a deal with the emissary of evil, and we both learned about our enemies that way," Rasmus said with a serious expression. "We both took the risk and turned their plans against themselves," he continued.

"Every move we made during the war was all orchestrated by me and Princess Anastasha. Every threat that we prevented was all because we both sold our souls to them, but everything came with a price," Rasmus said as he furrowed his brows and stared back at the eyes that were pointed at him.

Everyone was slowly losing their doubts about Rasmus and Anastasha, and they began to understand and see the big picture of those two's vision. They realized it would have been impossible to pull if they were in Rasmus or Anastasha's shoes. They might have gone out there to war against the demons with their weapons in their hands, but Rasmus had to fight with his brain and weapon at the same time.

"The price was the thousands of lives that were taken away, and I looked away from it. It was necessary in my eyes to put the demons and the emissaries of evil to lower their guards, and I'm not asking you to understand it or to put yourself in my shoes. I take responsibility for every death that I have caused or that I purposely didn't prevent," Rasmus said without hesitation or any remorse in his eyes.

Although Rasmus said the ugly truth, nobody saw him in a different light. They understood the cost and the risk. They had seen and experienced the real dangers of the demon army during the war, and if the enemy was cautious, victory wouldn't be possible. They had let go of the past and accepted the countless deaths as the price of peace, and Rasmus knew that, which was why he dared to say the ugly truth, because everyone had accepted it.

"If you asked me, am I a hero? No, I'm not. If you asked me if I'm evil, that's for you to judge. My only goal right now is to keep mankind to survive and to win against those demons, and there's nothing else more important than that," Rasmus said with a cold and serious expression. "Will I let innocents die? I will, but that doesn't mean I will do it for nothing. I wouldn't let innocents die for no reason, and I would prevent unnecessary victims and casualties. I don't glorify or romanticize deaths and sufferings, I bear them and remember them," he continued.

Everyone sat there, staring at Rasmus with conflicting thoughts, but somehow they couldn't see him as evil. There was an air around him that made them see nothing but reality without any fog of illusion. They knew he wasn't a hero, but they couldn't put him in the light where all evil resided.

"You all have achieved peace in South Neva, but not on the other continents. Countless are dying, humans are decreasing while the demons are increasing, and the privilege of having to sit down and to relax is a luxury that the other continents can't have," Anastasha said as she stood right beside Rasmus on the podium. "You may have achieved victory, but the war is far from over, and we are losing," she pointed out, pain and concern lingered in her voice.

The knights and the mages looked down, clenching their fists. They tried to clench their fists as tightly as they could, like they did when they held their weapons, however, they couldn't because of the fear that prevented them from getting back to their feet. They were all still traumatized, and some began to remember the insignificance of humankind in the face of powerful beings.

"Rise!" Anastasha shouted, her voice shattered the silence.

Anastasha's scream startled everyone and snapped them all back to reality.

"Soldiers from other continents are bleeding! Screaming in pain! And desperation overwhelms them. Rise and become their strength! Rise to let them know they're not alone! Rise because you know how they feel!" Anastasha's voice trembled when she shouted those words. "Don't abandon them because you knew how scary it was to feel abandoned..." she continued with a frown, her voice quiet and gentle.

The soldiers' hands trembled, their heels tapping on the ground as if they were resisting the fear within them. They knew it was impossible, but they knew how terrified the other soldiers out there were, fighting against those demons. Slowly, they gathered their courage to fight their inner fear and to become someone else's strength.

"Rise, papa..." The black-haired girl looked up at her father with an innocent grin on her face. She had no idea what was going on, she only repeated what Anastasha had said.

The knight looked down at his daughter, and slowly he rose and stood tall. Everyone looked at the knight slowly unsheathing his sword, holding it up as high as he could, even though his hand trembled. He then began to shout, to push away the fear that lingered on his spine.

"Yaaaah!" The daughter repeated after her father and giggled.

The children then began to shout as loudly as they could, and that gave the soldiers immense courage, close to being fearless. They all slowly stood up and unsheathed their weapons, raising them up high into the sky as they began to shout as well.

"I, Anastasha Asghar, will promise all of you that I will be by your side! I, Anastasha Asghar, will lend everything I have to assist you in the wars to come! I, Anastasha Asghar, have decided that I will become the next Asghar head family, and I will bring those evils away from our world and the people we love!" Anastasha shouted as she gripped onto the edges of the podium tightly.

Rasmus was the only one who could see the rawness in Anastasha's words. It was her plan all along to protect her family, to avoid bloodshed between her siblings because of the seat to become the next head of the Asghar family. She was going to make the world see her as the prominent candidate, preventing her siblings from cutting each other's throats, and to focus on her instead.

"You're not alone! You'll never be alone!" Anastasha shouted as she leaned forward and stared at the unified soldiers. "We have to win the war at all costs!" She continued.

"To win the war!" All the soldiers shouted at the same time.