



### 733 Their King Stands Up

“Since all are present, I will now announce the principal matter of the day.”

Leif VI sat at the central rostrum and spoke into the microphone.

Caitlin and the others stood below the dais, positioned to protect the King.

The chamber fell still, every ear straining for the King's words. Leif VI continued, “In the name of the crown, I hereby formally declare the removal...”

He spoke slowly, pausing on each word, lending weight and severity to the moment.

Many members were taken aback. Why announce a removal at once, rather than first call for a vote?

They were braced to hear of the Queen's abolition. No one expected the words that followed.

“...the removal of Maxwell from both his posts as Chair of the Army Commission and Minister of Justice.”

Silence crashed over the hall. It felt as if the air congealed and time stopped. People blinked and checked their own hearing.

The King had moved to strip Maxwell of both offices. Was this the decisive blow against the Ravenscroft family?

The divorce and the motion to abolish the Queen's title had already set tongues wagging. Now it was plain to see. The King had chosen to strike Maxwell on the floor of Parliament.



Maxwell's faction lurched in their seats.

"Your Majesty, were we not convened to discuss the Queen? How did this become about Maxwell?"

Maxwell stared up at the rostrum, eyes blazing. "Your Majesty, what offense have I committed that you would strip my authority without warning? I have served the nation with loyalty. Is this my reward?"

Leif VI had expected nothing less. "Very well. You want to know your crimes. I will tell you."

He glanced at Shane. The Secretary General connected the chamber's main screen. What followed were ten charges against Maxwell.

The first listed was this: Maxwell's involvement in the car crash that maimed the King.

It referenced events more than twenty years earlier, in the city of Li in country F, when Leif VI had still been a prince.

An uproar rippled through the chamber.

"Twenty-five years ago, Maxwell arranged a car crash that crippled the Prince?"

"This cannot be true."

"Is His Majesty's paralysis truly his doing?"

For his own gain, he had engineered a catastrophe twenty-five years ago that crippled the heir. Decades later he had used his own sister to move against the King. The words villain and traitor hung unsaid but heavy in the air.



Maxwell did not flinch. He seemed prepared, and his denial came smooth. "That was not me. Your Majesty, do not be deceived. I have always been loyal. Back then we were classmates and friends who trusted each other with our lives. How could I harm you?"

That was the bitterest cut. Back then, Leif VI had confided in him, even asked his counsel in matters of the heart with Kelly. And the mastermind behind the crash had been the friend he trusted most.

Leif VI's gaze sharpened. "Is that so? I wanted to believe you would not harm me. But facts are iron and stone. What else can one feel but grief?"

"Second charge," Shane read as the screen changed. "Sale of office and rank, bribery and corruption."

Evidence followed, neatly itemized: appointments purchased through Maxwell's hand, from parliamentary seats down to county chiefs, and the fortunes made by selling them.

The lawmakers who owed their careers to him began to sweat.

Maxwell stared at the detail on the screen and felt his composure slip. How had a crippled King, long confined to the palace, gathered so much?

There was no pause.

"Third charge," Shane continued. "Persecuting colleagues, suppressing loyal officials."

These were the results of formal petitions and investigations. Maxwell's abuse of power had eroded good governance. Those who dared to file complaints were punished; some had paid with their lives.

Maxwell clung to denial. "No. Your Majesty, these are slanders born of jealousy over my authority. I beg you to see clearly."



When the charges had all been read, the room understood: the King intended to judge Maxwell today.

Leif VI swept the chamber with a cold eye. “Having heard the bill of charges, does anyone wish to speak in his defense?”

Maxwell kicked over a table. It was a signal. On the upper balconies, soldiers leveled rifles at the floor.

Magnus shouted to them, “All of you, lower your weapons!”

No one obeyed. They were not his men.

Leif VI and Magnus both understood. The guards that used to protect the chamber had long since been replaced by Maxwell’s people.

“You see, Your Majesty?” Maxwell’s smile was a knife. “If anything happens to me, my men will seek justice. Think carefully. Withdraw your orders or announce your abdication. You have sat in that chair for over twenty years. You will never stand again. Better to retire and enjoy your remaining years.”

It was open defiance, a gauntlet thrown at the throne.

Panic rippled through the legislators. Many instinctively ducked under their desks as Maxwell’s guards aimed toward the King’s section. Caitlin and Magnus closed in around their father.

Zeke lunged, kicking the weapon from Maxwell’s hand. Maxwell’s bodyguards surged to shield him, clashing with Zeke.

Under cover of his men, Maxwell tried to break away and take full control of the chamber. He did not anticipate who stepped into his path.

From the flank, guards in royal livery—Tyler and King among them—cut



him off. The fight tightened.

The hall was chaos, but Caitlin's side was ready. Sebastian led the Obsidian Order and Lightwing units, the hunter behind the mantis behind the cicada. On the balconies, where Maxwell's marksmen stood frozen awaiting his order, Sebastian's teams, disguised in identical uniforms, slipped in from behind and silently removed them from their posts.

With the upper ring secured, Sebastian unfurled the flag of Aegis. Seeing the signal, Caitlin knew the perimeter was theirs.

But the melee on the floor remained fierce. Maxwell's guards were elite, and Tyler and King had their hands full. Seeing the tide turn, Maxwell drew his saber and raised it high, signaling his troops to open fire.

No one fired.

He slashed the air again. The guards stared through him as if they had not seen.

Before he could make sense of it, a clear voice rang through the hall, carried by the microphones. "Maxwell, surrender now. Every squad you planted around this chamber has been detained. If you do not want to die badly, lay down your arms."

Caitlin's voice shook him. He scanned the balconies and saw rifles swing in unison, not toward the throne, but toward him.

That instant of shock was all Tyler needed. He drove Maxwell to the ground and wrenched his arms behind him. King dropped the last of Maxwell's bodyguards. Zeke finished the rest.

Control returned. One by one, heads emerged from beneath desks. All



eyes went to Maxwell, trussed and forced to his feet before the King.

"Your Majesty," Tyler said, "the traitor has been seized."

They tried to force him to kneel. Maxwell lifted his chin and refused.

Magnus looked down at him, brow knotted. "Maxwell, do you understand your crimes?"

Maxwell's eyes were venom. He flicked a glance at Caitlin, then fixed on Magnus. "You are nothing but the King's adopted son. You have no blood right to anything. You are a dog the crown keeps."

Magnus did not answer. The reply came from the throne.

Leif VI's feet placed themselves on the floor. He rose.

A black cane appeared in his hand. Leaning on it, he stepped out of the wheelchair and walked, one pace, then another, to the front of the dais.

"Father!" Caitlin cried, stunned. Magnus stared. "You can walk?"

Around the chamber, a roar of astonishment swelled. Their King was standing.

Leif VI came to a halt and brought the cane down hard. The crack echoed until the hall fell silent.

Maxwell was the most shaken of all. He had not known, and the sight rattled him. The man before him stood tall, his presence unmistakable, the air around him charged with sovereign authority. For the first time, Maxwell felt a twinge of fear.

Leif VI's voice carried to every corner. "Magnus is my son. No one may defile our bond. You, Maxwell, dare to mock the law, disrupt Parliament,



and raise yourself against your King. Your crimes are unforgivable. Take him away to await judgment.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

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