

Herald 601

Chapter 601 Zanzan's Return

Mithriditus sounding the retreat with his meager bare voice only managed to travel around the confines of his vicinity.

He would have liked to use a bugle but since he did not have one, he could only use his god-given gift, the idea behind such a tactic being that others would hear Mithriditus and then pass it along from comrade to comrade until the whole army knew of the order.

This was of course not the best way to do this, and while a far better way that this existed in Perseus's hand, he did not blow his horn in fear of the men holding the lines breaking and running away after hearing it.

Instead, in a move that went against all fibers of his body, Perseus, already dressed in regular armor decided to serendipitously exit the battlefield seeing the battle was lost, taking only a makeshift team of bodyguards with him on horseback.

While close to 15,000 of his men were left behind to fend for themselves.

For someone like Perseus who commanded great respect among his troops, they never even imagined being stabbed in the back like that.

This would have been something unimaginable to think the hero King would do even a few hours ago!

And even Perseus himself could not believe he had actually done something so disgraceful

'Oh, if I had not let greed get the better of me!'

'Oh if I had decided to come with all 35,000 of my troops!'

'Oh, if I had ordered the manor to be evacuated sooner!'

'Oh if I had spotted that hill pass earlier!'

So while he escaped, galloping down the paved, stone-cement road, his heart was filled with bitterness over all the mistakes he had done in hindsight.

But there was no pill to cure regret, and life did not have buts and ifs,

Whatever Perseus did, it had consequences and the man would have to live with it, whether he liked it or not.

Though the consequence for him this time were truly dire, with around 15,000 to 20,000 likely lost, including many, many veteran officers, but with no gold or significant booty to show for it all.

And couple this with the personal tragedy of Leosydas's deteriorating health, which was surely about to get worse with his rapid run down the hill, even though they had put him on a cart, Perseus knew he would have a hard time keeping his throne stable after this.

All the goodwill he had gathered defending Tibias from Amenheraft was about to turn to smoke.

So it was only natural for him to feel a scalding heartache.

While back at the manor, as Perseus rode like the wind, trying to put as much distance as possible between him and his leftover troops, it took a while for Perseus's departure to be known, especially because Theony was disguising as him.

So the soldiers always thought their king was with them.

But a while later some began to have doubts about the situation on the battlefield.

For though the peasant soldiers might not be the sharpest tool in the bunch, they were not dumb rocks either.

At some point, some of the quicker ones began to notice some of their commanders were nowhere to be seen for a while, and the rear was surprisingly quiet.

While others even turned around to see a few of their allies running down the opposite side of the hill.

These were the mercenaries, whose keen eyes had immediately noticed Perseus leaving, and reading the winds had decided to follow him closely, their total numbering around 4,000.

But even all this did not completely break the lines, only sprout doubts in some of the soldiers.

And it took till Melodias forcefully breaking a part of the line which was no longer bear the constant attacks that Tibias's whole defense shattered.

It was as if the destruction of one part of the army had created a crack in a pane of glass, one which once produced, required only the slightest touch to propagate throughout the whole structure, and ultimately break it into a thousand pieces, or in this case fifteen thousand (15,000) pieces.

"Arrghhh"

"Hahahhaa"

And as Tibias's lines broke, the Zanzan soldiers rushed forward, eager to deliver the killing blows and take back their lands.

"Run!"

"We have lost!"

"Make for the hills! Make for the hills!"

Many such shouts would be heard as the Tibian scattered to try their best to save each's skin.

They ran in any direction they could, while others held their spears up and thrust them toward the sky, the ultimate signal of surrender for any phalanx unit. I think you should take a look at παπδασnovel.com

"We surrender! We surrender!"

"Don't kill! Don't kill!"

They could be heard pleading.

And the Zanzan soldiers for their part mostly accepted their surrender instead of butchering them, rounding them up by the hundreds.

These prisoners of war were firstly told to shed all their weapons and armor, and then made to sit down or even lay prone on the muddy ground, while most of the Zanzan infantry concentrated on trying to kill any soldiers that were trying to escape, chasing them all over the hills and even the surrounding woods.

It was a chaotic scene, where all semblance of order had broken down, the once neat rows of disciplined soldiers nowhere to be found, only to be replaced only by a macabre game of cat and mouse.

A game where an armed cat equipped with a sword tried to stab all the mice scampering around.

And though this ferocious creature of 30,000 men managed to catch many preys, many also managed to slip into the surrounding overgrowth, as the uneven hills gave the much lighter phalangite without their shields or spears a much-needed speed advantage compared to the fully clad legionary.

So this deadly play went on for quite a while, as the Zanzan defenders tried to round up the stragglers.

While the higher-ups only made their way up the hill after everything calmed down a bit and the compound was secured.

"Cam...My lady, we did it! Hahaha," And the instant Menes stepped up the hill, he produced a grin that was difficult to hide even through the helmet.

While Cambyses was much more composed, producing an acknowledging nod and saying, "Yes. Thank Gaia," as she then reminded,

"While capturing the enemy, all remember to start looking for survivors among the wounded."

Saying which the girl decided to take a tour of the premises, intending to view the destruction for herself.

pandasnovel.com And she was not disappointed.

The carnage around here was truly well and thorough.

The gardens and the beautifully manicured flowers and flower bushes were all tramped to the ground under the footsteps of tens of thousands of men, completely mixing the greeny into the soil to the point all that was left was only a dull brown.

The outside kitchen used to hold outside parties and barbeques was smashed, dead bodies of men, women and children were littered all around and the prisoners were placed buddled up in groups all around.

Cambyses had a hard believing the scenery in front of her and the one in her memory was less than one day old.

But that was certainly not the most striking piece of destruction.

No!

For the centerpiece of it all, had to be of course the manor, which was a smoldering wreck.

As Cambyses gazed upon it, she found she could even now see some of the parts burning, with lashes of flames flicking out into the sky, emanating heat to all sides, while its insides turned into a blackened char of ash and soot with almost nothing of value left to salvage.

Even its stone walls and foundations, though still stood intact without collapsing, showed clear signs of damage as many parts were charred matt back and at some places were even deformed, as the mortar between the stones crystallized in the heat and cracked.

Cambyses understood that if she wanted to live here, she would probably have to build her house again from scratch.

And this was such a pity given she quite the house, both in its style and grandeur, but also in its view.

Depending on which room you were in, one would be able to see the boundless Mad Sea or its golden sandy beaches, the expansive mountains and its lush vegetation, and in rare instances, even some small springs tricking past the hills.

And of course, there was the complete view of the entire city which the manor majestically overlooked, like an ever-watchful guardian keeping its eyes on its people.

In fact, Cambyses's favorite thing to do every day after waking up was to go to the balcony and look over the city, gazing down at the people wandering about.

Seeing so, sometimes she would feel great satisfaction, like a mother seeing her child grow up right before her eyes, feeling immensely proud of seeing the city develop from its destitute state to a thriving city center in just a year.

While at other times she would also feel a great rush of power knowing all the people down there were hers to command.

It was a majestic feeling.

But seeing it now, in its current state, Cambyses was not sure when she would be able to feel like that again.

And her only solace was taking comfort in the knowledge that she would at least have the chance to some time in the future.

Because for all the damaged Zanzan took, it was still in her hands.

She had managed to save Zanzan.

Chapter 602 After-Effects (Part-1)

"Mistress! We have caught the king! There!"

Suddenly, as Cambyses stood around the premises, feeling a bit lethargic after all the exhaustion she had bottled up until now wash over her, a herald all of a sudden came to her with his huge information.

One which made her interest instantly turn to that.

If that was really true....Cambyses felt that she could cripple Tibias with her ransom.

But that burst of anticipation lasted only a few seconds as after she approached the crowd and saw only a young boy wearing Perseus's helmet, she knew the report was incorrect.

Cambyses had seen Perseus before from up on the wall, and this was not it.

"Heh, so your king has resorted to having small children dress up as him," She hence taunted.

To which Theony declined to answer, and only turned to face her and calmly replied as per protocol, "I'm a noble of Tibias, the next successor of the House of Theony."

"I demand to be treated with due respect as my title dictates. My family will pay the proper ransom."

Though Theony was caught, he still had his pride as a noble and was yet to lose his spirit.

"I see." And Cambyses only replied as such, not feeling like being bothered with the proceeding interrogation herself.

Instead, she only turned to Menes to instruct,

"I will leave it to you to make proper arrangements for all the prisoners."

"Make sure they are all given the proper food and homes according to their ranks. And that the wounded are treated to the best of your ability."

"I want to squeeze Tibias out of as much gold as possible even they come to exchange them."

Cambyses sounded a bit expectant.

"Yes!" Came the instant nod from the Menes, and then leaving the man to it, Cambyses turned to go meet Melodias.

She first greeted him for the good work, congratulating him on the success, and then asked the main thing she was here for.

"Melodias, given we have caught so many men, would it be possible for us to launch an attack on the enemy's main camp? It should be quite empty by now!" Cambyses sounded very eager to strike while the iron was still hot.

"!!!" To this Melodias produced a bit of a shocked look.

He had not thought about that, especially because he was more preoccupied with winning his current battle and then hunting down the running enemy.

But now that Cambyses said so....

"I'm afraid right now is difficult," But thinking would it for a few seconds, at last Melodias shook his head, finding the idea untenable right now, which he then delineated to a skeptical Cambyses in a calm tone.

"We have deployed almost all the 35,000 men we have here. The rest are either mostly servants or a few remaining defenders we have atop the wall to prevent any attack from that side."

"If we were to use them to attack the camp, given the enemy has likely 15,000 to 20,000 defending it, and they have had two months to build up the defense around it, I doubt we will be easily able to break it using those low-quality troops."

"In fact, the enemy might actually counterattack and beat us given they will likely outnumber us!"

Melodias hypothesized.

But even hearing this, Cambyses was not resigned, wanting to destroy that 'nest of evil' when presented with such a golden opportunity.

So she pointed to the formations in front of her and asked, "And this army? They can't do it either?"

To which Melodias immediately grinned, before nodding confidently,

"Of course they can....but look around you mistress," As shortly after he waved his hand, pointing his finger to many of his units scattered all throughout the entire Cisrain hills hunting for survivors.

"The soldiers are busy hunting. And it will take us hours to gather them."

"And by the time we do this and then get ready to attack the camp, it will likely be dusk. It is winter after all,"

Melodias pointed out, and finally, it was a reality the girl was forced to accept.

Winter days were especially short, and she regretted it not being summer

"*Sigh*, I really wanted to destroy that camp before their king could rejoin it," She ruefully shook her head, before trying one last time to ask Melodias, "Could we start a siege now? Prevent him from entering the camp?"

But even though Melodias wished for a similar happenstance as Cambyses, he knew they did not have enough troops right now to start a full blockade.

So shaking his head, he could only calm the girl down by saying,

"My lady, we have already sent riders after the king. It is likely they will be able to catch him before he can reach the camp. Let us hope that happens." I think you should take a look at panlasnovel.com

"And if they cannot, we can always launch a full-fledged attack tomorrow."

And hearing so Cambyses at last stoically nodded.

But she did not immediately leave.

Instead, feeling Melodias was currently idle, decided to dump an important task on him.

"Then Melodias, since you here, have some of your men put out the fire in the manor. Or else the fire might spread."

And before Melodias could weasel his way out, quickly added,

pandasNovel com "I have other places to be."

"Also remember to secure the manor premises. We have a lot of gold in our treasury and if has not to been already stolen, you are to protect it."

And with that, just like that Cambyses was off into the wind even before Melodias could get a word out.

And while the general could hardly hide the exasperated look on his face, Cambyses was on her way to visit the Ramuh temple, wishing to personally inform the ladies that they were safe.

"Mistress! You are safe!" And as she entered the temple, she was very quickly greeted as such by Mean who was pacing around the statue of Ramuh in the center, while furtively looking around in anxiety.

It was as if she was waiting for someone to show up.

And when that person did show up, the girl rushed forward to hug Cambyses with all her might, and then suddenly started crying.

"Oh!" And at the bear-like tackle, and this sudden burst of intense emotion, Cambyses was a bit surprised, and then understanding where Mena was coming from, patted her little maid's head, and calmed her in a soothing, "It's okay. It's okay. We won!"

".....Mmmn, we know. Thank the gods!" Mean was still red-eyed as she replied, and added amidst her choking sobs,

"The guards came a while ago to tell us. That's why the temple is now a bit empty," as Mean managed to fill Cambyses in on some of the less important details.

And at the mention of this, Cambyses took the time to have a look around the surrounding and found it to be quite absent of people.

It was not deserted or anything, as many people, especially women, and children were seen still loitering about, unsure of the veracity of the news.

But it was also not the kind of overwhelming, crushing tsunami of people cramped inside the temple like she had expected to see.

And after a while of this, Mean finally bought out her head from Cambyses's lap to look up at her mistress and say,

"We...we were so scared when we saw smoke from the hills. We thoughtwe thought..." Mena was not able to articulate the fear she had felt when she heard some of the people saying what they saw, 'the lord's manor is burning as they put it, which made her heart feel like it was being constantly stabbed.

And so the petite girl again buried her head into her mistress's lap, remembering how she had even gotten into some altercations with the people saying so, calling them liars, and even threatening to have them executed for spreading lies.

But now that proof of everything being alright was in front of Mean, she shed tears of relief, ones which stained Cambyses's red armor with several pearl-sized teardrops.

"I knew they were lying...I knew they were lying," She repeated.

"It's good to see you are safe, sister. It seems the gods have answered our prayers,"

And finally, the duo's reunion was interjected with the addition of others, as Ophelia was the next to greet her, followed by the others.

And after hearing all their comments, Cambyses gave a nod of appreciation, "Thank you. It was due to all of your efforts that we were able to overcome this ordeal. The gods have blessed us."

"Praise the gods!" Came the reply in unison.

"Lay Cambyses, what happened? Could you tell us?"

"When may we return home?"

"Some said the manor was on fire?"

And once the pleasantries were over, and Cambyses was taken to a secluded room, soon came the barraged of questions, which Cambyses replied mostly truthfully.

"But the manor is indeed burnt. We probably will need to stay in the temple for the time being." She confirmed, which got a gloomy response.

That was not just a place to sleep, but everyone had all their expensive clothes, jewelry, perfumes, and other personal belongings there.

So it was a difficult result for them to accept.

"*Sigh*, well at least we are still alive. That is the most important thing. Everything we can get." And it was the mature NN who said this to smooth everyone.

And it was in the spirit of such words that that fateful day came to an end.

Chapter 603 Alexander's Return

It was the day after the fateful battle ended that Alexander arrived at the outskirts of the city.

And the first thing he noticed was his house which should have been visible even from atop the hill he was on was nowhere to be found.

Instead, he only noticed the husk of the manor's silhouette standing awkwardly at a slant angle against the background, like a ruin left to desertion.

It was a forlorn sight to see.

All while in front of him, outside the city, the Tibian camp still stood tall and proud, mightily waving their flag on a pole, letting everyone know the wannabe conquerors of this land were ready for a fight.

"No! How could this be!" And seeing so, Alexander felt like breaking down.

This scene implied some very bad things and to him, it seemed like his worst nightmare had come true.

"Alexander stay strong! We still don't know the full story!"

While seeing Alexander falter, it was Hemicus who stepped up in this time of crisis, loudly urging Alexander to not lose heart by calling him by name, as he then quickly turned to one particular man to command,

"Mizanoz! You take five men and try to sneak into the city via the harbor. Figure out the situation there. Quick!"

Given the strange circumstances in the city, HH felt it was imperative to first and foremost send scouts to gather information.

"Yes, captain," And sharing this thought, the man immediately saluted, and after selecting his team in a heartbeat, the group was on their way.

While in the meantime HH turned to bring the shellshocked Alexander back to his senses, pointing to some inconsistencies with the conclusion they seemed to have come with.

"Alexander! Get yourself together! the Tibians are still outside the city! And look, there are defenders on top of the walls wearing blue. That's ours!" HH quickly used his armored fingers to draw Alexander's attention.

And as Alexander slowly turned his eye to that figure, upon this visual confirmation, indeed some life returned to his eyes.

'Yes, looks like the city is indeed in our hands.' Upon seeing the uniform of the guards patrolling the wall, he found the evidence credible.

But then found himself asking, 'But then why is the manor nowhere to be seen? What happened there? Did it suddenly catch fire? Or did a lightning strike?'

Alexander's mind produced a lot of such doubts seeing the current situation but he kept all this to himself, knowing the only way to get any real answer would be to wait till the men returned.

And so they waited with baited breaths, every single second feeling like an hour to him.

Until finally, after what seemed like an eternity to Alexander, but was actually around two hours in real life, the men returned.

And they brought a guest!

"My lord!" This happy greeting and huge grin was called out by Menes who had personally come to meet with Alexander.

And turning to see the man's happy demeanor, Alexander was instantly assured that things had not reached the worst case scenario.

Hence subconsciously he too produced a huge grin.

"Menes! What's with the city? How's it going? Is Cambyses alright?" Alexander's first and foremost concerns were these.

paṅdasnovel.com "We are alright! Lady Cambyses is alright! We are all alive!" And Menes was quick to answer positively.

He had heard from the men Alexander had sent to the city about how their leader had almost broken down upon seeing the destroyed manor, hence the rapid answer of reassurance.

"That's good. That's good," And hearing such Alexander finally could drop his heart down from his throat to his chest, and feel the organ not hurt so much when it beat.

"Come my lord. Let's return." And seeing Alexander calm down, Menes quickly presented his invite, adding, "Lady Cambyses is very eagerly waiting for you. In fact, she had very much wanted to come to meet you. It took a fair while to convince her to stay."

"Mmm. you're right, let's go. Or Cam might take a horse and start looking for me by herself."

And hearing so Alexander instantly nodded too, as he was also eager to see his wife and more ever see his city.

"And while we are on the way, perhaps you can fill me in on what happened in the last month. And why have I not got a home now?"

Menes felt a sharp glance from Alexander as he said so, which made the general produce a wry smile in his heart.

It was unknown how much Alexander was going to punish them once he got to know the whole truth.

But that thought only lasted a fleeting second. I think you should take a look at paṅdasnovel.com

'What will come, will come.' Menes braced himself.

"Of course. The council members should already be gathered around the front gates. We all will give you a detailed account of the circumstances once we reach there," Menes heavily nodded.

And saying so, off they were, urging their horse faster and faster.

But unlike the bodyguards who had entered the city via the port, by first stabling their horses on the beach opposite of the wall and then swimming to the other side, where they finally revealed their identity to the guards stationed at the wall's gate, Alexander, and his group followed a much different path.

They galloped straight towards the gates, and seeing horsemen wearing the familiar blue approach them, the gates were immediately opened and even a few thousand armed escorts flowed out to counter any Tibian attempt to block their lord's entry.

Though this move proved to be largely redundant as the Tibian camp placed around 500 meters away from the city walls never even understood what kind of fish they let slip through their finger.

Thus Alexander was able to safely enter the city under huge cheers from the gathered crowd.

The people were especially happy to see Alexander's return because up until now, he had always managed to get them what they wanted, unlike the people he left in charge, who screwed up big time and caused casualties exceeding ten thousand.

Hence the people were eager to have him here and set things right.

"It's good that you are safe. I was very worried." And as Alexander entered the city and the gates were quickly closed, Cambyses was the first to approach him accompanied by a few guards, and seeing her in the flesh with no apparent harm, Alexander felt all the weight being lifted from him.

Whatever else happened, Alexander really did not care.

For as long as he had his city and Cambyses, no matter the losses suffered, he knew it would be salvageable.

But while Alexander's side rejoiced, the sound of reverie drifting to even the opposite camp, drawing some curious gazes, they were instead more worried about dealing with something much more important.

So important in fact that perhaps even if they knew about Alexander's return it would not have mattered.

Because currently they were busy comforting their leader who had descended into a black mood.

"I'm sorry for your loss, Your Majesty. There was nothing more we could do!" A group of physicians would be seen kneeling in front of the man, begging for his forgiveness in a shaken voice.

And the reason for this act was apparent if one cared to take a look at the open coffin just in front of them.

Or more specifically at the body inside.

It was Leosydas's!

Dressed in full armor, his arms laid peacefully over one another on his chest, the man's face painted with a serene facade, with the only evidence of his current state being how unnaturally pale he looked.

Almost as if a vampire had sucked all the blood out.

And this unnatural state also worked to easily give away his cause of death- Cardiac arrest through excessive bleeding.

It seemed that the hurried escape through the hills and then galloping as fast as possible east to rejoin the camp had taken too much toll on the poor man's body, with even the just newly applied stitches snapping, and causing his body to be dyed in the color of life.

Perseus clearly remembered how the mattress on the wagon Leosydas was on had turned blood red as they reached the camp.

In fact, they had soaked up so much blood that the corners had even started to drip blood.

And even though he desperately thought of wanting to stop his march and have some kind of first-aid performed on his dear friend, unfortunately, the riders sent out by Melodias were always hot on their tails.

Not enough to endanger them as the horsemen numbered less than a hundred, whereas they had more than 4,000 men.

But enough to keep harassing them, shooting javelins and sparse barrages of arrows to keep them on their toes and trying to slow them down, all so that perhaps a large contingent of their allies would have the time to come join them.

And it was precisely knowing this that Perseus knew he could not stop.

If they stooped to try and heal Leosydas, by the time they were done, it was they would be entirely surrounded and destroyed.

Not to mention there was the very real possibility of the soldiers would not even obey the command given a majority of them were actually mercenaries.

Thus Perseus was forced to keep on going, and Leosydas kept on bleeding.

Until finally he succumbed to his wounds.

The result of which made the king descend into absolute fury!

Chapter 604 Perseus's Gloom And Laykash's Narrow Escape

Leosydas's wounds in the eyes of modern medical science would have been seen as trivial, being treatable with just a simple few bags of blood and a few injections of antibiotics.

And if that was too much, even a make-shift tourniquet might have worked, something to tightly wrap around the chest and forcefully bind the wound together so that blood could not leak.

Any such rudimentary techniques might have saved him.

But given he did not have this available to him, Leosydas was forced to enter the domain of death, perhaps accelerated by how seeing his friend's deteriorating condition, Perseus had even sped up his march, trying to reach his camp as soon as possible so that Leosydas would get his treatment faster.

But it was to no avail.

For by the time they reach the camp, at around the late afternoon, Leosydas had already bled for too long and was long cold and dead.

"Arrest them! Capture every one of them!" And when Perseus found this out, he did not break down into tears or howls but instead displayed a level of fury rarely seen, as he immediately ordered all the physicians responsible to be detained.

And that rolled order over to today's event, where the physicians tried to make their case and defend themselves.

"Your Majesty, we tried our best!"

"It was all the jerking...that was what caused the wound to open up,"

They cried.

Hearing which Perseus simply flashed his palms and in a venomous tongue spat,

"Enough! I have heard enough! Whatever you did, you failed!"

"No need to prattle on about your incompetence!"

"Leosydas only went to battle because you reassured him of his health and that his stitches would hold."

"And when they broke, back at the manor you wasted so much of our time again reapplying his stitches."

"Only for them to snap a few minutes later."

"We lost that battle because of you!"

Perseus had somehow managed to pin his loss in the battle of Zanzan onto the heads of the doctors, an accusation which made these simple men experience a short circuit.

They could not believe they were being blamed for something so huge.

So they did not even know where to begin to try and refute this.

Not that they would have any chance to do so anyway, as seemingly Perseus had already determined their guilt even before the meeting.

Hence, laying this accusation, at this point Perseus's voice suddenly turned regal and commanding, decreeing,

"I blame all of you for his death. And I blame you for wasting our time during the retreat."

"So I hereby declared all of you are to be executed!"

"Immediately!"

So as soon as Perseus's words were uttered, *clang*, *clang*, out came the swords from all the guards around him in an almost rehearsed motion.

And an instant later the armored men pounced on these innocent defenseless men, slaying them like reaping wheat.

"Your Majes...ahh..."

"No please Your Majes..."

"Mercy...mercy.."

While being outnumbered and out-armed, these poor doctors could only fall to their knees and beg for forgiveness, but the only forgiveness they got was being mercilessly hacked to bits.

It was a sad sight to witness, but also nothing rare, as this was always the accompanying danger of serving the king.

That's why it was said serving the king was like serving a tiger.

The tiger was just as likely to defend you from other threats as it was likely to turn into a threat itself.

So upon Perseus's order, the deadly act was carried out which only lasted a short few moments, as the king's guards made quick work of these hapless lambs with brutal efficiency.

And once the order was finished being carried out, the macabre site was quickly cleaned with the dead bodies being instantly dragged out of the tent so as to not ruin the carpets or be an eye sore.

"And find that prisoner who killed Leosydas. I want to kill in the most brutal way possible!"

But it seemed Perseus's lust of revenge was yet to be sated, for he turned to Mithriditus to give that order, intending to torture Laykash to death.

"At once Your Majesty," And given the furious state Perseus was currently in, no one dared to argue.

But that did not mean Laykash was fated to die a brutal death.

No, because it seemed there was a guardian angel looking out for him in the most unexpected form.

"Lord Mithriditus, are you going to find the *cough*, *cough* prisoner?" A young, but weak voice suddenly buzzed near Mithriditus's wizened ears as the man was making his way towards the prisoner camp. I think you should take a look at

And recognizing this very familiar voice, the aged noble instantly turned to spot the man just behind him and produced a happy smile.

"Ah, Your Highness! What a pleasure!" He greeted with a slight bow, before asking in a slightly worried voice, "How is your health? Are you sure you should be walking around? It is quite cold out here you know!"

This was the crown prince of Tibias- Philips, whose power and influence was said to be only second to his father and Leosydas, rivaling even Mithriditus's.

But in this particular campaign, he had been almost completely useless, due to having caught a severe case of cold and high fever from almost day one of the siege, thus forced to resign himself to his personal tent for the last two months.

He did not even get to particular in a single war meeting.

And so seeing this strapping tall man with broad shoulders and a slightly pale face, covered in heavy woolen clothing, Mithriditus was understandably worried, and also puzzled.

'Why is he out here? It even seems like he was waiting for me. And why does he care about the prisoner?' Many such questions rose inside him.

"I'm fine. *Cough*! There is no doctor to stop me *cough* anyway!" At Mithriditus's concern, Philips gave an almost sarcastic reply, one which made Mithriditus produce a wry smile.

Perseus had not only implicated the doctors present with Leosydas at the time of his death but even charged every single physician in the camp with the accusation of being quacks and deceiving the royalty.

Which even meant Philips's personal doctor.

"It was the king's orders Your Highness. We had to obey. I'm sorry" The old man had a slight bitterness in his tone to the answer.

Like most of the court, he too was much peeved at Perseus's decision to do away with so many accomplished doctors.

No one knew when death would come to greet them, so good doctors were always in high demand and short in supply.

"It's okay. *Cough*, I'm sure *cough* he did not tell any of you either.

While Philips did not seem to blame Mithriditus for not trying to stop his father, knowing what the man was like when enraged.

As for Mithriditus, he was much more concerned by Philips's coughing,

"Your Highness, judging by your coughing it really is not safe for you to come outside. Let us go to my tent. It is nearby. And we can then talk"

And this was Philips glad to accept as he really was not feeling well, hence soon the duo found themselves sitting inside a warm tent, the heat from the in-door hearth very much comforting Philips's ill body.

"Here, Your Highness. I have mixed some honey. It is good for the throat," And once seated, Mithriditus personally served a cup of hot water mixed with honey, which Philips was very grateful to receive.

"Thank you. Aghhhh...My throat feels a lot better, " The young man happily responded, then got to why he had sought him out.

"I just wanted to request something of you, my lord. Regarding the prisoner."

Philips seemed to pause here as if he was deliberating on how to proceed, and then after a while of silence finally came out and said it in a straight manner,

"I want you to delay giving over that prisoner. Or even give a different one!"

"....." Mithriditus's eyes only bulged.

If he really did that, and Perseus found out, he might be the one taking Laykash's place in the torture chamber.

"Your Highness...that's..." So the man only looked at Philips in an incredulous manner, unable to believe he would make such a request of him.

"I know, I know, it is a lot to ask." And expecting such a reaction Philips was quick to chime out, before explaining his reason,

"But I heard that Theony has been captured by the enemy."

"And I remember that prisoner...Laykash I believe his name was, is also quite a high-ranking officer."

"So I was thinking we could exchange the two."

"...That..." And hearing so Mithriditus lightly muttered.

He was not surprised at the idea.

Even a toddler could think of that in his opinion.

But the problem was wholly another.

"Of course, that is indeed the best case of action. I know that Theony and Your Highness are good friends. So it is only natural for you to try and get him back"

"And even better Zanzan has shown interest in a prisoner exchange."

"But His Majesty's orders..... " Mithriditus revealed the bump in the road.

"Don't worry, I know my father." But Philips was quick to reassure the high-ranking noble, finally convincing him by saying, "He has simply given that order in anger. But once he calms down, everything will be alright."

"Besides, you and I both know how important Theony and his house is. Especially after we have lost so many nobles."

"He cannot be allowed to die."

And that was how Laykash's guardian angel saved him.

Chapter 605 Evaluation Of The Aftermath (Part-1)

Mithriditus did not simply agree to Philips on a whim.

But had decided to do so after considering several factors.

The first was of course Theony's family, which was a prominent family with close ties to even the queen.

And so losing their heir in such a needless way was sure to sour relations between the king and them.

Secondly, it was the crown prince's feelings.

The old noble had no proof but suspected the two had a closer relationship than just being friends.

And Mithriditus felt if he agreed he could curry some favor with his future sovereign.

And lastly, he was impressed by how Philips was able to get so much information even when he was ill and confined to his tent for the last two months.

'They say the crown prince is even sharper than his father, There is certainly some water to this,'
Mithriditus felt Philips was a smart man to follow.

And it was due to all these that he agreed to, nodding,

"Okay, Your Highness. I will try to stall His Majesty for a few days"

But then also added with an asterisk,

"But if we are going to do this, it should be done fast. As soon as possible in fact. For my abilities are limited."

Mithriditus could not say for sure when Perseus might turn on him for disobeying his order, hence the urgency.

And this was all Philips wanted and so gratefully nodded. "Mmmm, let's send an envoy tomorrow. And hope they will be willing to do the exchange."

'Or can!' At this Mithriditus silently muttered this in his heart, knowing it was very much possible Theony was not captured but was outright killed in the heat of battle.

If that happened... well, he could only express his condolences for that prisoner.

While back in Zanzan, the city had entered into a kind of festive mood, as Alexander's return worked to temporarily calm the frayed nerves of the people.

The populace felt that with him around, things would go back to normal, while the council members were reassured at the set hierarchy returning.

Thus, within hours of his return, the city began to rapidly stabilize.

While the man himself, first took a nice bath and a good meal at the eastern barracks as his wife had burnt the house to a crisp, and then, though he wanted to very much take a nap after the long ride or spend some time with his girls, instead decided to immediately convene with all the council members.

Because he was very much eager to know the status of his city from them.

So they sat in one of the war council rooms as each man and woman recalled his or her events in great detail, speaking freely of their experience.

And it was from this recollection that Alexander only now came to know about Heliptos's fiasco with the supply lines, how the elephants suddenly broke their lines, the state of the siege, the sudden attack on the manor, all the decisions Cambyses made that night and finally the resulting aftermath of this all.

".....and that's how we drove the Tibians out. We planned to attack the main camp today and completely eliminate them, but then you arrived," Cambyses finished the retelling, being the last in turn.

While Alexander, after finishing hearing everything, first subconsciously turned his head to look out the window, and noticed the beautiful clear sky painted with the dim orange hue of the setting sun.

The meeting had started at around midday and lasted so long that it seems he did not even notice when dusk had crept in.

And as he gazed at the scenic, disappearing, winter sky, trying to gather his thoughts, coincidentally he felt his mood very much matched the current sky.

The sky was not overcast and gloomy like the night just as his mood was not so bad for he had managed to keep his city and almost everyone he cared about alive.

But just like how the sky was also not bright and radiant like the blazing sun, so was his mood, for the damages inflicted on him were indeed substantial.

Thus Alexander's felt his mood to be a grayish murky kind instead, one mixed with both sweet and bitterness, just like how the current dusky sky was occupied both by the day and night, the orange hues conveying hope, but their dimness conveying damage and disappointment.

"....."

And as Alexander descended into this poignant contemplation, his silence made even the huge room feel very small and stifling for the people gathered there.

They all felt Alexander was simmering with rage like a volcano storing magma underneath just to explode out all at once.

While Alexander inside his mind was nitpicking all the decisions they had made in his mind, and saying to himself,

'Jesus Christ! They managed to fuck up so much in just three months! What would have happened if I was gone six months?'

With the advantage of hindsight, Alexander was not at all satisfied by some of the decisions his side made, even feeling that though the Tibian king was a great strategist, much credit for his success also had to go to the blunders of the opposite side.

Thus it took a while for Alexander to finally gather his thoughts, I think you should take a look at

"*Sigh*, not building a wall on the western side was indeed an oversight of mine. I never thought any enemy would be able to make it up through the dense forest."

"I was wrong about that. I must apologize." Alexander first and foremost began as such, as the others quickly jumped in to also say,

"No, no, we also all never thought it was possible, my lord."

"Mmmm," And hearing so Alexander emotionlessly hummed and then started to inquire about some of the doubts he had.

"But then how did the enemy know to attack via the Cisran Hill?" He first questioned and seeing the surprised faces quickly explained,

"After all, this was not the first time Tibias had attacked Adhania, or besieged Zanzan. All these have precedents.

"So the question then becomes if they had never done so then, why it changed this time?

"...."

And as Alexander pointed this out, for a few seconds, everyone simply looked at each other in askance, because it seemed no one had thought of it.

Except for one - Grahtos.

The man was one of the people in charge of the interrogations and after seeing no one else step up, the cavalry commander at last chimed in, at first hesitating a bit, but then fully revealing his findings,

"That.... I had the same questions, so asked some of the prisoners about it. But most of these were lower level grunts who had no insights into their commanders' thoughts."

"Until I found a high-ranking officer named Theony."

"That man was caught wearing the king's armor to deceive us while the real one escaped, so I was certain he knew something about this."

"But when I asked him about it, first he avoided the question."

"So I pressed him a bit."

Here Grahtos paused a bit and sounded quite pleased with himself, almost producing a smug smile before continuing,

"And it was then he betrayed that on one fateful night, their king, by some blind luck had noticed light filtering out from the western part of the city even through the thick overgrowth.

"And seeing this presumably gave the king an idea. He first recalled that that side had no walls, and thus whether he could attack via that."

"Then, with that thought in mind, the king apparently had decided to send scouts to try and plot out an initial route using the lights as guides."

"While back here, his siege was going nowhere."

"So in desperation, he decided to try his luck via that route, using the lights atop the hill to not get lost in the foliage."

"And with yesterday being an especially clear night, his gamble almost worked."

"We were only alerted to this sneak attack because they had set alight the iron refinery thinking they had reached the top."

"Or else..."

Grahtos shivered as he finished his exciting report.

And this spine-tingling sensation was subsequently shared by almost all, even Alexander.

He did not even want to think about the other 'if' scenario.

And at the same time, he was completely convinced by this answer, finding it very plausible.

After all, no one had also thought crossing the Alps with war elephants was possible, but Hannibal had done it.

Or that conquering Tyre was possible, but Alexander the Great had done it.

There were scores of examples in history of genius commanders coming up with innovative and sometimes even completely bonkers ways to overcome challenges.

Thus Alexander did not expect any kind of foul play, letting Theony pull a masterstroke in managing to keep their secret correspondence hidden through a mixture of truths and lies.

As for Alexander, this time his focus was attracted by something else completely, "It seems building the iron plant had this unexpected result. I never could have even guessed."

"This attack really opened my eyes to just how vulnerable the whole western part is. Thank Gaia it did not succeed."

Alexander involuntarily let a sigh of relief, before loudly resolving, "We will need to fix this," which got unanimous nods from the council members.

It seemed that instead of scolding his council members for the current situation, for the time being, Alexander had decided to focus on improving his defense, and had even stated making a few new projects in his head.

Chapter 606 Evaluation Of The Aftermath (Part-2)

As Alexander thought of these plans, he also suddenly turned to Grahtos to suddenly ask,

"Oh, by the way, that prisoner, Theony you called him I believe, is he alright? He doesn't have any fingers or toes missing right?"

Alexander was worried about what Grahtos meant by 'pressing the man' during interrogations.

"Haha, no worries, no worries, my lord. I remember what you said," The man reassured, revealing,

"I simply tempted him with a cup of cold water. After fighting for so long the man was so parched he could resist. Haha, he broke in less than ten minutes,!"

Grantos was quite proud of himself for being able to so easily break the young noble, even disparaging the man as soft cheese.

Whereas the real reason for Theony 'cracking' was that he had simply lied.

"That's good. We should try to exchange him with Laykash if possible," While Alexander, hearing the man was 'intact' nodded with pleasure.

"So how many men have we lost? And how about the damages to the iron refinery and the workshops? Oh and what about the brick kiln outside?"

With that question done, Alexander then moved on to these all-important questions, wondering just how far back this attack had set them.

And this three-pronged query like the previous question produced a momentary silence as the others looked around to see if anyone else was volunteering.

Delivering bad news to one's lord was always nerve-racking.

And after a stifling few seconds, seeing no one open up, one Krishok decided to take it upon himself to reply about the state of the part he was in charge of.

"...The brick kilns... we are not sure how well they are. But from what he had seen from the walls....umm...we might have to rebuild them."

"Because one day we did notice a lot of smoke coming from there, so the enemy might have set fire to it."

Krishok sounded unsure about how to report the bad news.

"Mmmm," While Alexander simply gave this acknowledging hum, neither saying good or bad.

He had seen the kilns when entering the city and had hoped it looked worse than it really was.

But that hope was dashed decisively now.

"And the deaths? How many?" He then posed turning his head.

This was the thing he was most interested in.

"We....are still counting the casualties."

And fortunately for him, he did not have to wait long this time, as came the hesitant reply from Melodias where the voice reported in an unsure tone, "But estimates are roundabout 5,000 to 7,000."

"These are mostly from men working in the mines and the iron plant. The enemy had attacked them without any warning in their sleep, so almost no one even got the chance to run."

"And coupled with that were the additional fires which killed even more."

"So all in all, we expect 3,000 to 4,000 dead in there after finishing counting."

"As for the rest, well around 500 defenders died for the manor."

"While many more men, women, and children were killed when the enemy's flanking force attacked the workshops, and even more after the manor was captured."

"We think those numbers in total should be around 2,000 to 3,000."

"So...." Melodias pursed his lips as he finished his estimates in a grave voice.

'That much!' And hearing these huge numbers out of the horse's mouth made Alexander's heart jump.

If the losses from the battle were also to be taken into account, then Alexander found he had likely suffered 20,000 casualties!

This was in no way insignificant and made his heart feel very grim and heavy.

"I see!" Thus he only shot back this in a flat tone with flat lips.

"And what about the actual damages to the iron plant and the workshops?" Alexander again repeated, reminding Melodias had not replied to the second part of his inquiry.

And here it was Harun who answered.

"The iron plant....my lord... is mostly destroyed, or at least most of the facilities are. I went there to check it myself," The man's voice had a low, undercurrent of sadness to it as he said so, his heart still hurting at the fresh memory of what he had seen.

Rows upon rows of burnt skeleton remains of various houses, standing cadaverously under the open sky.

It was a sight Harun would struggle to forget.

But the man did not have the luxury to dwell in his misery for long, as after a brief pause, he resumed,

"Most of the facilities have burnt down- the coke-making plant, the coal storehouses, the waterwheels, the worker's log houses, and even the shed for storing the tools- everything has burnt down, leaving only some of the stone walls and pillars behind."

Harun had a hard time describing a place of such ruin, especially as it was a place he worked at.

And it was only a small comfort that he was able to finish the report on this happy note, saying

"The only thing that fortunately survived was the blast furnace and steel-making crucible." "I think you should take a look at

"Being made of cement, they did not catch fire."

"Thank Gaia."

And hearing all this, Alexander's brows twitched as he felt a slight headache, knowing he would have to rebuild everything.

That would not be a small undertaking.

But at least he could take solace in the fact that the hardest things to construct- The blast furnace and The Bessimer crucible were still intact, and hopefully, the remaining infrastructure could be rebuilt relatively quickly.

Hopefully.

"I see. I will have to visit the plant sometime later then," Alexander lightly muttered, intending to witness the presumed destruction for himself.

And lastly, he then followed this with another anemic query,

"And the workshops? How are they?"

Though after hearing the fate of the iron plants, Alexander could not help but not have much expectation for that.

"It's not as bad as the iron plant!" But contrary to his musing, these encouraging words came right from Cambyses's own mouth, who then informed him,

"When the enemy attacked that part, they seemed to have been in a hurry to cross it and move towards their main goal- The manor."

"So they beelined for it without much caring for anything else."

"Thus most of the deaths were to the few unfortunate people who happened to be in their way. Or a few beautiful women who attracted the eyes of unsavory characters."

"But these were rare cases, as the survivors testified later, saying that in general most of the 6,000 to 7,000 troops largely ignored them, and simply marched straight head-on, only occasionally destroying some shops because that was easier to do than circle around, This accident setting off a few fires."

Up until this point, Alexander was quite liking what Cambyses was saying.

It seemed the workshops were basically bypassed.

But that thought was soon shattered when she said,

"And if that was all there was to it, then our casualties would have much fewer. But... *sigh*" Cambyses would not help but pause to regretfully shake her head, before resuming,

"But when the people at the manor saw the workshops were under attack and particularly noticed the fire, many abandoned their posts disobeying all military command, and started to blindingly run towards that side, hoping to save their family"

"And then what happened?"

"In the darkness, they all blindly ran straight into the enemy's advancing forces without even realizing it."

"While the Tibiasns, seeing this unarmed, unruly, desperate mob run towards them, simply cut them to bits, like a hot knife through butter."

"That was where most of our casualties came from." Cambyses sounded quite rueful, finding it a true shame that they had to die even when it was totally avoidable if they had just listened.

"Yeah, even TK died. We found his body stabbed multiple times just a few meters from the workshops' outer walls." Melodias chimed in with an equally sad tone, while Menicus additionally stated.

"Mmm, even his poor grandson died. After capturing the manor, some of the soldiers had burst into his nice looking good house, looking to make it their own, when they met the kid."

"And the bastards gutted him then and there. Animals!"

Alexander had rarely seen Menicus so angry and was surprised by this intense reaction.

But what he did not know was that Menicus and TK being of similar ages and having somewhat comparable status had hit it quite well, and the aged military quite liked the little kid.

Even though the boy was challenged, that did not take away the intelligent shine he was beginning to display, and everything Menicus would come to visit, the kid would try to show off the new things he learned.

That always bought a smile to Menicus's face.

But now that little joy had been robbed from the old man's face, as well as the little life.

Menicus really wanted to find the men responsible and execute them himself.

While Alexander, hearing the news too felt sad, remembering how he had promised the two safety and security, and how he had failed them.

It was certainly a dereliction of his duty.

"The Tibians will pay," And as Alexander learned of the atrocities, he promised such, though he struggled to keep a neutral tone.

The Tibians had really managed to maim his most economically productive center.

Chapter 607 Evaluation Of The Aftermath (Part-3)

When Alexander had first heard Cambyses say how the Tibians had ignored the workshops in favor of the manor, he was actually impressed.

Impressed by the fact that upon entering the workshops and seeing all the blingy things, the soldiers did not immediately lose cohesion and started looting.

This was the standard practice of most armies after all.

But now that he learned of their subsequent atrocities, his mood began to turn.

'After the attack, who knows how many skilled artisans and workers I have lost? According to Melodias, a lot of the killed were men,' Alexander dreaded in his mind after hearing Cambyses's report.

He had after all paid a pretty penny to get those expert men to migrate from Adhan to Zanzna and work for him.

Furthermore, they had a year to learn the basics of how to make all the new products.

'But now if all that skill and experience were to be lost...' Alexander could only shake his head in dismay at that thought, unwilling to complete the rest of the thought, but ultimately forced himself to.

'Then I will have to ask Pasha Farzah or Lady Inayah to give some of their artisans. And that would mean giving away a lot of my secrets.... *sigh* . '

The losses projected by Cambyses really made Alexander the scale of his wounds, not enough to grievously wound him to death, but certainly, enough to force him to stagger and rest and recuperate.

And while Alexander had these thoughts, the other council members simply sat still, unwilling to make a peep in order to avoid attracting Alexander's attention.

"Are all the head artists of the workshops okay?" Finally, Alexander asked this, trying to sound as objective as possible and not show his fear.

He at least hoped those four were okay.

That would make the rebuilding process much easier.

"....." But this only produced a small silence at first, which was never a good sign.

"....." And Alexander could only placidly sway his head looking for a response.

Until it was Cambyses who decided to finally speak up.

"The crossbow maker Faziz, and Haquim who make the soaps are alive. I met them." She started with the good news.

"But the papermaker Azizak was found dead. Killed at the doorstep of the crossbow workshop's warehouse."

"According to other survivors, he was overseeing the distribution of the weapons there and was one of the first to take a few men to fight off the Tibians."

"*Sigh*, alas!"

Cambyes did not need to say much more as Alexander could guess he was likely easily overwhelmed.

And hearing the man's demise, he could not help but feel a bit remorseful, saying "*Sigh* that is indeed a shame. I liked that man too. He was sharp,"

Alexander still remembered how the man had proposed to use a kind of tree sap to prevent the newly made wet paper sheets from sticking to each other which Alexander certainly appreciated.

But even though Alexander was certainly saddened by this loss, in his mind, neither of these three was the one he was most interested in.

Because for all their technical expertise, all of them could be relatively easily replaced.

But one could not.

"And Gajok? What about him?" Alexander was unable to hide the slight alarm laced in his inquiry as he asked.

Yes, it was this glassmaker he was most worried about, as glassmaking was perhaps the most skill-intensive industry he had.

And losing someone like Gajok would be quite a hard hit for him.

Hence he really hoped Cambyes was saving the best for the last and nothing had happened to him.

While Cambyses, knowing her husband, long ago had guessed this might happen, and hence saved the complicated answer for last.

"Mister Mister Gajopk is alive...for now. But not conscious." She quickly revealed without much suspense with some suspense and as Alexander's inquisitive eyes seemed to ask her to delineate, she added,

"We found him around the basement of the manor. He was unconscious and his entire body was covered in soot."

"The rescuers quickly took him to the clinic, and after seeing him, all the doctors could say was that he was still breathing and hence alive."

"That's it."

"I told them to let me know if he wakes, but it seems he has shown no signs of waking any time soon."

Cambyses succinctly retold the events.

But the details of it made Alexander a bit confused.

"Why was his body inside the manor? What was he doing around the basement?" He asked, unable to think of a good reason.

"Mmm, I too thought that." And Cambyses quickly replied, continuing, "So I asked the other manor survivors about it."

"And they said that apparently, the Tibian king attempted to use some of them to get the gold in our treasury."

"But failed to do so because no one was to get near it due to the smoke and heat." I think you should take a look at

"And it seems Gajopk was one of the unfortunate ones who inhaled too much smoke and simply fainted there."

Cambyses finished informing how the glassmaker got there, which made Alexander almost mourn.

'And in the smoke, no one bothered to look after him,' He ruefully added in his mind.

And then he wondered if the man would be able to pull through after lying on the floor and taking in the harmful smoke for so long, and even if he could, whether he would ever be fit to work.

"I see. Let us pray for his recovery then," But by this point Alexander could do nothing to aid him but only hope the man to have a miraculous encounter.

And just as he said so,

"*Knock*, *Knock*, Excuse me, my lords," A respectful knock and a deferential voice emanated from outside the room.

"Come in," And once he was given permission to enter, soon came a man carrying a large candlestand with many lit candles.

"Ahhh, yes, it is indeed getting dark. Please bring some more." And seeing this, while also noticing the deep, dark shadows being cast all around as sunlight coming from the windows had already faded, Menes quickly ordered the room be properly lit up.

And thus for a while, the clanking sound of candlestand being fixed along the walls, and the low, wheezing sound of the wick being lit permeated through the room.

All the while Alexander quietly felt the soft glow of the candles slowly drive out the darkness, as his unfocused eyes noticed the change in the ambiance of the room.

'It's already dusk,' He commented pointlessly to him, suddenly feeling his mood match the dimness of the lightning in the room, as he came to more intimately know about the losses.

It seemed that without the bright sunlight to illuminate his surrounding, his thoughts had begun to turn more pessimistic.

And sensing such, and also feeling quite tired, decided the end of the day as a signal to end the meeting.

So in a type of concluding tone, Alexander began his ending speech.

"Okay, I think here is a good place to end it for today."

"I have mostly understood the kind of losses we took. And they are certainly substantial."

"We lost a lot of men and materials. And we came very close to being destroyed."

"But by the grace of the gods, we didn't!" Alexander raised his octaves here,

"And all our struggles were not for naught. We have also learned a lot of things"

"We learned about our weaknesses, our oversights, and even how dangerous fire can be. By the way, we really should try to build as many houses as possible with concrete."

Alexander added the last point with a tangent, after which he lifted his head to look at all the council members, and producing a little smile encouragingly said,

"But none of the losses we suffered are irrecoverable."

"Because I still remember how the city was when we found it just a year ago. Dirty, plague-ridden, and almost deserted."

"And look at it now."

"We have roads, a sewage system in the making, and a population of around 150,000."

"Even after the battering it took this time, this still is far better than it was a year from now."

"And once given a bit of time and effort, we can make it flourish like it we could have never imagined."

"So don't be disheartened by what has occurred this time. Mistakes happen."

"We are all new to this after all. Hell a bit more than a year ago, I was a slave and you were all peasants, haha," Alexander generalized with a loud laugh, which helped to lift a lot of the gloomy mood.

And ended the speech by saying, "So the important thing is to report from this time's mistake and never repeat it."

"Work even more diligently!"

And hearing Alexander's arousing speech, the council members were quick to chime in, feeling Alexander had decided to overlook their blunders.

"You are right, my lord."

"Mmm, right. We must all strive to do better."

"The cement plants are intact, my lord. We can start rebuilding as soon as you give the order."

All such enthusiastic replies flooded Alexander's ears.

And it was with this optimistic feeling that the council members returned home, while in their carriage on the way to their temporary home, Cambyses pointedly asked,

"You are not gonna seriously let them go scot-free, are you?"

If Alexander really did not punish any of the council members in any way, the girl would be indeed very disappointed.

"Haha," While hearing the question Alexander only mysteriously chuckled.

Chapter 608 Alexander's Scheme

Alexander found Cambyses's question and the looks being sent his way to be quite funny, one which caused him to chuckle.

And when that caused Cambyses to glare and pout, Alexander in a breezy tone asked, "And how do you suggest I punish them?"

"Fine them? Remove them from their posts? Or even capture and execute them to appease the city?"

Alexander of course added the last option as a joke.

"....." And facing Alexander's hypothetical question, Cambyses did not immediately answer but turned to face him.

"Achievements should be rewarded, and failures punished. I thought it was you who taught me that," She icily commented.

Cambyses felt it made no sense for Alexander to simply wave all the mistakes made away.

And hearing this Alexander first responded to it with a pursed smile, and then calmed her down, "There is no need to be so hasty, Cam. There will be lots of time to settle old scores. After all, no one says we cannot take actions two, three even five years from now, hehe." Alexander ominously chuckled.

And then ignoring Cambyses's surprised look, he spoke in a revealing tone,

"The reason why I did not scold, or even say anything today was because I believe in second chances."

"And this was me giving them a way to fix their mistakes."

"As I said, all of them are new to this. So it was inevitable they would make mistakes. To err is human after all...though I did not expect them to fail so quickly," Alexander half-consciously added that part.

But then regaining his deep voice, once again continued,

"And punishing people just for failing just once is not a good idea. Then they will be scared to try new things and I will have to personally everything by myself.."

"So by saying what I said at the end, my hope is that they will take that as inspiration to work diligently from now on."

"If that happens, then it will be truly good." Alexander nodded his head.

"But if they don't, if they think my mercy as weakness...." Then suddenly his voice turned menacing, "Hehe, well...." and he only chuckled with a chilly light in his eyes.

Though some of the more intelligent ones did, some of the council members were yet to understand that behind Alexander's lukewarm admonishment lay the true test, one through which he wanted to separate the ones truly striving to work hard and make contributions, from the others who only knew how to throw puffery and empty praise, while leeching off him.

And Alexander believed he would not have to wait long to see the signs.

"Mmm, okay, If that's what you want, then so be it." While hearing this Cambyses, only commented such, she herself being more of the opinion that it might have been better to kill the chicken to scare the monkey as a kind of warning to others.

Not literally kill anyone of course, but certainly came an example out of one or several.

But since Alexander had made his decision, she would respect it.

Hence with that done, Cambyses moved on to her last question.

"But Alex, even if they work hard, are you sure they are capable of doing their task competently?"

"Have you wondered about that? Whether someone like Helipotos can really do his job. His abilities are certainly not impressive." Cambyses posed,

And this query certainly poked at one of Alexander's weak spots.

People like Helipotos were not exactly chosen for the post for their competency but more for their loyalty.

And though that had helped him stabilize his rule over the city in the short run, it also produced some problems as revealed this time.

But Alexander was right now not willing to institute these changes.

And he revealed his reason by saying,

"Let's not get into debates over whose faults which mistake was and who to replace where. We have already lost a lot of good men, and even finding replacements for them will be tough."

"We can wait to throw the rotten apples later."

"So for now, instead of tearing ourselves, let's concentrate on healing."

"And we can think about moving people from their posts once the teachers Pasha Farzah promised arrives and we manage to raise a few talented people."

"I will then definitely make Heliptos and others like him irrelevant."

And hearing this promise, finally, Cambyses felt placated, so she silently nodded.

While sensing his wife quieten down, Alexander felt it was his time to get some questions in, as he asked the all-important question,

"By the way, you mentioned Tibias wanting the gold in the manor. So did they?" I think you should take a look at

The tone in his voice said that he really hoped they didn't.

And for once he got a good answer, as Cambyses beamed a smile and shook her head,

"No, they tried but didn't. Almost everything is there. I personally checked."

"*Wheew*" And this made Alexander finally give a big sigh of relief.

If he lost his gold atop of all these losses, he might have truly fallen into the nadir.

He was also never worried about the gold coins being damaged as gold had a melting point above 1,000 degrees, whereas house fires typically only reached 700 to 800 Celsius.

Plus, even if the coins were truly damaged, with bits of it melted, still, the gold was never gonna evaporate.

So all Alexander would have to do was recollect the solidified drips of gold and recast the coins.

A relatively painless process.

"And what about you? Did you manage to do the things you went for?"

It was then Cambyses's turn, and to this Alexander nodded lightly,

"Yes, mostly. I can at least mint the ropal. I will tell you about the details later."

After all, everything that happened in Adhan would take some time to explain, and not something that could fit into a carriage ride.

And speaking of carriage rides, Alexander only now remembered that with his house gone, he didn't know where he was going.

He had simply gotten into the vehicle as Cambyses indicated.

"By the way, where are we staying tonight?" So he asked.

"One of the noble houses in the western district. The one you picked before. I asked Mean to go prepare it for us." Came the swift, succinct reply.

The houses Cambyses was referring to were the many abandoned houses belonging to nobles who fled Zanzan with Muazz, all of which then Alexander seized, converting them into either guest houses for visiting dignitaries and guests or giving them to his retainers as gifts.

Of course, he kept two nice bungalow-type houses for himself just because he liked the house.

"That's good. That's good." And so hearing Cambyses preparing those places he had yet to stay, Alexander was pretty pleased.

"Will Nanazin and the twins be too staying with us? I haven't had the time to meet them," He then additionally asked.

Alexander felt it would be a bit rude to not even meet these important guests after entering the city, especially given the ordeal they suffered.

"No. The house doesn't have enough bedrooms. So I arranged for them to stay at the other bungalow." But Cambyses informed with a shake of her head, dashing a bit of Alexander's hope, then posing,

"Do you want to go visit them now? I can ask the carriage to take a detour. We are not too far away."

"..." And hearing this Alexander considered it for it a while, knowing the two houses being in the same district meant the time needed would not be too long.

So though his tired body very much wanted to just go home and hit the bed, he felt it was his duty to at least show his face to them and speak a few words.

"Okay. Let's go just say hello." Thus Alexander nodded.

And so soon after the luxurious carriage parked itself in front of a large, ornately decorated wooden gate, overlooking a huge two-story bungalow.

There were two city guards posted at the gates, who upon seeing the crest of Alexander's carriage and his entourage immediately let them inside, and after crossing the stone-paved short walkway, Alexander was soon face to face with the six ladies.

"Oh, it is truly an unexpected pleasure to see, my lord. I heard you arrived only today. So I never expected to meet you so soon." Nananzin courteously began as her personal maid served the guests some wine and fruits.

"Haha, sorry to bother you at this time. I got caught up in.... viewing the city, haha," While Alexander's chuckle was a bit sheepish like he was embarrassed about his loss.

And just like that the group exchanged some pleasantries and light-hearted banter, which covered a whole host of topics.

Alexander first apologized for the painful and scary experiences they suffered, and while Nanazin was very understanding, the twins seemed to glare and say, "Bad man, you seem to get into wars every month. That's not good."

And this was an advice Alexander took to heart, reminding himself not to get into any battles anytime soon.

Afterward, he also thanked them for their contributions during the siege, especially the twin's sermons, while also promising to make the city much safer.

Following this, he moved to a cheerier topic where he talked a bit about his adventures in Adhan, about the Jtaama and the party, though he made sure to avoid mentioning Ptolomy or her father.

And with all these said, and the night having truly and well descended, he decided to finally take his leave.

Chapter 609 Cambyses's Thoughts On Nanazin

"Well then Your Highness, I will take my leave now. Please stay safe. I will come to visit soon," Alexander gave this farewell as he boarded his carriage.

While Nanazin and the others, who had followed him up to the gate, tempted him to stay a bit longer, saying,

"My lord, I really wished you could at least stayed for dinner. It's already been cooked and it's already so late. We had even prepared the beds."

This was not the first time Alexander had been offered a meal or an offer to spend the time there, as this was Nanazin's umpteenth time asking so.

"Haha, I'm sorry sister. But Mean and the others are still waiting for us with food back at the house. We are really sorry that we cannot accept."

But it was Cambyses who was really adamant about returning and pushed her man out of the house and into the carriage.

"Ahhh, I see. Then take care." And seeing the other side being so staunch, Nanazin could only politely accept.

While back inside the carriage, once it had traveled a few distances, Cambyses thought back about the eager Nanazin, and then half muttered with a smirk,

"She seemed really eager for us to stay, wouldn't you say, Alex? Is she that desperate, heh?"

Cambyses seemed to produce a disdainful tone towards Nanazin as she said so.

And Alexander, easily guessing what his little wife was indicating, first shrugged,

"Can't you simply believe she was being courteous?"

To which Cambyses simply produced a teasing look of disdain.

Although it was indeed Adhanian custom to offer meals and beds for guests, especially once it got dark, Cambyses did not believe this was Nanazin's only intention for a second.

And neither would she ever buy that Alexander believed it either.

The way that woman looked at her husband was too telling.

It was apparent to almost anyone that all Alexander would need to do was simply wiggle his finger, and the 'Queen' would be ready to get naked and on her knees then and there.

Thus Cambyses kept looking at Alexander for a real answer.

And sensing this, after pursing his lips a bit, Alexander humored his girl,

"Perhaps it is because she fears once our losses become known, Ptolomy will want her back stating security issues.... just to make her suffer more"

"So she might be trying to cook the rice with me before that to tie herself to me."

Alexander's guess was that Nanazin was insecure about her status in Zanzan, and wanted a physical relationship with him to strengthen her sense of belonging to him.

"Cook the rice?" While Cambyses herself was surprised by his strange idiom, as she knew not of any food called 'rice'.

But this was not her first time hearing Alexander say some strange idioms, and by this point, she had learned to just accept them.

So she simply did that and tried to guess its meaning from the context.

And as far as she could tell, it seemed what Alexander was saying was that Nanazin wanted to use her body in exchange for her continued stay in Zanzan and access to all its high-level, noble exclusive facilities.

"Hmmp, if whoring was so easy, then everyone would be doing it. And she calls herself the queen!" And understanding so, Cambyses somewhat lightly spat venomously, feeling if that was indeed Nanazin's plan, then was certainly getting the better deal.

In her eyes, being able to enjoy all the nice food, clothes, houses, and other facilities just in exchange for agreeing to sleep with Alexander was too good a price.

Especially when it was really a 'one in four' deal, for her daughters would be able to share the privileges with her, them having paid nothing.

This somewhat peeved her.

While Alexander was much more sympathetic to the older woman's situation, especially after knowing her backstory and the kind of life she was forced to live up until now.

Alexander wanted to help her to the best of his abilities from the kindness of his heart just because of that, hoping this poor, unfortunate woman would be able to at last find some happiness in her life.

So in his mind, Nanazin's insecurities were simply her overthinking things.

But Alexander was also careful not to say anything like this out loud in front of Cambyses, fearing it would be like pouring hot oil into the fire.

His wife currently did not seem yet receptive to the idea of him sleeping with Nanazin, and with women being by nature a bit jealous, he saw all the more reason to not show the soft spot in his heart for Nanazin.

He could already hear the young girl sneering and complaining if he did.

'Oh, I see that she has stolen your heart. I wonder what will happen after a few more years. Will I even have a home then?'

Alexander decided to tactfully avoid that landmine.

Thus for now Alexander simply played along with Cambyses's mockery and replied with a light smile, I think you should take a look at

'Well, I guess having a whore who was a queen is expensive, hehe.'

Though Cambyses was not impressed with Alexander's joke answer, as she then muttered half annoyed,

"If what you said is true, then she must have been truly desperate. Did she forget I would be staying there too?"

Cambyses could not imagine what Nanazin could have gained from making Alexander stay the night tonight.

But to this, Alexander chuckled the joke, "Well perhaps she would not have minded you joining too, hahaha."

Pinch And this got him a light pinch on his hands from Cambyses, who then shot him a soft glare, and sniggered,

"Heh! A massive pervert like you probably would love that. I bet you even dream of eating the mother and daughters together."

"Tell me, how many times have to actually wanted to see all four of the girls kneeling in front of you, licking your cock? A grown Nanazin, surrounded by three little Nanazins! Does it excite you that much, *pinch*!"

Cambyses seemed to know her husband well enough to even guess some of his fantasies.

And Alexander would certainly be lying if he said he had never imagined so even once.

"Hahaha," So hearing this, he could hardly hold back his laughter, which seemed to make Cambyses even more displeased.

Because just as Alexander suspected, Cambyses entirely disliked the idea of her husband sleeping with Nanazin.

And it was not simply because she disliked her.

On the contrary, she actually somewhat liked the lady on a personal level, for the royal woman did not put on air around her.

But the reason why Cambyses did not want Alexander to form a relationship with Nanazin was because she felt a bit insecure when standing against the woman's status.

Even if she was confident in Alexander's feelings towards her and was sure he would not be easily swayed, but still, the title 'Queen' had a fearsome power on its own.

Cambyses did not want to compete for Alexander's affection against such a fearsome foe.

Thus her implicit show of dislike towards the idea.

And Alexander, though not fully aware of Cambyses's inner thoughts, could certainly hazard a guess to the twenty-year-old's thoughts.

And though he would never let Cambyses dictate which women he could or could not get into his haram, he would certainly try to be as diplomatic as possible, and take her feelings into consideration where possible.

So he tried to end this conversation on a good note, delivering this good news to Cambyses.

"Don't worry, whatever Nanazin's wishes are, it is unlikely I will bed her anything soon. Her stay in Zanzan is still tenuous and her status ambiguous."

"So until I clear things with Ptolomy about what to do with her, I do not want any strange rumors about me sleeping with his wife to reach Ptolomy."

"Who knows what that idiot might do then!"

Alexander here felt that though Nanazin was de facto exiled from her husband's house, it would still be prudent not to start enjoying the dish just yet.

After all, Ptolomy had not said anything yet, and without that, if word got, it was quite possible Ptolomy might later use this to blackmail Alexander for a variety of things, from giving up industrial secrets to forcing him to participate in his wars, to even outright exhorting funds out of him.

He was no intention of letting that happen.

After all, Alexander would be already paying for sex with Nanazin by covering her bills.

Why should he be also paying her husband?

Hence, though he had no problem letting Nanazin stay with him for as long as time permitted, but as for sleeping with her, he intended to wait till the king married the Queen mother and Helma and largely forgot about his ex.

"Good." And hearing this Cambyses naturally gave a pleased nod, the single word conveying a subtle sigh of relief.

"And I guess it also goes for the daughters too?" She was quick to try and close that loophole too.

And Alexander was there to instantly reassure Cambyses,

"Of course, of course. As long as their 'father' does not explicitly say anything, taking their virginities would not be wise. It might harm their marriage partners.," He said, though the word 'father' was said with the highest possible number of air quotes possible.

Ptolomy after all was not the girls' father.

But such loopholes and wordplays could wait for later, for as they just finished discussing this, the carriage finally stopped.

It seemed they had arrived.

Chapter 610 Alexander's New House (Part-1)

Once the carriage halted and was parked, Alexander quickly followed Cambyses to step out of the vehicle, eager to see his new, sweet home.

This would after all be his place of abode for the time being.

And as he laid eyes upon it, he found it was of a similar design to the one Nanazin and the others were staying in, the typical bungalow-styled two-storied building made of stone and wood.

It seemed in this infantile era of architecture, it was customary to follow a standard design.

Hence many of the noble houses looked quite similar.

But of course, not all were like that.

And even for those that were, the nobles, being people with strong personal identities worked hard to add their personal touches to each of them, making each a little bit unique.

But Alexander did not have the time to try and discern any uniqueness with the place, for as soon as descended off the vehicle, he was quickly distracted by the greeting of his three women, who had been standing outside the large wooden gate for him all this time, as they enthusiastically cheered,

"Ahh, master! Welcome."

"Welcome Your Holiness."

"What took you so long? We were waiting so long!"

As one could easily guess, these sayings were from Gelene, Ophenia, and Mean respectively, the last one being one of slight annoyance, but even more worry.

"Haha, sorry, sorry. We got caught up in meeting everyone. It's good to see all of you are safe." And to make up for the delay, Alexander was one to quickly apologize and then proceeded to even give the spicy, petite girl a large hug to placate her, and then not to leave the other two out, followed it with Ophenia and Gelene too.

"We are very happy to see you safe too my lord. We hope your journey has been fruitful," During the hug Ophenia let a sigh of relief as she said so, feeling a great weight being lifted off her as Alexander's wide chest encompassed her body,

And this was a similar feeling Gelene experienced who too said similar words of welcome.

And after this greeting was finally concluded, the small group decided it was time to get out of the cold, and so quickly made it into the houses, crossing the small outer walkway in a short time.

The distance from the outer gate to the porch was a short distance, with a small, dead due to lack of care, garden on either side, the design being quite similar to his late manor, though nothing could compare with the scale or grandees.

"It feels like the good, old times. Back to being peasants, hahaha," And seeing this, Alexander could not help but joke as such, suddenly feeling this bungalow which would have seemed huge to him even in his previous life with its multiple bedrooms, now suddenly felt kind of small.

It seemed that living in that huge manor for a year had changed his taste, similar to how one might feel after moving to a condo after living in Versailles or Buckingham Palace.

Though a condo was also certainly a very luxurious piece of property, but it could never hold a candle to those titans.

And as Alexander realized this, he also firsthand understood that the words big and small were really subjective.

Even this huge bungalow now seemed small to him, how time changes things.

As for the women around him who heard his crude joke, they could only lightly smirk, feeling Alexander was exaggerating.

While the freest of the bunch, Mean, quickly tugged at Alexander's sleeves and fearfully urged,

"I quite like it here. We can live here comfortably. So there is no need to rebuild the manor is there?"

Her eyes seemed to swim in worry and reluctance as she said this, even suggesting

"We could even let the workshop workers live there, right?"

And it did not take a genius to figure out where Mean was coming from.

The recent attack had really scared the petite girl and she much preferred that they stayed here, far away from the frontlines, than try and live in opulent luxury along the borders.

Living as a peasant perfectly suited Mean when the alternative might be dying as a noble.

Not to mention Alexander was clearly exaggerating the rough state of their abode, as this house, being a noble's vacation house was certainly still an opulent property housing the highest levels of decadence.

As for Alexander, sensing the concern in Mean's voice, he quickly patted the short girl's head to calm her, and said,

"Don't worry. What happened this time will not happen ever again. I promise you. I will not allow it," Alexander sounded extremely steely in his voice, one which helped to reassure Mean, who then silently nodded and hummed, "Mmmnn."

And Cambyses too stepped up from the side to add,

"Besides Mean, it will take some to rebuild the manor. So rest assured we will not be returning there in the short time." "I think you should take a look at

Cambyses was aware that the destruction of the manor and the dead bodies of the servants had cast a shadow on the petite girl as Mean knew and interacted with almost all of them daily.

So to lose so many of them in one single night had certainly hurt the girl very much.

And it took a lot of strength on Mean's part not to just break down into sobs especially when she remembered all the dead women and children.

Her only reason being that her mistress still needed her.

But now that the danger had passed and they were safe, all the suppressed emotions were starting to bubble up.

And knowing this Cambyses and Alexander tried to soothe Mean as much as possible.

And it was with these thoughts the group finally made it past the heavy oak front door as Cambyses invited him in with a gesture, "Welcome!"

Thus Alexander entered the house without further ado, and first and foremost found it to be very brightly lit, with lit candle stands placed all around the walls, while a few chandeliers hung above the

outer hallway, working together to drive away all the dark gloominess as well as heating up the place a bit.

But the real warmth of course came from a giant hearth burning right at the heart of the room, one into which log after log was being fed by an attending slave.

Entering from the cold outside, Alexander's body rejoiced at feeling this warmth as he felt energized, while his eyes recognized the man attending the hearth.

"Welcome back, master," And sensing the group enter, this black slave naturally turned around and instantly recognizing Alexander, quickly bowed.

"Mo! It's good to see you alive. I was worried," While Alexander cheerfully greeted back.

He was glad some of the servants had managed to make it out of this predicament alive.

"Yes, all by the grace of the gods and work of Mistress. I was captured when the manor was taken, but the mistress rescued us all. Thank you" The tall, lanky man diligently performed a second bow.

And between the time this small conversation occurred, Alexander felt quite a few pairs of curious eyes quickly fall on him, as his presence was finally noticed by the numerous maids present there.

They all seemed to have been hard at work trying to make the house as presentable as possible for Alexander, hurriedly cleaning, dusting, and even rearranging some of the furniture for his convenience.

"Welcome, master!" And like Mo, upon seeing him, these women greeted him on his return with a chorus, the group consisting of a few young girls that Alexander found somewhat attractive to women reaching ripe old ages.

"Mmm, it's nice to see all of you are well too. I'm glad," And seeing these familiar faces, Alexander put out a pleased smile too, before letting them get back to their work.

And as they went about their way, seeing the women still active this late, Alexander was a bit surprised.

Remember this was ancient times when almost all work stopped when the sun went down.

So seeing the hustle and bustle persist well into the night, he posed to Gelene,

"How come they are so late in getting the house ready? I thought they should have been done long ago!"

But Gelene was unable to answer this, for she replied, "I'm sorry master. I was out helping Lady Nanazin prepare her house. And arrived only some time earlier."

"It was sister Tayin and sister Mean who was in charge of managing this one."

And so as all the eyes shifted to those two, it was Ophenia who chimed up to inform Alexander,

"Master, I'm afraid it is not so simple."

"Remember, you only came at around midday, so we already started quite late."

"In addition, many of the slaves and servants we had are injured or dead, or are simply missing, ran away when the manor was attacked, *sigh*." Ophenia shook her head a bit, before continuing,

"Anyway, because of all this, we are quite shorthanded at the moment."

"In fact, it took us a while to even gather everyone here."

"And if that was not enough, we then also had to send some of them to help Her Highness Nanazin get her house ready too."

"All this ate up too much time which is why we are a bit behind." Ophenia gave a detailed explanation of the current circumstances, before putting on a large smile and reassuring,

"But don't worry master, we have the food hot and ready."