

Herald 841

Chapter 841 Lapitus's Tribulations

Lady Felicia left without giving Lapitus a chance to question her, just like Alexander had instructed.

Thus the man was left to deal with this hot potato of an intelligence as he saw fit.

And like Lady Felicia had predicted, over the next several hours, Lapitus agonized endlessly about it, pacing restlessly to and fro in his house as he was torn between his old and new oath.

Until finally lunch time came and Lapitus made the excuse of wanting to see his wife and daughter to visit the mansion.

And once the couple managed to find some time alone, Lapitus whispered pointedly to his wife,

"Why do you want to betray the Pasha?"

When Lapitus was thinking about betraying Alexander, this was the single query that had been haunting the man for the better part of the morning.

"I don't." And Lady Felicia hissed this surprising reply, pointing, "I only do not want the Pasha to win too easily."

"If he keeps on fighting.... Well, then there will be more chances for you to earn honor and glory. And we will be able to get more his favor."

The way to earn honor and glory was of course referring to Lapitus joining the war and winning battles for Alexander.

"..." And to this, Lapitus seemed to have no reply, only putting on a thoughtful face, trying to balance greed with duty

While Lady Felicia went back to being silent, surprisingly adhering to Alexander's instructions

Given her prize was so close, Lady Felicia did not want to give the man any chance to find faults with her.

"....."

And the silence between the couple lasted almost the entire afternoon, as Lapitus left Lady Felicia to rejoin his daughter at the small party without saying yes or no.

And even as evening started to approach, Lapitus gave no answer.

Which at last prompted Lady Felicia to urge, "The aviary will close any moment. If you want to send the information now is the time."

By this point, the woman had a hint of desperation in her voice, for if Lapitus did not send the message, it might cost her her neck.

But Lapitus seemed to want more time, as clenching the pocket where he was carrying the paper he had written the key points on, he gritted his teeth, ".....I need more time to think. I will do it tomorrow."

"..."

This amount of resistance was not something Lady Felicia had expected, as according to her estimate, a bird should have been already flying towards the capital- Parthenigh by now.

So seeing Lapitus's indecision, Lady Felicia finally decided to try and bend some of the instructions Alexander gave, subtly nudging her man by creating a sense of time pressure, "If you gonna do it, do it quickly. We should not delay, lest it becomes too late."

"....." But Lapitus did not bite, only producing a wall of silence as the man turned unusually taciturn, his thoughts to his own.

And so the day passed like that, with both husband and wife being very restless, though for very different purposes.

Following the encroachment of night, Alexander then invited both of them to spend the night in his house, though the couple experienced very little sleep there, particularly Lapitus, who stayed up basically the entire night, various tumultuous thoughts gripping him, as he grappled over the guilt of the things he did, over the guilt of betraying his liege, and over the guilt of the potential decimation of his country right before his eyes.

And what was most difficult for him was that in this quest of his, the main person who started all this- his wife, proved to be of no use, only saying she would support him either anyway and thus he should do what he felt like.

This was a great departure from the usual way Lady Felicia did things, where it was she who was always pushing her man to do everything.

And although Lapitus had disliked it at the time, now that Lady Felicia left everything to him, he found himself grossly longing for Lady Felicia's input.

Dawn cracked for Lapitus with such thoughts, and as if to clear his mind, the tired, insomniac man decided to take a walk around the city even as the sun was waking up, one which brought him to the harbor along his travels.

And there he suddenly spotted a large group of very specially marked boats being filled with supplies, their recipient clear- the army, which was advancing towards the capital.

And seeing this, another piece of Lady Felicia's advice rung inside him- 'If you want to go to the capital, you can take one of the boats. I will think of an excuse to tell the Pasha. Don't worry about it. Go!'

Hence the opportunity right before him proved a tempting sight and Lapitus thought multiple times about slipping into any of those boats using the dense crowd and then confessing all his crimes of Perseus.

He even circled several vessels multiple times but ultimately turned back every single time seemingly unable to make up his mind at the decisive moment.

"Captain! Is that you!" Until suddenly a sharp, youthful voice addressed him, seeming to clearly recognize him.

And suddenly fearing he had caught, the alert man whirled around at the speed of sound in shock, like he had been electrocuted.

Only to find a very young, slim man waving and grinning at him, a sight that brought him a great deal of relief.

It was a face not too familiar to Lapitus, but this was natural, for being a high ranking leader, he had many subordinates who he did not know by face, but conversely, the men knew him.

So the other side recognizing him was not at all surprising.

"Ahh! I thought it was you."lights

Having confirmed it was indeed Lapitus, the young man then cried out joyously, before saluting and introducing himself, "Ah! I'm a newly promoted officer, sir. My name is Anon. I just got a bit excited seeing you here, sir. Apologies."

"May I help you in any way?"

The man, barely appearing to be in his twenties seemed on his toes to try and accomplish any wish Lapitus might have.

"N...." Lapitus's first thought was to quickly dismiss the man.

But then suddenly stopped himself, like he had thought of something, as turning to the man, he asked, "Actually, I thought we talk a bit. Do you have the time?"

"Of course! Of course!" And the young officers seemed over the moon at the offer.

Even if he did have something to say, he would be foolish to ditch his boss's boss's boss and go to that.

'If I can leave a good impression with him, I will be golden.' This thought was basically plastered onto his face.

And although Lapitus could clearly see the ulterior motive, he did not seem to care, as after a bit of hesitation, Lapitus asked,

"You must have heard it too, right? Of Zanzan's victory against the king? They say an attack on the capital is imminent."

"As a Tibian, what are your thoughts on this? On our great country possibly being no more?"

Yes.

Lapitus was so desperate for advice that he turned to an almost random passerby.

But then again, perhaps it was not so foolish given he was asking for the opinion of the 'people'.

"Ah!" And for the young man, hearing his boss suddenly ask such a grave question made him involuntarily gasp.

For a moment he even seemed unable to understand what he was being asked, as he only stared blankly back.

"Well?"

Seeing the man in a stupor, Lapitus then again posed.

And this finally made the man respond, as he first frankly chuckled,

"Captain, how can I say anything about the actions of kings and lords? Doesn't land belong to the one with the greatest army?"

Anon revealed the prevailing thought of the time, before saying his own two cents, "But if captain wants to know how I personally think, well me and my family have actually been better off under the new pasha."

"Our houses have been rebuilt for free and the money given to us was more than we had in saving before."

"I think many people seem to think that too."

The answer was clear, concise, and radiated flashes of happiness.

"But.... what about your oath? To defend the crown?" However for Lapitus, this was the main point against all other reasons.

It had always been a sore point of his since the day he betrayed the city and produced a constant stream of pain.

"....hehehe" And towards this, after being initially surprised and then even a bit ashamed, Anon scratched his patchy cheeks and chuckled somewhat embarrassedly, "What we have done.... is done, We cannot change that."

"We knew what we were doing but still did it. The ancestors will never forgive us."

The man sounded sullen.

Before suddenly his voice turned high pitched and radiant, as he informed Lapitus with almost a fanatical gaze,

"That's why I decided to switch sides captain. No point in crying over split milk."

"I'm a believer of goddess Gaia now. She has forgiven my previous oaths and let me swear anew one with her!"

"The ancestors' spirits cannot bind me anymore!"

Chapter 842 New Found Faith

"You can do that?"

Hearing Anon's change in faith as a way to circumvent the oath, Lapitus could not help but blurt this out loudly in shock, producing an incredulous face that destroyed much of the imposing manner a man of his status ought to show before his subordinates.

Nod, *Nod*

But Anon paid no attention to such detail, instead only diligently nodding and informing,

"Yes. Captain, I swear. You can have your old oaths forgiven and also take new oaths if you change belief to the Goddess."

"After all, Thesalie is ruled by the goddess's chosen. The ancestor spirits have lost to Her and so they cannot object."

"Neither can they hurt those under Her protection, and those who serve the Pasha."

"Thus it is Her who I worship. And it is Her protection I seek."

Anon had a very pious radiance glow to his face as he placed his right arm across his chest.

While on the opposite side, hearing it, Lapitus was currently experiencing a fierce hurricane in his mind, one where everything he knew was being turned upside down, for the new revelation produced a road that seemed to have not existed before.

If it was true, he could indeed free himself of his previous burden, then.... What was he waiting for?

'I need to confirm this!' Thus Lapitus urgently thought this, as he hurriedly excused the new officer goodbye, and hired a nearby horse carriage to take him straight to the main temple.

Whilst as Anon watched Lapitus leave, the cheerful demeanor that had graced his face up until now suddenly faded, instead being replaced by a sharp, calculating glint.

He was among the newest batch of spies Camius had managed to recruit here in Thesalie and this was one of his very first missions.

Originally he had been tasked with only monitoring Lapitus, to see if he really sent the message.

But yesterday night, orders came down from the very top that if they found the target to be dithering, they were to try and nudge him toward the safer direction.

As for how that was up to them.

This was the real reason Anon had approached Lapitus.

However, that did not mean the man had lied for indeed the story he told Lapitus was true to the very last letter.

'Hope he makes the choice.'" Thus as Anon saw Lapitus disappear into the crowd, he genuinely wished so.

Lapitus reached the familiar large gates to the main temple soon, and paying the driver his due, he quickly shuffled inside.

Since it was still early morning, many of the priests were yet to awaken.

And even among those that did, Lapitus only recognized a very handful few, with most of them being unknowns, being from Zanzan as evidenced by their unique green robes patterned with red and blue roses as opposed to Thesalie's white ones, confirming their status as priests of Gaia.

This robe that been designed by Alexander with green as the base to represent the verdantness of nature and earth, which was the core identity of the goddess Gaia, the red roses represented the national flower of Adhania, while the blue roses were Alexander's house symbol.

Alexander had asked a small batch to move to Thesalie to preach, mostly consisting of the men whom Pasha Farzah had sent.

And as Lapitus went past these priests all busy with various tasks, he had to fight off the intense urge to grab them by the sleeves and inquire about all the burning questions that were smoldering inside his heart.

But he ultimately refrained, knowing the only ones to get up so early in the morning were the smallest fish in the pond, those who were tasked with doing all the menial tasks in the temple, like cleaning the halls, clearing the paved walkways of leaves, and ripping the weeds from the nearby gardens.

Thus Lapitus refrained, saving his breath as he beelined for the main hall, hoping to meet the head priest as soon as possible.

Entering the open premises, Lapitus found much of the interior of the great hall to be still the same old same old, with the only difference being that the huge ancestral bull statue was replaced by the

silhouette of a gigantic lady, towering above all as she stood off a huge circular pedestal, a large brazier of fire burning brightly underneath her feet

It was the first time Lapitus had seen this statue and initially, he was caught a bit surprised.

It was not just the size of the sculpture that appeared amazing to him, but also how quickly this huge new figure had been constructed.

'Is it made using that material blessed of the goddess? Cement?' Lapitus muttered, recalling some of the things we had heard about the stuff.

He knew it was using that substance that that sturdy outer wall in front of the city was built.

Allegedly, Lapitus heard that each batch of this magical white powder needed Alexander's personal 'essence' to make.

While others said this cement was the work of the devils, made using black magic with the crushed skulls of babies as one of the ingredients.

Beyond these absurd claims, there was also the weird rumor that it was made from volcanic ash.

Lapitus personally did not know which to believe.

It was unknown how long Lapitus had waited sitting patiently on the pews as the priests slowly woke up.

But eventually, with his status, he was able to get an audience with the head priest here, Theocles.

Yes, Alexander had made this archpriest come to Thesalie, to make him personally oversee the establishment of all the new temples and set up the initial command structure.

"Captain Lapitus, so nice to see you! What brings you under the gaze of the Goddess?" Given Lapitus's role in the capture of the city, Theocles had of course met the man at the many parties Alexander held for various reasons, hence the warm greeting.

It was also because of it that Lapitus got to meet someone as high up as him so quickly.

"Ah! Your Eminence, greetings." Towards the tall, immaculately robed man, Lapitus first gave a low bow, before revealing his worries in a very roundabout, ritualistic, way.

"I came here because I just had a vivid dream. And I wanted to hear your thoughts on the matter."

"Dream?" Towards this unorthodox request, Theocles first produced a surprised face.

But it was not because people did not come to him with such worries.

In fact the kinds of things Theocles had to reassure these superstitious bunch were not only endless but also truly bizarre.

In a way even, dream divination was perhaps one of the more 'normal' things people asked him to do.

But such things were usually not paid much heed to by the upper echelons of any power.

So it was the fact that a man of Lapitus's status was asking for the service that caught Theocles off guard.

But it was only for a moment.

As the professional priest quickly regained his pious face and gestured, "Of course. Please reveal it. And I will try my best to help you."

Getting the signal, Lapitus nodded curtly, before recounting the 'dream' he had thought up while he was waiting for Theocles.

"It started with a pitch black sky tinged with the flames of fire. I heard people screaming and saw them dying."

"While I myself was drowning in a blood pool underneath that very sky. There were innumerable hollow screaming faces around me and their arms were trying to drag me down to hell with them."

"They screamed into my ears with unfettered fury and kept saying that they were the ancestors' spirits, here to judge for breaking my oath." As Lapitus said this, he visibly shuddered, for although the dream was made up, he really did feel like that in his heart.

While Theocles only silently nodded and gestured him to continue,

"But just as the spirits were going to take me, suddenly a bright, brilliant verdant light pierced the dark sky, driving away the darkness!"

"And I heard! I heard a voice! It was feminine. It was angelic."

"She said to be that as long as I take a new oath to Her, I will be granted salvation. And that all my nightmares will disappear." Lapitus finished his narration.

As he then turned to ask Theocles, "What are your thoughts on this, Your Eminence?"

"....."

'Sounds like you made it all up.' This was Theocles's real thoughts, but of course, outwardly he made no rash comment.

Instead, he quickly focused on the dream that was recited to him, and being an experienced man in this line of work, instantly understood the main point Lapitus wanted to highlight here.

'Is he feeling guilty over his act and trying to see if there is an alternate method?' Theocles correctly hypothesized.

And with this theory in hand, he grinned the reply in a very joyous tone, "Captian Lapitus! Blessings of glad tidings upon you! The goddess has chosen!"

"She has seen your great acts of valor in helping Her son obtain victory in battle and personally sent revelations of your salvation."

"Rejoice!" Theocles raised his octaves, hoisting his hands up as he said so, before claiming in a gleeful voice,

"You are free. Free from any burden. Absolved of all sin like a newborn child. And you will remain so as long as believe in the Mother and loyally serve Her son- The Pasha."

And a while later, the faith of Gaia gained a new, zealously devout member

Chapter 843 Lady Felicia's Fate (Part-1)

Theocles of course did not buy Lapitus's claim about the dream he supposedly had.

It was too vivid, too descriptive, and too much filled with symbolism.

Lapitus also did not bother to make it believable either.

He only wanted to euphemistically confirm whether he could be absolved of his oath by swearing fealty to the new goddess.

He chose to do so in such a roundabout way because Lapitus felt a bit ashamed to open himself up too directly, for he felt it was like he was confessing to some sort of crime.

Thus it was fortunate for him that Theocles was skilled enough to accurately determine the key point behind Lapitus's request, and thus answered accordingly, reassuring him that he was no oathbreaker... if he only followed this new religion.

And Lapitus needed no more encouragement.

Ordinary people might be unable to sympathize with his thought process, but for a career, straight laced soldier such as him, an oath weighed heavier than gold.

And few could imagine the discomfort the man had felt every time he recalled how he had violated it.

If not for the fear of his family, he would have never done it.

But it was ultimately because of this that Lapitus was so indecisive about what to do with the letter.

On one hand, he thought of trying to offset his guilt by offering this vital intel to his king, regardless of whether the man would feel grateful or not.

But the potential consequence of this, particularly the wrath of Alexander on him and perhaps even more frightfully on his daughter gave him pause.

It was because of that he did not send a bird to the capital yesterday.

And it was because of that that he wanted to get on a boat and go to the capital himself, to simply run from his family as a way to escape the consequences.

But now that a professional, robed, pious looking priest was offering him a way out, how could Lapitus be foolish enough not to take it?

After all, he had already betrayed the ancestors, so what was the point in staying with them?

Hence on that very morning, Lapitus converted his faith under Theocles's guidance, and as he prostrated towards the feet of the goddess at the end of his initiation, very casually he threw some scraps of paper into the blazing inferno there, its true contents only known to him.

Lapitus would then return home feeling like a thousand tonnes had been lifted off of him and crash into his bed so heavily that he would not wake up till the next day, such was his mental exhaustion.

While coming back to Alexander's perspective, he would receive the full account of Lapitus's activities at around dusk on the very same day and upon learning of the full story be actually a bit surprised at the turn of events.

'Huh! Not only did he refuse, he even converted to my religion, Must have been a busy day!' Alexander mused to himself with a small chuckle.

Alexander was quite relieved to see this report for he liked the fact that he would not have to waste a useful pawn like Lapitus.

He was also weirdly glad to see Lapitus's struggle with his oath.

For this went to show that he was at his core a man of principle.

And if Lapitus had really sent the message, well then unfortunately, he would have met a 'little accident' inside an alleyway very soon.

But just as one's success meant another's failure, Alexander too now was left with the decision of what to do with Lady Felicia.

And to let her know that, after around supper, he decided to call the lady to his study.

And this time there was no misunderstanding over why she was being called.

An evidence of which was how Alexander found her to be visually very different than her regular self.

For in much contrast to the usually very stylish way the lady tended to present herself, Lady Felicia's current appearance could be said to be almost frightening, for she not only looked very haggard and gaunt, with sunken eyes and sullen cheeks, but her entire body also seemed to ooze a kind of melancholic fragrance like all the liveliness in her had been sucked away.

The lady wore a very simple, nondescript white dress and upon noticing Alexander, gave a very woody bow, before proceeding to sit in that very chair from two days ago without needing any more instructions, her steps appearing almost like a puppet.

To Alexander, the entire thing looked very bizarre, as if the lady he knew had been replaced by a weird, lifesized robot.

But then again, if their sides were reversed and Alexander was as power hungry as her, perhaps he would be the same.

Taking a seat across the table, Alexander then leaned on the luxurious chair, initially enjoying the sight of this devious woman squirming.

Until finally getting to the main point.

"I believe you have heard?" His voice was cool and collected.

".... Yes." While the reply was anything but.

It took a while for Lady Felicia to produce this word, and it sounded extremely coarse, like it a bone was stuck inside her throat.lights

Even now, the woman was in kind of a daze, for she could not believe Lapitus had not done it.

And when she had first learned of it the lady felt like her world was literally spinning, as she even felt very unwell.

Furthermore, much similar to Lapitus, she too had spent a sleepless night, and now that the only promise she had made to Alexander had come crumbling down, she felt like she was lost at sea, all alone and amidst a typhoon, with no end in sight.

And it was while swimming in that horrific whirlpool of absolute terror that she suddenly heard Alexander's cold voice, "So what do you have to say for yourself?"

"Nothing... I was wrong." This time the answer was instant but very monotone.

Like Lady Felicia had lost the will to fight.

This was because she could tell that Alexander was not really asking her to provide any excuse, but simply wishing to see her reaction.

To play with her.

However, if Alexander was thinking he was going to get a good show, then she would have to disappoint him.

As even when beaten and defeated, the proud woman was not going to let herself be treated like a jester.

Hence she did not put on an elaborate performance of crawling and begging Alexander.

That trick had already been used.

Instead, she was of the mind that if she was gonna go down, she was gonna do down with her neck held high, like a proud peacock.

While Alexander, seeing this and sensing a sort of martyrdom in Lady Felicia, half chuckled to himself,

'She seems to have some misunderstanding about what is about to happen.'

Then, without hanging the lady in waiting for long, Alexander straightened his back up and revealed,

"Well, you were not wrong necessarily. I can say with good authority that Lapitus did indeed think of sending the message."

"But seemed to have changed his mind midway."

"So I'm willing to give you the city.... for a price."

One should have seen how Lady Felicia's face changed the moment Alexander said this, like as if a lightbulb had turned itself on.

"My... Lord Pasha," The other party seemed so overwhelmed that fiercely gripping the handle of the chair, she began to stutter, almost having lost her voice.

And then Alexander even noticed literal tears starting to streak down her face.

Something which caused him to half lagoon, 'I have not been said what I the price will be.

But just the promise of the city seemed to be enough.

And it took a few minutes for Lady Felicia to finally bring her emotions under control, as at last her logical mind took over her emotional heart, and halted her from doing something like starting to jump in joy just yet.

Instead, it managed to at last give a proper response to Alexander's offers, by making Lady Felicia deeply bow her head and give this aureate praise,

"Thank you, my lord. Your insightfulness is truly a manifestation of your great eruditeeness. Verify you are a god's favored."

The words were so flowery that Alexander struggled to even understand some of them.

But he could at least tell they were good things about him, as he then continued.

"However.. the condition..." Alexander paused a bit to look at Lady Felicia's reaction, but in much contrast to the expected wariness, Alexander only saw alacrity.

It appeared that as long as Alexander was willing to give her rule of Thesalie, the woman was willing to endure it all.

So he pressed on, narrowing his eyes to coldly say, "If I were to ask,... which body part would you be willing to sacrifice for this position?"

"Anything!"

If Alexander was wishing to see Lady Felicia squirm, he was grossly disappointed, for the answer came almost instantly, like the presumed act was not even worth a consideration, and her face was even flushed with excitement.

'Hisss! I forgot just how ambitious you were.' Alexander could not help but slightly curse as reminded himself of this once again.

Chapter 844 Lady Felicia's Fate (Part-2)

Lady Felicia's instant reply really made it apparent how much the woman was willing to sacrifice for power.

It was a level that even made the self professed ambitious Alexander twitch his lips a bit in incredulation.

So he could not help but add with a taunt, "Oh? Then what about an arm?"

"Of course! I do not mind!"

The answer that came instantly did not have even a shred of fear, as Lady Felicia then put up her left arm to say with clear, limpid eyes,

"Losing my right hand will make it hard for me to write and do my work, Lord Pasha. But I can sacrifice my left," She zealously chimed, further adding,

"If I can live the procedure, I'm even willing to give up both of my legs, my lord!"

The raw determination on display here made Alexander even now astounded, as the way the lady said it made it seem like it was really of very little concern to her like she would be perhaps getting her hair cut or something.

And Alexander was quite sure she was not bluffing.

This made him momentarily stunned as he found the real punishment he himself had thought of to be quite inadequate.

"... You do not need to lose your hand. I do not want Lapitus to turn hostile because I mutilated his wife," Until finally, massaging his globular a bit, Alexander forced this with an exasperated tone.

Snap.

And then instantly gave a signal with his finger causing a few nurses to appear from the other room.

"But you will lose a finger." He informed.

This, unsurprisingly, did not cause any commotion, as Lady Felicia appeared very calm, and even very expectant to this news, quickly bowing her head in deference, as she then voluntarily held out her left arm.

So Alexander only gave a gesture with his head for the nurses to begin.

Thus, like practice, one very burly nurse took out a large cleaver and positing it over the cut finger, she separated the lady's left ring finger at the second bone in one single strike.

Thud!

While Lady Felicia only gritted her teeth and groaned through her nose, but did not let out an octave of scream, for her mind was filled with gleeful lights.

And then ignoring her gushing finger while staining the heavy oak table a dark red, she turned to face Alexander and solemnly promised, "I am eternally thankful for your leniency my lord. I swear I will remember this lesson. I will never lie to you, by the gods!"

"....." Seeing her so easily brush off the pain, Alexander by now really had little more to say regarding her willpower and could only give an acknowledging nod.

Adding saying in a deep voice, "I will hold you on to that Felicia. You have lied to the gods once. There will be no salvation for you if there is to be a 'twice'.

"Serve me well and I will even make you a noble. With separate lands and titles from your husband."

"But lie to me ever, next it will not be your arm that I cut. But straight your throat."

Lady Felicia only nodded her head repeatedly to this, promising Alexander that she had understood, as she then suddenly felt a profound sense of weakness grip her.

It was not due to blood loss from the bleeding finger, but more so the fact that having finally obtained what she wanted, relief washed over her.

And as all her worries and alertness that had caffeinated left her, it was replaced by the enormous tiredness she had been bottling up.

Then willingly resigning herself to it, Lady Felicia fainted right as where she was sitting, slumping her back against the chair and drifting off, to Alexander's slight panic.

"Felicia! The man even lightly screamed as he feared the worst, while one of the nurses quickly sought to take her pulse.

"She's just asleep my lord." And it was this reassurance that finally calmed the man down

The next morning Lady Felicia would wake herself to find she was in Alexander's room, though the man did not appear to be in sight.

Instead, accompanying her was a stinging sensation on her left hand, instantly making her recall the events that had transpired the night prior.

And as the memories came flooding in, instinctively Lady Felicia pulled her hand out of the light blanket and was momentarily amazed by the sight of her hand.

For whereas she was expecting her ring finger to be only a stump, now the bandage finger was actually whole, its tall and slender shape visible even through the thick white roll.

And when she tried to move it, it brought her a mind numbingly stinging pain.

It was a terrible sensation, but that only brought her great joy, for it clearly meant her finger had been stitched together.lights

"Hehehe. He really has a soft heart." The revelation then made the injured woman giggle as such, for she felt she had been given a brief insight into Alexander's mind,

Then lifting her left hand towards the ceiling, her eyes sparkled in joy at having obtained as all she had wanted without losing anything.

Alexander really had a soft spot for the fairer sex and given how endearing he found Fabiyana, he found it hard to hurt her mother.

Besides, given the amount of 'stuff' the lady was willing to lose, he reasoned that to her, losing or not losing a finger would really not matter.

But Lady Felicia was unaware of these thoughts, and for the moment, she did not seem to care, as having survived the ordeal, relief, and excitement filled every pore of her body, and then, as suddenly as she had woken up, she fell back to sleep again, wishing to swim in this joyful experience for much longer.

Lady Felicia would only wake up only around noon and then as she was attending the lunch with the others,

"Mommy! What happened to your hand?"

As expected Fabiyana cried out in alarm upon seeing the large, prominent bandage, her big, dolly eyes almost tearing up at the mere sight of it.

But the mature lady was quickly able to alleviate her daughter's fears by simply claiming it was a small cut.

However, in much contrast to this easy target, Lapitus would of course not be so easy to hoodwink.

So when she was asked the same question that night, Lady Felicia revealed with slightly clenched teeth,

"Those papers were a trap! The Pasha wanted to test us using it. He let me steal those."

It was a narrative that instantly made Lapitus shiver upon hearing it, while Lady Felicia continued,

"And he let me give them to you. And surely he had his eyes on you too! To see if you were really loyal to him."

"Fortunately you passed. Otherwise..." the trailing voice could easily let Lapitus finish the thought as there really was one end for traitors.

"You... you mean the Pasha knew everything all along? Everything?" Lapitus appeared astounded at this revelation, as Alexander's scheme made the straight laced man shiver and his incredulation peaked at Lady Felicia's nod of confirmation.

"He did not punish you because you did not send the message and converted. Or else I would be a widow" The fair lady slightly joked, before showing her bandaged finger "But this is my punishment for stealing. Fortunately, I was only struck by a dull knife, so the finger severed," Lady Felicia embellished the truth.

But even this reduced wound made Lapitus's heart bleed upon seeing his wife's injured digit, and a low flame of dissatisfaction and anger ignited itself in his mind.

How could he serve a lord that had hurt his beloved?

How was he any better than Petrino?

'Did I switch chains from one cruel master to another?' Thus Lapitus momentarily appeared a bit disillusioned.

And subtly sensing this. Lady Felicia quickly and pointedly asked with a bit of alarm in her voice, "You are not thinking of revenge, are you? You idiot!"

"....." Lapitus gave no answer to the shout, neither a yes or no, which was pretty indicative that he was indeed thinking about it.

This then prompted Lady Felicia to point at the man and almost scream,

"Listen Lapitus! We finally got the city! After so long. After so many sacrifices! We finally got it. I have the papers making us governors of the city!"

"Do not screw it up for me! Do not try to be a hero and take any revenge. Not even the tiniest bit."

"As a matter of fact, remove even the tiniest bit of such a thought from your head." The mature lady's voice was forceful and didactic, grandly declaring,

"Whatever the Pasha did, we deserved. I do not hold the slightest bitterness."

Following this the lady then fiercely grabbed Lapitus by the arms to urge,

"Swear to me Lapitus! Swear to me by the gods that you will not do anything stupid."

"The Pasha will soon be leaving for the capital, and we will become like kings and queens inside this city."

"To get all that for only a small cut on my finger is more than worth it! It is a thousand times worth it."

"Do not do anything to jeopardize that."

Chapter 845 Lord Theony's Roll Of The Dice (Part-1)

"I forbid you to do anything that would jeopardize our rule of the city, Lapitus!"

Lady Felicia was really afraid that bolstered by his success with Petrino, the man would try and pull a similar stunt with Alexander.

But Alexander was no Petrino and seeing Lapitus go quiet, Lady Felicia urged him so, hissing, "Say it! Say you won't do anything. "

Ultimately, it took Lady Felicia a while to make Lapitus abandon any notions of even petty revenge against Alexander.

With Lady Felicia's issue decided, Alexander then at last turned his attention to much greater matters, such as leaving for the enemy's capital that was supposedly set to fall imminently.

So taking most of the men and many of the nobles with him, he rode along the River Diannu towards his destination, at last leaving Lady Felicia and Lapitus in charge of Thesalie with a small garrison.

While his wives, children, and Fabiyana was made to at last return to Zanzan.

They had spent six months here and really could not afford to say any longer.

Though Cambyses did grumble, "I really do not want to return to that hut. Why can't we live here?"

And she was indeed right that compared to Lord Ponticus's sprawling mansion with not just one but two swimming pools, Alexander's large bungalow was indeed like a hut.

Being a woman who had come to love the nicer things in life, Cambyses hence was slightly reluctant to return.

But this was also really just her rambling.

He knew Alexander really could not switch his 'capital' from Zanzan to Thesalie just yet.

Thus with a strong entourage of about 500 men, the women and children finally returned to their home.

While Alexander was on his way to Parthenigh, unbeknownst to him, Lord Theony decided to do something on his own.

Something that Alexander did not quite know how to feel about.

"Hahaha, I was right, I was right." On the very afternoon, Menes had defeated Perseus, this sudden loud, boisterous laughter of Lord Theony could be heard reverberating around his luxuriously furnished study, as he read the rolled paper presented to him by a servant.

It came from a messenger bird sent by his scouts whom he had sent to covertly trail Perseus and up until even last day, the information he had gotten made him quite concerned.

His men very confidently reported that Perseus had 40,000 men with him, while Alexander would at best be able to bring 30,000.

A mismatch that seemed very hard to overcome.

Due to the 'leave' Lord Theony was given from court, he had been unable to keep up to date with the latest information as quickly as he would have liked, and thus the addition of the 20,000 troops caught him completely off guard.

'I did not think Thesos would send so many. At best I thought it would be 5,000. How is it 20,000?' Lord Theony had incredulously thought when he first got the message, muttering to himself, 'Weren't Cantagena and Exolas tearing each other apart?'

He was unaware of Manuk's surprise visit and his gifts, for the spies he had in court and with Perseus were not able to deliver these messages to him thus mistook the entire boon as from Thesos.

But as Lord Theony read the latest report, all such considerations were naturally turned mute.

Perseus had been defeated and was confirmed to be seen running.

He had no army and little way to defend himself.

Thus Lord Theony saw a clear chance, the chance to take the capital over before Alexander's army could capture it and then hand it over to him on a silver platter.

For a reward of course.

It was with that thought that Lord Theony quickly activated the various sleeping pieces he had covertly placed throughout the capital, as his eyes glowed with greed and ambition.

"So.... it has come to this?"

Lord Theony's son Theony was one of those secret pieces.

In fact, he could even be said to be one of the most important pieces as placed inside the very heart of the palace, he had the greatest access of them all and hence was trusted with leading the most macabre of acts by his father..

It was a supposed act that made the young man's heart tear itself to even think about committing, but then again, the fear of disappointing his father and earning his ire was equally terrifying.

So when he learned that a messenger bird had come for him from his father, and knowing of the king's defeat the day prior, Theony even thought of pretending to ignore it, so that he did not have to carry out the treasonous instructions he could easily guess written in there.lights

But he knew deep down that that was not really possible.

Theony would have to make a brutal choice- stand by his family or by his oath and occasional lover.

And it was this choice that the young man tried to grapple with day and night over the next few days as Lord Theony readied his pieces.

Until finally the fateful day came!

"Open the gates! We are here to reinforce His Majesty!" On one clear afternoon, around 4,000 men, waving Lord Theony's house standard were seen standing in front of the main gates of Parthenigh, being led by the lord himself.

These people were the very last dregs of manpower Lord Theony could muster and taking advantage of Perseus's vulnerability had come here disguised as friendly forces, wishing to infiltrate the sturdy walls like a trojan horse.

"Open the gates! Open the gates! It's Lord Theony! He has come to aid us!"

And this naturally worked, given the man's timely arrival with 'coal in the winter' in the eyes of many of these demoralized garrisoned men.

Many had learned of their brave king's defeat and fear and uncertainty had gripped every single man, woman, and children of the city.

Hence, Lord Theony's forces were a sight for sore eyes, for every single additional man was one more bulwark against the imminent onslaught from the enemy that was surely about to come any day now.

And since Lord Theony had never shown any sign of betrayal up until now, nobody suspected even the slightest whiff of conspiracy as almost an entire legion worth of men were let into the city no question asked.

In fact, they were even received with a royal reception, with Lord Theony being personally received by the crown Prince Philips, who immediately congratulated him for this selfless help by hugging the man and grinning,

"Lord Theony, I really cannot express how grateful we are for you coming to our aid even amidst all the danger."

"I very well appreciate the peril that you must have had to put your own territory in to come here with so many men."

"It must have been not easy."

"Rest assured. Hand on my heart, once we win this war your bravery will not go unrewarded."

Philips sounded ecstatic at Lord Theony's arrival.

To this the well groomed man outwardly chuckled in an amicable tone, "Haha, what are retainers for if not this, Your Highness?"

"When I learned of His Majesty had..... *sigh*," Lord Theony put on a facade of bitter regret, as if unable to pronounce the word 'lost' as he only shook his head,

"I lamented day and night that I could not go to battle with His Majesty. So this is the least I can do. We are after all Tibians! Never surrender!"

The man pumped his armored fist in the air zealously as he shouted, his cheeks ruddy and healthy.

While inwardly, in a complete night and day contrast to his outer self, inwardly, Lord Theony was only sneering menacingly,

'Heh, brat! Win? You dare say you will reward me after you 'win'? You think that you can still win! Are you delusional? Or are you trying to keep up morale by loudly claiming this?'

Unnoticed by anyone, Lord Theony's dark eyes narrowed at this thought, saying in his heart,

'If it was not that I wanted to kill all of you and hand the city over, you think I would have come to his doomed city? Do you think my head has been screwed over?'

'Once the gates are breached, who knows what the enemy men will do? Nobles, commoners, slaves, all will die.'

'I certainly did not come here to defend the city with my life!'

But of course, all such thoughts remained hidden from Philips, who quickly even set up a feast that very night to celebrate Lord Theony's arrival and as a way to lift the fighting spirits of people.

In the midst of that merriment, the shrewd prince even apologized for Lord Theony's dishonorable discharge from court, saying with a bit of reddened ear,

"Lord Theony, I believe the people have a saying- A friend in need is a friend indeed."

"I believe this can apply to us too. A retainer's true face is only revealed when his lord is in trouble."

"I know that recently royal father has not been fair to you. But hear me swear, with as the ancestor's as my witness, once I ascend, I will make Theony my right hand man."

"And your family will be compensated with all the lands of the traitors!"

With Lord Theony's four thousand (4,000) strong force being the biggest contingent currently inside the city, the crown prince thought it was imperative to gain the man's unquestioned loyalty and remove any grievance the man might harbor.

Chapter 846 Lord Theony's Roll Of The Dice (Part-2)

Crown Prince Philips's great political insight was readily on display when he sought to soothe Lord Theony over the feast so graciously.

Given the current busy timing, most men would not think to do so, especially when the 4,000 men were already in the city.

They would thus assume the other side had already forgotten the little bickering and there was no need to lower himself.

But not Philips, who sought to quickly reassure Lord Theony with both gratitude and promise of heavy rewards.

It was only a pity that this was unfortunately already too little too late.

Lord Theony had already set the ball rolling by sharing all that valuable intelligence with Alexander and there was no way to undo that, to simply forgive and forget that.

So even if he were to have a change of heart, it would not matter, for there really was no turning back.

Besides, even if Lord Theony fought tooth and nail, they really had very few chances at victory.

So currently, his choices really were either to betray Perseus and live or fight and almost certainly die.

But whatever Lord Theony was truly planning to do, he kept it strictly to himself, only replying to Philips's apology with a breezy wave of his pudgy hand, "Haha, oh Your Highness, I have already forgotten about that! Hahaha, please there is no need to even mention that."

An attitude that Philips found very reassuring, as he then heard the other party quickly ask in a hushed tone, "Where is His Majesty? Will he be returning to the capital soon?"

This was a critical bit of information that Lord Theony needed to know before committing to the act he was planning, for he did not want Perseus to suddenly appear before the gates just as he was trying to capture it.

He had tried to find news about the king's whereabouts on his own, but with the scattering of the army, his own scouts had lost sight of Perseus and his small group of bodyguards.

"... I heard royal father is still trying to gather the scattered army a bit west of us,"

Regarding this query, Philips saw no reason to deny this information to the high ranking noble, for they were undoubtedly on the same team according to him.

Thus Philips even frankly revealed new information in a sort of low hushed tone, "According to him, our losses in the fight were really not that great."

"Although we lost, it seems that the enemy was unable to give chase due to the rough terrain."

"So we only lost around 3,000 men. Meaning we still outnumber the enemy!"

"That's why royal father has not returned to the city. He believes he can get all the scattered men to rejoin the army instead of running away if he is out personally."

"And once he is ready, he plans to flank attack the enemy from behind as they assault the walls, crushing them like a hammer against an anvil!"

Philips was here unwittingly revealing some bombastic news that made Lord Theony's heart thump.

This might sound very good for Tobias, for it was terrible news for him.

Of course, everything Philips was saying here had to be taken with a great deal of salt, as the man could be simply lying about their losses to keep morale high, or be misinformed himself, or simply be overestimating the capabilities of their army.

But still, whatever that might be, the simple possibility of such a thing happening made Lord Theony very alarmed.

He wanted to snuff that idea right in its crib.

"Does His Majesty wish for us to hold the walls and draw the enemy in while he prepares?" Lord Theony then guessed the strategy that might be used.

"Yes! As expected of you, my lord!" And Philips instantly nodded with a light smile, unnoticing how Lord Theony's face went slightly dark at this.

The crown prince only presumed that the lord was a bit daunted by the scale of the challenge.

"Where is Mithriditus? How come I have not seen him?" While Lord Theony then suddenly changed the topic, asking for the location of his rival, for he was the man most likely able to stop him.

"Oh! Lord Mithriditus has currently gone to meet with royal father. To discuss how to proceed given our shortcomings. He should be back within three to four days."

By saying, Philips had unconsciously revealed that the capital was currently hollow, with really only him as a recognizable figure of authority here.

Along with Lord Theony of course.

Thus, if he were to disappear...the fate of the city.... Lord Theony flashed with a very cold, dark glint.lights

Philips's answer about Mithriditus's expected time also revealed that Perseus was likely around three to four days' march west of here or around 100 km.

So a quick peruse of the map that Lord Theony had in his mind instantly revealed the place where Perseus most likely staying, for in that direction within that radius, there really was only one city that was large enough to house Perseus and his army of tens of thousands of men.

'I must send scouts now!'

Obtaining all this valuable intel, Lord Theony was determined not to let his 'ally' down once again as he had done with Perseus and the troop numbers.

So the moment the feast ended, Lord Theony organized a group of his very best riders to ride out that very night, tasked with informing the approaching Zanzan army of all of this, and thus foiling any chance of Perseus making a comeback.

These riders would find Menes quite easily, for an army of nearly 30,000 men on the march was really hard to miss.

As these turncoat riders approached the 'enemy', in order to make sure they would not be shot to bits by the forward vanguards, they carried white flags with them, shouting in broken Azhak,

"Don't shoot! We are not enemies."

They would then be taken to custody and once they were vetted and the information they carried delivered, it would very quickly climb up the grapevine to end up in Menes's hand, who would show no doubt to its authenticity given who was the sender.

But then this would produce another dilemma for the marching general.

Which was- whether to keep marching for the capital or to take a detour and finish the last surviving tail of the snake.

Menes was unable to contact Alexander right at the moment via messenger bird because the latter had just left Thesalie and was currently on a boat toward the capital.

Thus, being left to decide on his own, quickly a fierce discussion, or more like an argument broke out among his officers regarding what to do with this information.

"We should attack the king! Catch him off guard before he can mount any attack. The capital is not going anywhere. As soon as the king dies, Tibias dies."

This was the main point of argument for one faction, who saw defeating the king as equal to the country, reasoning that once Perseus was defeated or better yet killed, all resistance would naturally crumble, and marching into the capital would only be a formality.

But in counter to that, the opposing party had some strong rebuttals too, as they claimed,

"The king has his eldest in the capital. So killing the man will simply transfer the power to the other. Tibias's will not break by simply putting Perseus's head on a spike."

"And that is assuming we can put his head on a spike."

"Remember! We do not know exactly where Perseus is! Even the scouts say they have not verified the information with their own eyes. It was all dedication and hearsay."

"What if we simply end up going on a wild goose chase? Who can say for sure that will not happen?"

"And even if this information is right, who says the king will give us a fight just because we showed up."

"He could simply retreat further back and bait us into giving a long chase through god knows what terrain."

"If that were to happen, not only would we have wasted a golden opportunity to take the enemy's empty capital, but would also have nothing to show for it."

"Do you General Menes wish to take that risk? What will the Pasha say if you fail?"

Like this, the latter side made much better points than the former, and with that last cheeky question where they casually brought up Alexander, finally convinced Menes to stick to the original plan.

Placing his large, heavy palms on the wooden table thus he declared in a deep, commanding voice,

"I have decided!"

"The enemy king can scuttle like a rat all around the country as he pleases. Once we take his capital, none of that will matter."

"I will send a small scout detachment to keep an eye on him, while the main force concentrates on the capital."

"That was the order from the Pasha and that is what we will do."

"If any of you have any problems with that, you can bring them up with Lord Alexander when he gets here."

For Menes, the risk of going after Perseus as opposed to simply taking the undefended capital was too great for too few a reward.

And this would actually be the correct decision, as upon reaching the walls of the capital-Parthenigh, Menes would find the gates instantly opened to welcome them, with Lord Theony's son being there to personally escort them in.

Chapter 847 Theony's Love (Part-1)

When Menes decided to leave Perseus alone and instead target the capital, some of the officers, particularly led by the bellicose Grahtos felt it was a mistake.

But outnumbered at the negotiations table and unable to provide a decisive argument, they at last chose to obey the general's decision.

Which was the correct decision as when the army finally got to the outskirts of the city, it soon received a jovial messenger sent by Lord Theony, who then invited them inside the city, with the urging that they do not sack it.

This Menes had no problem agreeing to, as he was more than happy to make this concession in return for being able to entirely bypass the city's sturdy 6 meter wall.

That fortification might not have been as formidable as Thesalie's but it was still significant and Menes preferred to avoid bashing his head against it.

Thsu courtesy of Lord Theony, the army was allowed to waltz into the capital without any resistance

But then the question arose- 'How Lord Theony was able to take control of the city and decide to let Menes in so openly?'

And to know that one had to travel to two days after Lord Theony had arrived in Parthenigh.

"My lord, we have stationed the men along all the points you asked. The keeps housing the gate's mechanisms, the city guard's quarters, the various local gangs, as well as the quarters of the few nobles still living in here, we have eyes on all these places."

"The men only need your command to start!"

Around noon of that fateful day, Lord Theony's right hand man and the field commander of his forces, Jupiter came with this report, delivering so in a deep, martinet voice.

"Good." And Lord Theony, who was gazing at the mighty Diannu through the window in his third story room solemnly nodded in acknowledgment.

Before turning to ask the battle hardened man, "And the guards of the palace? What about them? Do we also have eyes on them?"

"That... no my lord... I'm afraid," To this inquiry, the commander replied with a slight hesitation to his answer, reasoning,

"His Majesty left a few hundred royal guards protecting the place. It is very secure."

"There is no way we can place our men between them like we did in the other places with the excuse of bolstering manpower."

"So no infiltrating the various keeps and taking the palace down from the inside."

"And there is also little hope of convincing them to stand down either."

"So if we are going to do this, we are going to have to fight through them. It will be bloody my lord." Along with the detailed assessment, the fully garbed military commander made this grim prediction.

"..."

Lord Theony only pursed his lips with a slightly frustrated expression but initially said nothing.

It was an answer that Lord Theony had already expected, but still, if possible, the man would have preferred to do it with as little bloodshed as possible.

Those palace guards were good men.

However, since that was not possible, well,

"Then we will have to spill blood, it seems. " Lord Theony thus steely declared, as turning to face his man, he ordered,

"Jupiter! The king is already close. So we will do it tonight!"

"You will command the forces in the city and put down any resistance. Take control of the gates and capture or if they resist, kill the nobles and officers."

"I will personally lead the attack on the palace." Lord Theony waved his sturdy fist as he declared.

And hearing this order Jupiter accepted instantly with a military salute, although he would have much preferred if his lord did not have to personally lead such a dangerous frontal act, and rather delegate that to one of his subordinates.

But he knew there was really no other way.

As, in order to keep the plan as secret as possible, Lord Theony did not even tell the officers of his army about this planned coup, much less the ordinary soldiers, fearing a leak and thus alerting the other side.

Instead, he kept the entire thing entirely confined to only him, his son, and the head commander of his forces.

Which also meant that as far as the men in his contingent were concerned, they were really here to defend the capital.

And it would take a commander of the very highest echelon to convince them otherwise.

Someone like Jupiter and Lord Theony.

Thus they needed to be on the front lines, heading the attack.lights

And with that division of labor decided, the sun quickly set on a promised sanguinary night.

Dinner was finished quite quickly, and soon afterward, both Lord Theony and Jupiter arrived at their respective stations, preparing the men for the act.

As for the last person who was aware of Lord Theony's plan, his son Theony- well he also had a very crucial job to do, even arguably the most vital.

For he was tasked with killing the crown prince Philips!

The reason for this was of course plain and simple.

If Philips were to be gone, the biggest obstacle on Lord Theony's side would be removed.

And then with no one else to rally around, all the neutral soldiers and remaining low ranking nobles would be rendered incapable of making a decision, thus letting Lord Theony easily step up to fill that power vacuum, and grasp Parthenigh in the palm of his hand in one fell swoop.

As for how Theony was to go about that macabre act, well, Lord Theony left the choice largely up to his son, though he did provide him with a vial of poison, a clear indication of his preferred way.

And currently, Theony was exactly in the process of deciding that, as he restlessly paced back and forth in the crown prince's bedroom, the poison vial literally in his hand.

As for how he got in that bedroom, well, it was easy, the man had full time access to the place courtesy of being Philips's lover.

And it was also this one fact that made the deed so hard for Theony, as he felt like his body was being literally torn between his duty to his family and his love for Philips.

He had been trying to reconcile these feelings for days now, but till now, Theony was ultimately unable to make a decisive decision.

He did not want to face his father's wrathful face, but neither did he want to see his lover's dead corpse.

Creak

When suddenly, while the man was amidst this intense rumination, the door to the room was slowly creaked open and a smartly dressed Philips stepped in.

"RH! What's wrong?" And as soon as Philips laid his eyes on him he could tell the other side was in a great deal of pressure, for Theony flashed a very panicked face the moment he saw the crown.

And then, suddenly seeing Philips's face, it was like something suddenly came over Theony, as his heart swelled and the decision that had haunted him for so long was instantly made for him, for he instinctively burst,

"Philips! You have to run! My father wants to kill you! Quick! The men are coming!"

Even Theony himself did not know why he said what he said, but he did not regret it.

For the moment he said it, he instantly felt a surge of relief wash over him.

While the other side, Philips was naturally totally confused, as with an agape mouth he blurted., "Wha... what?"

Even to the usually fast man, this sounded too incredulous.

"It's true! Look I was given this vial of poison to kill you!" So to quickly convince the man, Theony produced a small, bronze tube as evidence, before opening the cork and letting Philips get a small whiff.

And as that pungent smell hit Philips, it was like that hit woke him up from his slumber of doubt and confusion, for he recognized this smell.

It belonged to a type of deadly poison that was extremely lethal in even small doses, and highly dissolvable in drinks with almost a noticeable taste.

"Wha... why?" And then following this realization, the next question was naturally why, why Lord Theony would be doing this, as turning to Theony, Philips then asked with a bitter, almost wounded face,

"Is it just because of what happened at the court? Is Lord Theony going to betray us over only that? How could he abandon the ancestors just because of that petty nothing?"

"I even promised to compensate him! Was it not enough?"

To Philips- what happened regarding Lord Theony at the court was simply part and parcel of the game played in the royal court, and assumed the other side would be mature enough to easily understand it.

To him it seemed too insignificant a thing.

While standing opposite to him, Theony very much had the urge to tell him that what seemed like a trifling thing to the royal family was actually very significant to most other families, even to one as powerful as them.

But instead of poking Philips at that, Theony very succinctly summed up his father's reason

"His Majesty has lost three consecutive battles. Father believes he has lost the favor of the ancestors."

Chapter 848 Theony's Love (Part-2)

Theony's naked hard truth of the matter struck Philips hard.

In fact, it might have hurt harder than if Lord Theony was just a power hungry traitor.

Were that to be the case, the Crown Prince could have somewhat soothed his heart.

But Theony's reasoning laid bare to the crown prince the absolute disaster the royal family was currently facing.

They had lost three huge back to back battles- first- the chance to take Zanzan, second and their most grievous wound- losing the fortress of fortress, Thesalie and the third and the latest, the defense of their capital.

Each of these defeats not only caused the loss of the crown's prestige and territory, but it also meant the death of a huge number of loyal nobles and competent officers, shrinking the royal family's pillar of support even more.

The wars also cost the country an immense amount of manpower as all able bodied men were diverted to the army, turning the countryside almost barren with few people left to work the fields.

And with no one to produce stuff, naturally, taxation fell, making the treasury also dry up.

It really was the perfect storm.

For given their vulnerability, it was only natural that rivals to the royal family would pop up.

And although it was not like Philips had never thought about this possibility, but still, thinking something might happen and something really happening before one's true eye were two very different things.

"Let me go talk to Lord Theony. I know I can still convince him." Faced with this monumental betrayal, Philips hence decided to try and negotiate, as he attempted to exit the room.

His very initial thoughts were to try and muster the royal guards and resist Lord Theony forcefully but quickly found the idea impossible.

The other side outnumbered them almost by ten times so the most likely outcome of that fight would be to be crushed like a bug.

And even if they would use the palace's choke points to hold off, well then for how long?

Lord Theony would surely be able to put the entire place under siege and starve them out.

It would also be almost impossible for Philips to ask for reinforcements, as there were no messenger birds in the aviary trained to go to the place where his father was currently staying.

And even if somehow a rider could get there, well then the king would still have to get here, the entirety of which would take almost two weeks.

And what would the king find upon his arrival?

Surely not a grand reception with the red carpet rolled out where he would be able to simply waltz into the city.

Instead, Lord Theony would surely defend the walls, forcing Perseus to smash through them.

And while this would be happening, Menes's army would still be marching towards them.

If they were lucky, the Zanzan army might even be able to catch Perseus out of the walled city, squeezed between them and the walls.

That would truly be disastrous.

So Philips wisely decided that talks, not swords, were the way to go.

"No. Don't bother." But just as he was about to go find Lord Theony, he was suddenly grabbed strongly by the arm by Theony, who cried,

"My father's mind is already made up. There is no turning back for him."

"He was already thoroughly disappointed at the royal family for all the failures. But then, once he learned that his His Majesty had taken help from Zanzan again, it completely shattered him." "You know how much he was against that deal in the first place. And he was right in that."

"Adhania did backstab us. Zanzan is not in our hands. As a matter of fact, it is trying to destroy us even as we speak."

But then His Majesty has done the exact same thing."

"So my father believes there is no point in following the king anymore."

"If you go before him, you will be just delivering yourself to him like a nice present. He will kill you instantly. Please don't waste all my efforts!" The voice pleaded with almost sobbed cries.

And Philips's body slightly shivered at this reveal.

It was not like the man could not see the reason behind Lord Theony's actions.

He could very well see them.

And perhaps it was because of exactly that that the crown prince was beginning to see how deep the rabbit hole went.

The future of his family seemed to be filled with only darkness.

"Then... what do you want me to do?"

Thus faced with this desperate situation, Philips turned to his partner with clenched fists.

"Run away!" Came the instant answer, as Theony then spoke quickly,

"Change into my clothes. We both have similar builds. The guards will not be able to see us apart from afar."

"Keep to the shadows of the palace and do not let anyone see you."

"Make your way to the place we usually meet. You will find a horse ready, hidden among the bushes."

"Take it! It has supplies to last you three days. Then go meet up with His Majesty. Stop my father's madness!"lights

The elaborate preparation Theony reveal so succinctly very clearly revealed that he knew who he would choose over, his father or Philips, even before he consciously made the choice.

And hearing this, Philips was at first a bit taken aback..

"Why... why are you doing this? Betraying your family? Do you think your father is wrong?" He could not help but ask.

Because for a logical point, Lord Theony really was not the villain of the story.

He was only doing what was best for him.

'Because I love you!' To Philips's question, Theony wanted to shout out this simple reason.

But for reasons even he did not know, he did not.

Just as those words rose up from his throat to his tongue, Theony felt a bitter taste, he even felt dirty.

He felt that he had no right to love this man after what his family was trying to do to him.

So Theony instead answered.

"Because you also saved me. Back in Zanzan, when I was captured,I know that it was you who went behind His Majesty's back and convinced Lord Mithriditus to do the prisoner exchange. Without that, I might be already dead."

"So take it as me returning the favor."

It seemed both men were willing to defy their fathers for each other.

But this was really not the main reason Theony was doing this.

He would have most likely betrayed his father for Philips even without that.

Because he loved him.

Philips, hearing the answer, did feel a bit down.

He wished the reason had been more primal.

"Wait! Then... what about you? If your father is really as determined as you say... will you be alright?"

But then as he thought about Theony's plan, he quickly found a missing element, as he then urged his lover with moist eyes. "Come with me!"

Although the crown prince was given a clear way out, it was very hard for him to take it, for he would have to leave so many things behind.

"Don't worry about me." But Theony brushed aside these concerns with a strong tap on the crown prince's shoulder, putting on a very confident, reassuring smile,

"I'm still my father's son. His heir! He will not harm me."

"And besides, if I were to also go, who will protect your sons and daughters? Someone has to talk sense to my father!" He pointed out, before once again repeating,

"Don't worry about me! Go!"

Then the man started to quickly strip given the time crunch.

But although Theony sounded very nonchalant about committing this folly outwardly, internally, he was not so calm.

For he was not letting just any no name nobody escape, he was letting the crown prince slip through his fingers.

One who could not only alert the king to the happenings in the capital, but also be able to rally the people around him.

So even if Theony was not skinned for this huge blunder, or more perhaps like betrayal, at the very minimum he would be surely chewed out, and chewed out badly.

And given how long they had together, of course Philips could tell Theony was heavily dressing up the situation.

But ultimately he did not insist.

Because he knew that it would be too hard for two grown men to escape on a single lone horse.

And if Theony was to be caught escaping with him, Lord Theony's anger over his son would surely be many, many times greater.

So to honor the sacrifice Theony was making for him, Philips quickly followed his partner's suit, andilently the two men finished swapping clothes with one another.

"Promise me you will live. Do not die!"

And then sharing a brief intimate moment with this promise, the two men parted ways with this small sentence.

Dressed as Theony, Philips would indeed be able to make it to the secret rendezvous point without any problem, for Lord Theony was still unaware of his son's betrayal.

There the crown prince would find a large, snow-white mare waiting for him, all saddled up.

And getting up on it, the crown prince would be away!

Chapter 849 Theony And Lord Theony

"Men! The time to act is now. Traitors have infiltrated the palace and taken the Crown Prince hostage! We must rescue him!"

Standing on a small raised platform, this was the reason Lord Theony gave the gathered officers, galvanizing them for the attack.

After a bit of discussion with Jupiter, this was the reason they chose to give to the men.

And when Lord Theony first said this, it naturally produced a lot of shocked looks.

'What! When did this happen? Who are these traitors' Many of the men found themselves asking.

But given they were Lord Theony's personal troops, none of them dared to raise any doubts and simply nodded in agreement.

Thus satisfied with this deference, the lord then swung his broad arms to order, "Go! Breach the palace! Capture the traitors and kill anyone who resists! The Crown Prince is waiting for us!"

"Hurraahhh!" Came the instant loud cheer.

The armored men then soon began to flood out of their barracks and started to make their way towards the palace.

And as the tidal wave of men filtered through the streets and started to converge on the palace gates, fully armored and weapons drawn, it was a sight that initially made many of the palace guards feel incredulous.

"What is that!" Some were so astounded by it that they had a hard time even conceiving this was actually happening.

"Get the Prince! It's a coup!" While the quicker ones knew exactly what was happening, and shouted this.

Finally their worst nightmare had come true.

With Lord Theony openly making a move against the palace, the palace guards instantly mobilized, and soon after, the two sides finally made contact.

"Traitors! Give up and surrender."

But then imagine the palace guards' surprise when right at the gates where they were fighting, they heard the other side chanting this.

"We should be the ones saying this, you bastard!" Some of the men could not even hold their anger as they blurted this out, while other, calmer personnel simply rolled their eyes at the shamelessness on display before going back to the fighting.

Using the relatively narrow gate to the palace, even the small number of royal guards present were able to hold back the tide of men for a while, the formers' great training and experience proving decisive against much of Lord Theony's, almost peasant dressed up as soldiers.

"Let them in. The Prince's orders." Until this order came that is, bore by the messenger sent by the highest officer there.

"What!" And understandably, the man there was confused, perhaps even a bit enraged.

"Let Lord Theony's men in. The Prince's orders." But undeterred by his superior's livid face, the messenger once again repeated, before producing a bit of rolled papyrus as evidence, "Here!"

The officer snatched the light scroll like a hawk before scanning over the instructions.

But what he really was looking at was the unmistakable royal seal pasted at the bottom of that order, leaving no doubt that indeed the order was legitimate, for this stamp belonged solely to the king himself, and was currently held by the Crown Prince himself.

It was an order from undoubtedly came from the Crown Prince himself, and although the officer personally believed the act to be a mistake, he knew he had no other choice.

He had to obey.

Whistle

Thus blowing the bronze whistle hanging by his neck, he signaled his men to stand down.

A move that surprised even Lord Theony's forces as they suddenly felt the formation of men fighting them crumble away to make way.

And Lord Theony sensing this opportunity of course did not look a gift horse in the mouth.

He immediately capitalized on it, pushing through the gates and quickly taking control of it, before disarming all the men.

And as Lord Theony entered the premises in the flesh, still unsure of how all this had happened, that samemessenger quickly stepped towards that flamboyantly garbed man and after bowing, invited,

"Lord Theony! The Crown Prince invites you to the palace. Please come in!"

"....." Lord Theony was at first a bit surprised at the request, even bluntly asking, "Philips is not dead?"

Because by his calculations, he should be, so he could not help but worry, 'Did Theony fail?'

"Wha... my lord... what are saying?" While the messenger appeared absolutely ashen at the query, like he had just heard about the death of his entire family.

And by observing the reaction, it appeared to Lord Theony that the Crown Prince was still hale and hearty.

So keeping his queries to himself right now, he simply waved his hand and said,

"Okay. If Philips wants to talk, then let's go. Lead the way."

And it was like that that Lord Theony managed to capture the palace pretty bloodlessly, just like he wished.

And the same story went for Jupiter, who found that the Crown Prince had sent messages to most of the troops and nobles asking them to stand down.

So other than the few zealous hotbloods who did not know what was good for them, most of the other men survived.lights

And Lord Theony and Jupiter were able to smoothly accomplish their individual task, taking control of the capital just like they had wished.

"Through here!" The messenger led Lord Theony through the corridor housing Philips's private chambers, before gesturing him to enter the room.

Creak.

And as the man entered with a few bodyguards, he naturally did not see the man he was expecting.

"Theony! What are you doing here? Where is Philips?" Instead, faced with his son's lone presence, Lord Theony instantly blurted the most reasonable question.

"I.... Philips escaped father! Someone tipped him off!" While Theony in a pretended panicked voice shutted so, pointing his finger towards the window.

Theony, for the briefest of seconds, had thought of revealing his deeds to his father, but then quickly decided against it.

He knew his father and the bombastic earful he was going to get if he were to find out the real reason.

"Escape? How?" But Lord Theony was of course no child who could be hoodwinked so easily.

He wanted details, and then further posed with sharp glinted eyes, "And why are you here? Were you the ones who gave that order to the palace guards? Why are you wearing the Crown Prince's clothes? Where is he?"

"....." To all this, Theony drew a blank.

He could think of nothing that would be adequate enough to convince his father,

Perhaps he might have been able to stitch together something if he had a few days, and even then he would have struggled with coming up with an adequate explanation regarding his dress.

But right now it was all too sudden.

Lord Theony would not buy everything off even his son unless he could not show some such strong evidence.

And thus faced with his very strict father glowering over him, the young man was unable to think instantly of a good answer and suddenly broke.

"I... I couldn't do it. So I told him!" Theony blurted out.

And strangely, as he said this, Theony felt more relieved than scared.

"What!" While, predictably, this got a roof blowing, thunderous shout from the other side.

Followed by Lord Theony stepping forward, and

"Stupid boy! *Smash!*" landing a fully powered heavy punch on his son's face, with his bronze gauntlets still on, a strike which resulted in Theony literally tumbling over, spitting out a jet of blood as he fell

Lord Theony really had not held anything back.

"Why!" He then roared at the top of his lungs, not the slightest bit bothered by his son's swollen face.

"...." But Theony really did not have an answer.

Or at least an answer he would find acceptable.

"Why? Stupid boy! I asked you a question! Answer me!" But Lord Theony was not the type to be simply ignored, as he again roared.

"I... he saved my life. I could not do it." Theony hence was finally forced to reveal the truth.

"Bah! Lair! Do you think I do not know!" But Lord Theony only spat in disgust, before turning to look at his son with blazing eyes, "I ignored your disgusting thing with that brat because I simply did not care. Clearly, that was a mistake. To think you would betray your own family like this."

"Didn't we clothe you, feed you, shelter you?"

"Why would you hurt us like it?" By now Lord Theony's eyes had transformed from soldering to hurt and wounded,

"I... I..." And suddenly seeing this vulnerable side of his powerful father, Theony momentarily did not know what to say.

"I did not betray my family! I would never do such a thing, father." And then suddenly he stood up to claim this in a very strong voice, reasoning,

"I simply did not think the way you were doing this was the best for your family."

"So I decided to change it!"

"Look! By doing it my way, we were able to able to take the palace without any bloodshed. Just like you had wanted!" Theony then pointed, revealing,

"Yes! It was I who sent that note to all the guards ordering them to stand down."

"And because I let Philips escape, he will surely remember it and look at us favorably. "

"So in this way, we can have our feet on both boats."

"If Zanzan wins, we can earn favor by gifting them the capital."

"And if His Majesty wins, the Crown Prince will surely retreat us leniently based on this!"

"It's a win win!"

Chapter 850 Theony And Lord Theony (Part-2)

"It is a win-win!"

Theony tried to put such a positive spin on the matter of letting Crown Prince Philips escape, claiming it was done as a way to obtain the best of both worlds.

Sort of like having one's cake and eating it too.

"*Smack* Idiot! If you were not my flesh and blood, I would have killed you here and now, "

But if you think that was enough to fool Lord Theony, then you had another thing coming.

For instead of putting on a thoughtful nod or look of dawning realization, the armored man only gave his son another tight slap, this on his other cheek, making both sides now equally ruddy as he cursed threateningly, before bombastically shouting,

"You take me for an idiot? Feet on both boats! Don't you know what happens when you put your feet on both boats? You lose your balance and fall into the water! You die! *Smack*!"

Lord Theony very knew that trying to play both sides was a recipe for disaster.

If he was unable to give Alexander the capital, he would lack a crucial bargaining chip.

While in the case of Perseus, much contrary to Theony's rhetoric, the king would certainly not reward Lord Theony for 'not' killing his son.

Not when he had so blatantly initiated a coup and shown himself as a traitor to the Tibian nobility.

So for Lord Theony, upon choosing this path, there really were only two options for him- success or death.

And it was because the stakes were so high that his son's betrayal hurt the father so much, as he turned to give Theony one last begrudgingly look before saying acridly,

"If Gnaeus was here he would have not been so foolish. He would have understood what we are trying to do here! He would not have sabotaged his own family!"

Gnaeus, as could be gathered from the way Lord Theony said the name was his most favored son, born of a noble widow that the man had as a mistress and the woman he truly loved.

Unlike Theony's mother whom he was almost forced to marry by his father and other retainers.

But since she was the legitimate wife, her son- Theony got to be the successor of all the estate.

While Gnaeus being an illegitimate child was not entitled to even scraps.

For Tibian succession laws were that strict, barring any 'outsider' from inheriting anything from the family estate.

At best, he would become a steward, which he currently was, being in charge of Lord Theony's estate as of now while the latter was away.

For Lord Theony, this fact had always been a very sore point who would frequently lament that even as the lord of his household, he could not choose his own successor.

This regret even turned into a sort of bitter vengefulness for Lord Theony, as he would always compare Theony with 'in his eyes' flawless son at every opportunity, leading to much dissatisfaction on Theony's part.

Like now, when upon hearing the name of his older stepbrother, not only did Theony not feel any regret over letting Philips escape, but instead felt glad that he did it.

Though he did not say it out aloud and only dropped his head low.

"When did you tell him? How did he escape? In which direction did you send him?"

Following the chastising of his son, Lord Theony then once again turned to the matter of Philips, asking for more details.

And at the pointed inquiry, Theony's heartily slightly shuddered.

He knew why his father was asking this.

Because he was about to send riders after the Crown Prince, still hoping to finish the act he chose not to do.

And given the very short head start Philips had gotten, Theony feared the expert riders of his family had a genuine chance of catching up to the lonesome prince.

So Theony lied.

"He took the secret tunnels underneath the palace. I heard it lead to the river Diannu. From there he probably took a boat. I do not know." Theony used his finger to point, emphasizing his answer.

And on the surface, this sounded quite plausible as it was indeed true the royal family's tunnels led to the river as escape via there was far easier than over land.

But who was Lord Theony?

He was not going to be swindled so easily.

"A boat? At night? *Smack*, you stupid son! Tell the truth! Where did he go?"

It was common knowledge that boats did not travel at night due to problems of navigating them in such poor visibility, as well as the fact that most sailors would sleep during that time.

So unfortunately for Theony, Lord Theony did not buy it.

But Theony here was anything if not determined.

He would never reveal where Philips really was.

He could not!

So he loudly insisted, "I do not know where he went, father! I only told him that you were coming to kill him and that he should escape."

"Philips quickly left the room after that and I do not know anything more!"lights

Saying this, Theony a bit dramatically stamped his foot and then pointed toward the table,

"I have been in this room the whole time, pretending to be Philips and writing the surrender orders."

"When the first messenger came, I made sure not to let him in and instead told them the Crown Prince was busy."

"And hearing my voice, the man of course did not enter," Theony pronounced as a matter of factly for when faced with this kind of situation, this was what the soldiers did.

This was because although same sex relationships were not strictly persecuted in Tibias, it was certainly still very taboo.

And so even for someone as high status as the Crown Prince, it could be done too openly.

Thus everyone in the palace took the attitude of seeing yet not seeing, pretending like they did not know what Philips and Theony did in their private rooms.

And this worked out very well for Lord Theony this time, as he continued his tale of how he fooled the messenger,

"After hearing the man, I then quickly wrote the surrender order for all the soldiers and passed the message through the door, claiming it was from Philips."

"And that was how you were able to get here so quickly father!"

"Do you think I would have issued those orders if I had truly betrayed the family? Theony then suddenly posed, pointing,

"If I had truly wanted to switch sides, I would have surely had the palace guards fight you tooth and nail."

"That would have bought much more time for Philips to escape."

"But I did not."

"Because I truly thought it would be better for us to be in favor with both sides. I... was mistaken in thinking that. I'm sorry."

Theony very convincingly lowered his head in regret, trying to show that the blunder of letting Philips escape was due to an error in his strategic thinking, and not his original plan.

"....."

Hearing this finally managed to somewhat convince Lord Theony, as he glared furiously at his son, not saying a word.

Inside his head, he processed the words his son said, until finally he came to the conclusion that what his son did appear to make sense.

So at last his glowering eyes dimmed a tiny bit.

But that did not mean Lord Theony stopped being angry with Theony.

No, far from it.

As with a deep, gravelly voice, he first rebuked,

"You idiot! Why couldn't you simply do what I told you? We would not be in this mess if you had simply done that."

Before turning to look at Theony with a glint in his eyes.

If one thought Lord Theony was simply going to let Theony off the hook with a bit of smack and scolding, then simply forgive and forget, well they would be grossly mistaken.

For Lord Theony then gave an order he had surprisingly dreamed many times of giving but never thought would have been possible.

So now that such a golden opportunity had presented itself, the ambitious man took it, ordering Theony's punishment by saying,

"When the Pasha of Zanzan gets here, you will go to him and say that you have decided to abandon your family's inheritance."

"You will then name Gnaeus in your place."

"Got it!"

Lord Theony did not ask but ordered.

And hearing this, although Theony had expected something like this at the very back of his mind, it still shocked and wounded him.

From the very day he was born, Theony had been brought up as the successor of his family, who controlled vast swathes of land and wealthy.

So to be all of a sudden stripped of all that wealth and prestige within seconds by a mere few words, it would affect anyone.

But Theony knew better than to protest.

'Yes, father!' So like an obedient son, he nodded heavily.

And internally, Theony was even a bit relieved that this was all that his father had done.

For in his mind, Theony really had not been able to rule out the possibility that his enraged parent would unsheathe his sword and stab Theony to death and then pin the blame on the escaped Crown Prince.

Theony was glad that he had at least survived.

While suddenly inside Lord Theony's head, an idea flashed, as he turned to order his son,

'Oh! You stay in the room. Continue to pretend to be the Crown Prince. That way we can keep the news of the escape a secret!'