

Herald 851

Chapter 851 Fate Of The Palace

Lord Theony's order for his son to stay in his room and continue to act like the Crown Prince really went to show the man's shrewdness.

Because then Lord Theony could claim to have put 'Crown Prince' on house arrest and refuse to let anyone see him, thus letting him still keep the illusion that Philips was still in the capital.

After all, other than Theony, nobody else knew that the Crown Prince was actually missing.

And this would do tremendously in his effort to take over the capital.

It would even be tens of times better than killing Philips, as Lord Theony could not only placate the loyalist nobles and officers by this, but he could also use the Crown Prince's name to issue whatever fake orders he wished, all claiming it was sanctioned by the royal family!

Something made so much easier by the fact that in his moment of hastiness, Philips had forgotten to take the royal seal with him, thus effectively making Lord Theony become the king of Tibias now!

The idea truly was brilliant and was the perfect example of Lord Theony taking the lemons life gave him and making lemonades.

Even though Philips had really slipped through Lord Theony's fingers, instead of just slapping his head and lamenting, the man had decided to do this, trying to capitalize on the situation as best as he could.

Theony could do nothing but look with his wide, almost doe eyes as his father took the seal and pocketed it, before attempting to leave the room.

"Wait!" But was suddenly stopped by Theony, who then quickly asked, "Father! What will you do with the remaining royal family?"

"Because I was thinking instead of killing them, it might be better to let Pasha Alexander decide.
"Perhaps he will like some of the women or even the men there!"

The reason Theony made this excuse was of course because he knew his father planned to execute much of the lineage, or at the very least all the men.

And this was his way of trying to stop it.

"...."

To this Lord Theony left without giving any answer. only leaving two men to guard the door to make sure no one could enter and discover their secret.

While Theony was left all alone in the huge room, wondering to himself what his father's next plan was.

Stepping outside the room, Lord Theony then instantly turned to order with unbridled sharpness,

"Immediately send out the best scouts we have! I want them scouring both sides of the bank. Tell to them to search every single boat for inspection and kill anyone suspicious."

Lord Theony had still not given up his wish to capture Philips.

This order was of course carried out with the utmost haste, with one of the men immediately setting out to arrange it, while Lord Theony turned his mind to the very last he had yet to do.

Deciding what to do with the remaining royal family.

When Perseus went to war, he took a lot of his male kin with him- his sons, younger brothers, uncles, cousins, etc. leaving mostly only the women and children in the palace, namely his wife, daughter, daughter in laws and grandchildren, with only a few adults to look after them.

And as Lord Theony recalled the names that were likely present, he found that Theony was indeed right in saying that there was little value in killing these leftover people.

They were of the wrong sex or if they were not, simply too young or insignificant to pose any threat to Lord Theony right this moment.

Lord Theony could take his time and kill them in the future if need be.

But right now, they seemed much more valuable alive.

Lord Theony could use them as hostages with Perseus, as gifts to Alexander, or if nothing else, simply as entertainment for himself, keeping the adult women as mistresses or courtesans and the young girls and boys as pleasure slaves.

"Capture all the royal family. Put all of them under house arrest!"

Hence thinking logically Lord Theony ordered such, as he then personally decided to lead the arrest, taking a handful of men to the current Queen, Perseus's wife's chambers.

Currently, the regal Queen was sitting by her nightstand, letting her personal maid braid her long, raven hair as she prepared for bed.

"I thought I heard some commotion. Do you know what it was?" And as the maid worked, her mistress posed so languidly.

The queen was blissfully unaware of any and all happenings around the palace as her chambers were situated at the very back of the palace and because the commotion caused by Lord Theony had died down fairly quickly courtesy of Theony, no one had bothered to inform her about it.

"No, Your Grace. Should I go ask?" The maid gently asked.

"N..."

*Boom*lights

It was right that instantly, when out of nowhere the sturdy doors to her room were literally kicked open, the metal lock shooting across the room as then a number of unknown, armored men quickly rushed in, their hungry eyes instantly landing on the two beautiful women.

"What? Who are you, men? Do you know what you are doing?"

And this immense noise and the rude entrance naturally made the Queen furious, as she jumped from the chair like she was struck by thunder and screeched at the top of her lungs.

But contrary to her brave facade, internally, the sight of the intruders made her shake to the core.

Her heart thumped with the loudest possible sound and her head echoed with the only possibility of why they could they here.

It was a dreadful possibility.

"Hehe! We are so sorry to disturb your sleep, Your Grace. Forgive us,"

As the Queen was still trying to understand what was going on, Lord Theony slowly stepped forward in his magnificent armor and chuckled this with a breezy smile, informing the woman,

"A few traitors have infiltrated the palace. The Crown Prince suspects a group among the royal members are responsible. So he has instructed me to apprehend everyone for questioning."

"Traitor?"

Lord Theony's words were so sudden and appeared to make so little sense that the Queen at first appeared confused, with her mouth agape as she tried to make sure she was not hearing things.

'What traitor? Where would they come from?' Her mind naturally played these questions.

Until suddenly her eyes flashed.

"Traitor! The only traitor here is you Lord Theony! How could you betray us?" the Queen pointed her finger as she finally understood what was going on, before quickly posing a bit fearfully,

"Where is Philips? What have you done to my son? Let me go see him!"

Saying so the buxom lady then tried to push past the wall of men blocking the door.

But she naturally failed in this, as she was then very rudely grabbed by the arm by Lord Theony, who then very vulgarly chuckled while staring at the woman's chest,

"Hehe, I think Your Majesty should reconsider that. Especially given the way you are dressed. People might mistake you for someone else."

And feeling this scorching gaze on her chest mention, the Queen's mind finally clicked on the current state of her body and she instantly lowered her head with a heavy blush.

Given summer was already here, and she was just about to go to bed, the mature woman only had a thin black linen nightgown on.

The translucent cloth hid less than it revealed, making her appear very sexy.

Her skin though hidden could still be seen, appearing flawlessly when viewed through the veil, while the cloth did nothing to conceal the outline of her curvy body, letting all the surrounding men ogle at her heavy breasts, her smooth tummy, her wide hips and to make matters more mortifying, even her bush down, as the area around there appeared very dark relative to her fair thighs.

Just like Lord Theony had said, if the Queen was really to walk down the corridor like this, she would undoubtedly be called a prostitute.

"Kyaaah." As the Queen she came to this realization and felt the lustful eyes of the men, she gave this ear piercing shriek, before bundling herself up in shame.

Given how conservative Tibian society was, the fact that so many men had seen her like this was absolutely mortifying to this noble woman.

"Your Grace! Here!" Fortunately for her, the maid, who had been till now frozen in fear, seeing her mistress in such distress quickly moved, grabbing a nearby cloak and draping it over her, and at last helping the Queen hide some of her ignominy.

"Hehe!" Lord Theony found the Queen's whole reaction very funny, as he vulgarly chuckled while gazing at her with naked lust, very vividly licking every part of her body with his eyes.

It would be a blatant lie if Lord Theony were to claim he had never lusted over the Queen.

In fact, it would be a blatant lie if the whole Tibian court were to claim they had never lusted over the Queen.

Because when Perseus married his consort, she was unanimously said to be the most beautiful woman in the entire country.

Thus presented with such a chance now, Lord Theony's loins felt very hot.

Chapter 852 Phillips' Family (Part-1)

Lord Theony riding high on the exhilaration of having obtained the city definitely felt his heart itch with the temptation of forcefully taking the Queen.

But he ultimately refrained.

He was no inexperienced child who would let his lust control him and doing such a thing right in front of his men would entirely tarnish all his reputation with them.

So turning around, he left the Queen alone with these words, "Your son is okay, He is still in his room. And I suggest you stay in yours too."

Following that Lord Theony then moved to meet the once future queen of Tibian- Philips's wife.

And just like with the Queen, Lord Theony did not bother to offer any polite knocks but instead busted open her door forcefully, causing the woman and two of her maids in there to shout out in panic, while the two infant children in their cradle, disturbed from their sleep also joined the chorus.

Lord Theony replayed the same things he had said to the Queen, but unlike the latter, Philips's wife only nodded nonchalantly at this.

She did not even ask anything about her husband and only cared to bundle herself closer in fear while glancing at her son and daughter sleeping in their cradle.

And this ambivalence was really not surprising if one thought back to the exchange of Theony with Philips.

There, Philips had also not brought up anything about the safety of his wife and children, almost as if they were not his wife and children.

This was also something not unknown within the high levels of court and given the couple's distaste for each other, as well as Philips's particular taste, there were even gossips casting suspicion on the identity of the Crown Prince's children, saying they were not really his.

And as Lord Theony recalled that, he suddenly felt now was the perfect opportunity to pry the truth.

So stepping forward, he asked in the most unequivocal way possible, "My lady, pardon me for asking, but your children, who are their real father?"

To this question, Philips's wife at first produced a shocked or even somewhat panicked face, before quickly hiding it with a wall of incredulity, as she then shouted in an offended tone,

"What... What do you mean Lord Theony? Of course, it's Philips! Why would you even ask that? Surely you do believe those filthy lies too."

If the woman really had anything to hide, she was not going to come out clear just because Lord Theony asked nicely.

"..."

And seeing this Lord Theony decided to change tactics.

He decided to be forceful.

So without answering the woman, the man only walked up to two cribs where the babies were, and

Shoosh, Lord Theony very straightforwardly unsheathed his dagger and held it against the boy's neck, before turning to look at the lady with a murderous look, "I will ask again. And if you lie, I will slit your son's throat right here and now!"

The threat was as cold as ice, as Lord Theony then snarled,

"Tell me whose children are they? I know That disgusting faggot could not have gotten it up for you!"

'I... th... It was a slave! During our nuptial night, Philips had me sleep with a slave! Wuhhh... Wuhhh!"
And with her son's life in danger, the woman finally broke, revealing the earth shaking secret with suppressed sobs

"Lies!"

But Lord Theony did not buy it.

And true to his threat, accompanied by the shout came the swift movement of his wrist,

Slit

The sharp knife cut through the soft skin and muscle of the infant like butter, cutting open the thorax, and

Wahhh.. urghhhh

Giving one last muffled cry, the child boy went forever silent.

"No! Why?"

That silence was instantly replaced by this mournful howl, as the mother let out this piercing cry of anguish, before scrambling over to the crib herself and breaking down completely upon seeing her son's lifeless eyes and the blood gushing out of the deep wound.

He had already perished,

"Wuuuuhhhhh," The woman was inconsolable.

"Tell the truth!" But the perpetrator of this, Lord Theony did not feel the slightest emotion upon seeing this mournful display.

Neither did the fact that he had just killed a child right in front of his own mother cause the slightest vibration in his conscience.

The man was only interested in knowing the truth that this lady was trying to hide.

The reason for his suspicion-

"How could a lowly slave be allowed to touch you, my lady? The future Queen of Tibias."

"Philips would have never let that happen. I know him. His pride is too high."

"Regardless of whether he cared for you, or detested you, you were still his bride in name."

"So My lady... do you truly believe that Philips would have allowed his son, the next king of Tibias to be the disgusting spawn of a lowly slave?"lights

Lord Theony's loud, booming voice felt like the drums of the devil, and the helpless woman shivered in fright and bitterness as he clearly revealed the place where she had messed up.

A mistake that had just cost her her son.

The amount of regret the lady was feeling right now was so enormous she had nowhere to keep them.

While Lord Theony sensing this, pressed harder, first mocking the lady for her lack of quick wittedness,

"You could have said the name of any loyalist noble and I would have probably believed you. Heck, I might have even believed it if you had said it that old croon Mithriditus, hahaha."

Lord Theony crassly giggled, like he had said a funny joke and the surrounding men joined in too.

And this was not because Mithriditus was too old.

But because the woman was Mithriditus's daughter!

"So why did you lie?"

Finally finished with his chuckle, Lord Theony then quickly returned to the inquiry, it being sharp and incisive.

"....." But the woman by now had gone almost unresponsive, sporting a hollow, blank look, her face ashen and devoid of all color.

'Why didn't I say that? How could I have been so stupid? My son... it was I... I killed him... Stupid... stupid... stupid...'

While inside her mind, the woman found herself tearing herself apart with such regret and guilt.

Now, it would be all too easy to judge the poor lady for this foolish mistake.

But it had to be appreciated the kind of stress she was put under.

She had very little time to think and blurted out the most common excuse that came to her mind.

After all, a slave sleeping with a noblewoman was indeed the most common type of scandal heard inside the court.

But as Lord Theony pointed out, there were several flaws with that kind of thinking.

Seeing the lady go quiet, Lord Theony of course did not let her be and mourn her son in peace.

"Speak! Why did you lie?" He again barked, and then to galvanize her even more, he moved to the infant girl's crib, making the same threat again,

"Your son died because of your foolishness. Do not kill your daughter too!"

Given the lady had tried to hide this even when her son's life was in danger had truly piqued Lord Theory's curiosity, and he could not wait to find the real cause.

"No!" Seeing that same bloody knife now pressed against her last child's neck, finally brought the noble lady back, and fearing for her daughter's life, she mumbled with a panicked, white as a sheet face,

".....I... it...it was His Majesty!"

"What!"

This answer came as such a surprise to Lord Theory that even this veteran politician who had seen so much scenery could not help but blurt out in shocked incredulation, as his hands suddenly shook so much that he nearly sliced the poor girl's throat by mistake.

"You mean the king impregnated you? These are Philips's brothers and sisters!" Lord Theory still sounded like he was unsure that he indeed heard the woman correctly.

"...Yes." The answer that came after a bit of pause was very monotone, lacking even the slightest spirit.

The woman knew what her revealing this meant, for her, her child, her father, and even the Royal family.

"Hahaha... hahaha!" And in a complete 180 degree to her own mood, Lord Theory hearing so instantly let out this euphoric laughter precisely because he too could see the consequences of this.

His heart giggled with the thought of how he could spin this story.

So for the last time he turned to look at the lady, to confirm, "Are you sure? Do you swear? You are not slandering His Majesty are you?"

Though even if she were, it would not really be such a big concern for Lord Theory.

He could turn it into the truth if need be.

After all, the lady had confessed to it in front of so many people.

They could all be eyewitnesses.

But Lord Theony would not need to jump through such hoops, for the lady confessed in detail,

"No. it is the truth. Philips likes men. Everyone knows that."

"Even after trying for close to two years, he could not impregnate me."

"So it was decided that His Majesty would do it, and we would pretend that they were Philip's."

Chapter 853 Phillips' Family (Part-2)

Hearing the lady confess to all of this, Lord Theony's heart felt like it was doing cartwheels.

It was a story so scandalous that Lord Theony could not have written it himself even if he had wanted to.

And he even saw no reason to embellish it by the tiniest.

Just the raw facts were damning enough.

A father in law having an illicit affair with his daughter in law all while the son was fully aware of it.

The scandal practically wrote itself.

Such a thing would have destroyed the reputation of any man and his family.

Never mind this happened to the most prestigious in all of Tibias.

"Who else knows this?" Lord Theony then curiously posed so to the woman.

"Only the three of us! And my maids," Came the concise, monotone reply.

"How frequently did the king sleep with you?" Lord Theony then pressed for more details.

"Only until I gave birth to.... to Wuhhhuu... wuhhh"

But then suddenly that mechanical voice changed as the woman broke down in the middle of her answer.

For that suddenly reminded her of her son's name.

While Lord Theony was able to calculate that since the lady had given birth to her daughter first and then her son, the king must have slept with her for one year at the very least.

"...."

Lord Theony's interrogation came to an end with this and the room then once again returned to its silence, with only the low, mournful sobs echoing across the space.

So feeling he had obtained all he wanted at last pronounced,

"What you have done with the king and father in law is an affront to the ancestors and all living spirits in Tibias."

"It is the most heinous of acts."

"You and your daughter will be brought to trial before the court to be judged for this filth "

"Do not even think that you can run away!"

Lord Theony was filled with disgust and scorn, before he turned to look at the two maids who by now had huddled themselves to a corner of the room, trying to appear as inconspicuous as possible.

And as the lord's eyes fell on them, both shivered like a trembling kittens, as they then heard Lord Theony say to them,

"And both of you will be summoned too- to testify to the things Her Grace has confessed to."

Lord Theony felt the room with this, without waiting for the maids' answer, his heart dancing with joy and his head already getting to composing the speech he was going to give then all this was revealed.

He dreamed of standing in front of the court, addressing them as,

'My fellow lords and lady, you have heard what the lady had to say. Of what she has confessed to doing, And with who!'

'Can you truly believe it? That she had committed such a filthy act?'

'I know no words to describe this heinous.... thing!' As Lord Theony thought of the speech, he could not come up with an exact word right at the moment, and decided to skip it for now, intending to come back to it later.

As he then continued making the rest of the speech,

'It has violated every conscious morality of our society. She deserves to be punished in the most cruel way possible.'

'Also do not forget- it takes two to tango.'

'And who she has done this filthy act with? His Majesty the King no less. All while her husband the Crown Prince watched!'

'My lords! I truly have no words to describe this. In all my years, I have never even heard of such utter depravity much less seen it.'

'It is because of such acts that our country is where we are. It is because the king has lost the favor of the ancestors.'

'And it is put to us to bring His Majesty to justice!'

"The ancestors demand it!'

Lord Theony's spine already tingled with excitement as he thought about giving this speech.lights

He was sure not even Perseus's most staunch supporters would be able to speak up against Lord Theony when he showed them this proof.

Lord Theony was sure he could erode much of Perseus's influence with this speech.

But alas, Lord Theony would be very disappointed the next morning, as he would be woken up late morning not by the smell of sumptuous food brought by a maid right onto his bed, but by the loud thuds of fists smacking against the door followed by heavy footsteps of armored men.

"My lord! Terrible news!" And as soon as the men entered, Lord Theony heard this panicked shout, followed by the report that the lady in question, and both her maid had killed themselves, even taking the daughter with them.

"What!" As soon as the man heard it, he bolted up from his bed at the speed of lightning, and simply putting on a light robe, he almost ran through the corridor to the room in question.

And upon entering it, found a ghastly sight.

Hanging off the tall bedpost were the two maids, a linen sheet wound around their neck, acting as the rope.

Their eyes were bulged, their tongues rolled out, as they must have tried desperately to grasp for the tiniest bit of air at the very end points of their life.

While a bit side to these 'floating' bodies, on a large armchair laid the lifeless corpse of the mistress of the room, her arms sprawled over, wrists cut.

The rusty blood had gushed out of the deep wound and stained her nightgown before the rest pooled around the chair, where Lord Theony also spotted a large fruit knife, no doubt the 'murder' weapon.

And lastly, and perhaps mostly tragically, there was the infant girl, who, as if being played a cruel joke by fate, had been killed by having her throat slit open, just like her brother.

From this it could also be clearly seen how the lady's darning confession under stress was oh so different from a very similar condition faced by another lady, Lady Felicia.

And it could be heavily argued that if were to switch places with the woman would have certainly been able to come out much better.

Given how smart she was, it was unlikely Lady Felicia would have stumbled even in that first roadblock and might have possibly named a random noble- like Perseus's brothers, cousins, or even his other sons.

And even if she were to be caught in that, she would have never revealed the truth.

Like she had not revealed the fact that she had killed her step siblings even when she was in danger of losing her most desired dream.

And that was something actually relatively mild in the context of the time when compared to what the king and his daughter in law had done,

Because what Lady Felicia had done was simply kill some commoners.

But Philips's wife and the king's deeds violated the very social structure of the time.

And plunged the entirety of the royal family's reputation down into the abyss of absolute filth.

Lady Felicia would not have confessed to it, even if that knife had been pressed against Fabiyana.

And she would not have even needed to think too hard for a lie, because if you recall, Lord Theony had already given the noble lady the answer when he had said, 'You could have said the name of any loyalist noble and I would have probably believed you,' before pressing the lady for an answer.

This means the lady could have literally given the name of any loyalist noble.

But she was simply not smart enough, very much unlike the ambitious Lady Felicia, who had not even hesitated to harm her daughter during her pregnancy just to make her story about infidelity airtight.

And that had come to cost her dearly.

The noble lady was forced to commit suicide as she decided that death was the far better option than the ignominy that was surely to come.

Both her maids too decided to follow, one- because they were that loyal, and two- because they knew the information they had come to inadvertently know was the curse of a lifetime.

As long as they lived they would be hounded by it, from both sides as they pressured them to tell their version of the truth.

So rather than drag their mistress's name through the mud, they chose to end themselves too.

As for the baby, her mother trembled at the thought of what her dear precious would experience growing up with such a scandalous identity.

And that was if she could grow up at all, as the judgment hinted at by Lord Theony really made that doubtful.

So rather than leave the defenseless infant to fend for herself all alone in this cruel world, the mother had decided to take her daughter with her.

But one should not mistakenly think it was an easy decision for the woman, as when she was doing it, she had cried a river of tears, constantly kissing the fluffy cheeks of the baby, and mournfully confessing,

"I'm sorry, mother could not protect you... wuhhhuu... wuhhh..."

"I'm sorry."

"But do not worry. Soon we will go to where your brother is. No one will be able to hurt us there."

"My sweet precious daughter... this will only hurt for a second...wuhhhuu...wuhhhh."

It was truly tragic that four lives were wasted just because the woman was not smart enough.

Oh! How much regret that lady must have felt as her life came to such a lamentable end!

Chapter 854 Alexander Enters The Capital

"Dammit!"

Seeing the four, no ...five dead bodies in the room, as the little boy was yet to be moved too, and feeling the distinct stench that accompanied such a state, Lord Theony found himself cursing under his breath.

Not only did that perfect play he was so looking forward to get completely trashed, he was now left with the unenviable task of having to deal with this mess.

A mess that no doubt threw a wrench into his plan as now undoubtedly he would be the one who would get blamed for this.

'I should have been more careful with my words.' And Lord Theony blamed himself, feeling he had revealed too much of his plan in front of the lady through his words and actions.

"Lock this room up! Nobody is allowed to enter it."

But since the deed had already been done, Lord Theony did not waste time crying over spilled milk but instead went into crisis management mode, turning to the men and further ordering,

"Take the bodies out and quickly bury them in the garden. Make sure to cover their faces when you move them!"

"Then arrange it so that everyone thinks the five are still alive."

"The maids are still to bring them food and sometime later they are to take away the finished dishes."

"Of course, they will not be allowed to enter the room, but you get the idea."

Lord Theony left the details to the men.

"Yes, my lord. The guards at the door will handle them." And the officer leading the men understood what his master wanted.

The guards would take the food, eat it themselves, and then send the cleaned dishes back.

And it worked, as for the time being, none remained the wiser.

It was with such mixed success that Lord Theony managed to gain control of the capital, and over the following days quickly consolidated his hold over it.

A great boon in that endeavor came in the form of the royal seal which Lord Theony had managed to nab for himself, using it liberally to suppress and silence any dissenter and doubters.

When anyone of the royal family wanted to exit their room to meet with others, the seal would come into view denying them.

When a group of nobles wanted to see the Crown Prince, there was the seal.

When some of the officers questioned a few of the suspicious orders given to them by Lord Theony, the seal shut them up.

And even the very questionable decision to open the gates of the capital to let Alexander's army in would be issued by Lord Theony by relying on the seal.

It was like a cure-all for all his problems.

And Lord Theony certainly felt addicted to using it.

Even during his long time as a lord, never had the men obeyed him so unconditionally.

But here, it was like simply hearing the order was from the king made it absolute and unquestionable.

Even though Lord Theony knew just how rewarding it was to be the king long prior to this, it was one thing to know, wholly another thing to experience it for oneself.

And upon actually tasting the power, he would have to say, Lord Theony found the taste so much more delectable than we could have ever imagined.

For a brief moment, he even thought about betraying Alexander.

Killing him so that he could have the country all to himself.

Of course that was only for a moment as such a thing would be impossible even if he were to try.

But along with all the positive strides Lord Theony managed to make for himself, there were also some stumbles along the way.

One such particular hiccup was the scouts he had sent to hunt down Philips coming out empty even after three days of scouring each and every blade of grass along the riverside.

"Look again!"

And every time they would come empty handed, Lord Theony would bark this, before sending even more men to look for the escaped prince.

But of course, the men would fail to detect even a tiny whiff of the man, much to their lord's ire.

And it would only be after a week of relentless hounding that Lord Theony would decide to call off the search.lights

Another slight trouble was that with the passage of time, the people were starting to get suspicious of many of Lord Theony's claims, with more and more voices raising the want to see concrete proof.

But that did not prove to be too much of an issue, as Menes managed to arrive before any rebellion would foment and when his men entered the city, any and all such efforts were dead even before they could germinate.

The people who were originally suspicious bitterly shook their heads for not having acted sooner, while those who were clueless to that point felt betrayed and heartbroken.

But regardless of their individual thoughts, they all wisely shut up and bent their knee.

"Haha, Lord Menes! It is an honor to finally meet you. Please drink! Drink! I must thank you for sacking the city, haha"

Lord Theony naturally held a great party for Menes and his officers, getting to know many of the military men as he then inquired about Alexander's whereabouts.

And felt much reassured to know that the man was already on a boat and would be joining them soon.

Following the food, Lord Theony naturally arranged for entertainment for Menes and his men, with the general himself being presented with the following lucrative option by Lord Theony, "Lord Menes, in this palace, we have the Queen, her two unmarried daughters, a few princesses (the king's sisters), and a few of prince consorts (the wives of the king's brothers) as well as their children. Which ones would you like to have?"

Lord Theony had of course phrased it like that so that Menes did not have to choose only one.

And hearing such a rich and expensive menu, Menes's heart of course leaped at the thought of ordering the most expensive dish- the Queen and the two princesses.

It was the instinctual thought that came to him even though he knew nothing about them, much less having seen them.

Because frankly, Menes would not have cared even if they were as scary as ghosts, for he did not want to sleep with them because of their beauty but much more so because of their exalted status.

And who knew the next time he would ever get to taste women of such high status?

If ever.

But with much regret in his heart, Menes ultimately refrained.

Because he knew those three were reserved for Alexander.

It would be one thing if Alexander was still back in Thesalie waiting for Menes's report.

The general would have gladly tasted these delicacies then.

But with Alexander literally only days away from reaching the city, he knew he could not do it.

This was not something demanded of him but certainly expected.

So even if Menes thought that Alexander would not either of touch them, Menes knew that claiming them before Alexander got here would be too impolite.

Hence he settled for two of Perseus's sisters, who were married themselves, but who cares about that?

Alexander entered the capital city of Tibias exactly two days after Menes did, and even while he was on the boats, he could see a huge procession of his soldiers dressed fully in blue standing by the river cheering and shouting to greet him.

The large fleet of boats was quickly invited into the city, and as Alexander docked off the harbor, he found his generals as well as Lord Theony personally waiting for him.

"Welcome Conqueror of Tibias! Welcome to Parthenigh- once the capital of Tibias." And Lord Theony greeted Alexander with such grandiose words as he bowed deferentially, before leading him to an ornate carriage.

Alexander found the tour of the capital to be nothing special, being of a very similar layout to Thesalie, with the poorer living near the outer city walls, while the richer neighborhoods resided at the center.

Among the few notable architectures inside the city was first and foremost of course the palace, being of a very similar shape to the one in Thesalie- only much, much, bigger.

Alexander found everything here to be bigger- bigger walkways, bigger courtyards, bigger gardens, bigger buildings with many more rooms, and even bigger pools.

And this was actually quite normal when came to know that the palace Lord Ponticus lived in was actually built by the royal family a few generations ago and modeled after this very building.

Alongside the palace, the next thing of note in the city to Alexander was the main ancestral temple of the Tibians, situated by the banks of the River Diannu.

It was a very large temple, several times bigger than the one in Thesalie, and although much of the layout was very similar, there was one glaring exception.

Right past the front gates, along both sides of the walkway were a large number of ornate black and white obelisks, arranged in an immaculate grid like structure, with intricate frescos etched into them.

Alexander would be told that each of these obelisks represented a hero of Tibias.

In there, Alexander also got to see the huge larger status of Tibias's statue, and his eyes even shone with greed when he saw many parts of it made of pure gold.

And the last notable thing the capital had, something that Thesalie did not- was a large amphitheater for outdoor plays.

Chapter 855 The Tibian Nobles (Part-1)

After Alexander entered the capital, he quickly got to work getting to know about the latest situation.

With his first and most immediate inquiry being - "Where is Perseus now?"

"The scouts have located the king four days west of here. But at the moment he seems to be moving south." Menes quickly reported, aware of such a thing because he had sent a detachment based on Lord Theony's intel.

Hearing Perseus was on the move, made sense to Alexander, as he felt he could understand Perseus's line of thinking.

Alexander had been told the entire truthful story of Lord Theony's coup d'etat, and one of the conclusions that Alexander came to hearing that was surely the Crown Prince had already reached his father or at least managed to send a message, informing him of the loss of their capital.

Thus, with the capital lost, and the northern half of the country under the enemy's control, if Perseus should want to continue fighting, Alexander figured there really was no other option for the king other than to head south in this peninsula of a landmass, which was the furthest distance from Alexander as he tried to regroup and reconstitute his army.

"Should we give chase?" And hearing the king on the move, some of Alexander's officers then eagerly asked, itching for a fight.

They did not want to give Perseus a moment's respite.

"...Hmmm...." And to this, Alexander put a thoughtful face.

It was not like there was no merit to this suggestion.

If possible, Alexander would definitely love to catch up to Perseus and force him to a decisive battle, thereby finishing the threat as soon as possible.

After all, who knew if the king would magically get another round of reinforcements that Alexander had no idea about?

Perhaps with the larger army, the man would then be able to turn things around and force Alexander to get on the back foot.

And even if that did not happen, even if Perseus was to only hole himself inside a city and fight to the death, well a long siege too would be a pain to deal with.

So cutting the head of the snake as soon as possible certainly felt like a good idea.

But all this hinged on Alexander being able to actually catch up to the Perseus in the first place- an endeavor that was quite difficult given the latter already had a head start and certainly knew the terrain better than him.

So Alexander feared he would end up chasing after Perseus's illusory tail and simply tiring out his army with nothing to show for it.

"How many men does Perseus still have?" Whilst trying to come up with the decision, Alexander then asked this, wanting to know the strength he would be facing.

He reasoned that if Perseus was weak enough, then the gamble might be worth taking, reasoning that even if his army were to become tired or fall into any kind of unforeseen trap by Perseus, they would simply be able to bulldoze through it through raw muscle power.

"The scouts report around 33,000 to 35,000 men are moving with Perseus."

But Grahtos's report smashed any such optimism, as that number put both sides on nearly equal footing, with Perseus even coming out somewhat on the top.

On Alexander's side, even with the one extra legion that he brought, due to the injuries and death the army had prior suffered, Alexander only managed to bring up his strength to around thirty one thousand, 31,000 men.

But hearing such a large number for Perseus surprised Alexander.

"Didn't you say Perseus only had forty thousand, 40,000 men at the start of the battle? Didn't we win our last battle? How come he has still so much?" Alexander shot this curious query towards the man in charge of the scouts.

"That... ummm," Grahtos was at first a bit embarrassed to answer this as it nakedly revealed their mistakes, but sensing Alexander's expectant eyes, knew there was no hiding it.

So ultimately revealed all the various reasons behind this phenomenon.

Which were- due to the uneven terrain that made chasing men harder, the long fight that had exhausted the soldiers, and most importantly the lack of discipline among the men.

All this had contributed to the failure to properly capitalize on that opportunity and letting much of the query escape and even taking many avoidable losses.

It was because of that that Perseus only had around 3,000 dead, most killed inside their camp, and another 2,000 captured, with some more deserters.

"But we made sure to punish all of the involved my lord." Then as if like a silver lining, ended his recount by this promise, a bit scared by the pensive but unimpressed face Alexander had assumed by that point.

"Okay. Good." And it was only after Alexander got to know what that punishment was that he decided not to punish anyone.

Later on, he would even send a gift to Remus, who, like Menes had promised, was indeed given the credit for coming up with the optimum level of punishment.

But Grahtos's report also dashed Alexander's plan for chasing Perseus as there was the very real possibility that in the midst of doing it, Perseus might suddenly ambush Alexander or even just turn around and force Alexander's tired, smaller army to fight.

Hence Alexander decided to wait and let Perseus run to his heart's desire to wherever he wanted, intending to give him battle once the latter had pitched his camp.

In the meantime, Alexander started to consolidate his hold over the new territories and bolstered his forces.

An endeavor made a bit easier by the fact that both were mutually inclusive.lights

Because both required making the nobles cooperate.

And Alexander had already thought of how to do that.

That was also why he had brought many of the nobles from Thesalie with him!

All to show them the few Zanzan nobles under Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum that he had managed to capture in front of them.

On one bright morning, Alexander had taken a large entourage of nobles to view the enclosed pens where they were being kept, pointing to them and saying,

"My lords, look! Look at these men! I'm sure I do not need to tell you of their true identity."

"Why don't you ask them why they are here? Hear the truth for yourself!"

Alexander graciously presented.

And being presented with this irrefutable evidence right in front of their eyes, many Tibian nobles who had only bowed down to Alexander out of fear and powerless but still harbored hatred were shocked.

There was no doubt in their mind that these men were authentic Zanzan nobles, as their unique armor and accent made it apparent where they were from.

While the expensive gear they wore, such as gold plated sword handles and ivory sword sheathes gave credence to their high statuses.

Even their simple mannerism was very refined, much different from a peasant's.

And if that was not enough, there was also the fact that many carried their family's personal seal with them.

Thus soon a crowd of flustered nobles took rapid turns to churn out many inquisitive questions such as- who are you, why are you here, how many of you are there, why you were fighting for His Majesty, etc.

And all the responses confirmed Alexander's allegations and even added weight to the young lord.

Especially that last 'Why you were fighting for His Majesty?' which got a very interesting response.

When asked this, stepping up, one of the captured lords pronounced, "We were sent here by our lord Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum under His Majesty's Archpriest Manuk's instructions."

"We were told that a secret agreement between Tibias and His Eminence Manuk had been reached where it was determined that in return for us helping the Tibian king defeat the Lord of Zanzan, the northern half of Tibias would become ours!"

This was of course a lie, something Alexander had concocted himself.

How?

Well the day prior, when Alexander had gone to see the prisoners for himself, he twisted the nobles' arms.

During this visit, one of the captured lords seeing Alexander dressed in full armor asked him about the progress of their ransom

"Ransom? What ransom?" And Alexander had pretended to be surprised by the mere notion of it, and revealed with a light smile,

"We have received no diplomatic messages concerning your release. Neither from your family or your lord."

"How can that be? His Eminence Manuk should have surely sent word on our behalf!" And this message was greeted with such shock as more than enough time had passed for the message to have reached Alexander.

Some even cried this in disbelief,

"Pasha Alexander, are you sure you are not lying?"

That particular statement got a resounding rebuke from one of Alexander's surrounding entourage, while Alexander revealed with a slightly malicious grin,

"Something has happened between your dear Eminence Manuk and the king. Their alliance has broken apart."

"Manuk has already left Tibias, leaving you to die in this ditch."

"So you see, with no one to prove your identity and no one here to ransom you, you are nobodies!"

After that implicit threat, it did not take Alexander long to make them sing the tune he wanted.

Chapter 856 Captured Zanzan Nobles

Alexander's plan to make the captured nobles cooperate was simple- threatening to not recognize them as nobility but as instead common peasants who could then be killed or sold as common slaves.

"You have no one to come save you. You are alone here. No one knows whether you are even alive! I can do whatever I want to you," Alexander's threat was naked and real as he laid bare the situation to the defeated men.

To this of course the esteemed men had protested at first, one pointing at Alexander and very simply angrily shouting,

"Lies! His Eminence Manuk would never do that. He is probably caught up in some urgent matter and will no doubt soon contact you."

While another of his friends too quickly chimed in,

"That's right! And even if Lord Manuk were to encounter something untoward, there is still our own lord. He will surely send messengers to inquire about us! Our families will never let us be forgotten."

This man was far more genteel and polite with his speech.

And lastly, another man warned this,

"Lord of Zanzan, surely you cannot hope to keep the massacre of so many nobles a secret. It will no doubt get out. You should be smart enough to know what the consequences of that would be." "So I would advise you to exercise patience and not to be too rash with your actions, lest you do something regretful that you cannot reverse."

This particular voice was very smooth and cool and Alexander found the source of this subtle threat to come from a short, quite slim man, in his mid- thirties, with very bushy eyebrows and sunken cheeks.

He appeared very gaunt, showing evidence that his days in captivity had not been kind to them, but his eyes still shone with intelligence and wit.

It seemed he was one of the leaders here.

And all these men pointed to the same thing, that even if what Alexander said was true, and Manuk did truly abandon them, their other backer Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum would surely not.

And so if Alexander was to kill them, no matter how well he hid it, there would always be the danger of it getting out someday.

That would be a diplomatic clusterfuck in the best case scenario.

"Bah! He doesn't have the guts! Sewer rat!"

But then suddenly, as Alexander was thinking of the best answer to respond with, this abhorrent slang rang out, and the bellicose voice cursed in one of the filthiest languages that Alexander had yet heard,

"Hehe! Do you think we will be scared by a mongrel like you? Bah! I have my dogs tear slaves like you every weekend just for fun!"

"Just wait till my father defeats you."

"Your children's flesh will be picked apart by vultures and wives will be r@ped not by men but by my dogs, pigs, and horses. Because that's what you are, filthy animals not even deserving to be treated as humans."

"Just you wait!" The man pointed with dripping malice at Alexander.

And even then he was not done.

As after saying this, this man appeared to be in his mid twenties turned around to the other nobles, before spreading his arms and claiming in a jubilant cheer,

"My fellow lords, how can you be intimidated by this low blood cur? He is a slave! A low born object! How dare would he harm a single hair on us nobles? He would make the entirety of Adhanian nobility his enemy if he did, hahaha."

The laughter was boisterous and very happy.

"....."

Which rang particularly prominently against the pin drop silent backdrop as the entire surrounding had suddenly gone completely dead silent at this man's audacity in shock and horror.

'How can this idiot be so delusional?'

Was the same question surfaced in the minds of everyone present, from both sides.

The captured side cursed this idiot for being so oblivious to his circumstances, as although many of his enemies called Alexander many names behind his back, none of them were stupid enough to dare him so openly, especially when so much of the advantage belonged to the man.

While Alexander's side, after being shocked out of their wits, turned livid to the point many faces turned almost pepper red.

"Scum! You dare!" Menes was the first to respond, and his lion like roar was at such a volume that it even made Alexander twitch a bit in shock.

And following Menes's example, came many such similar enraged shouts, with many even unsheathing their swords wishing to cut the man down then and there.

However, to this, the man did not show the least bit of fear, and even put his middle finger up as he revealed a taunting smile.

Like he was daring them to touch him.

"Who is your father?" While Alexander, who was externally the most pensive and unmoved by all this picked that one interesting phrase to inquire about.

"Of course its Matbar (Marquis) Kyaum!" And the man puffed up his chest in pride as he replied.

To Alexander, it seemed almost as if the man might be condensing pride out of his skin pores.lights

"Oh? And are you legitimate?"

The fact that his father was Alexander's greatest enemy to the West was not a surprise, as the way the man had said 'my father' was a pretty big giveaway.

But Alexander did want to know his true status in that undoubtedly large family.

"Yo... you!" And this suddenly got a very large reaction from the man, as he turned very flushed, and looked at Alexander so hatefully that it was as if he wanted to eat the man raw.

It was very apparent that this was a particularly sore spot for him.

"Oh! So you are not?" And given the answer was not an immediate 'yes', Alexander was pretty easily able to deduce the answer.

As he then sneered, "Heh! So you are not even a noble, just a pretending nobody."

"What! Kyuam r@ped your whore of a mother and then left her to die in a ditch?"

"Were you then brought up in the stables by dogs and pigs? Is that why you only have them as friends? That must be why you talk so filthy instead of us civilized human beings?"

Alexander might not have shouted and swung his sword like the rest of his men, but his reply was not any less sharp.

In fact, it actually cut that man far far deeper than any sword cut.

Because many of the insults Alexander hurled were indeed true.

He was indeed a bastard, born from a maid, not a working woman.

And he did work in the stables as a boy.

But the reason Alexander was able to figure all this out was not because he was some kind of psychic unable to see the past.

It was simply because stewards and stable boys were the two most common jobs for illegitimate children of a noble.

And since this man was out here fighting instead of looking after an estate, Alexander could bet he probably grew up as a stable boy looking after the horses while serving as the squire to any one of the lords of the house.

As Alexander finished taunting the man, suddenly, blind with rage, that man jumped over the relatively short fence, and

"Ahhhh!" started to maddingly charge towards Alexander, a small rock that he had picked up from the ground in his hand, his eyes bloodshot, his face twisted with malice.

It appeared Alexander's mockery had hit a hit too close to the mark and driven the man mad.

Bang!

But of course, he was tackled to the ground long, long before he could even get to properly see Alexander through all his entourage.

"Damn animal! Looking to die aren't you?" Menes ground his teeth as he held the squirming man down, pressing him so strongly against the ground that it seemed he wanted to mesh the two together.

"Get him on his knees!" While finally tired of this circus, Alexander lightly stepped up and asked this.

Before,

Clang

He soon equipped himself with a dagger, the large, steely blade glinting off the sunlight.

"Pasha Alexander please restrain yourself!" And seeing this some of the captured nobles urgently shouted so, with one of them even asking,

"Lord Alexander, that man has lost his mind after staying in captivity for so long. Please do not lower yourself to the same level."

But Alexander paid no heed to these clamors and instead lowering his head to look the restrained man directly in the eyes, he growled, "Those things you said... did you do that? To other slaves?"

"*Grrrrr*" In response, Alexander only got this sound, as the man just struggled to free himself from the men holding him to his knees.

But the way his eyes swam with pure hatred at Alexander made him convinced that the man indeed was capable of doing such a thing.

"Aghhhhh"

And so Alexander had no remorse in driving his full dagger into his beast in the shape of a man's heart, and once dead, he turned to look at the nobles and said,

"I do not care what you think. But know that if you do not obey me, every last one of you will end up like that."

Chapter 857 Captured Zanzan Nobles (Part-2)

Although Alexander did not show, internally, he was extremely furious with that man.

And it was not because of the threats he had made.

Those Alexander only saw as the barkings of a mad dog.

But what really ticked him off was how that man had surely tortured other innocent people to death.

So taking the dagger, Alexander plunged it deep into the man's chest,

"*Aghhhhhh!* You dare! When my father... arghhhh"

Even as the man let out an ear splitting painful howl, he still could not stop from threatening Alexander, while Alexander himself only sneered,

"Noble! What noble? I only see a dog in human skin, panting like a miserable beast,"

As he then brought the huge knife downward diagonally, ripping open the chest and producing an extremely large, undoubtedly mortal wound.

"Aghhhhhh! Kill! I will.... arghhhh"

But even at this maddening pain, the man did not repent and letting out an even larger pitched howl continued to curse Alexander as he tried to twist his body to try and break free of the men holding him.

That of course he failed in.

"*Stab!* Why did I kill those innocent people?" But Alexander was not done with just that one slash, as retrieving the dagger, he once again struck, now on the opposite left side, and drew a cross, dying the man's chest and abs matt black.

"Agghh... uuhhh," It was only by this point that the man seemed to have lost his voice, possibly due to the huge blood loss as Alexander had ripped apart major veins and arteries, and started to pant as he entered his last death throes, his eyes losing focus.

While Alexander too found himself breathing heavily.

He had only slashed twice but he felt like he had run a mile.

And the reason for this exhaustion was because he felt like his whole body was set on fire after hearing that story and his heart thumped uncontrollably in anger at how much pain the man had surely caused for no reason at all.

Just killing him with a few slashes seemed way too merciful.

But Alexander was no torturer and other than slashing the man a few more times and getting his armor splashed with blood, he was unable to properly inflict pain on the man.

"Ahghhh." And after a while of bleeding out, the man finally slumped over and went quite, utterly this last word- 'Mother!'

But although that single utterance might sound like the clue to a tragic backstory, it really was not.

That maid of a mother was no saint and that Matbar (Marquess) Kyuam was no great villain who drove the woman to death.

In fact, he could be even seen as a kind of a victim.

When he was young, that older maid had seduced him, pretending to be in love and even managing to fool him into getting her pregnant.

The reason was simple, she wanted to have first his son and thus in her mind become the main wife.

Just imagine!

A lowly commoner woman dreaming of becoming a Matbar's (Marquess) main wife.

Not just a mistress, which already would have been a tall claim, but the main wife.

Her ambitions were even higher than Lady Felicia's.

But of course that never happened, as her son was declared illegitimate, and eventually the Matbar (Marquess) was chosen to marry an appropriate noble lady, namely one of Pasha Muazz's sisters.

However, the maid mother was anything if not determined.

She was not going to give up that easily.

So very much like how Lady Felicia had poisoned and crippled Petrino's wife, this maid too poisoned and even killed that lady.

But unfortunately for her, that was where the similarities between the two ended, as, while even more ambitious than that lady, she was not even a tenth as smart.

Unlike Lady Felicia who had managed to get away with her deed scot free, with Alexander even till now unaware of it, the maid had gotten caught red handed embarrassingly easily.

And then no one's surprise, she got what she deserved.

Or perhaps even more.lights

For the death of their girl naturally made Pasha Muazz's family absolutely furious, and they threatened to go to war unless the maid was handed over to them immediately.

This of course the Matbar (Marquess) Kyuam's family instantly agreed to that.

In fact, Matbar (Marquess) Kyuam's father had even suggested the son be sent too, as a form of compensation, and was only dissuaded otherwise by Matbar (Marquess) Kyuam throwing a gigantic tantrum claiming the boy was his son, and was just a child.

So only the mother went.

And if you recall the various cruel plays the Muazz family did just for pleasure to their servants, well it could only be imagined just how much a maid that killed one of their own was made to suffer before she died.

Her death was neither fast nor pretty.

And once she was killed or more like allowed to die, Pasha Muazz had even made sure to send her tortured body back to Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam, and he did so in a grand display at that, tying her naked, 'whatever was left 'of her body to a large crucifix that was pulled by a horse cart.

And that sight of his mother on that crucifix- flayed, burnt, beaten, smashed, mangled, pierced, gouged, and every other horror imaginable that could be done to a human present on that body, that man's mind suddenly snapped.

From that day onward he began to get slowly more and more cruel, starting first of all with small bugs and rodents- breaking legs or ripping their wings, before moving on to farm animals like chickens and sheep, and lastly to human slaves and servants.

All under Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam's immaculate knowledge, who found himself unable to punish his son adequately because of the guilt he felt towards him and his mother.

A romantic at heart, the man had always cherished his first love and even after all she did, Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam was still unable to forget her.

So no matter what mistake his son committed, the man was never admonished, which only let his tyranny grow and grow, leading to the current tragedy.

This of course did not excuse the man from his crimes, and neither could Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam deny his culpability in facilitating his son's crimes.

But strictly speaking, the man himself never did such things, neither did he encourage or propagate such acts.

Alexander was of course unaware of such intricate details, and slitting that man's throat to put him out of his misery, he angrily turned around to sneer at the captured nobles,

"So you serve a lord whose son is such a scum like this? And you dare call your nobility!"

But if Alexander's plan was to intimidate them, he failed, as the nobles were veterans who would not be caught by a simple trap, as one of them simply replied with a brush of his hand,

"Please do not paint everyone with the same brush, my lord. He was not our lord's son, but an illegitimate offspring."

"He is nothing to us- neither a noble nor related to one."

Following this, another quickly chimed in nodding his head,

"Yes, that is correct. Even his 'so called' crimes that you say, that is simply just your word against his. You have no proof. Please do not slander!"

And lastly, another man claimed breezily,

"Whatever Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam and his sons did in their estate, it is up to them. We would never judge them."

It was apparent these men were very nonchalant about the crimes the man had clearly committed and Alexander was indeed very angry to see not even a single word of condemnation from them.

They might not have done these things themselves, but they certainly tacitly condoned, through their actions and gestures.

So Alexander gave them a harsh choice, turning to address them as such,

"Since you are all nobles, you should be aware of the sides me and Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam represent."

"And if you know your lord, and he really is as stubborn as I heard, you should know I will not be able to reach any compromise with him."

"That means once the peace treaty expires, there will be war." Alexander declared in a deep voice, before pulling a chilling look,

"With that inevitability almost set in stone, I see no reason to keep you alive."

"Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam will go to war if I kill you, while Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam plus all of you will go to war if I let to return."

"So doesn't it make more sense to make to end up like that!" Alexander pointed to the corpses lying prone on the ground while producing a malicious grin.

"That! Lord Al... Pasha let us not be rash!" And that certainly got the reaction Alexander wanted from the captured nobles, who up until now had appeared quite relaxed, with that particular statement being uttered by that bushy eye browed man, who further added,

"We... we can swear! As part of our condition for release, we can swear not to participate in any war between Lord Alexander and Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam."

"Oh? Is that possible?" To this concession, Alexander pretended to put asurprised face, like he had never even thought about it, before posing, "Does your oath to Matbar (Marquiss) Kyuam not oblige you to come to his aid when he calls?"

"No! No! We are allowed to make exceptions when our life is in danger! By Ramuh!" The bushy browed swore.

Chapter 858 Tibian Noble Treaty

"Great! Then do as I say and you will be back to your fiefs in no time."

With the nobles properly scared that Alexander would really massacre them all, it did not take long for these nobles to throw Manuk under the bus.

As for how Alexander was so sure that Manuk had truly deserted them, well he had no concrete proof but his hunch was that since no one had bothered to ransom these people something must have happened.

He did not know what so made something up

And that was what brought him to the present, whereupon listening to the captured Zanzan nobles' confession, Alexander turned to address the Tibian entourage,

"Look! This is what you are really fighting for. This is what your so called honorable king plans to do."

"To sacrifice all of you. Just to save himself."

"Do all of you still want to fight for your king? For what?" Alexander spread his arms widely in a grand manner as he posed, before suggesting,

"I will again offer you the chance- join me now and partake in the special benefits I provide, or wait to have your family slowly fade into obscurity."

"....."

The nobles did not immediately answer and some continued to question the captured noble for more details long after their time was due.

But ultimately, they were indeed convinced that Perseus did indeed intend to betray them.

And this left them in a limbo.

They could either continue to follow Perseus and after winning get Amenheraft as their lord.

Or they could take the guaranteed deal with Alexander, which came with some perks as testified by some of the others who had already bent the knee.

The decision was not hard for most.

Thus over the next few days, Alexander was inundated with nobles coming to swear their fealty to him, and from each of them, he would ask the following:

An absolute oath of loyalty denouncing Perseus and accepting Alexander as their new lord.

Swearing to come to Alexander's aid when called upon during times of war.

Having a certain number of envoys in Zanzan's senate building to represent the areas they governed.

Restriction on the size of their personal army based on individual noble's land.

Granting permission to open new temples worshipping Gaia within their privately owned lands.

Ensuring the safety of traders and merchants traveling through their lands.

An extradition treaty.

A flat 1 percent sales tax was placed on all goods entering a city, with few exceptions- such as grain, and salt.

A 3 percent land tax was implemented on all landowners, to be paid annually.

A 1 percent land tax was to be paid to maintain the temple of Gaia by all landowners.

And lastly, the nobles were demanded to open up their treasury and allow Alexander to take half of everything they had.

Now these were only the bullet points of the treaty and the actual thing was quite a few pages long, involving many legal phrases and twisted clauses that prevented any side from worming out of it by a sly tongue.

Among these points, there were naturally a few curious points, such as point 3 which was about sending envoys, point 5- about opening the temples, and even point 7- the extradition treaty.

For point 3, Alexander explained that Tibias would soon be divided into province like administrative zones, and two nobles from those areas would be chosen to represent their parts in Alexander's 'court'.

The reason why he did not call it court was self evident.

As for the details of what opening a temple would involve, well Alexander decided to leave that for later, only making sure to get the nobles' permission long beforehand.

And lastly, what point 7 really meant was that if the guards, or more formally police felt that there was a criminal hiding in a noble's property, they reserved the right to search it.

Outside of these slightly confusing points, there were also some contentious points that caused many of the nobles to haggle.

Especially the last four- 8, 9, 10 and 11.

But it was not only the points that Alexander brought that were curious.

For there were arguably some missing points too, as one might remember when compared to the one Alexander had presented to the Zanzan nobles.

To be precise- where Alexander did not ask for the nobles to stop minting their own coin, nor was there no clause about what the nobles could tax the men working under them.

And the reason for this was because Tibias was unlike the feudalistic Adhania.

In Adhania, the king shared his power with the greatest nobles, and then those nobles shared power with their lesser peers and so on, thus dividing up the country with many spheres of influence.

But Tibias was a much more centralized country.

The king had much greater power over his subjects, with perhaps his greatest ability being able to appoint and remove governors to any city he wished without any reason.

This was in much contrast to Adhania where each noble had their sphere of influence and not even the king would interfere with how he ran things except on very few special occasions- like if he was blatantly the basic laws of the lands, destroying the province or fomenting rebellion.

Thus An Adhanian king could really only exert influence on the other provinces through the use of his faith and the power of oath the nobles swore to him.

But in Tibias, the noblemen were more like rich landowners.

They could not directly levy taxes on the farmers working the lands but was only able to enforce the rate set up by the court, which was in the hands of the royal family.

They also certainly could not mint their own coins, with that sole power belonging to the royal family, although unfortunately for Alexander, none of the coin mints were in the capital, but situated much south, where Tibias had their largest gold mine.

And the nobles were of course strictly forbidden from raising an army, although Alexander had made that written in the treaty once again because he was wary about that thing that much.

From all this, it could be seen that, unlike Adhania, Tibias allowed its king to stick his nose in most noble's business, which conversely meant that the nobles could only pressure the king through economic means- such as not letting goods pass through their lands, making tax collection harder, etc, or by banding together and politically pressuring him.

But unlike their Adhanian counterpart, they faced deficiencies when it came to directly waging war on him, as only the king had an army, ready to put down any rebellion before it could even start going.

Of course, such a structure was only possible due to the state being quite small in size, only 300,000 to 350,000 sq km, as compared to Adhania's 4 million sq. km.

And this was one of the reasons why Perseus was still able to keep on fighting despite losing so many men even though his country only had a population of around 5 million.

By leveraging the centralization.

Alexander's 8th point- the implementation of a sales tax at 1% was half of Tibias's previous rate of 2%.

But that actually caused a lot of the nobles to be displeased, as they claimed,

"My lord, this was one of our biggest sources of income! We had taken half and given His Majesty half. But now....."

The faces many of these shameless nobles put on made Alexander roll his eyes as they made it seem like he was driving them out of their house and leaving them destitute.

Whereas just the money these men earned from their lands would be more than enough to lead a very cushy life.

So outside of Alexander simply muscling them to accept it, he also reasoned,

"This tax can be discussed once again in five years. But for now, the common people need some respite."

"Many have lost brothers, fathers, sons- which is not only just tragic but also means they have just lost their only source of income."

"So they will certainly enjoy the decreased prices."

Alexander was also afraid that with so many good, working men dead, there would be rampant inflation throughout the country as people flocked to the markets but found there was nothing to buy as all the people who would have manufactured these stuff were dead.

So by reducing taxes, Alexander hoped these demand pull inflation might somewhat be negated.

These two reasons combined, as well as the promise that Alexander would be open to renegotiating after 5 years finally convinced the nobles to acquiesce.

But what they were far less amenable to was the 3% percent land tax and 1% tithe.

"This is outrageous! We paid only 1% to His Majesty!" Almost everyone had shouted, with some even accusing Alexander like so,

"Lord Alexander, we thought you were a magnanimous leader when you had brought up the plight of the regular people as you set the sales tax"

"That's why we were willing to take that tax cut."

"But this! It is too much."

They had a façade of righteous anger on them.

It appeared Alexander would have a hard time making these men pay these taxes.

Chapter 859 Tibian Noble Treaty (Part-2)

The nobles' reluctance to pay the large land tax was of course something Alexander had anticipated.

No nobles wanted to pay taxes, including Alexander himself.

But since he was able to foresee that, Alexander was also able to have a great answer.

He reasoned with them, "The 4% total land tax that I ask you to pay is less than half what your Zanzan peers have to give!"

"Just ask them how much they pay?"

"9 percent! 1 percent to me and 8 percent to His Majesty Ptolomy as tithes. Do you want to be like that?"

"I don't get what you are complaining about!" Alexander sounded incredulous.

And this comparison between the two groups quickly made the Tibian nobles pipe down.

Furthermore, Alexander also made sure to give the nobles cheap access to some of his products, such as iron, sugar, etc. like he had done prior, with the exact quantity determined by the amount of land they each controlled, both as a way to help them soothe over their loss and also as a way to tie them to his boat.

Thus ultimately the nobles relented, although not before extracting a three year tax free concession from Alexander.

This Alexander was happy to give as Tibias was already ravaged by war and needed much needed relief.

As it could be seen just how hard it was to make these nobles concede to just these conditions so the difficulty in making them acquiesce to the last point, i.e.- giving up half their treasury, could only be imagined.

But Alexander did manage to do it.

In preparation for this, he first had to get a rough idea of the wealth each noble might have.

And this meant knowing their financial history.

This was a tedious effort, especially given that Tibian did not have tiered nobility like Adhania, so he could not simply put a general 'tax' to each class of nobility like shordars (barons), talukders (viscounts), etc., and ask them to pay up.

Instead, Alexander had to learn the details of each and every individual noble to determine how much they could pay.

Something that would be impossible without Lord Theony's aid, insight, and resources, who opened his vast storage of tax receipts which had the record for each and every one of the noble's payments for the past decade.

So with those ten years' worth of value as a baseline, Alexander felt he was ready.

He called all the nobles to a large feast and before serving the food, made them sit around a few huge tables, and handed them a small piece of blank paper.

"Please write your name." Alexander had first instructed, followed by, "Please write the amount of gold you have in your treasury- all the coins, precious jewelry, stones, slaves, animals, etc. together."

This sudden and very personal request naturally made all the nobles taken a bit back at first, but seeing this Alexander only revealed in a very breezy tone that betrayed the gravity of his speech,

"To celebrate my annexation of these lands, I require all of you to pay half of your treasury as tribute."

"That is my reward- a once in a lifetime deposit."

"And this payment will ensure that none of you are ever attacked."

Alexander's implicit threat was apparent, as he very shamelessly threatened the nobles with war if they did not pay.

Before he added sweetness to the spice,

"But rest assured my lords, I will not simply pocket your funds."

"They will all be reinvested for your betterment."

"It will be used to build new infrastructure such as roads, bridges, irrigation canals, to pay for a bigger army for increased security, to build a proper navy and in general, to increase the overall prosperity of the country."

And Alexander did truly mean it when he said this- as he intended to start some very large projects building projects to develop Tibias.

As for whether the nobles truly believed that, or only thought that Alexander was trying to swindle them out of their money, they kept those thoughts to themselves.

Given Alexander threatened to destroy them if they did not pay, they instead all obediently decided to cough out what was asked of them.

They were also able to comfort themselves when Lord Theony stood up in support of Alexander, saying,

"My fellow lords, do not be sad. It is only money. Remember! It is tradition for the defeated to be sacked. So as the victor, it is only natural for Lord Alexander to demand tribute from us. I would even say that he was generous for not asking for even more." Lord Theony exaggerated, before reinforcing the threat in a hidden way, lights

"Recall! Many noble houses have lost much more. Many houses have been totally wiped out! Many would prefer to pay this money if they could reverse that."

This was said to try and squash any suicidal, rebellious thoughts some of the noble might have, by reminding them of their family, as the slightly plump man who had gained weight over the last few weeks, then put his now chubby hands on his chest to emphasize,

"I too have given the Lord my treasury. And I have given nine tenths, 9/10 of it!"

"Why so much!"

"Because I believe! I believe in what the Pasha said. I believe that this money will be put to good use."

"Like the lord said, the money will be used to better the infrastructure of the country and boost the economy."

At this point Lord Theony then paused to take a look around the room to observe the attention of the crowd, and found most of the men staring intently at him, ears perked up.

Thus bolstered by this encouraging sight, the fine moustached man continued this time pointing his fingers toward a window,

"And you do not have to look far to see evidence of that."

"Recall the pristine road that now exists between Thesalie and Zanzan. I will tell you something many of you might not know!"

"The taxes earned per month in that city is now 1 million ropals! All because of that road! All because goods from Zanzan can easily get to Thesale."

This reveal immediately got a large reaction from the crowd, with many crying out in disbelief,

and Lord Theony struck the iron while it was still hot, pumping his fist and shouting,

"And all of us can be like that!"

"All of you should be aware just how lucrative all the new goods Lord Alexander has promised us. So by loyally serving him, we will be able to get more and more of them."

"That way not only will our economy surely flourish, but the total size of our economy will surely get bigger."

"We will be able to collect more and more tax revenue and within just a few years, we will be able to recoup all the money lost and make even more!"

"A rising tide raises all boats. And Lord Alexander is that tide. All of you would be foolish to miss it!"

By the time Lord Theony had finished, many previously reluctant eyes by now had flipped into little gems of smoldering ambitions and greed.

This speech was of course created by Alexander and recited by Lord Theony, with mostly truths but some great embellishments, such as the lie that all of them could be as rich as Thesalie.

That was not possible, as Thesalie was a unique case courtesy of its geography.

But still, it did the job.

Even though some nobles indeed guessed this was all just Alexander's marketing gimmick, and many even thought Lord Theony to be only a crony for Alexander by now, but still, many of the things, including the example he gave were indeed true.

This helped many short sighted men to see the demand from a new perspective, reasoning by siding with him, they would be able to indeed make a lot of money.

Best of all, they would have to only give 1% of that as profit to Alexander.

This was in much contrast to how they usually earned money, which was by getting around 1% of the value of the good in taxes.

Thus under Alexander, these nobles were allowed to earn many times more.

Hence although even then some men grumbled but ultimately had carts and carts of gold, slaves, animals, wine, and even food produce be sent to Zanzan city, the collection point for all these funds.

As for how much they sent and how they were prevented from simply lying, well that was where that small piece of paper and the arrangement in which Alexander declared the idea came in.

The sudden immediateness of the request made many nobles unable to come up with excuses beforehand, thus many were forced to reveal the amount.

And if they quoted too small a number or simply said that they could not recall the exact amount right now, Alexander would hand them a new value that he had estimated based on their previous year's tax payment.

And if they even then protested, Alexander threatened to send prospectors along with soldiers to their estate to verify their claim.

That usually got the message through as most nobles did not want a bunch of armed, belligerent men in their territories.

Chapter 860 Rewarding Lord Theony

The threat of being audited by Alexander was enough for most nobles to give the correct amount of tithe to him.

Too many nobles had too many skeletons in their closets that they preferred to keep hidden and did not want Alexander to go rummaging through them.

And besides, who knew if Alexander would swindle them of much more than half by underreporting the value of some product?

As for hiding the contents of the treasury somewhere else, well a big pile of gold and other precious metals and stones was surprisingly hard to hide.

And more than that, the ire they would have to face if they were found out made it not worth the trouble.

So the nobles bit the bullet and paid up, believing what Alexander promised would indeed come true.

Thus in total, by combining the contribution from the nobles with the royal treasury that Alexander took, which admittedly was quite minuscule, Alexander earned about 50 million ropals in total, combining the gold and all other goods together.

This was roughly 1 ton of gold, which was of course decent, though frankly, Alexander had expected at least 100 million given the wealth he had seen,

But it seemed Tibias's hard times had even affected those at the very top, and many had very dry cash reserves.

However, Alexander was at least happy that this was enough to recoup the cost of raising his army.

And to thank the main person who helped make this happen- Lord Theony, he asked the man to meet him in his study, whereupon he addressed,

"Lord Theony, your contribution to our cause has been nothing short of short. How would you like to be remunerated?"

At the straightforwardness, Lord Theony was both a bit surprised but also elated in his heart as he was glad to see Alexander not winding his words and looking for excuses.

'So it has come!' Lord Theony cheered at the chance at last, and then he did stand on ceremony.

He quickly recited the speech he had prepared and refined many times in his heart, speaking eloquently,

"My lord, I believe the matter of steward of Tibias is one of the most important moments of our lives."

"The decision of who is put in charge to oversee these lands on your behalf will surely have consequences that will reverberate through the annals of history for countless generations."

"I stand before you as one of the great lords in the country- a veteran of many wars."

"I'd like to think my experience has led to some small skill in statecraft and I apprehend that I am able to command the loyalty and service many houses in Tibias."

"My loyalty to you has been tested and demonstrated many times and I swear if I were to be given the chance to demonstrate my devotion to you, Tibias will remain an ever peaceful and prosperous place."

Lord Theony was both humble and ambitious in his words, as evidenced by how he said 'Tibias would remain peaceful if he was made the steward', which also implicitly meant that if that did not happen, it would be vice versa.

"Okay. I will make you the steward of these lands!" Alexander's answer to this was almost instant, his tone flat and light.

He knew this was what the man always wanted, and frankly, there was no other candidate other than Lord Theony for this post.

The only two others who could have competed with him were Mithriditus and Perseus himself.

Towards such a quick answer, Lord Theony was at first a bit taken back, as he thought the other side would surely haggle a bit.

'Hahaha, thank you, thank you, my lord.' But having gotten the answer so easily, Lord Theony let out a great, cheerful laugh, as he quickly got on his knees to swear the oath then and there.

Following that, Lord Theony would then make another request of Alexander.

"My lord, I have a son- Gnaeus. He is the current steward of my house but due to his illegitimate birth, he is unable to inherit my estate."

"I would like you to name him my successor. I would be ever grateful."

Given that there was a new sheriff in town, instead of forcefully making Theony abdicate which would no doubt cause some of his retainers to protest, Lord Theony wanted to use Alexander's influence to do it.

That way he could simply say it was Alexander's wish.

"Oh? Isn't Theony your successor? What's wrong with him?" At this uncommon request, Alexander naturally was surprised.

He still remembered Theony, the man who was exchanged in exchange for Laykash.

To his inquiry, Lord Theony then revealed what Theony had done and how he had let Philips escape, at last reasoning, "Thus I have trouble believing that he will be loyal to you my lord."

"Okay. A few days later I will decree that Theony has abdicated his position due to shame and name our other son as the successor."lights

And learning of the reason, Alexander felt convinced.

The fact that Theony had been impersonating the Crown Prince had gotten out once Alexander entered the city, and upon learning the full story behind how that had happened, and since the father was not simply depriving his child out of spite but had a true reason, he consented

Besides, to him it really did not matter who came after Lord Theony, as given any unforeseen circumstances, the man was likely to be at Tibias's helm for quite some time.

Anything later, he could deal with then.

"Thank you. Thank you." Alexander's quick reply naturally got him a profuse torrent of thanks from the man as Lord Theony felt glad that Alexander did not ask too many questions and thus even retook his oath, The following week Alexander would hold a feast to celebrate this announcement and in that party, he would even be introduced by Lord Theony to his three daughters, where the man made it clear he was in clear favor of Alexander choosing any of them as his mistress.

This in itself of course would not have been a problem, as this type of this was par for the course.

But the problem was the fact that all three of them were actually married!

However that did not stop the ambitious lord from trying to form a familiar bond with Alexander, as he figured given Alexander's young age, his future would be limitless.

So although he had no unmarried daughter, he proposed,

"My lord, you can choose whoever you like. Even all three of them are okay if they catch your fancy! I will ask their husbands to divorce them!"

To this Alexander was of course shocked but Lord Theony did not seem to see any problem with that plan.

And then for the briefest of seconds, Alexander did consider it.

A small reason was because looking at the three- one particular woman did strike a bit of his fancy.

She was the eldest of the three.

Mature, around her mid thirties- she did not have too beautiful a face, but instead gave a very motherly aura.

And in much contrast to Alexander's usual preference of slim and curvaceous, she was a bit plump with wide hips, heavy breasts that were apparent even through her heavy gown, and her most striking feature of all- rosy, fluffy cheeks.

Alexander thought she would be very soft to squeeze in all the right places and dreamed how she would sing in bed and what twisted face she would make while swinging her heavy hips as Alexander destroyed her from below.

He really wanted to know.

Surely the canal having that had given birth four times would be a bit loose- perfect for Alexander's girthy meat.

Even the evil thought of asking Lord Theony to let him first taste the three in bed and then choose invaded Alexander's mind, as like that he would be able to get the best of both worlds.

His lower half even felt hot at that thought.

But such lustful intentions only lasted an ephemeral second.

He would never take a mistress just based on his personal whims.

There would be no end of the line if he did that, and his harem number would probably swell to hundreds like that.

And if he truly found them physically attractive, at best, they would be like Lady Felicia, someone who he would occasionally hook up with behind her husband's back just to fill those physical attractions.

So the bigger reason why Alexander thought about accepting the offer was because of the reason Lord Theony wanted to.

He felt that marrying one of his daughters would strengthen Lord Theony's loyalty to him.

But ultimately he refrained, feeling bad about breaking up a happy marriage just for him.

'Dammit. I should have brought it up when I first went to meet him!' And hearing it, Lord Theony had felt he had missed his chance back then.

However, in truth, he knew that if he were to bring up such a large ask back then, Alexander would have most likely rejected him as the value of the information he had provided did not match the request.

And thus could only console himself that he had achieved two of his biggest goals.