

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hi there, as some of you might already know, I took a few days more as I had to brainstorm how to change a piece of the story. I mean, I had planned this whole story back in 2020 and some stuff has changed along the years, but nothing major till now. The initial plan I had does no longer fit the tone of the story and certain characters in my opinion so I preferred to modify it, and I needed a little more time to create an adjusted storyline that would make sense.

Okay, enough of my ramblings. Enjoy the chapter!

Chapter 78: Play your Role

Zanac Valleon Igana Ryle Vaiself was a simple young man, well, it would be better to say a simple prince. As the second born most would expect him to have started gathering support under his name by now, seeing how his older brother is a bumbling fool who normally would never have a place on the throne if anyone had the future of the kingdom at heart. And yet, he was here, spending his days in the library and playing chess with some, not as simple as they look, servants.

Well, he wasn't exactly doing that at the moment seeing how he had been summoned alongside the rest of his family in the council

room by his father. The same father that had just, less than a month ago, threatened war upon another kingdom over the death of his own daughter. Not that Zanac blamed the man. He knew little of Alysanne, shy and silent as she was, an acquaintance would be the better term to describe his relationship with her. Still, he could understand where his father was coming from, she was the last gift of their mother to this world.

He lazily gazed upon the Four Great nobles taking their seat, well... except for the magic caster, he was nowhere to be seen, but his father didn't seem bothered at all by his absence.

Blumrush, Pespea, and Raeven, men he might have politically courted at some point... that was if he thought he had any chance at getting the throne. That was something he was not delusional enough to think was achievable at the moment.

The noble faction was gone, the royal faction was decimated, minor nobles continued to silently die like flies every now and then if they displeased their subjects too much.

All the while his father was looking the other way as the only man who retained... no, who increased, his power was getting more and more control over the kingdom.

So, what was even the point in trying? In figuring out alliances? In scheming? In the end, whoever was supported by Marquis Satoru would become king... or queen. That is, if the men didn't just decide to take it all for himself, it would be bothersome, but quite doable given the right circumstances.

His gaze fell on the vacant seat at his father's right. A rare sight, seeing how his youngest sister hardly missed any meeting, and had never been late to one she intended to attend. She had

probably already whispered whatever she wanted in their father's ear beforehand.

The absence of the most influential and powerful key figures of the kingdom did not bode well for whatever was to come. But he was hardly concerned about it. After all, he had already given up on this hopeless game before even starting to play it.

“Now that everyone is present, I will open this meeting.”

His father spoke, his voice lacking any of his usual joviality, giving off only cold indifference the likes the second prince never heard coming from his father.

“We have received a missive from the Holy Kingdom, an answer to our demands.”

‘More like yours’ Zanak didn't dare voice his thoughts which seemed to be shared by most of the noble present judging by their expressions, not that any was brazen or mad enough to say anything about it.

“They claim ignorance on our accusations, but they acknowledge our reasons and hope to settle this peacefully with a direct negotiation.”

That surprised Zanak, the Holy Kingdom was playing a dangerous game, it was clear that his father was dead serious in declaring an open war, and even if giving away the High Priestess could be a disastrous move, open war would lead to much more severe consequences aside from political tensions.

In his view it was an easy choice, but then again, he was no ruler, and his opinion had little weight.

“Negotiations would take place on neutral ground, or it would be better to say sea, since they have proposed to meet on one of their vessels on the south-west, just outside our borders.”

His father continued as his voice gained more heat behind it, his sarcasm was bitter and unwarranted, but nobody said anything.

“Before I summoned you, my faithful subjects, I had instructed you to start gathering men and military forces as I had no intention of indulging any of this... but calmer minds prevailed in the end, if the kingdom of murderers wants to talk, let them talk! Let’s hear what they have to say for themselves.”

‘So, Renner intervened’ that was what Zanak concluded from his father’s words he spat out like poison.

‘And yet... she is not here...’ his eyes roamed again over the empty seat. A most peculiar riddle he lacked the pieces to solve.

“Seeing how his territory has entertained commercial relations with the Holy Kingdom for decades, I have selected Marquis Raeven to be one of the two envoys.”

The king nodded in the direction of said Marquis who raised and elegantly bowed toward the king.

“It would be an honor, Your Majesty, to represent the people and the Kingdom in these uncertain times.”

He said with all the etiquette of one who was raised into nobility since birth.

“As for a representative for the Royal Family, I have thought of my son Barbro.”

Zanak’s eyes almost bulged out at the completely asinine declaration. Did his father plan to fail the negotiation that badly?

What else would possess him to send the likes of Barbro to negotiate something so delicate? It would be like unleashing an ogre in a glass shop!

“Your Majesty, if I may?”

The one to intervene was none other than Marquis Raeven who had yet to sit back down. The king merely gave the noble a nod, allowing him to speak his mind.

“With no disrespect meant toward Prince Barbo, I believe that in this case Prince Zanac would be a far more adequate choice.”

The short prince’s neck almost snapped as the noble uttered those words. His blue eyes glaring fiercely at the noble of the west, his mind racing to understand what game was this man playing at.

He didn’t need to turn to imagine his older brother’s smug grin disappearing only to be replaced by a scowl while his face reddened in anger.

“How so Marquis Raeven?”

His father questioned with no bite behind his words, but only curiosity.

“As I said, my words are certainly not meant to discredit Prince Barbro’s abilities, but I think that with our military forces gathering, he may serve a better role in being a rallying symbol for the soldiers... he is the Heir to the Throne after all, I think seeing him take a direct role in this very likely conflict will improve his image and standing greatly in the eye of the common people... of course I will do my best to avoid the possibility of a war in the first place, but we all know how these negotiations tend to end.”

‘Yes, if one side has no intention to budge on any point, the discussion can hardly be considered a negotiation’ Zanac said himself as his eyes darted toward his older brother, to see how the Marquis’ words would be received.

Much to his surprise, his brother no longer scowled, but rather seems to have accepted the Marquis’ words, with some reluctance of course.

This was strange, his brother, for all he was a warmonger, had never cared for the opinion or desires of the common people. It was strange that such words would appease him so. Something might have changed while he did not notice. For some reason he had the impression his youngest sister had something to do with this.

“What say you, Zanac, you would accept this duty?”

He hoped his father would not just put him in the spotlight like this. He had always been self-conscious about his not exactly charismatic appearance, so he often tried to avoid being the center of attention, even more in public occasions.

“I am ever at the service of the crown, if my presence is required, I will do my best to serve the kingdom in any way it requires.”

He said neutrally, giving his father a small bow of his head.

“Very well then, you and Marquis Raeven will meet the envoys in three weeks, meet me later to discuss the finer details on the limits of the negotiation.”

The king instructed as his gaze left his youngest son, much to this last one’s relief.

“Now, as for the mobilization, Marquis Satoru has already gathered most of his forces...”

The king began before being interrupted.

“Forgive me Your Majesty, but where exactly is the Marquis? Shouldn’t he attend such a critical meeting?”

The one foolish enough to question the king was none other than Blumrush, not that Zanac had many hopes for the man who by now resembled one of the minor lords rather than one of the four most powerful nobles of the kingdom.

“The Marquis is with the Warrior Captain at the moment, they are attending to a most urgent matter, I will make sure to notify him of what transpired here as soon as possible... speaking of which, I have received no reports on the numbers raised by your mobilization Marquis Blumrush.”

The marquis seemed taken aback by the monarch’s words as he clearly did not expect the table to be turned on him. Fool got what he deserved for acting like a fool, or so Zanac thought.

“W-we had a small setback! This last winter has not been good for crops and many are worried for the lack of labor force if they are called to arms... but I assure you, Your Majesty! I will put those peasants in their place!”

The Marquis made a fool of himself with those fumbled words. Zanac, as well as the court, knew exactly what was the problem, the fool had a silent civil war going on in his territory... the northern Marquis thought that having his own version of Seven Hands would have somehow helped him get rid of the caster’s criminal organization... but apparently Blumrush did not possess

the same talent as the caster, and the organization he funded did not hesitate to turn against him once they grew powerful enough.

The northern Marquis nowadays hid in his precious fortress while his territory was ravaged by the conflict of those organizations, Zanak doubted the noble will ever retake control of his lands.

If Seven Hands won, they would have full control over the territory and Blumrush would have no stand to protest since this was the result of his own actions. If the other criminal organization won then he would have to publicly request aid to rid himself of them, exposing his incompetence that surely would bring his status down to a minor noble at best, the lands would be reassigned to someone more capable, and Zanak had no doubt on the identity of that someone.

Either way, the bloodline of Blumrush was done for, the four great nobles will soon be three.

As he lost himself to his own musing he had completely tuned out the rest of the conversation going on around him, which wasn't exactly good seeing how he would have to pull his own weight this time around. And while he hardly cared for any political standing anymore, he would rather not make a fool of himself like Blumrush.

He shivered at the thought, and with that dreadful prospect in mind, he focused again on the discussion.

{Green Claw's Village}

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

The blonde human petted the hydra's heads one by one, she learnt through failure that if she petted one for too long, the others would

get jealous and the hydra had grown too big for her to pet them all together like she did once.

“Hey big boy, it has been a bit, hasn’t it?”

She asked in a whisper as the hydra cooed in her hands.

“Shasuryu told me about the fire stone incident... you are a very special boy, aren’t you? But now I have to pay for thm, so I think I will have to ground you... who am I kidding, you are too cute!”

The hydra seemed to understand her as he gave her the best four pairs of puppy eyes she had ever seen.

The incident in question happened a few months before. The lizardmen village has been trading with the Azerlisia Coalition for a while, they mostly exchanged wood, which the Coalition had great use for but no way to acquire it, in exchange of some useful goods like reinforced metal nets for their fish farms or, in this case, fire stones, which were magical stones imbued with fire the lizardmen used to lit a fire when it was raining or the terrain was too damp.

Well, long story short, they stored the stones in the same barrels they stored fish in, and Luck confused the two and swallowed an entire barrel of fire stones. When she heard the story Lakys was horrified at the thought of the poor young hydra getting extremely sick, or even dying, it turns out that the hydra had begun to spew fire from then on.

Lakys was as confused as the other lizardmen were at the time, they told her that hydras were already rare and they had no idea if fire stones had the same effects on all hydras or Luck was somehow special. She might need to ask Satoru once she returns from her mission.

The hydra's long necks wrapped around her as they lifted her up from the ground and began moving her around playfully. She smiled at the silly baby she had adopted and that now has grown into a really majestic creature. She played along with the hydra to push away all the negative thoughts she was having as of late.

“Lady Lakyus.”

She looked down at the familiar voice of Leinas. The woman stood there with a neutral look on her face. The young noble caught her more than once looking at her like this as of late.

“What is it? Did something come up?”

She asked as the hydra lowered her down with an annoyed grumble.

“No, the others are fine, Riyuro said he wanted to take a walk.”

It went unsaid that the Quagoa was probably taking the chance to take a look at the mountain which has been his home for his entire life. Lakyus would not deny him that, she trusted him to know his limits and to not approach it.

She looked around noticing Zaryusu with his wife Crusch and their adorable children. The vision of the happy family always brought a smile on her lips, she had made clear multiple time to the lizardman that if he wanted to stay she would not resent him at all. But the wielder of Frost Pain was stubborn in his way of thinking.

On the other side of the small village, toward the lake's shore, Vulmitar, Rayne, and Arche were discussing only the gods knew what. The Frost Dragon has been pushing himself extra hard as of late, ever since his two caster friends managed to breakthrough into the 3rd tier. He was clearly determined in not remaining

behind. Though, she also was proud of the fact the dragon often trained with her for the sake of his physical prowess too.

Her eyes returned on Leinas.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

She noticed how the older blonde fidgeted at her words, biting her lip as if conflicted about something.

“I noticed how we are moving toward the Wyvern Tribes quite quickly.”

Lakyus blinked at her words.

“Yes, it is a long journey and way back, I want to go back before I die of old age, you know?”

The wielder of the dark blade scratched her cheek with a smirk at her own joke.

“My lady, are you... running away from what is happening in the kingdom?”

That question wiped Lakyus’ smirk off her face. The air stilled as the following silence was filled with tension.

She... she had been trying so hard to not think about it, the idea of a war on that scale... turned her stomach. The death that would ensure from that... went against everything she believed in.

And yet, she could not face it head on, not after what happened in the Azerlisia Mountains. Who was she to go to Satoru, Renner, or the King and request things to be done another way? When they lost a daughter, a sister, and a fiancée.

Compared to what they were feeling, her words would be trifling things indeed.

She should have been there for Renner, as her knight... no, as her friend, in the first place!

But she ran away... yes, that was exactly right, Leinas was exactly right... Lakyus had run away from what she could not bear to witness nor could change.

She swore it would have been different the next time... she swore it after Azerlisia. Yet, nothing changed, the only difference was that instead of hitting her head against a wall till she bled... she instead just ran away.

‘What a worthless existence... Master Brain, is this what you meant that time, when I was ignorant of the world, dreaming of impossible dreams?’ she remembered the words of her master as she trained under him in the alleyways of the empire.

But Master Brain believed in her... he took up his blade and fought!

Oh, how she misunderstood that moment... she thought that it was just that easy, that the gesture of her master signified that she was ready to face the world with her convictions.

No, only now she understood him... he believed she could become someone capable of that, but to achieve it, she would have to grow much more than she already did.

That day, in that arena, her master saw a larva who dreamed of becoming a dragon. She was still very much closer to the larva than to the dragon.

“Lady Lakyus...”

Her train of thought was interrupted by the older woman.

Lakyus hesitated, losing herself for a moment, asking herself how should she even react. She caressed the hilt of her blade, her digits brushing against a certain golden ribbon she was given years ago.

The smooth fabric, while cold, brought warmth to her heart, the memories linked to it giving her a renewed sense of herself... of who she had always been deep inside since the day she bowed and accepted the favor of a lonely princess.

A new and tranquil smile made its way on her visage.

“Yes, I ran away Leinas, for there is nothing I could do there but watch misery unfold.”

The knight visibly tensed at her words.

“Feeling bad for what will happen and telling everyone that what is happening is wrong will not change anything... words have only meaning if you are backed up by your actions... I don’t have a solution at the moment, but instead of wasting time complaining and trying to change something with just words, I am now trying to find a solution.”

She continued, looking directly in Leinas’ eyes.

“It is exactly like with the goblins, my empty words on how it is wrong to fight for territory would have not filled their empty stomach... teaching them that violence is not the only answer to their problem and providing them with a solution allowed them to change... slowly, bit by bit, but change they did.”

With each word she felt more and more confidence swell in her heart.

“I intend to change the world Leinas, you know that, and if to do it I will have to find a solution for every single problem... then so be it!”

Silence ensured as the two blondes shared that moment of peace.

“Oh, by the way, is dinner ready? I am kinda starving!”

A small smile blossomed on Leinas’ face at Lakyus’ sudden declaration.

‘Yes, it will be alright’ she thought as she glanced down, at the ribbon she was still caressing with her fingers.

‘As long as there is someone who believes in a foolish knight like me... it will all be alright... good luck, Renner’ the golden knight thought as she decided to push her worries on the back of her mind and focus solely on her goal.

{Arwintar}

{Jircniv’s P.O.V.}

How? How? How? HOW? HOW? HOW? HOW?! HOW?! HOW?!

HOW WAS ALL OF THIS GOING SO WRONG?!

By now he was supposed to be gloating while putting up a sad façade in public!

So why?

WHY WAS THAT DAMN DEVIL STILL ALIVE?!

He spent countless nights and resources for this! Two damn years of his life he prepared his revenge!

For she took everything from him! His ambition! His dream! She forced him to interpret a damn role! As if he was a jester performing for the masses!

He had endured it! Had he not?!

Didn't he swallow his pride in order to play the role while praying on her downfall?!

His plan was perfect!

He had used the foolish faith and their pointless grudges perfectly, didn't he?!

He fooled the idiotic Archbishop into believing that once Re-Estize fell he would aid him in establishing a second theocracy for the four gods, the moron lapped it up like the dog he was?!

Ha managed to hide behind the idiocy of faith to coerce even the Holy Kingdom, with no one suspecting him in the slightest! The only one who knew was the Archbishop and he had him killed far before the plan was supposed to start! To erase even the slightest of suspicions or chances the moron would talk!

He had waited two years to hear that the damn devil died choking on her own ambitions! She even presumed to order him around when she sent him a missive implicitly ordering him to marry her sister! He laughed himself silly that time at the thought of that soon to be dead devil!

And then the news came... the princess was dead! And it was THE DAMN WRONG PRINCESS! HOW? HOW COULD THEY HAVE FAILED?!

No human should have been able to survive this!

Yes, that's right! That is it! She is no human at all! She is a spawn of hell sent as the bane of his existence!

The world had to balance his existence with someone else and they created the most vile creature to ever walk this world!

She would have made the Greed Kings looking like children having a temper tantrum!

No, he needed to calm down... calm down... breath slowly... in and out... his blood pressure needed to stay at a normal rate for him to think clearly.

Yes, he could feel it, his heart was no longer racing, his mind was no longer scrambled.

The emperor opened his eyes to face the sole piece of paper on his empty desk, a letter received this morning, from none other than her.

He should burn it... yes, he should absolutely burn it and be done with it. That devil was only aiming to drive him mad, reading her words could only end in ruin.

And yet, his natural human curiosity was always his greatest flaw.

With a single precise movement he opened the missive, unfolding less of a page of text written in that precise, elegant and disgusting calligraphy he came to associate with her.

Dear friend,

I write to you with the heaviest of hearts. As you probably already know my wonderful sister is dead, a truly terrific ordeal it was. Who could have predicted such a thing?

The emperor paused as he felt like gagging at the words.

My hands are still trembling as I write you this.

Even though your actions on my behalf have been most appreciated... I must still warn you that straining yourself like this could be bad for your health.

He felt a shiver go down his spine. There was no need for her to thank him for going along with her charade... so what was she referring to?

No... it could not be... she could not possibly know!

I am sorry for thanking you only now. As you can imagine I have been incredibly busy as of late.

Your last actions in your country left me breathless and awed. I seldomly ever meet someone who is capable of giving me such a startle.

The more he read, the more he felt like sinking into his chair to never reemerge.

If there is something I learned from all of your actions is that you should never add sugar to tea... it ruins the taste... thank you for showing me the right way.

You are as always a magnificent friend, and I can't wait to observe your next moves.

Always with my beautiful eyes on you,

Renner

BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT! BURN IT!

He needed to burn this cursed paper now!

He shot up from his chair like a man possessed and stumbled to his fireplace, throwing the parchment inside as if it was a scorching hot and burning his hand.

She knew

She knew

She knew

...

She knew

...

She knew

That was all he could think in that moment as he saw the paper burn to ashes in a matter of seconds. As if doing this would erase what he just read. As if it would change reality itself.

He slumped forward, his knees giving out, bringing him on all fours, like a dog, with his head almost touching the floor.

Like that, defeated, he contemplated reality and what just happened.

Fat tears gathered in his eyes even if a mad grin was forcing his way on his face against his will.

He could not help the absurdity of it all.

And then he laughed, and he cried, and he laughed again...

A cacophony of contradictions echoed in his chambers.

And as he felt his bile stir in his stomach, Jircniv could hear it, among the cacophony of sounds...

He could hear his sanity cracking.

{Ro-Lente's Castle}

{Zanac's P.O.V.}

The second prince was waiting patiently in his room. The sun had already fallen over the horizon leaving space to the pale moon. A strange hour to receive guests.

Even more guests who were uninvited, but Zanac knew something was up the moment he had been pulled in today's meeting.

A single knock interrupted the peaceful silence.

"Come in."

He said without moving from his seat.

The door opened and closed quickly as none other than Marquis Raeven made his way inside his private chambers.

"Good evening, Marquis, I have been waiting."

Zanac said, gesturing for the seat in front of him.

"My apologies, these last days I had to study the servants' movement so to find an opening to enter your chambers unnoticed."

The tall man said as he took the offered seat.

"My, so eager to dodge my sister's little birds, maybe you will finally explain what you were thinking this morning... making such brazen moves is not your style Marquis."

The prince continued as he uncorked a bottle of wine, filling in two glasses.

"Tea has lost its appeal as of late, wouldn't you say?"

He asked mockingly, his dark humor so many found unpleasant making his way out of his mouth.

“Indeed, and to answer your question, it is exactly as I said... I believe prince Barbro will serve a much better role by staying here, what I omitted to say was that you are a far greater negotiator and much more gifted when it comes to politics.”

The marquis explained much to Zanac’s amusement.

“My, how flattering Marquis, you really have such a large heart you manage to fit the entire kingdom’s welfare in it.”

He paused to sip his wine, his pleasant smile disappearing from his face the following second.

“Now, tell me, what do you want from me, Marquis Raeven?”

He questioned seriously.

Silence descended into the room for a good minute before the eastern noble bowed his head to the point of almost touching the table with his face.

“Please Your Highness, become King.”

The Marquis proclaimed with clear pain in his tone.

Zanac’s mouth fell open at the Marquis’ words, to the point it took him quite some time to even be capable of speaking, let alone recompose himself.

“What... are you even saying, Marquis! I demand an explanation!”

The second prince demanded in shock at the Marquis’ sudden shift.

“It is the princess, Your Highness, she... she is a monster... a wicked thing vesting human skin... but what lays beneath has nothing humane about it.”

Zanac was speechless at the Marquis’ seemingly madness-induced words.

“W-What do you mean by that?”

He asked, unnerved like few times in his life.

“I-I have never been a good man, Your Highness, I admit it... at a certain point I even schemed to take the throne... b-but once I saw it... that monster in human skin... when I realized the scope of her plans... I could do nothing but cower in fear.”

The seemingly mad Marquis mumbled those words, all forms of dignity seemingly forgotten as the prince could see tears drip down from the still bowed head of the noble.

“At first... at first I thought that it was the magic caster’s doing... that he was using the princess to gain connections and power... everything matched, the revolts, Seven Hands, the combined uprising of the kingdom’s and empire’s traitors that he promptly put down... I thought it all his scheme.”

The Marquis admitted openly with despair dripping from every word.

“But then... then I saw the princess make her move, how she took control of the court, how she whispered in the king’s ear, how she met often with the first prince... how, all of a sudden everything shifted in her favor... I then realized that this was all her doing... to the last minute detail.”

Zanac kept silent, he couldn't bring himself to speak, he was lucky he was still capable of breathing at all.

"I confronted her then... and s-she... she just laughed... she admitted to it all... how she used the magic caster... how she fabricated the entirety of the uprising just to put out of the picture those who would oppose her... how she whispered in her father's ear until he was but a trained puppy ready to listen to everything she said... how she took control of her gullible brother to have a trained puppet to maneuver once the old king exhausted his uses... I would not be surprised if the second princess' death was her doing too."

The marquis laid everything on the table much to Zanac's bewilderment.

"You lie... you are mad... there is no way..."

He could barely articulate those words as his wide-open eyes never left the bowing noble.

The marquis did not respond to his accusation, he limited himself to standing from his chair and prostrating on the floor before Zanac in complete submission, his forehead pressed against the floor.

"Prince Zanac, I beg of you... you are the only one who has not been involved in this due to your distancing from court and the pursuit of the throne... you are the only hope for this kingdom... so I beg you! I implore you! You must become king!"

The man cried out in complete desperation as the prince could still not believe what he was witnessing with his own eyes and hearing with his own ears.

“Why Marquis... why are you telling me this? Why are you trying to help me? Why not join the winning side?”

He questioned, witnessing how his words caused the noble's body to tremble all over.

“You haven't seen them Your Highness... those eyes... those empty and dead eyes that looked at everything and everyone as if they were the most insignificant of bugs... no, even that comparison might not be enough... a person like that cannot be reasoned with... cannot be allied with... she will just destroy you at her earliest convenience, be you friend or foe... it is all the same to her... and... she has my son! My only son! My little Riri! I cannot protect him! She told me directly that if I dared overstep my boundaries, she will have him killed!”

Zanac saw the noble tighten his fists in rage at his own impotence.

“Please Marquis... rise...”

He said after a couple minutes of absolute silence between the two, the only sound in the rooms being the whisperings of a broken man.

The broken noble raised his head with hope printed all over his face. He slowly got to his feet as he anxiously awaited the prince's next words.

“If what you say is true... this cannot continue... this is pure madness... but you know as well as me what power my sister holds, this entire castle buzzes with her minions, serving as eyes and ears... but I don't think a clever man such as yourself would come to me without a plan.”

Zanac said, curious to hear what the other man had concocted. If this was really what was happening... as a prince, he had a

responsibility to put an end to it... to not do so would mean jeopardize the lives of thousands... no, maybe millions, if the one to instigate this war had really been Renner.

“Yes, Your Highness, that idiot Blumrush might have been a good ally, if it wasn’t for the fact he lost control over his own territory... but that also makes him desperate, so you will easily manage to get him on your side by promising his lands back... not that the man has much strength left to offer.”

The marquis began to explain quickly.

“Marquis Pespea might be your most precious possible ally, he is married to your sister though... if we manage to convince him to join an uprising, he might stab us in the back to take the throne for himself, his marriage would give him quite the valid claim... so while he certainly is a valuable ally, we must still watch our back.”

He continued explaining, receiving a nod from Zanac who could only agree with the logical reasoning.

“Marquis Satoru is a lost cause, he will never turn away from the princess, he had gained too much and is too deep... a real shame since he will be the fiercest enemy we will face... and then there is me, I cannot support you directly Your Highness, the princess has me cornered, but I will declare in your favor once the time is right.”

The marquis concluded his recap of the great powers still present in the kingdom.

“Marquis, I fear that even with that power, it will be hard to face Marquis Satoru... his influence and power are even greater than

the crown's at the moment, and he made no secret of the many allies he made over the years."

Zanac expressed his doubt in their capability to face such a foe.

"Yes, indeed, that is why... you must court the minor nobility, Your Highness... those who are still dissatisfied with the current state of the kingdom... the princess knows that if they bend together they might be problematic, so she is reaping them one by one."

Raeven explained prompting Zanac to try and calculate how much power they would hold combined.

"With the entirety of nobility united against him, even Marquis Satoru will not be able to win easily... he might possess the greater territory and population, but the rest of the kingdom combined still outnumbers him... a powerful caster he may be, but he cannot fight an entire war alone... once his seat of power is lost, he will need to flee."

Zanac dwelled on the Marquis' words.

"This is so sudden Marquis, I think... I think I might need time..."

He finally decided to speak as the Marquis just nodded much to his relief.

"I understand, but please be quick, if we want to move and stand a chance, we can't afford to waste anymore time... the more time passes the more enemies the princess eliminates, leaving us with fewer and fewer allies."

Zanac nodded at the Marquis.

"Thank you... thank you, Your Highness."

The noble bowed once again to Zanak with clear relief marking his face. With a swift gesture he grabbed his wine glass and raised it.

“To the next monarch.”

He said while giving Zanak a small hesitant smile the prince tried to reciprocate.

He was left alone in short time after that exchange.

Free to dwell on all he heard and discovered this evening.

He looked at his reflection on the window.

Short, chubby, and overall uncharismatic... who would have guessed it would be him to hold the kingdom's last hope in his hands.

Be it as it may.

He will have to play his role, like everyone else did.

A.N.

Well, well, well, I know, I know, we are not exactly moving foreword with the war, but you know, wars just don't happen in a week, a ton of time is needed to ready troops and resources... in the meantime some interesting things are happening, wouldn't you say?

I am really curious to know what you think of all of this, so leave a comment / review to let me know!

Stay safe! Till next time!