

The Changing of Tides

A Prince Irus side story detailing events of early Chapter Four.

Irus stared at the councillors around him, their words like barbed poison as they spoke over his head. Ellie sat at the head of the table, her expression disturbed as if she had realised the true consequences of sheltering an exiled prince like Irus. Irus dug his nails into the armrests of his chair. The wood bit at his fingers as splinters pressed into the pads of his fingers.

His uncle was here.

The thought alone was enough to send his heartbeat thundering, the way Crown's hooves dug into the dirt when he had to flee. A prickling feeling of dread crept up along his spine, the overwhelming doubt that he would always be pursued for being an unwanted heir. His uncle had no love for Irus, but he had never truly known how devastating the wrath of the Blood Guard could be until he had to flee.

He tried not to think about the carnage of Salt Bay, the faces of the dead and the stench of their blood. Though he would never admit it, the sight of their deaths had left him thinking about that night every day. Irus wondered if the same fate would befall Vinia and its people. Had he only succeeded in bringing more death and destruction to them?

In the aftermath of his uncle's arrival, Irus had not known what to do or say. Fear coursed through his veins and the sensation was laughable after the perils he had already faced. He was exiled and for that, the people of Cyre despised him, though perhaps they could not rival the loathing of his uncle. In truth, Irus did not know where to go or what to say. It was evident that no matter how far he fled, he would always be found.

"I say we give him up."

The voice belonged to one of the older councillors, a man who looked to be in his sixties. He threw Irus a wicked glower and Irus struggled not to cower under the look. In Cyre, no one had ever dared threaten him or look upon him with such disdain. Yet, here in Vinia, the councillors bickered over his future as if he was not present. Ellie frowned and turned her eyes to the councillor.

“We are not agreeing to Virion’s terms,” she replied.

Irus ignored the debate that followed, the words drowned out by the sharpness of his breath. His eyes were burning, a tell-tale sign of his exhaustion and yet, every time he closed his eyes, all he could see was the face of his uncle. He knew that it would only be a matter of time before he was turned over to Virion and if Ellie helped him, it would only bring more chaos to Vinia.

In the time of his youth, Irus had quickly discovered that to be king meant that people would die for you - most would even sacrifice themselves for you if you so ordered it. But Irus could not bring himself to think that ordering people he knew, people he cared for to risk their lives for him was the right thing to do. His father had been the reason for the creation of the Blood Guard and somehow, it was the very thing that was chasing after him.

A wry smile pulled at his lips, the irony not lost on Irus. How much more was he expected to endure in the madness that came with his exile? For a while, it was easy enough to pretend that the Blood Guard did not exist and that his uncle would have forgotten about him. It was easy enough to turn to you and catch a glimpse of your smile, the sight enough to soothe his worries.

But now, it was clear that he could not flee forever. It was only a matter of time before his uncle tore down the gates of Aspal to storm the palace and drag him out. The fear that lingered in the back of his mind came to the fore, like a wave, threatening to drown him. Irus released a sharp breath, his blue eyes shifting to the table in front of him. He felt hot all over and it was hard to pull in a breath without his chest pressing tightly.

Someone sighed beside him and Irus nearly jumped in his seat. He turned, catching the sight of your expression. You sat beside him while the councillors continued to argue amongst themselves. Irus felt a swirl of guilt tugging at his chest. He had never truly thought what it might mean for you when he dragged you from your burning home and towards Vinia.

Irus feared that he had only succeeded in prolonging your hardships. After all, in the time that they spent together, there had only been death and destruction left in his wake. He swallowed, his mouth dry as if he had swallowed a mouthful of sand. You turned, your eyes on him then and the expression in your gaze flickered with something uncertain.

It was difficult to look away from you, Irus thought. Yours was a face that had been a constant in the past few weeks. Irus felt shame creep up the back of his neck and wondered if you knew just how much he had come to depend on you. What future king was so weak to look to you for strength instead of the other way around? He turned away, his eyes on the table once more.

The councillors around him spoke loudly, nearly shouting at each other. Ellie was silent, fatigue evident in the way she gazed at the members around the table. It was clear then that no matter how much anyone tried to help Irus, it would never be enough for as long as the threat of Virion and the Blood Guard existed.

He knew that he would have to tackle the issues of his succession soon and that it would likely result in more bloodshed that he would rather avoid. But as Irus turned his gaze around the table, noting the different councillors and then glancing at you, he felt the familiar twinge of regret tug at his chest.

This was his fault and he knew he could not expect anyone to help him more than they already had. He had no idea why you were still helping him despite his recent actions. If anything, you should hate him, but you remained steadfastly by his side. And he could not fault you. Even after he dragged you to Vinia, you continued to follow him to his uncle's presence and the threat of the Blood Guard.

A fluttering of hope spread through his chest, the swell of something he dared not name for fear that it would disappear. But as he gazed at you, drinking in your features and the unwavering gaze that you offered him, he knew then that he would no longer be alone. Not now and certainly not when facing his uncle again.