

Home Sweet Home

I quietly observed a sizeable antelope grazing the vivid green grass as the sweltering sun rises to its zenith. I slung my bow into position as the tip of my arrow aimed directly at the peaceful animal. I legitimately couldn't remember the last time I had seen an animal of any kind. It was out in the open and in the woods, ready to become my prey. My arrow punctures through the animal's skull, killing it instantly. My work here was done.

I mustered my strength to drag the colossal carcass back to the location Gabriel, and I had agreed to return. The vantage point was a tree that was abnormally tall for this part of the woods. After I had joined the Brotherhood of the Templar, I was having second thoughts knowing how The Resistencia would respond to my actions. Those worries were immediately put to rest as I became a knight in The Brotherhood and came to my senses that they were not what The Resistencia had blatantly lied to me. I was now a Templar ready to begin my new duties soon.

In a matter of days, there would be a very important High Council. The Grand Prelate, Donovan Pickman, has ordered for the most essential Templars to be present. He didn't specify what the council would be about, but he had forewarned that the fate of the world would be in jeopardy should we fail.

Supreme Knight Cyrus was also summoned at the behest of the High Council. I had never seen or met Cyrus before. He was regularly referred to as Johnny Lancaster's older brother. Cyrus was frequently labeled as the greatest knight to ever live. Many asserted he should be the next in line to take Donovan's throne instead of Prelate Isaiah.

As I returned to the rendezvous point, Gabriel was prudently binding up a few dead rabbits. I had asked him days ago what happened to the animals in the wild. He explained that most animals went extinct or were rounded up by the People's World Government, who experimented on them for scientific purposes.

Food back in Solomon grew dangerously scarce, forcing us to resort to hunting to conserve the precious resource. As a Templar, I primarily hunted for food to practice my archery. I had previously asked Gabriel to come with me, but at first, he hesitated because of his title. Being a Bishop, my friend was primarily tasked in leading frontal assaults when the Grand Prelate or Prelate were not present. So, why would a high ranking Templar take a task he wasn't supposed to take? I playfully reminded him that one time he goaded me to accompany him to a town called Idra. He owed me one this time.

Gabriel glanced at what I had caught, and he was very impressed. "Wow. You got a big boy there," he chuckled. "They don't come so often these days. I could have gotten a bigger buck."

"Yet you could only manage a few cuddly rabbits. How shameful," I said, punching back at his arrogance.

An early morning gust of wind brushed the trees, rattling their fragile leaves. Gabriel's light brown hair swayed back and forth from the howling winds. His stocky build enabled him to carry more weight

than what I could. He also carried his signature shield on his back, labeled with the coat of arms insignia. He loved to show it off at his wall decoration in his room when he wasn't using it. Even though I wasn't as bulky as he was, I had extensively trained with him for several months that I favorably regained most of my lost weight back.

"Shall we return home now?" he asked.

I nodded, riding on horseback towards the road back to Solomon.

Home sweet home. The Brotherhood capital of Solomon shined from afar in all its glory. The view outside the city walls never failed to fascinate me, keeping us safe from the chaos and despair that lingered beyond its boundaries. I had almost forgotten that the rest of the world wasn't so lucky living under the duress of Iscar.

We dismounted directly in front of the Grand Temple. It is the most massive and antique structure in Solomon that runs for almost an entire mile in length. We dropped off the animal carcasses at the cafeteria, where the chefs would cook a meal for us later in the day. Gabriel and I trekked our way near the stairway to the throne room. There, the rest of our companions awaited us.

High Templar Jakeob Vickers was the first Brotherhood member I encountered. He spared my life because I had saved Gabriel's. I didn't know my friend had been with The Brotherhood for the time we were separated. Jakeob came to my defense when Isaiah arrested me for having ties with The Resistencia. He understood every nook and cranny about The Brotherhood from its history, weapons, and battles. His spiky black hair and slightly dark skin was an oddity in our ranks.

Micah Santos is the Guardian of the Brotherhood. He's the main Templar to speak for those who desire to join The Brotherhood. Micah usually travels to other towns, villages, and cities under our control, but lately, we had been losing our grip on many of those outposts compelling the Guardian to stay back here in Solomon. He's perhaps the most earnest individual in The Brotherhood I've met thus far. His actions were always in the spirit of The Brotherhood, and he's never in it for himself. Over the past several months, Micah has selflessly honed my training and survival skills. We liked to tease his ruffled blond hair as if he always slept on the wrong side of the bed every night.

Elisa Angeles is one of the Brotherhood's newest knights into our elite ranks. After what happened at Ruby Canal, His Highness made the crucial decision to allow females to join our ranks. Our numbers were growing dimmer day by day. This was a last resort to keep our numbers up to par. Elisa had the honor to become the first female knight to be sworn into The Brotherhood.

The trio noticed my friend and I arrive at our meeting point. "You boys are late," Elisa spoke first. Her black hair and violet color at the end of her hair strands was impossible to ignore. She wore a slick knight armor suited to her size. It was strange seeing a young woman like her in such armor. I secretly had a slight crush on her when we first met, but we have talked little since. Gabriel most certainly had a crush on her. He couldn't stop talking about her amber eyes.

"Better late than never," I said. "How are you three holding up?"

"We are awaiting the arrival of the Supreme Knight. His Excellency, Cyrus Lancaster," Jakeob said.

"Cyrus, huh?" Gabriel mumbled. "Only met him once before. I'll be the first to admit that he's far ahead of our league. He left quite an impression."

“Nothing like a good old visit from Cyrus himself,” Micah added. “I grew up idolizing him when I joined the Brotherhood. There are many great stories about him that most haven’t heard about,”

“What kind of stories?” I wondered.

“There’s too many to talk about, but I remember hearing this one story how he single-handedly invoked an insurrection at a large city under military control without a single civilian casualty,” Micah explained.

“That’s very impressive indeed,” Jakeob agreed. “No doubt His Excellency is as equally revered as His Highness.”

“How’s that shoulder healing up, Micah?” I asked him.

Had Maxwell shot him on the left side of his torso, he probably wouldn’t be here with us. I was beyond relieved when I heard the good news that he would live to fight another day. I was baffled that Micah didn’t resent or spew hatred towards Maxwell. He felt the rebels had misunderstood our side of the story. He is a humble and compassionate friend who rarely spoke bitterly of someone else.

“I’m fine,” he replied. “It’s gotten better. Nothing for me to worry about. Paladin Finn has done a fine job giving me the proper treatments.”

“Don’t you think he’s a cutie?” asked Elisa.

“Darling, you look cuter than our friends here,” Gabriel flirtingly said. Elisa smiled at Gabriel but looked to be uninterested. It was a fairly awkward stare between them.

“I got my love to hang out with,” she replied. “Thank you for your consideration.”

“May I politely ask who that lucky guy is?” Gabriel curiously wondered.

“In time, you will know,” she gracefully smiled. It certainly wasn’t me, although I had a suspicion of who it might be. I just didn’t want to blurt it out in front of everyone.

The fanfare of horns interrupted our friendly conversation. Those were specific horns exclusively for the Grand Prelate’s arrival, but he was inside his throne room. It was no doubt Cyrus who had entered the city.

“His Excellency is here,” Jakeob confirmed. We turned around, seeing the Grand Prelate and Prelate Isaiah walk downstairs from the throne room.

“Atten-tion!” Gabriel gave the order as the rest of us stood at attention with our right fist across our chest. Donovan and Isaiah respectfully saluted us back.

“You young folks are very respectful to your elders. I’m thankful to be your Grand Prelate,” said Donovan as his red cape beamed brightly behind him. His white beard and gray hair had grown very much since I first confronted him.

“Thank you for the honorable words, Your Highness,” Micah replied. “His Excellency, Cyrus, has just arrived.”

“He should arrive at the Temple Grounds in any second,” Jakeob clarified.

“Very well. Let’s not waste any more time,” Donovan nodded.

“Aren’t you forgetting about me?” spoke a familiar voice that sounded like a professor. We simultaneously turned around seeing a middle-aged man with pale skin, black hair with a white streak on his left, wearing his silver, black, and gold armor. It was none other than Paladin Finn Huckinson.

“Paladin Finn? You’re here to see Cyrus too?” I asked, perplexed by his random appearance.

“Yup. Every Knight and Templar in Solomon will be here to see His Excellency make his dazzling entrance,” he said.

“It seems the gang’s all here,” Micah declared. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

We walked as a unit to the Temple Grounds. Several Knights had lined up in two separate files facing each other while leaving a small space in the middle. There was only one other individual who would come with such fanfare, Grand Prelate Donovan. This was how much the Knights respected both leaders. I was curious to learn more about why Cyrus was such a big deal. I certainly was anticipating his arrival.

Summer was in full swing today. The excruciating humidity outside was searing and arid. The wind gusts urged my body to give up and blackout. At least I didn’t have to endure without a lack of water like back in Donquest, my old home.

An elaborate horse carriage pulled in front of the Temple Grounds. We stood firm looking on as a door opened and out came out the man they called Cyrus. He was tall, reaching past six feet in height. Next to him were his Knights, his younger brother Johnny, and a dog. The Knights who were in line saluted on as Cyrus walked past them. He moved to the center of the Temple Grounds, where we waited for his arrival.

“It is an honor to see your impending return home, Your Excellency,” saluted Donovan. “I have an important task that I know you shall not fail me.”

“It’s a great pleasure to be in your royal presence, Your Highness,” saluted Cyrus. “I have sworn not to fail you. I will never falter to do as you please.”

Cyrus moved onto Prelate Isaiah, who many considered being less suited to the throne. Both men seemed to be on good terms as they proudly saluted.

Gabriel was next. Both men salute one another proudly to be in their presence. “It has been too long since you last came,” said Gabriel. “You would make a perfect Grand Prelate for The Brotherhood.”

“I appreciate the sentiments and the praise you have shown me, but Prelate Isaiah has paid his dues. He is a worthy successor to the throne. I trust His Highness to make the right decision when the day comes,” Cyrus replied.

Next, he moved to Micah, who fiercely saluted the Supreme Knight. He murmured under his breath and burst in tears for his idol. “Your Excellency. It is an honor to stand by your side,” Micah sobbed.

“It is a pleasure to have seen your hard work not gone in vain, Guardian of the Brotherhood,” Cyrus saluted back. “You are a great young individual ready to one day command the Knights and Templar into battle.”

“Thank you sir,” Micah proudly smiled.

Jakeob was next, and like the rest, he follows with a salute. “The Brotherhood will require your utmost assistance, Your Excellency,” said Jakeob. “The enemy draws nearer with every passing day. My Brigade and I will follow wherever you go.”

Cyrus saluted back and said, “The situation in the front lines hasn’t gone in our favor. The Brotherhood will unite as one and push our enemies back to the hell that spawned them.”

Finn and His Excellency were next. Finn whispered something to Cyrus’s ear after they saluted.

Being the unpredictable Paladin he is, I wouldn't be surprised if Finn suggested something I wouldn't expect in the coming days.

The Supreme Knight moved on to Elisa. After both had exchanged salutes, Elisa quietly said, "Not only are you my idol, but you are such an elegant man for your age. You're quite handsome and adorable. And your eyes, ugh. Don't tell my boyfriend."

Cyrus got down on one knee and kissed her right hand, displaying a sign of chivalry. "And who is this boyfriend of yours?"

"He's standing here, but I won't say," she vaguely stated.

I was next to speak to His Excellency. I locked both knees, stood tall at attention, saluting him. I was finally able to take a closer look at him. Cyrus has clear spiky brown hair and green eyes. His hair sparks like a green color from a distance, and as with most other Templars, he wore a cross that had his name inscribed.

Cyrus respectfully saluted and spoke first. "Templar Luke Edwards," he nonchalantly uttered my name. "I've heard of your many deeds as a Rebel in The Resistencia, helping to spark their World Revolution. Although that would constitute as a renegade in our ranks, I'm pleased that you have shown your true colors and joined the might of The Brotherhood."

"It wasn't easy, but I haven't looked back since that faithful day," I said. "I will be staying with The Brotherhood until the bitter end."

Cyrus had an infectious aura to him. I could understand why many girls and women loved him. He was undoubtedly a good-looking guy. He is muscular and tall, but there was something other than his looks that I couldn't explain. He has earned the same level of respect as Donovan despite not being a Grand Prelate, let alone a Templar, yet he was treated like one. He is the Supreme Knight of The Brotherhood, the strongest and fiercest of all the Knights. That title is earned by years of combat experience and defeating other fellow knights in duels.

Johnny introduced himself to me again. After several months, the boy was excited to see me since he had departed to be with his brother. "Luke!" he shouted my name. "I told my big bro everything about you. He found it cool and interesting, but he told me that you are a scaredy-cat."

"Um...what?" I puzzlingly asked. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, he doesn't deny that you are brave for putting yourself in danger more times than not, but that means nothing if you hide from fame," Johnny explained. "If a tree falls, and no one is there to hear it, does it really make a sound? That's how he explained to me." I gazed back at Cyrus, who was casually making his way inside the Grand Temple with Donovan and Isaiah. His Highness had told us he needed an inordinate amount of time to speak with Cyrus until the High Council fully assembled a few days from now. I no longer had my trusty watch to keep track of time, so instead, I relied on the clock in my bedroom.

I was clueless about what to think about the words Johnny had told me on Cyrus's behalf. Should I resent Cyrus for calling me out as a timid person even though we barely knew one another? He may want what is best for me. I shouldn't let it get to my head, and maybe I shouldn't let it go either. Johnny's dog eagerly sniffed my legs, trying to grasp my attention. The dog is a white and brown husky, who joyfully

wagged their tail and stuck their tongue. I rubbed the dog's head and ears while playfully licking my hands.

"What's the dog's name, and are they a boy or a girl?" I asked.

"Falco," said Johnny. "And he's a boy."

"He seems to have a penchant for me already, haha," I laughed as Falco licked my face clean. "Hey, go easy there."

The rest of us returned to the cafeteria for a late dinner. I ate antelope stew, which the chefs gladly prepared for me and the others. Gabriel also had his rabbit stew to share. During our meal, we cracked jokes, spoke about our plans for tomorrow, and talked about what we wanted to do with our lives. I learned more about Micah, Jakeob, and Elisa with each passing day. They were unquestionably my friends now, all who motivated me to continue fighting for what we strive for.

After an excruciatingly long day, I clumsily walked back with Gabriel to the doors of our respective rooms. My bedroom was right across from his. Before we went our separate ways, I had something to tell him. "I'm going tomorrow to the asylum to interrogate the two Black Knights who ambushed you. Feel free to join me."

"Why waste more time with those two crooks? They aren't going to spit out the truth unless we make them talk," he replied.

"It's the least I can do to find out who is behind the Black Knights. Look, I won't punish them for talking against their will," I refuted his idea of potentially harming the two prisoners. "I will find a way to make them talk without resorting to violence if that's what you mean. And if that doesn't work, then I won't stop to get to the bottom of this."

"Okay. Do what you want then," he mumbled. "I'll make up my mind tomorrow morning, but don't expect me to join you if it's going to be the same old story. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," I said.

Gabriel was visibly upset that I had gotten in his way. I have never liked his way of doing things. The few times we agreed was what I had done to William. It had to be done, but that was in the past, and I did not want to relish it. I tried my best to be like my old self after losing something inside my shattered soul.