

War Song 1011

Chapter 1011

Carissa thought back to how Jessica had been so desperate that she had to pick up a few coins. It was clear she was now at her wit's end.

However, the situation had grown increasingly complicated. While Jessica's original intent was merely to get back at Flora's mom, the outcome was far more severe-Flora ended up losing her child. As if that wasn't enough, Jessica later pushed Serena into a lake, fully aware that the latter couldn't swim. This meant Jessica's actions weren't accidental. Her malicious intent toward Serena was clear.

"I know it's wrong, but I can't help it-I find it a bit funny that Serena got pushed into a lake," Violet said with a solemn face.

She quickly muttered an apology and prayer under her breath, hoping to redeem herself spiritually.

Carissa frowned slightly. "What I don't understand is how Jessica could be so stupid. She's no longer a duchess and she's not even respected at Ironridge Estate. Her mom's imprisoned and her dad's dead, yet she's still causing trouble. Is she trying to ruin her life on purpose?"

"If she didn't want to keep living, why would she come to the workshop for help?" Jacob asked.

Carissa turned her gaze to Rafael. "What do you think?"

Rafael paused for a bit before replying, "This situation might have more to it than we realize. Giles doesn't necessarily know the full truth. There are a lot of dirty secrets in a big family, things they're desperate to keep hidden. As far as Madam Margaret is concerned, Jessica had to be cast out. Maybe it's because Madam Margaret found out about her involvement in usury."

Carissa nodded. "It could be a combination of several things. Perhaps Madam Margaret just couldn't tolerate it any longer. The Marquis of Ironridge himself isn't the most decisive, and the household is run by his mom. Plus, the marquis clearly doesn't care much for Jessica."

"They're clearly two people who can't stand each other. It's a sad state when a marriage falls apart like that," Rafael said with a hint of melancholy.

Carissa murmured in agreement, but her mind wasn't focused on their failing relationship. When a couple no longer had affection for each other, it was pointless for others to speculate on their feelings.

Instead, she said, "The workshop has been open for some time now, but no one's willing to come.

"Jessica used to be a duchess. If we take her in, it could be a good starting point for the workshop-but that's only if she wasn't actually trying to harm the concubine's child.

"Let's think this through. She had intended to give Madam Barbara the laxative. At worst, it was a prank. She didn't mean to harm the child, but the mishap caused the miscarriage. It's obvious Madam Margaret wasn't fully enraged yet.

"But when Jessica pushed Serena into the lake, and with all her other actions piled on top-especially the usury-Madam Margaret finally reached her breaking point and had to cast her out."

Everyone nodded in agreement. The situation was indeed as Carissa had said-time and again, Jessica had made the same mistakes and refused to change. Given all that, her downfall wasn't unjust.

Carissa continued, "The problem is,

why did the medicine end up in Lady Flora's hands by accident? The medicine that caused her

miscarriage-how strong must that dosage have been? Who gave it to her? And what was behind Serena being pushed into the lake? As for the usury, Jessica didn't profit from it and the court already imposed a fine. We don't need to worry about that part."

She paused and added, "Of course, apart from that, we have to make sure that her intention to work at the workshop for a living is genuine. If she's only coming to eat, drink, and sleep without contributing, then we can't accept her."

Violet had always disliked Jessica,

and she was initially against the idea of taking her in. However, Carissa's reasoning was hard to argue with. Even someone of Jessica's former status was willing to seek refuge at the workshop,

perhaps it would inspire others who were hesitant and worried about social judgment to take the same step.

They couldn't afford to wait any longer. No one wanted to see another incident like Hollis'. And in truth, how many others had suffered before her?

Violet turned to Carissa. "What if you

go to Ironridge Estate and ask the

people there directly? If Jessica's truly at rock bottom, she'll probably come to the workshop again for help... But I'm not sure if Madam Margaret will be willing to reveal the full truth."

Chapter 1012

Before Carissa could visit Margaret, rumors about Skye Embroidery spread like wildfire the very next day.

It was said that both Carissa and Hannah were hypocrites. When a discarded woman came seeking help, they refused her and made things difficult for her.

Many had already harbored hostility toward Skye Embroidery, believing that sheltering discarded women was a challenge to social order. If a woman had been cast out, it was assumed she deserved it. Even being jealous and unable to bear children were considered crimes.

With the rumors swirling, the workshop was suddenly the target of widespread criticism. The public was filled with scorn-some called them hypocrites, others suggested they had ulterior motives, and some even accused them of trying to make money off the situation. That evening, Violet slammed her fists on the table. "How could Jessica cause such a stir on her own? I don't believe it."

Furious, she stormed out of the room.

Carissa called after her, "Where are you going?"

"To Glimmering Tower! I need someone who can look into this," Violet replied without looking back.

Her whole body trembled with rage. She had invested so much into the workshop, and her intentions had been good. She empathized with the women's fate and hoped the workshop would become a lifelong support for them. To be slandered like this was more than she could bear.

Carissa was also upset, but she wasn't as worked up. She had known this wouldn't be an easy task. There were plenty of kind-hearted, wealthy people in the world. If this was something simple, it would've been done by now. She sent a messenger to Margaret, informing her of a visit the next day.

However, she soon learned that Margaret was ill and bedridden. The reply indicated the older woman would visit Hell Monarch Estate in a few days once she recovered. Unsure whether the illness was genuine or a way to avoid involvement during such a delicate time, Carissa decided to leave the matter to Violet for further investigation.

At the moment, Carissa had her own

matters to attend to. In particular, she was dealing with some members of the Garrison Unit she was planning to expel. She was already making arrangements, and it seemed likely that she would have to face the king's wrath in the coming days.

While investigating, Violet confirmed her suspicions-Molly had been using money to provoke attacks on Skye Embroidery.

Since Molly's arrival in the capital, Violet had tried to avoid seeing her whenever possible. Although her cousin's actions infuriated her, she still held a certain familial affection for her and was reluctant to sever their ties completely.

This time, however, Violet couldn't hold back any longer. Skye Embroidery was her heart and soul, and seeing it undermined like this was unbearable. If she didn't beat Molly senseless, it would mean she was too soft-hearted. Violet had Claire inform Carissa about this matter, then headed straight for Edgeview Estate. The gatekeeper, upon seeing her approach, rushed out with two guards with drawn swords.

"Who goes there? Who do you seek?" one of the guards asked, his stance imposing as he stood on the stone steps.

Violet bit back her fury, saying, "Tell your princess consort that Violet Spencer has come to see her."

The name Violet Spencer was not unfamiliar at Edgeview Estate. After giving her a quick once-over, the guard gestured for the gatekeeper to announce her presence.

After the warm spring had arrived, Ruth's health had improved, but it was still unstable. Over the past few days, Yuvan had refrained from going to the palace to tend to her.

With setbacks in his efforts-Icarus'

and Penny's failures-Yuvan was growing increasingly irritable. To make matters worse, he received a report from Valken that Harvey had been robbed while traveling from the capital to Valken. All the valuables in his trunk had been replaced with stones and wood.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that this was the work of someone from Hell Monarch Estate. But in the capital, their force was beyond Yuvan's Reach. Every time he entered or left the city recently, he couldn't shake the feeling that someone was watching him. Perhaps he had always been under observation, but this time, it felt different-more oppressive, as though eyes were everywhere.

As he was discussing with Wayne whether they should devise a plan to return to Valken, a messenger arrived with news-Violet had come to see Molly.

Yuvan's eyes lit up; he exchanged a glance with Wayne, unable to conceal his excitement.

Without hesitation, he ordered, "Have Molly come to the study, and have Ms. Spencer brought to the main hall. Prepare refreshments for her."

Chapter 1013

Since their arrival in the capital, Yuvan had repeatedly asked Molly to make contact with Violet. Though they hadn't been in touch for years, they were blood relatives. The more they interacted, the more their familial bond would naturally grow. Carissa couldn't compare to that.

Little did Yuvan know, Molly was incompetent and fond of throwing temper tantrums. After a few failed attempts at connecting with Violet, she was unwilling to continue and claimed her cousin was judgmental. She also said that as she was now a princess consort, she wouldn't stand for such nonsense. Besides, if the two were to rekindle their relationship, Violet should be the one to make the first move and come to her.

This attitude baffled and angered Yuvan. To get to the bottom of things, he sent someone to investigate whether there had been any hidden bad blood between the two cousins.

He learned that there was nothing. When they were younger, they had gotten along well enough. It wasn't until Violet joined the Inferno Guild to study martial arts that they lost contact.

In Yuvan's view, this was a relationship that could easily be mended.

No matter Violet's reason for visiting, this was the perfect opportunity to repair their bond. Thus, he quickly sent someone to fetch Molly. Before long, she arrived at the study with her maid, Plum, in tow.

She looked pleased and curtsied. "You called for me, Your Highness?"

Yuvan watched her perform the same casual, unrefined curtsy she always did. After being married into the royal family for so long, she still hadn't shown any interest in learning proper etiquette. Her days were spent squabbling with the concubines, and she was always vying for his attention.

Yuvan suppressed his irritation and said, "Your cousin, Violet, has come to see you. I've already sent someone to invite her to the main hall. I want you to join me shortly. While she's here, you'll host her for dinner. Take this chance to catch up and improve your relationship. Don't be disrespectful-she's a guest, understand?"

Molly was excited when she first heard Yuvan had summoned her to the study, since she was never allowed to enter. Only Fiona had that privilege.

However, her excitement quickly faded when she discovered that it was because of Violet's arrival. Molly found her cousin insufferable and haughty. Violet didn't respect her even though she was now a princess consort.

"Did you hear me?" Yuvan pressed.

Molly finally composed herself and replied, "Yes, I understand."

Yuvan stood up and reached out to take her hand, guiding her toward the door. "Let's go. I'll greet her briefly and leave right away. I won't interrupt your conversation with her."

Molly hesitated for a moment, her gaze instinctively falling on their joined hands. A wave of warmth surged in her chest, a mix of sweetness and bitter longing.

"What's wrong?" Yuvan asked softly, noticing her pause.

Molly's voice trembled slightly as she responded, "Your Highness, this is the first time you've held my hand."

When they got married, she had imagined becoming a loving couple and dreamed of a deep bond between them. Many people told her that since Yuvan had married her soon after his first wife passed, he was probably cold-hearted.

However, she refused to believe it. Before he proposed, they had met once. Even though he was older, the way he looked at her was full of tenderness and affection.

During their early days of marriage, he had indeed treated her well. Over time, things had changed. After returning to the capital, his affection had cooled. She had wondered why-maybe it was because she didn't know how to act with proper decorum and had embarrassed him on more than one occasion. Or maybe it was because that conniving Fiona had sowed discord between them.

Molly had grown discouraged, but there was always a lingering sense of regret within.

Yet now, here he was, holding her hand. It was something he hadn't done even when they first married.

Seeing the slight flush on her cheeks, Yuvan smiled, his tone still gentle as he said, "Do you like it? If you do, I'll hold your hand from now on."

Molly's heart fluttered. Though many couples didn't hold hands in public, she really liked it.

When they reached the main hall, Violet was already standing inside, her cold expression now carrying a hint of fury.

Upon hearing their footsteps, she
turned around. When she saw Molly,
her sharp eyes ignited with fury. Without regard for Yuvan's
cousin and slapped her
presence, she strode toward her
face.

"Molly Spencer, what have you done?!" Violet roared.

The slap stunned Molly; even Yuvan froze for a moment.

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"Violet, have you lost your mind?" Molly snapped after recovering from the shock. She touched her reddened cheek and screamed, "I'm a princess consort and your older cousin! How dare you hit me?!"

Chapter 1014

Violet pointed a trembling finger at Molly, her eyes burning with fiery rage.

"Molly, I'm warning you if you continue helping Jessica spread rumors about Skye Embroidery, I'll tear your tongue out," she spat, her voice low and dangerous. With that, Violet turned in a dramatic motion and stormed out of the room.

The entire time, she didn't spare Yuvan a single glance.

As the guards outside gathered, Yuvan turned and raised a hand, signaling them to step back. Violet let out a cold snort and swept past them without looking back.

Yuvan watched her retreating figure, her red dress like a flash of fire. She moved with purpose, confident and unafraid this was the Spencer woman he had truly wanted to marry.

"Your Highness, she hit me! How could you just let her go?" Molly covered her face and started crying, her cheek red and swollen, tears streaming down like rain.

Yuvan withdrew his gaze from Violet's back and looked at Molly. The warmth and tenderness that had once been there had vanished completely, replaced by a sharp coldness. His brow furrowed. How could two women from the same family be so different?

"Your Highness!" Molly sensed his growing displeasure and pressed closer to him, trying once again to draw out his previous gentleness. "My face hurts so much. You should be the one to take revenge for me!" Yuvan's eyes remained hard, his brow still furrowed. "She just said you've been helping Jessica spread rumors about Skye Embroidery. What's going on?"

Molly hadn't told Yuvan about lending money to Jessica for usury, unsure if he would approve. The Spencer family had strictly forbidden such actions. Now, seeing his cold expression, dread filled her heart. "I... I just heard that Jessica was divorced and wanted to go to Skye Embroidery, but Carissa refused her. I couldn't just stand by, so I spoke up for her," she stammered.

Yuvan's lips curled into a cynical smile. "I had no idea my wife was so bold and could openly defy the Hell Monarch's princess consort herself."

Molly wiped away her tears, her large, innocent eyes wide with confusion. "I was just thinking... Jessica is your niece, Your Highness. I couldn't bear to see her cast out like that, so I helped her just a little." "Then, why didn't you go directly to Ironridge Estate to stand up for her? You pity her for being cast out onto the streets, yet you didn't bring her back to live here?" Yuvan asked, his voice cold and harsh. Molly hesitated, then spoke softly, her voice barely above a whisper, "Her mom was involved in treason and has been confined at the Heritage Bureau. I... I didn't dare bring her back."

Yuvan grabbed her chin, venomously snapping, "You know her mom's involved in treason, and yet you still associate with her? Do you want to get me killed?"

Molly, frightened by the ferocity in his eyes, trembled. Her voice quivered as she said, "Your Highness, what are you doing? If I've done something wrong, you should just tell me. You're scaring me!"

Yuvan's face was devoid of any

sympathy. "Have I not told you before? In the capital, don't associate with people carelessly. You're supposed to focus on building

a good relationship with

your cousin. How can you

handle something so small? What use are you to me?" . to

"Build a relationship with her?" Molly's tears spilled over, and a bitter resentment twisted her

features. I'm a princess consort!

Why should I have to flatter her?

She's just staying at Hell Monarch Estate. Even the Hell Monarch's princess consort has to respect me as her aunt! What is Violet to me?"

Yuvan's expression darkened. "And yet I don't see Carissa respecting you as her aunt, do I?"

He released her chin but reached up to touch the red mark on her face, his voice losing some of its earlier coldness.

"Tomorrow, you will go to Hell Monarch Estate to apologize to Violet and invite her to Edgeview Estate as a guest. If you fail to do this, I'll divorce you."

Molly could hardly believe her ears. Her voice cracked in disbelief, asking, "Your Highness... You want to divorce me? Why?"

"Because you're stupid!" Yuvan

jabbed a finger at her forehead, his

voice icy and sharp. "You've been married to me for so long, and you still don't understand what I want or what intend to do! You haven't helped me with a single thing. Why did I even marry you?"

Molly staggered back a step, breathless, her chest tightening in pain. Tears spilled down her face as her voice broke. "How was I supposed to know what you wanted or what you intended to do if you never told me?" Yuvan's expression didn't soften. "I've already said it. If you handle this properly, I won't hold your secret dealings with Jessica against you."

With that, he turned and left.

Plum stepped forward, offering her support. "Your Grace, are you all right?"

Molly grabbed Plum's hand desperately, her tears flowing freely. "Why does he treat me like this? One moment he's kind to me, and the next it's like he wants to swallow me whole. What have I done wrong? What does he want from me? He never tells me what he wants!" Plum shook her head. "I don't know, Your Grace, but His Highness has ordered you to apologize to Ms. Spencer. You should go and do as he says."

Chapter 1015

Yuvan returned to the study.

There, Wayne set down the scroll he was reading and rose to his feet. "Your Highness, why did Violet come? Has Lady Molly spoken to her?"

Yuvan's voice was laced with disdain as he said, "She's a fool. She's associating with Jessica in secret, and even went against Carissa just to help Jessica."

Wayne shook his head. "Your Highness, marrying her was a mistake. She has no standing in the Spencer family. Even the head of the Spencer family is unwilling to engage with you for her sake. She's of no help at all."

"How was I supposed to know she was this stupid?" Yuvan muttered, sitting down.

His eyes narrowed with a dangerous glint.

"Violet is a hundred times better than her. When she came today and slapped Molly, she warned her and left-sharp, decisive, and without hesitation. Watching her, I felt a deep regret. If I had married her, not only would I have gained the full support of the Spencer family, but I'd also have an invaluable ally. She would be worth more to me than so many others."

"Your Highness, we're surrounded by enemies on all sides. You must tread carefully and avoid provoking anyone from Hell Monarch Estate for now," Wayne said cautiously.

However, Yuvan was lost in his thoughts, consumed by his plans. "Molly is useless. She should step aside and let someone more capable take her place."

Wayne was startled. "Your Highness, you can't possibly mean... That's unthinkable! Violet is a wild mare, impossible to tame. She's a force of nature, not someone you can control."

"Wayne, I have no choice. Without Eleanor, it's becoming increasingly difficult for me to make progress in the capital. Molly is useless, and Fiona isn't my primary wife so the noble ladies of the capital won't associate with her. But Violet has connections here, and she's close friends with Carissa. If I marry Violet, Carissa would certainly turn a blind eye to our actions out of consideration of their friendship."

Wayne shook his head. "Your Highness, you're thinking too simplistically. The same strategy can have vastly different outcomes depending on the people involved. If your heart is unsettled, you'll only become impatient and rash. You need to calm down and look for a better way forward. Otherwise, you might as well give up."

Yuvan's voice rose suddenly, filled with frustration as he snapped, "I can't give up! I've worked for years to get here! How could I just walk away?!"

He took a few deep breaths to steady himself.

"You're right. I've been too hasty. But I just can't figure out the king. It's as if he's never suspected me. Whenever he sees me, his gaze is unchanged. This man's thoughts run too deep. I've truly underestimated him."

Yuvan knew Salvador had already begun to suspect him and had made no attempt to hide the fact that he had sent spies to watch his every move. Yet, each time they interacted, there was no outward sign that anything had changed. The more Salvador did nothing, the more elusive he became. Over time, it created a sense of unease in those around him.

Yuvan was still short on soldiers, and the Spencer family had yet to give him a clear answer. Whenever the topic of warhorses and weapons came up, they always steered the conversation away, avoiding it like the plague. Now, the forces in the capital had been shattered, Eleanor was no longer useful, and even the few plans he put in motion had failed. The continuous loss of men and resources had drained him of the patience he once had. And then there was still Rafael.

"I have no choice but to do this. Even if I'm not aiming for anything grand, I still need to protect myself."

Yuvan sighed deeply, frustration clouding his features. Yet, there was a sharp glint in his eyes.

"The Spencer family dotes on Violet the most. I need her to submit to me, whether willingly or not. Once she loses her innocence, she will have no choice but to follow me. I'll let her be my princess consort and will never mistreat her."

Wayne shook his head and sighed.

"Your Highness, I don't agree with this course of action. Violet is no ordinary woman. She has the backing of the Spencer family, the Inferno Guild, and the Hell Monarch's household. From what I've seen of her character, she is not the type to be constrained by societal norms.

"If you handle this poorly, not only will you fail to gain the Spencer family's support, but you'll also make enemies. The Hell Monarch is likely well aware of our dealings, even though he has no proof and can't pinpoint our forces. If you harm Violet, the combined wrath of the Spencer family and the Hell

Monarch's household will be

something we can't withstand."

"Then, what do you propose? If we don't do this, how can we turn things around?" Yuvan asked, his tone growing more impatient.

Wayne thought for a moment before replying, "I believe we should continue focusing on Marshal Prince at the Southern Frontier. As long as we can control a portion of the Southern Frontier's forces, our chances of victory will increase dramatically.

"As for Westhaven, we haven't lost

as long as King Edmund is on the throne. You've always said to take things slowly and to wait for the right moment. You've missed

several opportunities already

Compared to when we first

discussed the Southern Frontier, our chances are now much lower. Why rush now?"

Chapter 1016

with Violet.

Looking slightly impatient, Yuvan said, "Celeste has become Oliver's favorite, but he still hasn't won the support of his troops. That's something that can't be rushed. As for Westhaven, we'll need to plot and wait. We can't just sit idly. Molly is useless, so we'll replace her "I don't agree with what you said earlier. Both Molly and Carissa are princess consorts, and I refuse to believe Violet isn't interested in becoming one too. A woman like her, with such pride, would be even more eager to climb the social ladder. She wouldn't give a second glance to an ordinary man."

Wayne tried to offer more advice, but it all fell on deaf ears. Yuvan was too immersed in his plans to listen.

"What woman wouldn't care about her chastity and reputation?" he muttered to himself. "If she gives her body to me, can she simply turn her back on me?"

When the time came, the promise of the princess consort title would likely make Violet happier than anything.

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Carissa had returned to Hell Monarch Estate earlier. When Claire reported that Violet had gone to Edgeview Estate, Carissa was discussing something with Max. After their conversation, she headed straight back to the estate.

By then, Violet was already back at Hell Monarch Estate. After delivering that slap, she had felt a brief rush of satisfaction. Soon, however, concern crept in. It wasn't for herself-she feared she had caused trouble for Rafael and Carissa. After all, she knew Salvador had people keeping an eye on Edgeview Estate.

When Violet saw Carissa, she immediately stood to greet her and regretfully said, "Cari, I acted on impulse. I shouldn't have gone to Edgeview Estate. I'm afraid I've caused you trouble."

Carissa had hurried back to comfort her friend, but was taken aback when she beat her to the apology. Smiling, she linked arms with her.

"Did you make a scene at Edgeview Estate?"

Violet sighed, her frustration clear. "I slapped Molly."

"Did it feel good?" Carissa asked with a smile.

"It felt good for a moment," Violet admitted. "But I might have caused trouble for you and Prince Rafael."

Carissa gently pushed Violet down onto a chair and sat beside her, then called for Lulu to bring some royal jelly soup.

Once it was served, she smiled and said, "Do what you need to do. If it causes trouble, we'll handle it."

"I know you're trying to reassure me, but I was really too rash this time," Violet said.

She sighed deeply, frustrated with herself. She had thought she could control her emotions, but it all spiraled out of control in an instant. She felt like a complete failure.

Carissa stood up and patted her friend's back. "Everyone has their breaking point. You're not expected to swallow your pride and bow your head just because you live here. The workshop is the result of all our hard work, and you've played a huge part in it. Someone's trying to ruin your reputation. If you told me it was Molly spreading those rumors, I would have gone to slap her with you."

"You're not as hot-tempered as I am," Violet replied, looking up at Carissa. "Don't try to comfort me. Just tell me, is what I did today-going to Edgeview Estate-going to cause trouble for you?" "No. Absolutely not." Carissa was firm in her answer.

"You better not be lying to me," Violet warned.

Carissa sighed.

"Listen. When we came back from the Southern Frontier, we had to be extra cautious. At that time, Raf had achieved great military success, and I'm from the Sinclair family. The bigger the tree, the more it attracts the wind. If we weren't careful in our actions, it would be easy for others to frame us. That's happened too many times in history.

"Plus, with the situation at Victory Pass still up in the air, we had to keep our strength in reserve. That was a concession we made to the king. But it doesn't mean we'll always act this way. We've shown our goodwill and loyalty. Whether the king believes it or not is up to him."

Carissa looked at Violet with a hint of sympathy. When had she ever had to worry about others' feelings in doing something? Now, after letting off some steam, she still had to tread carefully. It was truly unfair to her. Upon hearing Carissa's reassurance, Violet relaxed. However, she was still angry at Molly.

"I went easy on her by slapping her only once. If it were in the past, I would've yanked her hair and thrown her out. I get that men don't understand the significance of the workshop, but she's a woman. How could she not understand?"

Lulu came in with the royal jelly soup, smiling. "You don't need to be angry with those people, Ms. Spencer. It's not worth getting upset over. Drink this, and you'll feel better in no time."

Violet smiled brightly. "Lulu, your words are getting more charming. You really know how to make someone happy."

After getting her revenge, Lulu was in a much brighter mood.

The next day, the gatekeeper reported that Molly had come and insisted on seeing Violet.

Rafael and Carissa had gone to the Ministry of Justice and the Capital Guard headquarters respectively, so Jacob sent someone to get Violet.

Chapter 1017

In the side hall, Violet coldly watched Molly, who was earnestly apologizing in front of her. If she didn't know her cousin so well, she might have believed her.

"Please believe me, Violet," Molly said, her voice sincere. "It was Jessica who came to me in tears, begging me to help her clear her name. I only helped her because I was soft-hearted at the moment. After you left yesterday, Prince Yuvan scolded me for a long time. He said the workshop was meant to benefit women, and I shouldn't be spreading false rumors. I've already realized my mistake. Will you forgive me?" Violet didn't believe a word of it.

She didn't believe Molly's claim of helping Jessica out of kindness, nor did she believe that Yuvan would ever say something like "the workshop is meant to benefit women". How had Avis, Carissa's aunt and Yuvan's previous princess consort, met her end? Others might not know, but Violet certainly did.

She listened calmly as Molly finished, watching as the last two perfect tears of regret fell from the latter's eyes. Her cousin hadn't learned much since becoming Yuvan's princess consort, but the girl had certainly mastered the art of acting. It seemed Molly must have spent plenty of time watching plays.

"Nice words, but if you truly came to apologize today, why didn't you send word in advance? How did you know I'd be at the estate?" Violet asked.

Molly's face stiffened for a moment. She had only been working up her emotions earlier and hadn't expected to be asked such an irrelevant question. It didn't really matter, did it?

Fortunately, Plum stepped in to help her out. She curtsied and explained, "Ms. Spencer, Her Grace cried all night and didn't dare come to apologize. It was His Highness who said that if she made a mistake, she should be brave enough to admit it and ask for your forgiveness so that your bond

wouldn't be harmed. That's why Her Grace immediately ordered gifts to be prepared. She said that if you weren't in the estate, she would wait until you returned."

That excuse might have fooled some other idiot, but not Violet.

After acting impulsive the day before, she had already spent the night reflecting on her actions. She realized that one shouldn't act in haste, and now she was curious to see what would happen after this apology.

Following Plum's words, Violet said, "Indeed, Prince Yuwan is right. You and I are family. We shouldn't let such matters hurt our relationship. As long as you help calm the rumors outside, I will forgive you." "Really?" Molly wiped away the tears at the corners of her eyes, but doubt lingered in her heart.

Just yesterday, Violet was shouting threats and making a scene-why was she so accommodating today?

"We're family. How could there be any deep animosity between us? Whatever happened in the past is over. I slapped you yesterday, but don't take it to heart," Violet said with a calm smile.

A flash of resentment crossed

Molly's eyes. How could she not take it to heart? Being slapped like that in front of Yuwan had completely humiliated her. To make matters worse, he hadn't stepped in to defend her. Instead, he had sent her to apologize-even inviting Violet to dinner at the estate tomorrow.

Now, Violet had brought up the slap in front of all the servants of Hell Monarch Estate. The humiliation was overwhelming. Didn't everyone now know that she, a princess consort, was utterly powerless?

"Honestly, Violet. Why couldn't we just talk things through? Why did you have to resort to violence?" Molly asked, her tone turning slightly bitter.

"I've always had a fiery temper. I'm not as calm and gracious as you." Violet tilted her head and looked at her cousin with an assessing gaze. "Are you still upset with me?"

Molly forced a smile, her eyes tight with tension. "If I were upset with you, would I have come to apologize?"

"True," Violet replied with a light laugh. "Since that's the case, let's put our past grudges behind us, shall we?"

Staring at Violet's bright, dazzling smile, Molly couldn't shake the feeling that there was something deeply malicious hidden behind it.

Taking a deep breath, she said, "Of

course, that sounds fine. By the way, though I've been in the capital for some time now, we haven't really caught up. I'd like to formally invite you to the estate tomorrow for dinner. We've recently hired an Ebonflow chef. What do you

So, the real purpose was to get her to come to Edgeview Estate?

Violet smirked. "Sure."

think?"

The sudden shift in topic made it clear that Molly didn't want to say anything more. She was so transparent-there wasn't an ounce of cunning in her.

Molly's shoulders relaxed slightly. "Good. I'll wait for you at the estate tomorrow evening."

Chapter 1018

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The next morning, after court was dismissed, Rafael brought the recently reviewed case files to the royal study for an audience with the king. Along the way, he took the opportunity to give a routine report on the progress of the treason case.

Though the case was still unresolved, the Ministry of Justice continued its investigation and submitted periodic updates. At this point, these reports were more procedural than substantive. Suspicion had increasingly focused on Yuvan, yet Salvador hadn't authorized an investigation into

him. In fact, he hadn't even publicly addressed the issue. Even after Rafael had spelled things out clearly, the king remained silent. Salvador skimmed through the files Rafael had brought. After hearing the latest developments in the treason case, he commented, "So, it seems there's still no real progress."

There could be progress if he said something!

Salvador set the files aside. "Well, keep investigating."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Rafael responded.

Noticing his brother lingering instead of leaving, Salvador raised a brow. "Is there something else?"

Rafael grinned. "Nothing urgent. Just that Uncle Yuvan has invited me and my family to dinner tonight."

Salvador glanced up, a flicker of surprise crossing his eyes before he smiled. "It's been some time since Uncle Yuvan returned to the capital to attend to his duties. As you're younger than him, you should've hosted him first. But since he's extended the invitation, go ahead and enjoy."

Rafael's grin widened, showing off his pearly white teeth, his smile as bright as the midday sun. "That's exactly what I thought, Your Majesty."

For once, Salvador's expression softened. "I hear Edgeview Estate has quite the collection of rare and exotic flowers. Take a look around while you're there."

Rafael's smile grew even brighter, his teeth gleaming again. "I was thinking the same thing, Your Majesty."

Salvador chuckled. "Go on, then. The prime minister is waiting for me."

"Understood." Rafael bowed, excusing himself before turning to leave.

Salvador watched him go, the smile lingering on his lips. For reasons he couldn't quite explain, he felt a rare sense of relief settle over him.

Ever since the treason case had come to light, a heavy weight seemed to have lodged itself in his chest, making him see suspicion in everyone around him. Now that the shadow of doubt had gradually narrowed its focus on Yuvan, that weight only seemed to press harder, making it almost impossible to breathe.

For years, Yuvan had built his influence in Valken. Yet, Salvador still had no clear grasp of how extensive that power had become. The agents sent to investigate hadn't returned-not a single one.

Night after night, Salvador lay awake, restless and plagued by thoughts. He had considered sending his younger brother to investigate, but didn't dare take that risk.

For someone to commit treason,

they would need to amass elite forces, weapons, gold, and provisions. While Yuvan might think he had not gathered enough, it didn't necessarily mean Rafael thought the same of his resources.

Yuvan and Rafael were worlds apart.

Oliver had submitted reports time and again, complaining about the Hell Monarch Army and the Sinclair Army's refusal to fully comply with him. This only proved that even though Rafael had relinquished his military authority, the soldiers'

loyalty remained firmly with him.

That was precisely why Salvador couldn't risk letting the Ministry of Justice push the investigation further. Instead, he left the case on hold there while secretly assigning lan's shadow guards to continue probing.

But the shadow guards hadn't returned either, and lan reported no progress. The primary issue was that Yuvan had taken no action in the capital, leaving the investigation at a standstill.

It was during this state of frustration

that Salvador heard Rafael's cheerful remarks. By all logic, it should've heightened his sense of crisis. From any perspective, this dinner

invitation was the perfect

opportunity for Rafael to make a

move.

And yet, when he saw his brother's bright, unguarded smile, the tension in Salvador's chest loosened just a little.

The king didn't understand it himself. Leaning back slightly in his chair, he turned to Derek and said, "I actually feel tempted to let him investigate. How strange." Derek chuckled. "Your Majesty, perhaps it's simply the trust between brothers."

"Trust between brothers?" Salvador repeated, turning the phrase over in his mind. His expression was inscrutable.

Derek said nothing more. He understood that Salvador would never fully trust Rafael-or any prince, for that matter. No ruler ever truly did.

But if even a small sliver of trust could offer him some peace of mind instead of suspicion, that was enough.

At Edgeview Estate, preparations were already underway to welcome Violet.

Wayne had been firmly opposed to the idea, but when Yuvan made up his mind, he ultimately chose to support him.

He handed Yuvan a small glass vial, its surface decorated with a painting of a saintess. "This medicine-just a drop is enough. Nothing more." Yuvan didn't take the vial. Instead, he said calmly, "I have my own."

Chapter 1019

Wayne let out a quiet sigh. "If it were any other woman, your usual methods would suffice. But Violet isn't just any woman. Ordinary drugs won't work on her." Yuvan raised a brow. "Aren't all these drugs supposed to stir desire? What's different about yours?"

"Strictly speaking, Your Highness, your usual drug doesn't evoke real desire-it merely awakens physical urges. My concoction, however, is a type of parasitic toxin. It numbs the brain, and after... intimacy, it causes the victim to develop an emotional attachment to their partner," Wayne explained. Yuvan's face lit up with delight. "That sounds like a miracle drug! Why didn't you give it to me sooner? If she becomes attached to me, what I desire will naturally become her desire as well."

Wayne smiled bitterly. "Your Highness, this so-called emotional attachment goes against one's free will. It can only last for a short time."

"How long?" Yuvan asked.

"Ten days, maybe half a month at most."

Yuvan's eyes gleamed darkly as he took the vial. "And what happens if I administer another dose after the effects fade? Wouldn't that extend the attachment indefinitely?"

Wayne frowned. "This is still poison, Your Highness. Prolonged use will harm the body. There have been cases where someone was dosed three times and became mentally impaired afterward. Too many doses could lead to irreversible brain damage, leaving one utterly incapacitated or even dead."

Yuvan's smile turned cold and predatory. "An imbecile would be even easier to control. The Spencer family would beg me to take care of her."

Seeing Yuvan's increasingly ruthless mindset, Wayne couldn't help but caution him, warning, "Your Highness, while planning is in our hands and outcomes are up to the heavens, hinging an entire scheme on controlling a single person is far too risky. It could backfire disastrously."

Wayne believed that while Violet held some influence, she wasn't significant enough to make both the Spencer family and Carissa completely back down. The plan was too dangerous, and failure would bring severe consequences.

The only reason he had offered the drug was to give Violet a temporary emotional connection to Yuvan. Even if it was fleeting, as long as she stood by his side at a critical moment, the people from Hell Monarch Estate would be less likely to make things difficult for him. The priority now was finding a way to retreat to Valken. Once they were back there and Violet was under Yuvan's control, they could take their time plotting their next moves.

Even so, Wayne still felt the plan was dangerously reckless.

At Edgeview Estate, preparations were grand and meticulous. Over at Hell Monarch Estate, everyone spared no effort in dressing up as well.

Carissa had swapped back into

women's attire for the occasion. She

donned a flowing crimson gown

crafted from fine brocade, its patterns subtly embroidered with gold in floral and vine motifs. Her hair was styled in a high braided crown, adorned with delicate pearl hairpins on either side. A cascade of curls, embellished with tiny pearls that shimmered in the light, fell softly down her back, adding a lively, enchanting touch to her noble appearance.

Meanwhile, Rafael wore a deep azure surcoat of fine brocade, embroidered with delicate gold accents along the edges and hem. Beneath it, a fitted tunic of soft ivory linen, subtly adorned with intricate stitching at the cuffs and neckline, complemented his tall, lean frame. The rich fabrics and meticulous detailing made his chiseled features appear even more refined.

Violet also dressed up carefully. Since arriving in the capital, she had rarely attended banquets. With Carissa accompanying her this time, she couldn't afford to look out of place.

She had no shortage of outfits, thanks to her wealth. Each season demanded its own wardrobe, even though she usually rotated between just a few practical pieces. The more elaborate dresses often stayed untouched-but owning them was a necessity, even if wearing them wasn't.

Lulu beamed as she brought out an ensemble for Violet-a fine tunic of pale apricot silk, embroidered with intricate lily patterns in gold thread. The tunic was paired with a pleated skirt of soft ivory, decorated with delicate butterfly motifs, blending lively charm with refined grace.

Though Violet had spent years running wild in Meadow Ridge, her roots as the daughter of a prestigious merchant family still shone through. With just a little grooming and refinement in her manners, she was just as elegant as the noblewomen in the capital.

Travis was also attending tonight,

but he insisted that his current attire as the captain of the guards was the best choice. It perfectly showcased his commanding presence, and no other Outfit could compare. Besides, he had convinced himself that the longer he admired his reflection in the mirror, the better he looked.

According to his account, his striking appearance had captivated a whole gaggle of maids. A few even lost their sense of direction around him, frequently bringing him snacks and bottles of wine as tokens of their admiration.

Chapter 1020

As dusk settled, two carriages from Hell Monarch Estate arrived promptly at the gates of Edgeview Estate.

The moment the carriages pulled up, the gatekeeper hurried to report their arrival. The main gate of Edgeview Estate was even opened to welcome them, showing just how important the occasion was. Molly and Fiona stood at the entrance with Stephanie and Sabrina, ready to greet their guests. Since Violet was a woman, Lucian and Randall didn't come out to join them.

The sight of two carriages immediately set Fiona on edge. She was well aware of Yuvan's plans for the night. Only Violet was supposed to be coming-why were two carriages necessary? When Rafael and Carissa stepped out of one of the carriages, Fiona froze and her carefully curated smile faltered.

What were they doing here?

"I thought you only invited Violet! How did you extend the invitation?" she hissed under her breath, glaring at Molly.

However, Molly was visibly pleased with herself. Originally, Yuvan had instructed her to invite only Violet. With Rafael and Carissa also showing up, she believed her husband would be delighted.

Annoyed by Fiona's accusatory tone, Molly's face darkened. "What kind of attitude is that? You're talking to me, the princess consort! I managed to get them here-something you couldn't even do, so keep your mouth shut!" Fiona had no interest in engaging further with this fool. She waved to a maid standing nearby.

"Go and inform His Highness at once!"

The maid nodded and hurried inside.

When Yuvan received the report in the study, he shot to his feet, his expression twisting in disbelief. "What? Rafael and Carissa are here too?"

Yuvan had planned to remain in the study tonight, leaving Fiona and Molly to entertain Violet along with his daughters. Once Violet consumed the drugged drink, Fiona would bring her to him.

Unlike Yuvan's shock and anger, Wayne was surprisingly pleased.

After dismissing the maid, he turned to Yuvan and said, "Your Highness, this is a golden opportunity! We've tried to visit Hell Monarch Estate multiple times, only to be turned away. Prince Rafael wouldn't even meet you privately. But now, he's come to your doorstep. Even if you can't win him over tonight, maintaining a friendly front could open doors for the future."

Wayne had always insisted on trying to win Rafael over. However, Hell Monarch Estate was like an impenetrable fortress, indifferent to both soft diplomacy and hard tactics. It was why they had been forced to change strategies. They hadn't expected Rafael to willingly walk into their territory-this was a gift handed to them on a silver platter!

On the contrary, Yuvan didn't share Wayne's enthusiasm. His face was shadowed with a stormy mix of anger and frustration, as though something he had eagerly anticipated had slipped through his fingers and left him with nothing but empty disappointment. "Your Highness?" Wayne called out.

Yuvan's gaze turned cold and dark. "Of all the times he could have shown up, it had to be now."

Wayne blinked in confusion. "Isn't his arrival a good thing?"

To Wayne, Yuvan's current plan was reckless and fraught with risk. Strengthening ties with Rafael and bringing him to their side would yield far greater benefits. No one was entirely free of desires. Rafael was often at odds with Salvador and the target of the king's paranoia, so he must harbor resentment deep down.

Even if they couldn't secure the Hell Monarch's full loyalty, driving a wedge between him and Salvador would still be advantageous. Should Rafael ever oppose the king

openly even without full familial need

with Yuvan-it would work in their favor. Salvador would undoubtedly focus on dealing with his brother first, leaving Yuvan free to reap the rewards of their conflict.

The opportunity to engage with Rafael had been elusive, until now. Why was Yuvan so furious?

Realization dawned on Wayne. He stared at Yuvan intently and asked, "Your Highness, do you genuinely want Violet for yourself? Isn't it just about using her to control the Spencer family?"

Yuvan's expression twisted into one of embarrassed anger, as though Wayne had just struck a nerve. "Don't talk nonsense!"

However, Wayne didn't miss the flicker of emotion in Yuvan's eyes. His suspicions confirmed, he frowned deeply, his tone turning serious as he cautioned, "Your Highness, if you're planning something grand, you mustn't let lust cloud your judgment." "There's no such thing," Yuvan snapped, his voice tight as he forced his emotions back under control. "You're right, Wayne. If he has come, it's an opportunity. Let's go."