

War Song 1021

Chapter 1021

Wayne wasn't reassured and continued to advise Yuvan.

"Your Highness, once your ambitions are realized, there will be no shortage of women for you to choose from. When that time comes, you might find Violet no different from anyone else." "That's enough." Yuvan's expression darkened.

After uttering those words, an unexpected wave of frustration surged within him. It wasn't something he could control-the feeling swelled, crashing over him like a tidal wave until it spilled out.

"I have lived a simple, restrained life these years. I've kept my desires in check, suppressing my nature and not allowing any mistakes to show. It's not like I haven't been tempted over the years, but I ignored all of it because I knew indulging in pleasures would ruin everything. But Violet Spencer is different. She's the first woman I've desired who also happens to be useful. She's the perfect candidate to help me achieve my goals."

Wayne was both alarmed and furious at Yuvan's outburst. For the first time, he raised his voice in a harsh reprimand.

"Your Highness, are you saying you have feelings for Violet? That you're in love with her? If that's what you believe, let me tell you it's not love. It's just a flimsy excuse to justify despicable behavior. It's nothing more than lust, dressed up as affection. If you truly cared for her, you wouldn't be plotting to ruin her reputation. I've even told you the drug could be fatal, yet you didn't hesitate for a second."

Yuvan's face flushed with anger at being so bluntly confronted. Embarrassed and enraged, he threw caution to the wind.

"Fine! So what if I do have those thoughts? And how dare you call me despicable? How many men out there have multiple wives and concubines, and still keep mistresses? Compared to them, I've lived an ascetic life! Do you need to make a big deal out of one or two instances? Remember your place. You're just my strategist! What I choose to do is none of your business."

"Your Highness!" Wayne didn't back down, and his voice grew colder. "If your aspirations are merely to pursue women and indulge in fleeting desires, then I want no part to play in your future. I wish you all the best. I hope your ambitions come true and your future is bright."

The room fell into an oppressive silence.

Yuvan's expression alternated between shades of red and white, but he managed to hold back his anger and soften his tone.

"Wayne, don't say such things. It would hurt my feelings. I'm not someone who acts on impulse. I've always valued your advice and followed it. Perhaps the string of failures since arriving in the capital has put me in a foul mood, which made me think of this as a way to relieve myself. It's just a woman, after all. If you disapprove, then I won't dwell on it any further."

Wayne knew his words risked offending Yuvan, but he pressed on earnestly.

"If I were completely opposed, Your Highness, I wouldn't have provided the drug in the first place. I only hope that you remain clear-headed and rational at all times. Violet is a tool to be used. Even if you take her body, it must only be for the sake of your grand ambitions-not because of fleeting lust ignited by her beauty. Lust is a whirlpool, Your Highness. It will drag you down and leave you with nothing."

Yuvan was seething with humiliation and rage. He never imagined that his first argument with Wayne would be over something like this.

He held his tongue, suppressing the urge to lash out, and left without another word.

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The tension arose because Molly

Molly and Fiona had already welcomed the guests inside. They were chatting and laughing in the main hall, but the atmosphere was growing increasingly awkward.

kept undercutting every remark Fiona made. At the door earlier, Molly had felt disrespected. She was also worried that Violet might have overheard-it would hurt her standing as Yuvan's princess

consort. So now, she seized every opportunity to make veiled jabs, trying to restore her pride while venting her anger.

Despite her usual composure, Fiona barely managed to not lose her temper. It wouldn't have been too bad if they were all women, but the Hell Monarch was sitting right there. The two of them bickering like petty housewives in front of such guests was beyond disgraceful.

Luckily, the awkwardness didn't last long.

After a short while, a servant announced, "Prince Yuvan has arrived."

The group rose from their seats as Yuvan strode in, his demeanor regal and commanding.

"Apologies for intruding on you today, Uncle Yuvan," Rafael said.

Yuvan smiled, stepping forward to pat Rafael on the shoulder. "I've visited your estate so many times, but you're always too busy to meet with me. For a while, I thought you might be upset with me." As he spoke, his gaze drifted lightly over Violet. Her face, free of makeup, looked naturally beautiful in a pure, untouched way that was simply captivating.

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Rafael chuckled. "Uncle Yuvan, how could you think I'd be upset with you? Unless, of course, you've done something to wrong me?"

Yuvan laughed heartily, waving a hand dismissively in front of Rafael. "Of course not!"

He was the first to stride over to his seat, sweeping his cloak aside as he sat down with an air of authority. "Please, sit. No need to stand on ceremony."

He was dressed in a finely embroidered surcoat of rich brocade, featuring a golden thread pattern of soaring cranes. A faint touch of color stained his lips, giving them a subtle red hue, and his face radiated with a confident smile.

Violet glanced at him, unable to shake the impression that he resembled a peacock spreading its feathers.

Once everyone was seated, Wayne entered with Randall and Lucian. The two brothers had been genuinely happy to see Carissa and Rafael earlier, but now there was a noticeable awkwardness in the air. After greeting them, they sat down, their expressions stiff and uncomfortable. They even avoided making eye contact with Rafael.

Knowing he was Yuvan's strategist, Rafael studied Wayne for a moment. Though he wasn't sure why, it seemed as if there had been some kind of disagreement between them. And from the looks of it, it wasn't a trivial matter. Both men had the telltale signs of lingering anger-an anger that would surely turn into bitterness. Martial artists, of all people, could sense these things.

His gaze shifted back to Yuvan's face, and he asked with a smile, "Uncle Yuvan, you suddenly invited us to your estate. Is there some happy news you're celebrating?"

Yuvan had been simmering with frustration, and he wasn't about to mention that he hadn't invited Rafael at all.

He cast a brief glance at Molly before forcing a smile. "As I mentioned earlier, I've visited your estate several times, but you've always been unavailable. So, I thought I'd extend the invitation to you and your wife. After all, we're family, and we should make the effort to keep in touch."

Rafael couldn't help but find the situation amusing. He wasn't just unavailable-he had flat-out shut Yuvan out.

"You're absolutely right, Uncle Yuvan. It's important to keep in touch."

While Rafael handled the conversation, Carissa observed Yuvan in silence. In just a few exchanged words, she noticed that his eyes kept drifting toward Violet. There was something about the way his gaze lingered that was unsettling-dirty, almost predatory. Carissa knew Molly had invited Violet to dinner with less-than-noble intentions, but she assumed it was just an attempt to have her cousin on her side.

She never imagined it would be for such dirty intentions.

"Your Grace. Your Grace?"

Carissa returned to her senses after Fiona called out to her.

"Yes?"

Fiona smiled and asked, "Why have you been staring at Stephanie?"

Carissa had been lost in her thoughts, her gaze drifting to Stephanie as she thought about Yuvan's vile intentions. Fiona had assumed she was staring at Stephanie, and the look in Carissa's eyes had been so sharp it startled Stephanie. "Nothing," Carissa replied coolly. "I just thought of my late aunt when I looked at them."

Her eyes swept over Stephanie once more before settling on Sabrina. The intensity in her gaze was the same as it had been when she had been lost in thought earlier, sharp and unrelenting.

Neither Stephanie nor Sabrina dared

to speak. They had been

disrespectful to Carissa in the past, but ever since she became the commander of the Mystic Army, they couldn't look down on her anymore. In fact, they now found themselves a little afraid of her.

Molly turned her head away, her expression one of distaste. To mention a dead person in front of her-how unlucky! However, Fiona saw it as a good conversation starter.

Smiling brightly, she said, "You're so sentimental, your Grace. Speaking of that, I have a small favor to ask. Both Stephanie and Sabrina are of marriageable age, and it's time they get engaged. As I'm not in the capital, I don't know which young noblemen have the right character to be entrusted with their futures."

Carissa recalled how Ivy had once told her that Sabrina had neglected Avis when she fell ill. Stephanie would occasionally come to serve her medicine, but her attitude was hardly respectful. When Avis got Stephanie's clothes dirty, she would lash out. Carissa was usually good at controlling her emotions, but only when it was necessary.

She didn't feel it was needed now, so she responded coldly, "Any young nobleman with decent character wouldn't even look at women who aren't dutiful and kind. If they want to make a match in the capital, t Oto their

would be wise for them to

mom's grave and beg for

forgiveness. Even a little bit of false

devotion would be better than acting like animals."

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Stephanie was initially a bit afraid of Carissa, but when she heard those words, she stood up in a huff and demanded, "Carissa, how can you slander me like this and ruin my reputation? What do you gain from this?" Immediately, Travis barked sharply, "How dare you call the princess consort by her name?"

Carissa raised her hand, signaling for Travis to step back.

She then looked up at Stephanie, her voice dripping with sarcasm as she said, "I see you're quick to speak harshly, but when your mom was treated so poorly, you didn't utter a word of protest. Why? If you were too scared to speak up, you should have at least served her properly. Don't forget, she gave birth to you."

Stephanie was seething with anger. She was about to retort, but when Rafael's cold gaze swept across the room, her anger quickly turned to hesitation.

She dared not speak further, though she muttered bitterly, "What does this have to do with you? If you're so capable, why didn't you do something about it? It's easy to criticize others, but why didn't you act on it?"

Carissa scoffed. "What an excellent point you make! So, if someone doesn't fulfill their duties to their parents, they can still criticize others for not doing enough? I'll be sure to remember this and tell Mrs. Murray. She'll be so pleased to hear how you want her to spread the word about your remarkable sense."

Yuvan's expression darkened. "Stephanie, don't be disrespectful to your cousin."

Stephanie shot Carissa a venomous glare but reluctantly replied, "Yes, Dad."

Yuvan was even more upset than Stephanie. Carissa's words were an obvious jab at his harsh treatment of his former wife. Worse, she said it in front of Violet. How could he preserve his reputation after that?

Fortunately, Rafael stepped in to defuse the tension, saying, "Alright, let's not bring up unpleasant matters today. We're here to enjoy ourselves, so let's not spoil the mood."

Carissa noticed that her husband was irritated and retorted, "What? Now I'm not allowed to speak? What's wrong with a few words? I'm just saying, my aunt didn't deserve to have two ungrateful daughters and two ungrateful sons."

Yuvan's face flushed with anger. Was she accusing the children of being ungrateful? No, this was an accusation against him.

Rafael furrowed his brows, clearly upset. "Carissa, we've come to Uncle Yuvan's residence as guests. Can you at least be a bit more thoughtful?"

Carissa shot him an angry look, clearly displeased. "Why are you taking their side? Are the things I'm saying wrong?"

Rafael's eyes were clouded with frustration. "I'm not saying you're wrong, but the timing is wrong."

As they bickered, the people from Edgeview Estate exchanged uncertain glances. They had always heard of the couple's love for each other, so why had they started arguing over just a few words? For a moment, even Wayne couldn't tell whether this was genuine or not.

It was Violet who stood up and moved forward to mediate. "My cousin invited us here today. Let's show her some respect and not stay angry. How about we go for a walk with her, okay?"

Molly had been thoroughly enjoying

the drama and didn't hide her

amusement. She never liked Stephanie or Sabrina, both of whom always acted so superior. Hearing them get scolded by Carissa was sweet revenge for her.

When she watched Carissa argue with the Hell Monarch, she thought the other woman was foolish. How could she embarrass her husband like that? It was clear that being too proud as a woman could be just as annoying.

However, Violet's suggestion was a way of showing her respect in front of the prince. Smiling brightly, Molly stood up.

"Our gardener is very skilled. He's grown several types of orchids, and now the roses and orchids are blooming together in a competition of beauty. Let's go see them together," she suggested.

Carissa had been reluctant to rise, but with Violet tugging on her arm, she got up. "Fine, I'll leave. I know I'm saying things that aren't pleasant to hear. It's better that I don't stay here and be an eyesore." Violet smiled and patted Carissa's hand lightly. "Don't mind her, Prince Yuvan. Cari can be a little blunt sometimes."

When Yuvan saw Violet's smile, he felt a lump form in his throat. His gaze slowly moved from her face down to her chest and waist.

Violet was unaware of his intent, so she didn't think anything of it. She still saw Yuvan as nothing but trouble, but having no experience with men, she didn't recognize what was happening.

However, Carissa saw it all too

clearly. What she had suspected earlier, she was now almost certain of it. Yuvan was lasciviously eyeing Violet. Her anger flared up instantly, her eyes flashing with fury. Without a second thought, she grabbed Violet's arm and pulled her toward the door.

Carissa yanked so hard that Violet stumbled and almost lost her balance. As she steadied herself, she quickly said, "Slow down!"

After they left, Stephanie scoffed and remarked coldly, "She has no manners herself, but dares to criticize others."

Yuvan inevitably reprimanded Stephanie and ordered her to return and reflect on her behavior, warning her not to embarrass herself any further. Fiona called for Sabrina and took her along as they left.

The moment Fiona stepped out, she signaled her maid to follow Carissa and Violet. While the estate didn't have hidden chambers or prisons, it wasn't a place anyone could wander through at will. Molly was a fool, and Fiona feared she might be used for something she wasn't aware of.

Wayne had been quietly observing Rafael. Although he was speaking with Yuvan, his expression clearly showed some displeasure, and his gaze occasionally drifted outside. It was almost like a young couple having a spat-annoyed but still unwilling to let go. And with the flash of anger Carissa had shown just before leaving, it was hard to pretend it was anything but genuine. Wayne was fairly certain that her purpose in coming to Edgeview Estate was to stand up for Avis and vent her frustration. This had likely been building in her for a long time.

Wayne figured that giving Carissa a chance to release it now wasn't a bad thing. They had left, but Rafael remained. Now, things would actually be easier to handle.

"Rafael, how is your mom doing?" Yuvan asked, exchanging pleasantries.

"Thank you for your concern, Uncle Yuvan. Mom is doing well. How is Lady Ruth? Is she feeling better now?" Rafael replied.

"She's finally showing signs of improvement," Yuvan said, letting out a small sigh of relief.

"That's good to hear," Rafael said with a smile. "So, when do you plan on returning to Valken?"

Yuvan laughed heartily. "Do you not want me to stay in the capital, my dear nephew? Why the rush for me to return to Valken?"

Rafael smiled faintly. "It's not that. I was just asking."

"His Highness is likely to head back to Valken by the end of the month," Wayne answered for Yuvan.

Rafael took a sip of his drink, clearly indifferent to the matter, his eyes once again drifting out the window.

After a long silence, Wayne realized Rafael wasn't asking any further questions. He couldn't quite figure out what the prince's true intentions were.

Wayne didn't believe for a second that they had come just because Molly had invited Violet to dinner. There was surely another reason, though it was hard to pry that out. And since he didn't have enough information, it would be unwise to delve into it too directly. Just as Wayne was thinking of bringing up a different topic to warm up the conversation, Rafael turned to Yuvan, his tone laced with subtle reproach.

"Uncle Yuvan, don't blame me for speaking up, but the way you treated Aunt Avis back then was honestly so cold and heartless. It's no wonder Carissa is so upset."

Yuvan and Wayne were both caught off guard by his words. They exchanged a glance, both confused.

What was this? Carissa had thrown a tantrum, and now it was Rafael's turn?

Even so, it didn't seem like he came here for that reason. It felt more like he regretted his earlier confrontation with Carissa and was now looking for a way to smooth things over.

Yet, the way he asked didn't suggest any hidden motive. If he had one, he would have been trying to extract information, not behaving like a petulant child.

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Meanwhile, Carissa and Violet walked behind Molly through the garden. The area was filled with maids and servants, some standing at a distance, others closer by. However, there were no guards in sight.

Carissa was uninterested in the flowers, and she waved her hand toward the maids nearby. "Come here. Go fetch some snacks. We'll sit in the pavilion for a while."

When the maids hesitated briefly, Molly snapped, "What are you waiting for?"

Two of the maids immediately stepped forward and curtsied. "Yes, Your Grace. We'll go right away."

Molly then turned to a few others. "You, tidy up the pavilion. Lay down some soft cushions, make it comfortable to sit."

By the time Fiona arrived, she saw

the servants bustling around, clearly preparing for a flower-viewing session. It seemed harmless enough, and she let out a quiet sigh of relief. She had been worried that

Molly would bring theme

study. If that happened, things could get complicated.

Still, Fiona was slightly puzzled. Could they truly be here just as guests? No matter-it would be best to win Violet over and have her return again another day. She was still of use to Yuvan, after all. With a bright smile, Fiona approached them. "Your Grace, Ms. Spencer, why not look at the flowers a little more?"

"We've already seen them. Neither of us is particularly fond of flowers. A glance is enough," Violet replied.

Fiona handed Violet a handkerchief. "Ms. Spencer, you should wipe your sweat."

It was a pleasant spring day, not too hot or cold, and they had only been walking a short while. Yet, Violet still accepted the handkerchief with a polite "Thank you" and invited Fiona to sit down.

Fiona glanced at Carissa, noting the

lingering anger on her face. She seemed unwilling to speak to her or Molly, instead staring vacantly at the servants rushing about. Recalling Carissa's earlier sharp remarks, Fiona didn't dare provoke her.

What Fiona didn't realize was that Carissa wasn't lost in thought at all.

Instead, her eyes were fixated on the servants movements, quietly

counting heads and listening to their words as she observed them

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Edgeview Estate was hardly a place where anything could be hidden. If there was something, it would likely be nothing more than correspondence, but anything truly important would have been hidden away or destroyed. Getting into the study would be no easy feat, and causing a scene would only make matters worse. They had invited Violet here for a reason, though its true purpose had been unclear until now. Now, Carissa knew what that reason was.

Before arriving today, she had planned to use this opportunity to find out how many people in Edgeview Estate were skilled in martial arts, and whether any of the suicide soldiers were hiding within the estate. If the suicide soldiers weren't here, she could allow Violet to return next time.

Now that she knew Yuvan's intentions, she wouldn't let her friend take such a risk. The way Yuvan looked at Violet was revolting. His gaze was so lecherous that just thinking about it made Carissa feel sick.

The maids filed in, placing various pastries on the table. Suddenly, Carissa stood up and walked over to one of the maids holding a tray of pound cakes. The maid stood perfectly still, not stepping back, not even blinking.

Fiona watched with suspicion, but Carissa merely pointed at the cakes and said, "These pound cakes are Prince Rafael's favorite. Please take them to the main hall for him."

The maid lowered her gaze and replied softly, "Yes, Your Grace."

She curtsied and left, her steps steady and deliberate, without a single wobble.

Fiona couldn't help but chuckle. "Lady Carissa and Prince Rafael are truly affectionate, aren't they? Even after a spat, she still remembers His Highness likes pound cakes."

Carissa returned to her seat, offering a forced smile, still maintaining an air of indifference. She even turned her back on them, resting her arms on the railing and staring off into the distance,

watching people walk by. Molly chuckled as well. "Violet, Fiona really enjoys doing things like this-trying to get close even when it's clear she's being ignored."

Fiona gave Molly a cold glance. This fool only cared about vying for power and favor. Now that they were merely guests in the capital, what power was there to fight over?

As a princess consort, Molly should have had her mind on more important things. Yet, all she thought about was trivial nonsense. She wasn't fit for any significant role.

Still, Fiona knew Violet. Women like her prided themselves on their sense of justice, always rushing to defend the weak. So, Fiona said nothing and only lowered her eyes, which were slightly reddened in irritation. Violet furrowed her brows and said, "Molly, you're a princess consort. You shouldn't speak so harshly."

Molly huffed. "What a fool! You don't even realize you're being used."

Violet nearly laughed. Did Molly think people were born with brains but no sense?

She decided to ignore Molly and turned her attention to Fiona, engaging in a conversation about the customs and culture of Valken. Of course, Fiona's responses were as guarded as ever. After a while, Carissa said she felt a bit weary from sitting too long. She suggested they take another walk, so the group stood and began to move again.

Violet seemed quite interested in the estate, pressing Molly and Fiona to show her around. They walked from the garden to the courtyard, then to the back garden, and even to the storage building. Naturally, Fiona didn't take them into the study. It was a place too important for casual visitors. Instead, they merely passed by the archway adorned with hanging flowers.

Fiona wasn't worried about them looking around. If they had ulterior motives, the more they looked, the better. Let them see that there was nothing to find in the royal estate. After the tour, Carissa had enough of the wandering.

"I'm hungry. Let's go eat," she suggested.

During dinner, Stephanie and Sabrina didn't join them. Rafael ate a little, then put down his cutlery. When Wayne tried to offer him wine, he declined.

"Why aren't you drinking? Afraid your uncle might poison you?" Yuvan teased.

Rafael shook his head, playing the role of the honest, dutiful nephew.

"You wouldn't have any reason to harm me, Uncle Yuvan. If you did, it certainly wouldn't be at this moment poisoning me now would ruin years of planning. I just can't stand this coarse wine. I usually drink ice wine, and these dishes aren't to my taste either."

Yuvan's lips twitched. This nephew certainly had no sense of courtesy, did he?

Tonight's dishes were sweetened to suit Violet's tastes, as she was from Ebonflow. A bowl of royal jelly soup would be prepared specifically for her afterward, but it seemed that wouldn't be needed tonight.

Yuvan gave Violet a long, piercing look. He would have this woman, no matter the cost.

After dinner, he turned to her and said, "Your cousin has no family here in the capital. If you have the time, please come by more often to keep her company, Ms. Spencer."

Molly immediately linked arms with

Violet, acting overly familiar. "Yes, when you have some free time, let's go out for a walk. Maybe have some coffee I've been in the capital for so long, but I haven't even finished exploring a single street."

Violet raised an eyebrow. "No family? Aren't you all her family?"

Yuvan paused, a flicker of surprise crossing his face before he let out a low, amused chuckle. He gave Violet a bow, his gaze teasing as he said, "Ah, my mistake. I misspoke. Please forgive me, my dear."

Violet suppressed the urge to slap him and fought the shudder running down her spine. She forced a smile and said coldly, "I'll come by when I have time."

Travis had been slow to catch on, but he suddenly realized what was going on. He grabbed Violet's wrist and hissed, "Let's go!"

Outrage surged through him. How dare this old fox try to play this game!

Chapter 1026

Back at Hell Monarch Estate, Violet jumped out of the carriage and gave a few quick hops at the gate, shaking off all the bad energy that had clung to her. Her face was ashen with fury. "What the hell was that? How dare he have designs on me? Doesn't he realize his son is older than I am? That shameless old fart!" she roared.

Luke happened to be walking out at that moment. When he overheard Violet's words, he took a step back, his round face looking thoroughly confused.

Why would someone be shameless just because they were old?

Carissa, just as upset, pulled Violet into the estate. "Don't go to Edgeview Estate again. The way his eyes were all over you... Just thinking about it makes me feel like you've been sullied. It's disgusting."

She couldn't tell if the man she saw tonight was still the ambitious man she knew it was like he had turned into a completely different person. He was nothing but a pervert.

Once inside the council hall, Rafael recounted to Jacob how Yuvan had been eyeing Violet.

Jacob listened with a stunned expression. "No way... It was that obvious?"

"It was that obvious," Rafael confirmed, shaking his head. "I even wondered if he was someone else in disguise."

Rafael had been mulling over this on the carriage ride back. Based on what they had learned, Yuvan wasn't the type to be interested in women. No matter how beautiful a woman was, to him, they were just pawns. He mostly used women to manipulate Valken's officials, all of them carefully chosen for their beauty.

Even his marriage to Molly was more about getting access to the Spencer family's wealth, weapons manufacturing, and warhorses than anything else.

Rafael couldn't make sense of what he had seen. Once they sat down, he asked, "Carissa, do you think it's possible he's not really Yuvan? That the real Yuvan has already gone back to Valken?"

Carissa was still seething with anger, but she calmed a little as she thought about what Rafael had said.

It wasn't entirely out of the realm of possibility. In the martial world, disguises were so skillfully done that sometimes, it was impossible to tell the difference unless one was paying close attention.

Even Jacob thought it was highly likely. From what they knew about Yuvan, he would never behave so recklessly. Even if he did have designs on Violet, it would only be because she was the favored daughter of the Spencer family.

If that was the case, then he certainly wouldn't have left such obvious signs.

The three of them fell into deep thought, pondering the possibilities.

Violet had initially disagreed, but seeing that the three smartest people in the estate all thought the same way, she found herself wavering.

Could it really be a fake Yuvan?

Meanwhile, Travis was fuming.

"What do you mean, fake Yuvan? It's him, alright! If he's different from before, it just means he was pretending before. Violet is the Spencer family's daughter, and she's good-looking.

"That day, when she barged in and slapped Molly she looked so cool, right? How Could Yuvan not be moved? Has he ever seen a woman like her? Let me tell you, men can be so full of themselves. They think we can't see through their intentions. They think they're hiding it well. Did you hear the last thing he said? What was it? 'I misspoke. Please forgive me, my dear?' I just want to slap him!"

Violet shuddered at the memory of those words. Suddenly, she found herself agreeing with Travis.

"Rod is right. I think that's his true nature. He's just been hiding it until now."

Travis patted his chest proudly. "That's right! You can trust me on this. My mentor listed a thousand types of bad men, and Yuvan is just like one of them. My master never gets it wrong-Yuvan is like a scruffy peacock, proudly showing off his

feathers without realizing how ugly

he looks."

The three who were overthinking froze for a moment when they heard Travis' words. His mentor said that? Then, it must be reliable.

"Seriously, trust me," Travis

continued. "My mentor says that no

matter how powerful or ambitious a

intentions

man is, he can't hide

toward women. Carissa, you especially need to believe this. If

Prince Rafael ever starts looking at another woman, you'll see right through him without a second thought."

Rafael had been following Travis' line of thought, but after hearing that last comment, his face darkened. "Nonsense! There's no way I'd be interested in any other woman."

Travis lifted his chin in defiance. "Well, you can never be too sure. My mentor's list of a thousand men includes those who start off all innocent and full of devotion, but eventually turn fickle. And when those kinds of men turn, they're far worse than others."

Chapter 1027

Jacob noticed that Travis had gotten off-track and quickly intervened.

"Mr. Mullen, we can't use Prince Rafael as an example. Sure, men like that exist, but that's not what we're discussing right now."

Travis put on a look of deep sympathy, as if he were offering sage advice, and continued, "Vivi says she doesn't want to marry, and I'm all for it. If she doesn't marry, she won't get hurt. Young love is intense, but after time passes, it just becomes gross.

"It's like iron with a coating of gold-when that coating falls off, the iron rusts and decays. Even with genuine feelings, it turns out like that. And then you have someone like Yuvan, who's all scheming and never tasted the sweetness of love. He's like an old thief. The minute a woman like Vivi steps into his life-someone who can heal his broken heart and also help him out-he becomes like a dog in heat and shows all his ugly sides."

Jacob was utterly lost. After a long pause, he asked, "Is that something your mentor said?"

If one hadn't been through so much, how could one possibly speak such words of weariness and wisdom? Travis definitely couldn't have said something like that.

"Yeah, my mentor has said a lot of things like that. Want to hear more?" Travis grinned.

"No thanks," everyone responded in unison, more than a little disgusted by the idea.

Yet, there was truth in Travis' words. Everyone took a moment to think, realizing that his perspective was rooted in human nature, which surely overpowered the behavior Yuvan had previously shown.

Carissa quietly noted the number of skilled servants and maids she had encountered at Edgeview Estate earlier that evening.

"There were 18 maids and 23 attendants. They didn't seem like suicide soldiers. Suicide soldiers undergo intense training, especially for high-risk situations. They instinctively react with defensive reflexes because they've been trained in life-or-death crises. I tested three of them today-one maid

and two attendants. They showed no change in expression or bodily reaction when faced with unexpected pressure," she said.

Rafael nodded in agreement. "I agree. Suicide soldiers don't need to be calm-they need to be ruthless and completely obedient. Those who are as steady as that are most likely martial arts experts, probably used as bodyguards."

They were all trained in martial arts and had undergone crisis training, but every move they made was calculated. However, suicide soldiers operated in the shadows. Their sole mission was to relentlessly pursue their target

without hesitation, to the point of

death.

When Icarus tried to assassinate Carissa, he had suicide soldiers with him. A few of them had been captured, and they had been tested. Just as Carissa had said, they responded exactly as expected.

"I've gone through nearly every part

of Edgeview Estate except for the study in the central courtyard," Carissa said. "I didn't feel the bloodlust of a suicide soldier, but I can't say for certain that there aren't any. There could still be hidden rooms or secret chambers where they're being kept."

"I'll look into it," Violet replied.

"No," Carissa cut her off firmly. "You're not going. You can't go back to Edgeview Estate."

"Why not? It's the perfect opportunity! That was the plan when we went there tonight."

Carissa shook her head. "At the time, we didn't know how vile Yuvan truly is. You can't go. That man is cunning and vicious, and he uses all sorts of strange poisons. If he poisons you and takes control of your mind, you'll be forced to do whatever he wants."

"I'll be careful," Violet insisted. "Who knows? I might just find the suicide soldiers myself."

Carissa was adamant. "No! That's

not why we went there in the first place. We weren't looking for suicide soldiers-we were just trying to figure out what Molly's intentions were in inviting you and to observe the security of the estate. All their guards are disguised as servants and maids. They blended in everywhere without any clear order. That kind of unpredictability is even more dangerous. If you fall into a trap, you won't be able to escape."

"You can't go," she reiterated. "If they invite you again, you must refuse. Travis, keep an eye on her."

Violet grinned playfully. "If you tell me not to go, then I definitely won't."

Having Travis keep an eye on her was pointless. He lacked what she had in abundance he was the easiest person to bribe.

Chapter 1028

The next morning, when Rafael went to the palace to retrieve the approved documents, he casually remarked, "I heard from Carissa that the orchids at Edgeview Estate are blooming beautifully. They have a wide variety, and there are many skilled and unusual individuals

in the estate. Even the servants and maids all seem to possess martial arts skills."

Salvador paused, surprised. Ian had been secretly investigating Edgeview Estate for a while and hadn't been able to uncover what gave Yuvan the confidence to remain in the capital for so long.

But now, Rafael and Carissa had uncovered it in just one visit?

"We didn't find any guards at Edgeview Estate, but there's concern that suicide soldiers might be hiding nearby. They're highly skilled, making it difficult to detect them, so we didn't dare to intrude recklessly," Ian had reported.

Salvador went quiet for a moment, then asked, "Were they suicide soldiers?"

As soon as the question was out, Rafael smiled at him. "No."

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Salvador shot him an irritated look. "Why are you smiling? What's so funny?"

Rafael's smile only widened. "I've recently developed a liking for pointless smiles."

Salvador glared at him but then couldn't help but chuckle. "You fool."

The two brothers exchanged a quick glance and smiled at each other. That smile carried an unexpected power, as if it had cracked the high, sturdy wall Salvador had built around himself.

His question about suicide soldiers suggested that he hadn't reached that part of the investigation yet. However, his willingness to ask indicated he was open to sharing the general progress Ian had made, and possibly seeking some information in return. There was a hint of trust in his approach, a small step away from his previous tight-lipped position.

Under Yuvan's urging during dinner, Molly used a sum of money to quash the rumors about Skye Embroidery. The same group that had spread the rumors was now responsible for clearing them up. Although it wasn't entirely convincing, Molly had at least made a financial sacrifice to resolve the issue.

When Jessica learned of this, she immediately sought out Molly, but the latter avoided her.

Jessica resorted to standing outside the gates of Edgeview Estate and shouting her grievances. Concerned

that the situation would ensue

Fiona ordered that Jessica be

chased off if she appeared. With no other choice, Jessica returned to the Workshop, this time with a much calmer attitude.

At the workshop, the staff couldn't make decisions on their own, so they said they would report to Hannah and let her decide. Jessica waited outside Hannah's residence, Seabrook Estate. When Hannah emerged, she rushed forward and began to sob.

Hannah was the type of person who

didn't respond well to force or threats-she was more likely to be swayed by a softer approach. Jessica was known for her arrogance, and Hannah wouldn't usually care about someone like her. Seeing the once-respected duchess now reduced to such a pitiful state, however, Hannah's heart softened.

"You can stay for a few days, but don't expect me to take you in. I'll try to find you a place where you can work for your food, but that's all I can do for you."

Jessica was reluctant. "You want me to do servants' work? No, I can't do that!"

Hannah motioned for a maid to help her into the carriage. "Then, go beg for food, like a beggar. Don't stay at the workshop. Go find a rundown shack somewhere to sleep in. The sooner you start, the better." With no other choice, Jessica agreed, though begrudgingly. "Fine. You find me something, and I'll stay at the workshop for now."

Hannah sat back in the carriage, massaging her temples. "Still acting like a duchess..."

"Madam Hannah, the problem is that it's easy to invite the gods, but hard to send them away," said Gertrude, a maid. "She's like chewing gum-it sticks no matter how hard you try to shake it off." Hannah thought for a moment, and then came up with an idea.

"Go back to the workshop. Tell them that from now on, only buy Jessica's portion of food. Everyone else will return home to eat. If she wants to eat, she'll have to cook it herself. If she doesn't know how, she can ask them to teach her. Under no

circumstances are they to cook for her. And she'll have to clean the house, water the plants, and tend the garden. If she doesn't do it, no food will be provided the next day."

Gertrude laughed. "Madam Hannah, that's a brilliant plan! She'll be working in the workshop anyway. At least there, she'll get food. If she takes up a job, she'll have meals and a small wage.

She'll surely know which is a better option." Little did they know, Hannah's momentary kindness would soon spark a whole new wave of criticism.

Chapter 1029

The day after Jessica moved into the workshop, rumors about the reasons she had been divorced began to spread like wildfire across the entire capital. Whispers said she had plotted to harm the Marquis of Ironridge's children, caused trouble with the concubines, and

even pushed one of them into the water in an attempt to kill said concubine.

As the rumors spread, someone also revealed that Jessica had been involved in usury.

She was such a wicked woman, yet the Marquis of Ironridge's family hadn't handed her over to the authorities. Instead, they had simply cast her out from the household to settle the matter. What truly shocked the people was that Skye Embroidery-of all places-had taken her in, providing her with food and shelter as though nothing had happened.

Carissa had been focused on wrapping up the cleanup operation of the Garrison Unit. She had no idea that Skye Embroidery was facing a storm of public backlash once again. She only found out the day before her operation ended, and immediately went to ask Violet. Violet was flustered. "Claire looked into it. It wasn't Molly who leaked the news. I'm guessing it came from the Marquis of Ironridge's family. They never officially explained why Jessica was divorced, so someone within Ironridge Estate must have spilled the beans. Whoever did it wants to make sure Jessica is completely ruined."

Carissa frowned. "This isn't just about ruining Jessica-it's about taking down Skye Embroidery too. Have you found out who's behind it? Spreading rumors on such a large scale must have cost a lot of money."

"There's someone you know well from Ironridge Estate. Could it be her?" Violet replied.

"Serena?" Carissa thought for a moment, then nodded slowly. "She's the most likely one. She hates Jessica and despises Amelia too. The workshop is named after Amelia. But Serena doesn't have the means to do this on her own. She'd need help." The two of them exchanged a look, then burst in unison, "Flora!"

If there was anyone who hated Jessica enough to go to such lengths, it was Flora, who had lost her child because of Jessica's actions.

Carissa had thought about it before. What kind of medicine could cause a miscarriage with just one dose? She had wanted to find out, but Margaret had been ill and refused to meet. It wouldn't be proper to just show up at her door.

Violet's face turned pale, and her heart felt like it was on fire. She couldn't decide whether to be angry or just deeply upset.

"Now everyone knows we took Jessica in! They're saying we're feeding and housing her, and that Skye Embroidery is sheltering a criminal and covering up dirt. The things they're saying are beyond cruel, Cari. I think this might be the end for us."

"Don't worry. There's always a way out," Carissa reassured her. "With Skye Embroidery in such a mess, I'll have to put the Garrison Unit's matters on hold for a few days. I need the public's attention on my side. Once it reaches the Oversight Department, we can make some real progress."

"But what can we do now?" Violet fretted, still anxious. "I went to see Mrs. Lloyd today. She regrets the decision. She said even if we send Jessica away now, it would be useless because someone is clearly intent on causing trouble."

"Let's have Claire investigate first and confirm whether the rumors really came from the Marquis of Ironridge's family," Carissa suggested.

Violet spent the rest of the day feeling down, but by the next morning, her resolve returned. She set out with Travis to look for any trace of the culprit behind the rumors.

Avoidance wouldn't help. They had to face the situation head-on, for there was still a slim chance of turning things around.

The next day, as Carissa was preparing to head back to the Capital Guard headquarters, she intended to send someone to Ironridge Estate with a formal notice of a visit. Luke quickly intercepted her, walking briskly toward her.

"Your Grace, the Marquis of Ironridge's secondary wife passed away last night. It would be inappropriate to send a visit notice at this time."

"What? Was her condition that serious?" Carissa froze, not believing the news. "Are you sure it was his secondary wife, Lady Emma?"

"Yes, it was. Giles told me. He said

that her condition had been improving with the warmer weather, but suddenly, over the past few days, her health worsened. She passed away last night," Luke explained.

"What illness did she have? I saw her last year and didn't notice anything terribly wrong," Carissa said, confused.

"Giles said Lady Emma's health had

never been very good. She was in charge of the household's provisions and was always busy. When she was pregnant with her second child, something happened, and she fell ill. He didn't know the exact details, but he mentioned it was a result of overwork."

The passing of a life could sometimes go unnoticed, slipping away quietly.

The Marquis of Ironridge's family hadn't made a big spectacle of Emma's death, keeping it low-key

because of all the recent rumors et

Even the funeral was kept quiet, and it wasn't until the coffin was carried out that people learned of the loss.

But because the Marquis of Ironridge's family hadn't made an official announcement, rumors began to swirl.

Some claimed that Jessica had poisoned Emma, and that she had only survived thanks to a physician's care and expensive medicines. But now, she was finally unable to hold on any longer and passed away. Thus, the people strongly believed that Jessica was responsible for Emma's death.

Chapter 1030

Because the Marquis of Ironridge's family was in mourning, Carissa couldn't press forward with her visit. There were too many rumors circulating outside, and while she wanted to put a stop to them,

she had no way of clarifying the truth. Without the facts, any attempt to suppress the rumors would be useless.

Claire had returned with the results of her investigation. She confirmed that the rumors had indeed started from Ironridge Estate. She had done a thorough job, meticulously tracing the source of the gossip. She even spent some money to dig deeper and learned that the It turned out that Jessica had been cruel to the servants in the past and had abused them. Now, they were seeking revenge. The storytellers, enraged by the tale, felt it was their duty to spread the word of Jessica's wickedness to the public. Claire had asked them, "Since you speak so passionately about justice, are you sure this is the truth?"

storytellers' information had come from the servants of Ironridge Estate.

The storytellers had looked at her in surprise. "Of course it's the truth. Who is she? She's Eleanor's daughter. The king even stripped her of her title as a duchess, so it's clear she's not innocent in the treason case. If she's bold enough to plot against the king, what wouldn't she do in her household? Who knows how many people might have died at her hands?"

Jessica's name had already become a mark of guilt. Claire questioned a few more people, but didn't uncover anything concrete. She reported back with her findings, though she had little to offer in terms of hard evidence.

Violet had ridden out to the workshop that day, only to find she couldn't even get inside. A large crowd had gathered, shouting about tearing the place down. The gates and walls were covered in rotten eggs and feces.

Violet was furious. She quickly turned her horse around and headed back to Hell Monarch Estate. As soon as she entered, she overheard Claire explaining that the servants of Ironridge Estate had leaked the story. They did it because Jessica had been cruel to them in the past, and now they wanted to get back at her.

Violet slammed a cup down in anger. "This is outrageous!"

However, Carissa took a moment to think before asking, "Did you see Jessica?"

"I couldn't even get in!" Violet replied, her anger still raw. "Just thinking about her makes my blood boil. And honestly, it doesn't surprise me that she'd do something like this. She was never a good person."

Carissa smiled and gently reassured her, "Don't let it get to you. When we set up the workshop, we expected to encounter all kinds of people. What we need to do is solve the problems and handle the troubles, not let them drag us down and stop us from moving forward." Violet looked at Carissa, a wave of discomfort washing over her. "How can you still be smiling? I'm about ready to lose my mind over Jessica. If it weren't for her-"

Carissa interrupted with a light laugh, "If it weren't for her, you'd be worrying about how nobody is coming to the workshop. Truth is, we're just as stuck by these rumors. We might as well keep things simple-look at this from the perspective of the workshop.

"Jessica was the first one to seek

help here. Let's set aside any personal bias. Let's pretend we've never met her and start the

investigation from scratch. Once we figure everything out, we'll do what

needs to be donat

means sending someone away or clearing their name."

Violet sat there quietly, processing what Carissa said. She understood the logic, but seeing how Carissa was being unusually lenient with Jessica in this matter left her feeling uneasy. She felt like if she didn't

bring up the issue, she would remain uncomfortable forever.

"What's wrong?" Carissa asked after a long moment of silence.

Violet looked up and said, "Cari, I think we should just kick Jessica out. Doesn't that align with what the public wants? It would show everyone that our workshop only accepts good people." Carissa's eyes widened in mild surprise, as if she hadn't expected Violet to say that. "Vivi, how do you define 'good'?"

"Naturally, someone who hasn't done anything wrong."

"Does that mean you would distinguish between big and small wrongdoings?"

Violet faltered. "Well... Anyone who's done wrong shouldn't be allowed in. We should only accept the good ones."

Carissa raised an eyebrow. "So, do you think we're good people?"

"Of course we are."

"Have we never made any mistakes or done anything wrong?"

Violet hesitated, thinking back over the years. A flush of guilt crept up on her. "Well, small mistakes... I guess we all make them. After all, we're only human." Carissa smiled softly.

"Exactly. We can't hold others to the highest standard. If we did, no one would be able to join the workshop. A woman who's been divorced isn't always guilty of something major. There are so many reasons why a marriage might end. We need to set clear standards for who can join the workshop—standards based on the workshop itself, not on our personal feelings."