

War Song 1041

Chapter 1041

At the Quinton family's residence, Malcolm straightened his clothes and said, "You're being foolish, dear. How could you believe Carissa's deception? If Her Majesty really stepped in to support the workshop, wouldn't she be scorned by the civil officials? "Right now, the queen doesn't need to do anything-Prince Connor's position as the crown prince is already nearly secure. He is the legitimate eldest son. Who else could it be but him?"

Marjorie remained seated, her expression calm as she asked, "If that's the case, then why did you target the workshop, my lord?"

Since the matter with Casey, Marjorie had stopped addressing him affectionately. After so many years of marriage, there was a clear distance between them now.

Malcolm pursed his lips, silent, though the darkness in his eyes deepened.

Marjorie understood the reason, and when he remained silent, she added, "His Majesty is in his prime and there's no talk of choosing a crown prince. The palace is full of concubines, so the number of princes will only grow.

"If another prince emerges, wiser and more capable than Prince Connor, won't His Majesty take that into consideration? Right now, His Majesty refuses to discuss the position of crown prince, and I'm sure you know the reason for that better than I do. But one thing is certain-Prince Connor is mediocre and His Majesty looks down on him."

Malcolm furrowed his brow, wanting to argue, but there was nothing he could say.

In the end, he simply responded, "If we anger His Majesty and provoke the nobles and civil officials, it won't be good for the queen. Don't be foolish, dear."

Marjorie replied, "With the Hell Monarch's princess consort and Mrs. Lloyd leading the charge, there's no need for the queen to raise a banner herself. She could test the queen dowager's stance first. If the queen dowager approves, the queen could send some money to the workshop.

"If the king blames her, she could say it was done out of respect for the queen dowager. If the king doesn't say anything, it'll just be some rumors outside. But in the long run, it would benefit both the

queen and Prince Connor's reputation. After all, you believe the workshop can succeed. Otherwise, you wouldn't have sent people to sabotage it."

But no matter how Marjorie urged, Malcolm still disagreed. He felt that avoiding the matter entirely would be the safest course-why take the risk?

Seeing that he wouldn't agree, Marjorie didn't press further. However, after some thought, she decided it was a viable plan, so she sent someone to the palace to send word that she was coming to visit the queen.

In Everspring Palace, Kylie listened to Marjorie's words with surprise.

"Mom, are you mad? How could I support Carissa? His Majesty has always opposed the establishment of that workshop. If a woman is cast out and her family doesn't take her in, she can always go to a convent. Starting a workshop for self-sufficiency? I don't agree with that either."

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Marjorie was somewhat surprised. "You don't approve, Your Majesty?"

Kylie shook her head, the delicate sound of her jeweled necklace faintly chiming as she smiled faintly. "Why would you think I'd support it, Mom?"

Marjorie froze for a moment, instinctively asking, "Why don't you support it? The workshop would benefit women, and you're a woman yourself."

Kylie chuckled softly. "Mom, you're

being quite strange. Let's be honest-a workshop like that is nothing but a refuge for discarded women. If a woman is cast out by her husband's family, it means she's rejected by society as well. What's the use of taking someone

Jessica in? She's already.

Mom, you're getting older, yet you've become so soft-hearted. Why would you pity people like Jessica?"

Marjorie didn't know why, but she felt a chill spreading in her chest, gradually extending through her limbs.

"But what if not all women are like Jessica?" she murmured.

"Mom, stop talking nonsense," Kylie replied, her face now serious. "What kind of good woman would be abandoned? There are laws in place to protect women-so long as a wife serves her husband and fulfills her duties, there's no reason for her to be cast aside." As Marjorie heard those words, an indescribable feeling stirred in her heart.

Before her daughter was married, she had been a well-known scholar in the capital, well-versed in literature. Back in her boudoir, Kylie had once said something naive-that if women could take the national examinations, she would have been able to serve in the government.

But now, Kylie was so far removed

from the suffering of the common people, and even further from the

sorrow of women. Marjorie would

rather her daughter say she didn't want to intervene because she was afraid of angering Salvador. Hearing her speak so coldly about women was truly disheartening.

Marjorie fell silent. Some words, if they weren't pleasant to hear, would only cause resentment.

Still, Marjorie couldn't shake the feeling of unease. Why was it that men viewed women this way, yet women treated other women the same?

Chapter 1042

The scholars submitted their articles, but Jacob rejected them outright without even presenting them to Rafael. The scholars' attitudes were dismissive, and they still held prejudice against the workshop. They were reluctant to even consider issuing a clarification. "Submit it again tomorrow. If it's still like this, then there's no need to bother coming back," Jacob instructed indifferently.

"Sir, you're a scholar yourself. Now that you've gained power, why are you making things difficult for other scholars?" one scholar asked, gritting his teeth.

Jacob responded with the simplest, most direct retort, "It's a pity you weren't born a woman. Maybe then, you'd understand the hardships your mothers face." "What does the workshop have to do with women? It's a place for discarded wives," another one of them scoffed.

Jacob's expression darkened. "If there are discarded husbands, they can go too."

The scholars froze.

"Discarded husbands? Such talk is absurd!"

Jacob looked at them with scorn in his eyes. "Oh, really? Why wouldn't there be discarded husbands? Are all men in this world so virtuous, so much better than women?"

"Men face hardships. They build careers, support their wives, and raise children. What doesn't a man do?" one of them argued.

Jacob shot back, "And what doesn't a woman do?"

The scholars stared at him in shock, as if he had just uttered some blasphemous words.

"There's only one day left," Jacob continued. "If I don't have an article I'm satisfied with by this time tomorrow, then forget about your future. You can go back to farming, sell your articles, or let your wives sell their embroidery. Maybe they'll support you until your hair turns gray, and when they're old, you can just kick them out."

With that, Jacob gestured for Travis to escort them out.

Swinging an iron rod menacingly, Travis shouted harshly, "You lot crawled out from under a woman's skirt, studied for a few years, and are now acting all high and mighty and insulting your mothers."

"The one thing I hate most in this

world is people like you who are ignorant, ungrateful, don't stand up for others, and don't understand the hardships of life. All you do is criticize this and that. Did all your education go to the dogs? If you have the ability to denounce corruption, come talk to me and I'll

cheer you on!"

Though they looked down on this crude, rough man, the scholars couldn't even lift a hand to defend themselves. Now, with one blow, they were forced to flee in disgrace.

The next day, they all dutifully submitted their articles.

This time, Jacob was much more

satisfied. At least they had written about the hardships and

helplessness of women in the world, as well as acknowledged the original intent behind the establishment of Skye Embroidery. After all, not all women who were cast out were terribly wicked. Even those who had erred deserved a chance to redeem themselves.

The articles also touched on how being abandoned was already enough of a disgrace, and without a place to stay, the only option left was death. A question was raised: Should abandoned women be denied the right to live? But, as expected, the scholars were still reluctant to sign their names or stamp their seals.

When Jacob saw them hesitate for a third time, his patience finally snapped.

The sound of footsteps came from outside. Before Travis even entered, the scholars had already signed their names and stamped their seals, eager to leave. By the time Travis walked in holding his iron rod, they were already pushing and shoving each other out the door. Having the articles only solved part of the issue. The situation at Ironridge Estate still needed thorough investigation. The public had already decided that Jessica was guilty of heinous crimes-plotting to harm the marquis' child, being unable to tolerate concubines, and even abusing her servants.

"Mr. Mullen!" he called out.

The charge of servant abuse had stirred a great deal of public outrage. Many poor families had children sold into servitude, sent off to high-ranking households as slaves or maids. So, this accusation struck a deep chord with the people, stirring both sympathy and anger. Fortunately, Violet and Claire soon returned with the results of their investigation.

As soon as Violet saw Carissa, she immediately reported, "It was Giles. He organized the maids and servants to track down the storytellers and paid to spread rumors about Jessica's behavior at Ironridge Estate. I found one of the maids. After a little intimidation, she confessed that most of the stories were fabricated. Jessica never mistreated them. They were all Emma's servants."

Chapter 1043

Carissa furrowed her brows, already suspecting it had something to do with Emma. Knowing how the years at Ironridge Estate had been unkind to her, having to not only manage the household but also bear children, Carissa had desperately hoped it wouldn't be her. Jessica frequently criticized her, and although Emma was Margaret's niece, she wasn't the primary wife. While she oversaw the internal affairs of the household and social engagements outside, her standing was always questionable.

Violet was also frustrated. "What should we do? Could it really be her? If it's her... well, the woman is dead. Will the Marquis of Ironridge and the old matriarch even believe this? And there's no solid evidence to prove that Emma arranged everything before her death. The testimony of one maid isn't enough. She could easily say I coerced her."

Carissa thought for a moment before saying, "Then, let's have Luke summon Giles again. This time, we'll question him ourselves."

"That seems like the only option. After all, everything traces back to him. He definitely wouldn't target Jessica without reason-someone must be pulling his strings from behind the scenes," Violet concurred.

Carissa nodded, then instructed someone to get Luke. Once they had a thorough understanding of Giles' involvement, they might be able to piece things together.

Luke was stunned when he heard that Giles was behind the schemes. His round face twisted with anger. "So, everything he told me before was that just to mislead me so I'd report back to Her Grace?"

"That's a strong possibility. He might have intentionally mixed up the facts, making us believe that Jessica was a villain. She may be one, but in this case, she might actually be innocent," Violet replied.

"Right. He's making sure we jump to conclusions and distrust Jessica. He probably didn't mean to deceive or manipulate you on purpose. Let's get to the bottom of things first, and we can confront him once it's clear," said Carissa, trying to reassure Luke.

Though Carissa wasn't entirely sure of Giles' intentions, she didn't believe him to be a malicious person. After all, if he were truly deceitful, Luke wouldn't have maintained a friendship with him for so many years.

Luke's face paled slightly. "Never mind. If he really did use me, then I can't say anything. After all, it wasn't entirely appropriate for me to ask him about the inner workings of the marquis' household. I just thought that, after all these years of friendship and because we come from the same place, he wouldn't deceive me."

"How much do you know about Giles?" Violet asked.

Luke calmed down and replied, "He's

loyal, no doubt. When Lady Emma

was in charge of managing the household, she relied heavily on him. She also promoted him to steward,

and even married one of her personal maids to his son. In terms of Loyalty, he's far more dedicated to Lady Emma than to the Marquis of Ironridge's family."

Hearing this, Carissa and Violet exchanged glances. It seemed increasingly likely that Emma had orchestrated everything.

Luke went off to invite Giles to Glimmering Tower, while Carissa and Violet made their way to Arcane Sanctum. They sought out Sebastian to ask whether a stable pregnancy could be threatened by taking laxatives.

Sebastian explained, "It depends on

the dosage. If too much is taken and

it causes severe diarrhea, it could indeed result in a miscarriage. If the dosage is small and there is proper treatment after, there shouldn't be any issues, especially with a pregnancy that's stable to begin with."

He looked up at them, his gaze sharp. "Are you asking about the concubine from Ironridge Estate?"

Violet's eyes lit up. "Sebastian, you're incredible! How did you know we were talking about her?"

Sebastian chuckled. "It's common knowledge in the capital now. She was given several doses of laxatives by Jessica, which caused a miscarriage and possibly damaged her womb so she can never have

children again."

"Is the rumor really that outrageous?" Violet frowned. "It wasn't a few doses. There were just laxatives in the pregnancy supplement she was taking."

At that moment, Rowan walked up and added, "That concubine who lost the baby had been taking medicine to promote blood circulation and reduce stasis. But the medicine was switched out a while ago."

Violet and Carissa both reached out for Rowan's arm at the same time. "Who told you this? Tell us everything."

Chapter 1044

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Sebastian's apprentices were well-connected in the capital's medical circle and quick to catch wind of any news.

As the controversy surrounding the workshop and Jessica grew louder, many in the medical community began to gossip. They questioned how a single dose of laxatives could lead to a miscarriage.

One person muttered, "She's been drinking Redroot Restorative all along, and that's meant to stimulate blood circulation. That stuff can be dangerous, potentially causing excessive bleeding if taken in excess. How could she not lose the baby?"

The gossip spread quickly, reaching Rowan's ears. Naturally, he investigated further. It didn't take long before he found out that the person who had spoken was Aaron Hawthorne's apprentice. Aaron was the personal physician to the Marquis of Ironridge's family, although he also ran his own small clinic and had several apprentices.

Rowan dug deeper and discovered that Aaron, under someone's orders, had been sending a special blend of herbs to Ironridge Estate every day. The mix included a small amount of Redroot, combined with other herbs, all masked with dried fruits to hide the taste.

At Glimmering Tower, a middle-aged man with a few strands of gray in his hair was speaking to Luke about the marquis' household.

"If not for Jessica's interference, Lady Emma wouldn't have passed away so suddenly. She was so upset. Since she entered the marquis' household, Jessica made things difficult for her at every turn. Her life was full of grievances, and at such a young age, she fell ill and passed away. It was heartbreaking for us servants to see," he said, his voice still carrying bitterness.

Luke listened, his expression impassive. He looked up, his voice cool as he asked, "I heard Lady Emma lost a child last year. Is that true?"

Still lost in his feelings, Giles instinctively nodded. He was about to speak when he suddenly realized what he had done.

At that moment, Carissa and Violet walked through the door.

His eyes widening with surprise, Giles immediately stood up and bowed. "Greetings, Your Grace."

Carissa studied him for a moment before smiling. "Giles, please sit."

He paused, clearly uncomfortable. "I dare not, Your Grace. I'll stand and wait on you."

"Please sit," Carissa said warmly. "I've asked about you several times but never properly thanked you with a cup of coffee. That was rude of me."

She sat down first, raising her eyes to look at him and gesturing to the chair across from her.

Giles instinctively glanced at the door, where he noticed a woman standing. He immediately recognized her-Violet from the Spencer family in Ebonflow, who had helped organize the workshop.

He hesitated, unsure whether to leave or remain. He stood with his hands hanging loosely at his sides, his face betraying uncertainty as he glanced at Luke, who remained silent.

Luke's gaze was cool, as if to say, 'You deceived me once. Don't expect me to let it slide without a response.'

"If you prefer to stand, that's fine. I have a few questions, and I hope you'll help me with them," Carissa spoke up, breaking the tension.

Giles bowed slightly. "Your Grace, please ask. If I don't know the answer, I will do my best to find out for you."

"You must know something about this. It has come to our attention that it was you who spread the rumors tarnishing Jessica's reputation and the workshop's name. I want to know why you did that and who gave you the order?" Carissa asked. Giles's face drained of color, turning as pale as a sheet. His eyes widened in panic as he immediately denied it.

"Your Grace, where did you hear such things? I never did anything to harm the reputation of the workshop. There must be some misunderstanding."

"There is no misunderstanding,"

Carissa replied coolly, her eyes

sharp. "It's fine if you don't want to answer that question. But I have another one. After Lady Flora became pregnant, she was taking

pregnancy supplements. However, somehow, that medicine was switched out with Redroot

Restorative. Do you know anything

about this?"

Giles was visibly startled, his face full of disbelief. "How could that be? The pregnancy supplement was personally brewed by her mom. She has given birth before, so if anything had been added to the medicine, she would have known. And Redroot Restorative has such a strong taste-it's impossible to hide."

Carissa's voice was filled with

pointed meaning as she said, "If the dosage is small, the taste is mild. Otherwise, why would it take over a month for the effects to be seen? A stronger dose would have caused a miscarriage with just one use. And the person who brewed the

medicine wasn't Lady Flora's mom. It was the other concubine in the household, Serena.

"Don't bother denying it. I've already looked into it thoroughly. The Mystic Army has investigated the source of the herbs, the daily dosage, and how the leftover herbs were disposed of. If this were solely a matter of the Marquis of Ironridge's family wouldn't involve myself. However, since it involves the workshop, I can't stay silent. So, tell me, Giles, do you want to escalate this or do you wish to handle it quietly?"

Giles remained silent, his mind racing. He was unsure how much Carissa truly knew and feared she might be bluffing.

Violet spoke up loudly, "What's there to decide? Just present the evidence and report it to the authorities. Even if the culprit is dead, the deeds they committed still need to be accounted for."

"No!" Giles suddenly dropped to his knees, panic flashing across his face. "This has nothing to do with Lady Emma! She's already gone; we cannot disturb her spirit. Your Grace, please, it was all me. I did it all. I was also the one who spread the rumors about the workshop."

Carissa's gaze turned cold as she stared at him. "Ms. Spencer didn't even mention Lady Emma, yet you're in such a hurry to bring her up. I suppose it's time for us to report it to the authorities."

Giles pressed his head to the ground, his fear genuine. "Please, Your Grace! Whatever you want me to do, I will do it. If you want my life, I will gladly give it up without a word of complaint."

Chapter 1045

Although the authorities hadn't been alerted, the truth had already been uncovered through Rowan's investigation and Giles' admission. The only remaining question was whether the Marquis of Ironridge and Margaret had known about Emma's actions and chosen to cover for her. The entire scheme had indeed been orchestrated by Emma, with Giles and several of her trusted maids tasked with carrying it out.

The reason behind it was simple-Emma knew her time was running out.

Around this same time, Leopold had told her he planned to take another secondary wife to manage the household. He had already chosen the candidate: Flora, who had recently entered the household as a concubine.

In other words, Leopold had intended to marry her as his secondary wife from the start. While secondary wives were technically concubines, they held a higher status than common concubines as they were still rightful wives.

When Leopold spoke of Flora, he had admiration in his eyes. He mentioned that her father was a scholar and that she was a well-mannered, cultured woman who would be perfect to manage the household.

After inquiring more about Flora, Emma learned that she was young and beautiful. She had once been engaged, but her fiancé had died, leaving her unmarried well into her twenties.

Emma was deeply familiar with Leopold, so she immediately declared that Flora was unlucky and couldn't bear the title of secondary wife. If he truly liked her, he should just take her as a concubine, not a rightful wife. Leopold was well aware of the objections raised by Emma, and he understood that her words were her way of blocking Flora's entry as a secondary wife. Yet, despite this

opposition, Leopold couldn't deny his feelings. After much consideration, he ultimately decided to marry Flora anyway.

The night Flora entered the household, Emma's condition worsened. She felt a deep sense of despair, realizing that after so many years of marriage, there was no longer any affection between her and Leopold. Naturally, she began to plot for the future of her own children. After Flora entered the household, Leopold stayed in her room nearly every night. It wasn't long before she became pregnant.

Emma had been managing the household for years, so she had deep connections both inside and outside the estate. Because she had experienced a miscarriage before, she was well-acquainted with the physician who dealt with gynecological issues. After a bribe of five hundred silver coins, the pregnancy supplement was quietly swapped for Redroot Restorative.

Due to Flora's discomfort during her pregnancy, her mom, Barbara, was called to stay with her. Meanwhile, Emma asked Serena to assist, taking responsibility for brewing the medicine.

The medicine was provided by the

physician, and the kitchen staff was watching when it was brewed. After taking the medicine, Flora didn't feel any significant discomfort. The physician visited daily and confirmed that the pregnancy was stable, so neither Flora nor Barbara

had any reason to suspect anything.

At first, Jessica wasn't involved in the whole scheme at all. However, after a few arguments between her and Barbara, Jessica instructed Serena to secretly administer a dose of laxatives to Barbara. Such a golden opportunity was not one Emma would let slip by.

Serena was in charge of administering and changing the medication. The dosage, carefully decided by the physician, was enough to cause Flora to miscarry and damage her health permanently.

Since Jessica became involved in this, Emma knew the only way to eliminate any future complications was to have her removed from the household. But Margaret was kind-hearted. When Flora miscarried, Jessica was not divorced or cast out.

Then came the incident of Serena

being pushed into the lake. With both events Kappening together, Emma cried in front of Margaret.

She said that her life was coming

an end and complained that Jessica, the primary wife, was ruthless and cruel. Now, she had even harmed Flora's unborn child and a

concubine. When Emma died,

wouldn't Jessica become even more

vicious?

She wept bitterly, begging Margaret to let her children be sent away to the countryside to avoid Jessica mistreating them. She wanted them to grow up there, marry there, and never return to Ironridge Estate.

Margaret couldn't bear to part with her grandchildren, but at that moment, news broke about Jessica being involved in usury. In a fit of anger, she finally decided to cast her daughter-in-law out, citing her lack of children as the reason.

However, Emma and Serena never

imagined that, cornered and with nowhere else to go, Jessica would seek refuge at Skye Embroidery. At first, the workshop refused to take her in, even having a scandal over it. That made Emma breathe a sigh of relief.

But that relief was short-lived. She soon learned that Hannah eventually decided to let Jessica stay at the workshop. That forced her to resort to any means necessary to ruin the workshop's reputation and get Jessica kicked out. Unfortunately, Emma passed away before her plan could succeed.

Chapter 1046

Carissa and Violet escorted Giles to Ironridge Estate.

Following Emma's passing, Margaret's health deteriorated further. She remained bedridden after the funeral, unable to rise.

When Carissa arrived, Margaret had just taken her medicine and was lying propped up in bed. Serena stood by, tending to her. Though Serena didn't look up at Carissa, a storm of emotions stirred inside her.

It was because when Carissa arrived, she had announced she come to deal with Jessica's issue and had brought Giles along.

Serena harbored a deep hatred for Carissa. She could never forgive Carissa for what had happened. No matter how much she hated Carissa, however, Serena couldn't help but fear Carissa. With Carissa's current position and power, taking down a lowly concubine from Ironridge Estate would be as easy as breathing.

Margaret had rejected Carissa's invitation once before, but now, Carissa had shown up after the funeral had just concluded. Margaret knew this was because Jessica's situation had dragged down Skye Embroidery, and the issue had to be resolved sooner or later. As Carissa entered, Margaret took the handkerchief Serena handed her and wiped the medicine from the corner of her mouth.

"You've come because of Jessica, haven't you? I'm so sorry to trouble you. You can just drive Jessica out. I'll send someone to take care of her at the estate," she said weakly.

Margaret had lost a lot of weight. Her eye sockets were sunken, and her skin was pale with faint yellowish patches. The darkened circles on her only emphasized her worn-out appearance, and she seemed devoid of any energy. Her once serene and dignified presence was completely gone.

"Are you feeling any better?" Carissa asked gently.

Margaret forced a weak, strained smile in response. "Better... Yes, much better. You're very thoughtful, Your Grace."

Serena, standing to the side, squeezed her handkerchief and said, "The physician said Madam Margaret must not be agitated, or her condition will worsen. You're here to visit, so please finish and take your leave."

Carissa didn't look at Serena. Instead, she turned to Giles and asked, "Do you want to explain things to Madam Margaret yourself, or would you prefer that I speak for you?"

Giles dropped to his knees and sobbed out Margaret's name.

Suddenly, Serena raised her eyes, her gaze sharp and cold. "Giles, think carefully about what should and shouldn't be said. Don't let someone provoke you into spitting out lies that would tarnish the good deeds of the late Lady Emma toward your family." Margaret's eyes widened. "What's going on?"

She shot a cold, piercing glance at Serena-so sharp that it sent a chill down Serena's spine.

"I..." Serena quickly stammered, "I was just worried Giles might be persuaded by Carissa to do something he shouldn't."

"Either way, it's not your place to speak," Margaret rebuked her coldly.

Serena gritted her teeth, anger rising within. This old woman was so ungrateful! After all the days Serena had spent tending to Margaret, she couldn't even earn a little sympathy.

Margaret had never once doubted Emma-never. So when Giles finished recounting Emma's scheme, she was left speechless and lost in disbelief. She struggled to come to terms with it, her mind racing.

After a long pause, she finally whispered, "Why?"

As soon as the question left her lips, she understood. She sighed deeply, her face contorting with grief as she stared blankly ahead, her eyes filled with sorrow.

Serena dropped to her knees, her voice full of misery. "Madam Margaret, I was coerced by Lady Emma! Please, have mercy and see the truth!"

Margaret didn't even glance at

Serena but instead turned her gaze back to Carissa, trying to maintain her composure. "Your Grace, I will ensure that the workshop receives a proper explanation. I will put an end to the rumors circulating outside. Please, rest assured."

Carissa nodded slightly. "Please take care of yourself, Madam Margaret. Nothing is more important than your health. Farewell."

Margaret's eyes reddened slightly. "Thank you, Your Grace."

As Carissa and Violet turned to leave the courtyard, they suddenly heard Serena's frantic cries echo behind them.

"Madam Margaret, please have mercy! It was all Lady Emma's doing-I didn't dare defy her! Please don't cast me out!"

Then, footsteps hurriedly followed

from behind. Serena was there, her voice dripping with venom and fury. "Carissa, did my family dig up your family's grave? Why else would you be so bent on ruining us?"

Carissa didn't look back, her voice calm and dismissive. "Where's that stray dog coming from, barking so loudly?"

Violet snorted with laughter. "She

really is a stray dog, isn't she? When her mom died, she didn't even go back. That's cutting ties with your family, isn't it? Doesn't get any more 'stray' than that." en

Serena was seething with rage. "Carissa Sinclair!"

Neither of them paid Serena any further attention, striding away without a second glance.

Chapter 1047

The Marquis of Ironridge's family spent the entire night getting to the bottom of things.

Once everything was clear, Margaret summoned Leopold. She laid out her plans.

"Divorce Serena, bring Jessica back, and invite those storytellers to come and tell the truth. We need them to clear things up." Leopold was already filled with disdain for Jessica. He didn't want her back, and strongly disagreed with Margaret's approach.

"I don't agree, Mom. We should just leave things as they are. People have already been gossiping about me because of what happened to Jessica. After all this time, I finally got some peace when I divorced her. All the gossip outside doesn't concern us-it's all about Jessica.

"If we clear things up now, it will only tarnish our reputation and Emma's as well. She's your niece, and she's also the mother of your two grandchildren. You're being too harsh. Either way, I won't take Jessica back-if she's divorced, she'll stay divorced." Margaret looked at him, her chest tightening with frustration and sorrow. Leopold had a head and eyes, but he was as good as a mannequin. He neither thought nor looked around him.

In families with noble titles and a long history like theirs, the one thing they feared was a lazy and mediocre heir-a disgrace worse than a wastrel.

Margaret's head spun, but she forced herself to push through.

"Lady Carissa has already investigated everything thoroughly. If I don't speak up, do you think she won't? She came here because she still respects me and wants us to handle it ourselves. If this gets out because of her, we won't have anything left to hide behind. Fine, it's your decision now. Ironridge Estate is yours to manage. Whatever you decide, I'll support you."

Margaret took a slight breath, her breathing becoming a bit labored.

Leopold thought for a moment and asked, "Since Lady Carissa is willing to give you some respect, could we ask her to suppress the matter? That workshop is just for show and a way to gain attention, anyway. Wouldn't it be smarter to use that workshop to get a favor from us and keep the matter under wraps?"

Margaret's eyes widened as she stared at him for a long time, confirming he was serious before letting out a heavy sigh. "Fine. Go speak with her, but you'll have to explain it to her yourself."

"I'm not familiar with her. You should talk to her instead," Leopold said, hoping to pass the responsibility.

He was already annoyed with the whole situation-whether it was Jessica, Serena, or Flora who had miscarried he was frustrated with them all. If Barbara hadn't provoked Jessica, none of this would have happened and Flora's unborn child would still be fine. Margaret's heart sank. "I'm sick. I can't deal with this anymore. You'll have to decide for yourself."

With that, she waved him away.

"Mom, you can't just ignore this! It's a matter for the inner household-how can I interfere?" Leopold grew desperate.

Margaret pursed her lips together for a moment, then suddenly grabbed the cup by her bedside and slammed it onto the floor, shouting in fury, "Why is it always on me? I'm dying! When I'm gone, who will care about the affairs of this household?" The cup shattered with a loud crash, shards of delicate porcelain scattering across the floor.

One piece sliced Leopold's hand, leaving a thin trail of blood. He furrowed his brow, his irritation growing. Seeing his mom was in such a state, however, he dared not oppose her for fear of being branded disrespectful to her.

"We can clear things up, but I won't take Jessica back. If anyone else wants her, they can have her. Serena can go too. I've had enough of her."

With that, he turned and left, giving orders to the servants to clean up the mess.

Margaret slumped back against the bed, her eyes closed, but tears fell freely from her eyes.

Useless!

The next day, Margaret personally invited a few storytellers to the estate to recount the entire situation to them.

The storytellers were taken aback.

Regardless of whether what

Margaret said was true or otherwise, Jessica had already been disgraced and the Marquis of Ironridge's family had cast her aside. On the other hand, Emma had kept a spotless reputation, having borne a pair of children.

Why not just let the matter lie? After all, who could Jessica possibly rely on now?

To speak of this would damage the reputation of the Marquis of Ironridge's family beyond measure. It didn't seem like a wise choice.

Margaret noticed their hesitation

and said solemnly, "I am ashamed. I

once wrongly blamed Jessica, but now that know the truth, I must do

right by her. It's also a lesson for the future generations of my

family-never trust just one side of a story.

"Only by listening to all sides can we truly understand. We must remain calm in the face of adversity, investigate thoroughly before making a judgment, and never let past mistakes cloud our judgment of the present."

Margaret's open and honest

demeanor earned the admiration of the storytellers. They had seen their share of noble households, where scandals in the inner household were usually covered up at all costs-sometimes even at the expense of lives-to protect the family's reputation.

Chapter 1048

A few days later, the rumors finally began to die down.

It was curious how fickle public opinion could be. After the storm of gossip, slander, and outrage, some began to look at Skye Embroidery in a new light.

It might be because some agreed with the articles written by those scholars, prompting other academics to interpret the situation more positively.

As one of the storytellers at the Ascension Coffeehouse had put it, Skye Embroidery was, at its core, a lifeline for women cast out of their homes. It wasn't some earth-shattering rebellion against morality or societal order. Could it truly be so difficult for anyone to show even a sliver of compassion?

However, this line of thinking was shared only by a portion of the populace. Most still withheld their approval, though the vehemence of their opposition had lessened. Cooler heads began to prevail, even if grudgingly.

It was around this time that Leona, the Duchess of Everpeace, made a shocking move.

She stepped into the halls of Skye Embroidery and declared to the world that she was severing all ties with Harvey. She no longer recognized Harvey as her dad and announced that Skye Embroidery would henceforth be her home. This decision had not been made on a whim.

When Skye Embroidery had stood empty, with no one willing to take up residence, Leona had already considered moving in. She had discussed the matter several times with Alana and Leah. They had advised against it, saying it would seem too deliberate. They worried it would bring more controversy to the workshop rather than help it.

Even after the recent upheaval, Leona remained steadfast in her resolve. Alana eventually sought counsel from Carissa. Carissa personally met with Leona and had a long and private conversation with her. Afterward, Carissa gave her blessing on the condition that Leona publicly disavowed her ties to Harvey.

Since trouble was bound to come from Harvey, severing their father-daughter relationship would ensure Leona wouldn't be implicated in the future.

Leona hadn't made her decision with such practicalities in mind. Many things remained outside her awareness, but her parents' actions or lack thereof had left her heart cold.

When she had fallen into trouble, her parents had turned their backs on her. When her grandfather faced tribulations, they still didn't care or even visit him once.

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After enduring her tumultuous marriage to Samuel, Leona had come to understand that some relationships could not be forced. Love was like that, and so was family. To force affection where it did not exist only led to pain for everyone involved. Letting go was better-for herself, and for them.

Back at Ironridge Estate, Leopold had Serena, tearful and hysterical, sent back to her family. Once she was gone, he dispatched someone to fetch Jessica.

At Skye Embroidery, Violet and Hannah were assisting Leona in settling in when the new steward from Ironridge Estate arrived to escort Jessica back. Seeing this, they assumed Jessica would be overjoyed to return.

Jessica had once been so desperate

that she swallowed her pride and begged to stay at Skye Embroidery. Now that she had the chance to return as the Marchioness of Ironridge, everyone assumed she would leave triumphantly. Perhaps, she might even sneer at those she left behind before striding out the gates.

Yet there she was, sitting on the stone steps in the main courtyard. Her arms were wrapped around her knees, and she was staring blankly ahead. She hadn't said a word about leaving. Leona approached and settled beside her cousin. "Jessica, why aren't you going?"

Jessica turned to her with confused eyes. "Going? Where would I go?"

"Back to Ironridge Estate to take your place as the Marquis of Ironridge's wife," Leona said gently.

Jessica didn't reply. Instead, she absentmindedly pulled a tiny sprig of grass stubbornly growing from a crack in the stone. She tugged at it a few times, but it wouldn't budge. In her struggle, the sharp edge of the grass cut her finger. A drop of blood fell on the weathered stone.

She stared at her hand, then back at the small blade of grass, transfixed by its resilience.

"Oh no, you're bleeding!" Leona exclaimed softly.

Selma quickly stepped forward with a handkerchief and wrapped it around Jessica's finger. "What were you thinking? That grass wasn't bothering anyone. Why tear at it like that?"

Her tone was sharp, as it often was when addressing Jessica. From the day Jessica arrived at the workshop, Selma treated her coldly.

In the beginning, Jessica had hated

Selma for it. She hadn't just hated Selma-she had hated Hannah, the workshop itself, every last twig and stone in the workshop. She especially despised the broom, a symbol of the labor she had been

forced to do just to earn her meals.

And yet, now, she could start a fire with ease. Who would believe it?

"Go on," Selma urged. "Go back to your life. The steward has been waiting outside for ages. Are you putting on airs again? How many times must I remind you be practical and efficient?"

Chapter 1049

Jessica's expression shifted, her face twisting into irritation.

"How many times do I have to tell you? Stop nagging me! You're so annoying! People like you are impossible to tolerate. If I were the lady of the house, I'd never keep a servant like you around!"

"Then go on back and become the lady of the house. I'm sure you'll find plenty of obedient servants to dote on you there," Selma shot back without missing a beat.

Jessica scoffed, lifting her chin. "Of course I'm going back! Do you think I'd stay here to look at the sour face of an old servant like you when I could be living a life of comfort?"

"Go on, then. Don't bother packing your clothes-what need do you have for them when you'll have every silk and satin you could wish for waiting for you at Ironridge Estate?" Selma replied tartly.

Jessica's head snapped up, and she pointed an accusing finger at the older woman. "I'm warning you-don't you dare touch my clothes! Once you've given them to me, they're mine!"

Selma laughed and scolded, "Look at you, clinging to something so trivial. Do you think you can even wear those clothes back at the estate? Not even the servants would be caught dead in such cheap material." "Whether I wear them or not, they're mine, and I'm taking them!" Jessica retorted sharply.

"Fine," Selma said with a dismissive wave. "I'll gather them for you so you can leave already."

"Stop right there!" Jessica sprang to her feet, her posture fierce, like a tigress defending her den. "Don't touch my things! I'll pack them myself!"

Without waiting for a response, she stormed off toward her room, her footsteps echoing in the quiet hallway. Leona exchanged a glance with Violet, who gave her a slight nod to follow. Rising, Leona trailed after her cousin.

The room Jessica had been staying in was small, and Leona could take it all in with a single glance. The room was far from tidy-mud streaked the floor, and a brand-new outfit hung over the back of a chair, reeking faintly of sweat. On the ground were two pairs of shoes -one plain but new, the other a pair of mud-caked sandals. They were haphazardly tossed aside, as if they had been kicked off the moment someone walked in.

Jessica scooped the dress off the chair and clutched it to her chest. The garment was plain, with no embroidery or patterns, made from the most unremarkable fabric. Yet, the stitches were fine and meticulously done.

Leona tilted her head. "Is that dress particularly precious to you?"

Jessica sneered. "Precious? Hardly! Selma dug out some old scrap fabric from the bottom of her chest to make it for me. That old hag acted like it was such a hardship to part with even that much. Hmph, I'm not about to leave it behind for her to reclaim." Leona stared at her, wide-eyed. "Jessica, did you just curse?"

Jessica glanced at Leona with a smirk, then replayed her words in her head. With a dry laugh, she replied, "If you think it's crude, cover your ears and spare yourself. It's not your place to police what I say it's not like I insulted you."

Leona blinked, clearly startled by the response, but then nodded dumbly. "Oh... All right."

Jessica huffed hugging the bundle of clothes tighter. "It's that old hag's fault. She's rubbed off on me. Ugh, if I go back to Ironridge Estate and get something like that slip, Madam Margaret is just going to find

another reason to criticize me."

Leona's brow furrowed in thought. "Jessica... Are you sure you even want to go back?"

Jessica scoffed and strode toward the door, her tone sharp. "Of course I'm going back. I owe more money than I can count. How am I

supposed to repay my debts if I stay here? Besides, what's so great about this place? It's going to fill up with bitter women, abandoned and angry. I'd suffocate in the misery."

With that, Jessica made her way to find Hannah to say her goodbyes and offer her thanks.

She still barely acknowledged Violet, though before leaving, she cast Violet a long, deliberate glance and said, "Don't worry. Soon, this place will be bustling with people."

Violet responded with a soft hum and offered no further words. She had already learned to let time unfold at its own pace.

When Jessica finally departed, she strode past Selma with her head held high, though she couldn't help but glance back every few steps. There was a glimmer of unshed tears in her eyes, but she blinked them away. Thus, Skye Embroidery's first resident departed and its second resident moved in.

On the third day after Jessica's departure, before the sun had risen, an older woman with streaks of gray in her hair hesitated at the gates of the workshop. She clutched a small bundle to her chest, her eyes hollow and brimming with uncertainty.

Several times, she reached out to knock. Each time, her hand wavered and fell back to her side.

"Go on, step inside."

A voice came from behind her, startling her. She stepped back in fright, ready to flee, but her path was blocked.

Jessica stood there, dressed in a luxurious gown, her hair intricately styled in an elaborate, towering updo. Behind her, two maids carried armfuls of parcels.

Chapter 1050

Jessica studied the woman before her.

The woman's face was lined with sorrow, and her shoulders slumped as if the weight of the world had ground her down.

With a voice softer than her usual sharpness, Jessica said, "If you're looking for a way to keep going, step inside. The life here is simple, but no one will hurt you ever again."

At that, the woman's tears spilled over, flowing like an unstoppable river breaking through a dam.

Her name was Camila Moore. Once upon a time, she and her husband, Soren Carter, had owned a thriving dye shop in the capital. They weren't among the wealthiest, but their lives were comfortable. Their marriage was harmonious, and their little family was complete with a cherished daughter.

However, her daughter's birth had been harrowing. The blood loss nearly took Camila's life. While the midwife had managed to save her, the verdict had been clear: she would never bear another child.

Camila had grieved deeply over the news, but Soren had always reassured her.

"One daughter is enough," he had said with a smile. "She is our treasure. Besides, I have two younger brothers. They'll carry on the family name."

Taking comfort in his words, Camila devoted herself to her role as the eldest sister-in-law, using their wealth to arrange good marriages for her husband's brothers. Over time, both younger men had

wives and children of their own. They held Camila in the highest regard and sought her advice on all family matters.

However, the world they had built crumbled a year ago. Soren and their daughter had traveled to the countryside to visit relatives, only to encounter a band of ruthless bandits. When word reached Camila, it wasn't her lively husband and sweet child who returned, but their lifeless, battered bodies. The grief had been unbearable-her very reason for living was torn away in an instant.

She might have succumbed to despair, but the duty to care for her elderly parents and in-laws had kept her going. She told herself she still had a purpose, a responsibility to honor her husband's family.

Her in-laws, however, didn't share her sense of loyalty. With Soren gone and no son to carry on the family name, they saw Camila as a burden, one better cast off.

In less than a year, they stripped her of everything her home, the dye shop she and her husband had built together, and every coin she had saved. Then they cast her out and accused her of beating her mother-in-law, an accusation they backed with false witnesses and carefully placed bruises. The case went before the local authorities.

Despite her pleas of innocence, the testimonies of servants and her brothers-in-law's wives sealed her fate.

Banished from her husband's home and branded a criminal, Camila turned to her own family for help. However, her elder brother and his wife saw only disgrace in her misfortune. They refused her shelter, blaming her for tarnishing the Moore family's name. "I thought about ending it," Camila admitted, her voice trembling as she recounted her pain.

"What reason was there to go on? But I couldn't do it-I couldn't let them win so easily. If I die, I'd only be giving them exactly what they want. No, I want to live. I want to take back the dye shop that belonged to my husband and me. I want to hold my head high again. I want to live better than any of them could ever dream.

"I've been cast out for over a month. I'd heard of Skye Embroidery, but with the reputation I've gained-beating my mother-in-law, they say I thought there was no way you'd accept someone like me. I didn't believe there could be a place in this world with such kindness toward women."

Her gaze flickered toward Violet, her eyes red-rimmed but bright with a faint glimmer of hope.

"Then I heard of Lady Jessica. I

thought about it for days. If someone like her could find refuge

heybe....just maybe, I could try

my luck."

Violet studied her for a moment before asking, "Where have you been staying all this time?"

"A woman who worked at our dye shop took me in," Camila admitted. "But her home is small, and I didn't want to burden her any further."

The woman who had taken Camila in was probably facing blame from both Camila's natal and husband's families.

Violet nodded. "Then stay. There's a place for you here."

Camila froze.

They were accepting her, just like that? Didn't they need to investigate?

"But... I have a bad reputation outside."

Jessica scoffed. "Reputations are worth nothing. You think your bad name is worse than mine? They didn't hesitate to take me in."

Selma chimed in, "She's right. That's the infamous Lady Jessica for you. Her family dug up the truth about her past and took her back to the marquis' estate."

Camila's mouth fell open slightly in surprise. If Jessica had been taken back to her noble family, why was she still here at Skye Embroidery? Leona was leaning next to Violet. She sniffled and wiped at her red-rimmed eyes. "Camila, I'm Leona. Welcome to Skye Embroidery."

Camila didn't know Leona's true

identity yet, since even though

Leona had arrived at the workshop, the staff hadn't made any public announcement.

"You're living here too?" she asked.

Leona smiled and replied, "That's right. For now, this is my home. Let's be friends. You worked in a dye shop-can you embroider as well?" Camila nodded; the faintest glimmer of hope flickered in her eyes.

"I can. I can do both."