

War Song 1061

Chapter 1061

Yuna continued to massage Lisandra's scalp, and asked softly, "Your Highness, General Stellwyn has agreed to retreat his troops. How do you plan to handle Penny?" "Are you trying to plead for her?"

Yuna hesitated, then said, "She tried to harm you, Your Highness, which is an unforgivable crime. But there are so few women in the court, and Penny at least had the potential for promotion. People like us probably won't get another chance to rise. Is there any way you could give her another opportunity?" Lisandra's gaze was as cold as ice. "She has no chance left."

"She only wanted to avenge Prince Arthur-"

"Yuna Rutherford!" Lisandra pushed her hand away and warned coldly, "If you truly think her position is so hard to come by, then you shouldn't be pleading for her. Do you remember how hard we've fought to get here? One misstep could ruin everything. Even the smallest mistake would be enough for others to tear us down, especially for her-she should have been more careful than anyone!"

"She should have thought twice before acting. The road for female officials is tough. They cannot afford to be careless, or they'll be disrespected. But she lost sight of the bigger picture, focusing only on revenge and putting Westhaven in jeopardy. She risked the lives of the people and the soldiers for what? A petty grudge? If Arthur knew of this, he would only be disappointed."

"She had no strategy, only hatred, and she placed revenge above all else. She was willing to harm me to provoke a war between the two kingdoms, thinking that a war would settle her grievances. Where would Westhaven's supplies come from in a war? Is she truly suggesting that we recruit peasants to fight, as the king had said in anger? One cannot let their emotions rule their actions and expect to accomplish anything great!"

Yuna thought of the current state of Westhaven. Could they withstand a full-scale war?

She immediately knelt. "It was my failure to think this through."

Lisandra sighed. "Starhaven won't be the one to start the war. Westhaven already has internal struggles. We cannot afford to add foreign conflict to the mix. Let the people have a few years of

peace. How many of them can barely feed themselves right now? Strategy is important, but the priority is to stabilize our land."

"Yes, you're right, Your Highness," Yuna replied, though she understood deep down. She had only made the request out of a sense of camaraderie as a fellow female official.

Lisandra closed her eyes, too tired to keep them open. Yet, her mind remained exceptionally sharp. Her scalp felt as though a tight iron band had been placed around her head, adding to the discomfort.

"Your Highness, will you go tomorrow?"

"I won't go. I don't want to see her again." Lisandra raised her hand, signaling for Yuna to leave. She needed to rest.

"Understood, Your Highness. I'll take my leave." Yuna bowed respectfully and exited.

Aurora was locked in the dungeon of Warhawk Keep. The place was damp and dark, with no sunlight reaching in. On days when no one came it was so pitch black she couldn't see her hand in front of her face-even in the daytime.

Throughout the day, she only saw light twice, when the guards brought her food.

Even though the food was often spoiled, she ate it all. She needed to keep her strength up while waiting for Barrett to come.

She never allowed herself to doubt whether he would actually come. In her stubborn heart, she believed he would.

It was the only thing that kept her going. Without that belief, she would have already broken down.

The heavy, rusted iron door creaked open again, and light poured in.

Aurora's heart sank. Why was someone coming now?

They only came twice a day at mealtimes. Was this a sign that they meant to kill her?

She lay flat on the cold stone floor. Since arriving in Fawnrun City, her tendons had been cut. Every day she could do nothing but crawl like a beaten dog in the dark, damp dungeon.

Aurora lifted her head just in time to see a woman carrying a lantern approach slowly. There was only one of them. She exhaled slowly, relieved.

Yuna stood in front of the iron bars,

looking down at Aurora. She held the

lamp forward, its light casting a

harsh glow on Aurora's bloodstained face, making her look even more wretched and ugly.

"Aurora, the grand princess has given orders. Tomorrow, you'll be taken to Grapevine Village and Melondrop Village. Do you remember these two villages?"

Chapter 1062

Aurora trembled.

Of course, she would never forget these two villages.

She took a sharp breath, her elbows pushing against the ground as she crawled forward, moving slowly. "N-No, I won't go! You said you were taking me back to Westhaven's capital, didn't you?"

"Of course we are." Yuna's expression was cold as ice. "We'll just bring your head back. It's simpler that way."

Aurora's eyes widened in terror, and her hands gripped the iron bars weakly. "No! Please, don't take me to Grapevine Village! Take me to the capital. Kill me in front of the prince's grave!"

Yuna's face twisted with hatred. "What makes you think you're worthy to reach the prince's grave? Don't think I don't know what you're trying to do. Do you really believe your coward of a husband will come to save you? Stop fooling yourself-he won't come."

"No, you've got it all wrong!" Aurora's eyes darted nervously. "I truly regret my actions. I shouldn't have used such cruel methods against the people of Fawnrun City. I was wrong! I'm not asking for your forgiveness. I just want to be taken to the prince's grave, so I can beg for forgiveness in person!"

Yuna laughed bitterly, her voice dripping with contempt. "How laughable. We've been receiving reports. Barrett never left Starhaven, so whether you're heading to Grapevine village or Westhaven's capital, there will be no one coming to save you."

She leaned down slightly, locking eyes with Aurora's shocked gaze.

"You're going to die. And it will be a painful death."

Aurora collapsed to the ground, her hands too weak to hold the bars. She rolled to the side, curling up.

The fear of death shook her body, her heart racing with panic.

It couldn't be true. Barrett wasn't heartless. He might be weak, he might be useless, but he had promised her. He would keep his word!

"Are you afraid? You should be." Yuna's voice was cold, but with a touch of satisfaction. Seeing Aurora like this finally gave her a sense of relief.

These past days, she had been busy dealing with the retreat of the troops. So, Yuna had only ordered Aurora's tendons to be severed and nothing else. This was the moment Yuna had been waiting for.

"N-No, it's not possible..." Aurora gasped for air as if drowning, her breath shallow and quick.

She had to stay calm. This person was only trying to intimidate her. She couldn't fall for it!

Who were those villagers to pass judgment on her? She was

supposed to be brought to

Westhaven and to the prince's grave, where she would be executed. That reshe

way, it meant she still had a

chance-she could wait for Barrett

to come and save her.

Yet at this moment, her mind was clear. No matter how much she tried to deceive herself, reason couldn't be silenced.

Barrett hadn't come all this way. Even if she were taken back to Westhaven, Barrett wouldn't come. Even if he did, he wouldn't be able to save her.

She grabbed the moldy straw on the

floor, using all her strength to lift her head. Panic set in as she stammered; "I-It was Dominic Sullivan! It was Dominic's orders! was just following instructions Tell the grand princess that. Tell her to find Dominic. I'm just a scapegoat! I'm just a scapegoat. You've been tricked, really! You've been deceived!"

Yuna sneered, but said nothing. She picked up the lamp and slowly began to walk away.

Aurora watched the faint glow of the lamp slowly disappear. Without the light, the darkness seemed to surge forward, devouring everything around her like a wild beast. The darkness was like a whirlpool

pulling her in. Her body shook with

cold.

"No! Come back! Please, listen to me! I'm just a lowly commander! I couldn't have made the decisions on my own! Why would they listen to me? I was used! They pushed forward to take the fall for them!"

The light grew fainter and eventually vanished completely. The only sound left was the creaking of the heavy iron door. The darkness closed in, swallowing her frantic cries.

Aurora let out a strangled scream. "No, don't leave! Come back!"

There was no response. The silence around her was deafening, and all she could hear was the pounding of her heartbeat thudding in the darkness like the beat of a drum. Her eardrums felt as though they would burst under the pressure.

Chapter 1063

Yuna walked toward Yasmine and Penny, the lamp in her hand casting a soft glow.

Penny wasn't detained, but she knew what awaited her. She wasn't afraid of death. As long as she could see Aurora torn apart, she would die without regret.

"I've already told her. She's terrified," Yuna said, her gaze briefly flicking over Penny's face before resting on Yasmine.

"Let her experience the fear of death," Yasmine replied with a cool tone.

"When she dies, I'll die in peace," Penny said, taking a deep breath as tears flooded from her eyes like a broken dam.

"You didn't have to die," Yasmine retorted. "We were set on taking Aurora, but you had to go and mess things up."

Penny wiped her tears. "I don't regret it. Even if I had to choose again, I'd do the same."

A flicker of annoyance passed across Yuna's eyes. "You're still saying that? If you don't think you've done anything wrong, why bother pretending to regret it in front of Her Highness?"

The night wind rustled Penny's cloak and disheveled hair. Her eyes and nose were red, but beneath it all, there was a deep, burning resentment.

"I never wanted to disappoint Her Highness. I've always respected her, but I don't understand her. Prince Arthur was her brother-how could she just let it go? Did he mean nothing to her?"

"It's for his sake! Even if the kingdom goes to war for his sake, it would be worth it. I believe if we called for it, the people wouldn't hesitate. They'd march to battle, even without conscription or supplies."

Yasmine listened and then responded, her voice sharp, "Let's set aside whether the people would be willing to do that. Even if they would, are you planning to expose Prince Arthur's humiliation and suicide to the public? Right now, we're covering up the truth to preserve his honor."

"Everyone Westhaven's court officials and the people of Starhaven believes Prince Arthur died on the battlefield protecting those two villages. He died with battle achievements to his name. But now you want to tell everyone that he never earned any merit, that he was captured, humiliated, castrated, and then took his own life?"

She raised a hand, pointing to the sky. "Ask Prince Arthur himself if he would want this."

Penny froze, tears slipping down her face once more. "Does Prince Arthur's injustice never deserve to be known? He was the crown prince!"

"By killing Aurora, aren't we avenging

him? There are some things we can't sort out just yet, but we will get there in time. First, we need to stabilize the political power in Westhaven. We can't afford a political upheaval at court. Once we've secured that, we can plan for the next step, TM

Yasmine continued, her voice steady but pointed..

"And about your grand idea-calling on the people to fight to avenge Prince Arthur... How could you be so naive? The first thing the people care about is their own families-food on the table, and security for tomorrow. Unless enemy forces are marching on their homes, they'll only fight to protect their own."

Yuna and Yasmine didn't say anything more to Penny. Once someone became fixated on something, no amount of persuasion could change their mind.

At dawn the next day, Aurora was locked in a cage. The prison bars were forged from steel, unyielding and unbreakable. The cage was placed at the back of an ox cart, fastened securely with long ropes to ensure it didn't move.

Leroy was accompanied by a group of officers who followed the cart, along with guards from Lisandra's retinue.

Grapevine Village and Melondrop Village-just as their names suggested-one was known for brewing wine that was sent to Fawnrun City for sale, while the other was famous for growing sweet melons.

Once, these two villages had been one, but over time they split due to their differing developments. Geographically, they were separated down the middle.

Grapevine Village sat to the east, Melondrop Village to the west. Melondrop Village had a large stretch of sandy land, where the melons they grew were particularly big and sweet. Villagers from miles around would come to buy the wine and melons. The villagers had lived here for centuries. Their ancestors had inhabited these lands for hundreds of years, and were the most humble and unassuming of people.

Sadly, there were few of them left now.

When Aurora had massacred the villagers, some had managed to hide. Some had been away and escaped death, but their families-torn apart, with even infants slaughtered without mercy-were gone.

Though they survived, they were like vengeful spirits from hell, living only to avenge their lost loved ones.

They formed into a long line, armed with whatever they could find-kitchen knives, sickles, hoes, clubs. Anything that could serve as a weapon was put to use.

Their eyes were

filled with

bone-deep hatred, their faces

twisted in rage. As Aurora's cage

arrived at the village's edge, the rising sounds of the crowd struck her like a physical blow, causing her to lose control. Her body trembled uncontrollably, shaking like a leaf in the wind.

Chapter 1064

All the eyes filled with anger and hatred seemed to merge into blazing flames, flames so hot they felt as if they could scorch her.

At that instant, Aurora felt as though she were being roasted alive. Fear squeezed her chest, almost crushing her heart. Her entire body was wracked with pain.

The cries of the crowd rang out like thunder.

"Kill her! Kill this demon and offer her as a sacrifice to the spirits of the villagers she slaughtered!"

Aurora trembled uncontrollably, unable to hold herself together. She curled into a ball in the cage, too terrified to open her eyes and face them. The sounds of shouting and violence filled the air around her.

Leroy raised his arm. "Move aside, everyone! Clear a path! We're taking this prisoner to the grave pit. Once there, I will release her, and you can do as you wish with her. But..."

He paused, his voice taking on a sharp edge.

"One thing her head must be left intact. We need to bring it back to the capital to report to the king. You can tear her to pieces, but do not destroy her head, or the king won't recognize her." Everyone had waited for this day for so long.

Their eyes burned with blood-red rage, but the deed was done. The prisoner had been brought to them. They weren't in a hurry. First, they would take her to the grave pit. Then, they would deal with her there in honor of those who had died. The spirits of the fallen would be avenged today.

The ox cart moved forward, with someone from the village guiding the way. When counted carefully, there were only about thirty villagers left.

They walked on, shedding their outer garments to reveal the black mourning clothes underneath. These people had once been whole families, with parents and children. They weren't wealthy, but they had lived together in peace.

A group ahead of them raised a black banner. They had come from a small side path and formed a line, with those on the left holding the white banners and those on the right scattering flowers.

Yasmine moved forward and asked

a few questions, and soon learned that these people were from the nearby Whitesand Village. They knew of Aurora's execution, so they had prepared the black banners in advance, ready to mourn and honor the dead.

The village chief of Whitesand Village was an elderly man, his waist adorned with a trumpet, though he had not played it yet.

"We thought Grand Princess

Lisandra would take that beast back

she w

to the capital, so we planned to follow her once she left," he told Yasmine, "but we never imagined would have us deal with her here. Once she's properly punished, I'll sound the trumpet to let them rest in peace."

Yasmine was surprised. She hadn't known they had planned to travel to the capital together.

Even though they lived in a border town and were used to the ravages of war, the slaughter of entire villages, and the murder of innocent people still struck them deeply. This deep sorrow and anger lingered in the hearts of the villagers in the area.

They had narrowly escaped a fate much like the one that befell those who weren't so fortunate. They knew that if Aurora and the others had set their minds to it, they could have wiped out every village in the area. The scene was enough to terrify Aurora to her core. She huddled in the cage, her body trembling uncontrollably, her teeth chattering. She had never felt fear like this in her life.

Her eyes darted around desperately, hoping to see Barrett and his men swoop down from the skies. In her heart, she knew even if Barrett did come, it wouldn't matter. He would simply be killed alongside her.

But at least, if someone else was there to die with her, it would be better than facing death alone. Back at Victory Pass, Barrett had promised they would face whatever came together, through life or death. He had said it.

"Barrett... Barrett, please come. Please come..." she mumbled to herself, as if uttering his name could ease some of the terror tightening around her chest.

By the time they reached the grave pit, Barrett had not arrived. All around Aurora were the deafening shouts of people calling for her death to pay for her crimes.

She looked around, her eyes wide with panic. The hatred in the eyes of the villagers seemed capable of burning through her.

The suffocating sense of death loomed over her. Her stomach churned violently. She retched, vomiting the sour remnants of yesterday's meal onto the ground.

Chapter 1065

The grave pit was a large grave mound. It was as high as a small mountain, and there was a big tombstone standing on it, engraved with many names. Aurora's terror reached its peak, her throat releasing sharp, desperate screams for help.

One of the guards opened the cage door and grabbed her by the hair. Then, he yanked her out and tossed her onto the ground. Aurora felt a wave of pain flood through her body; she curled up, trying to crawl away.

The guard immediately seized her hair again and dragged her toward the grave mound, shoving her against the tombstone. He pointed to the names carved on it and roared, "Do you even recognize these names? You don't understand, do you? They're all the people you killed!"

Aurora shook her head frantically, gasping, "N-No, it wasn't me—"

Before she could finish, the enraged villagers surged forward.

Her screams cut through the crowd, echoing in the valley, sending birds scattering in fear.

Black clouds gathered from all sides, quickly blotting out the sky. Thunder rumbled, drowning out Aurora's screams.

Blood began to seep from under the crowd, flowing like a winding stream.

Outside, Penny, Yuna, and the others had no idea what was happening to Aurora. From the chilling cries and the blood that stained the villagers' knives, axes, and hoes, it wasn't hard to imagine the horrors she was enduring.

They sought revenge for their deceased loved ones in the most direct way. They didn't need to tear her apart slowly. A villain like her shouldn't be allowed to live another moment, for the souls of the wronged could never find peace as long as she remained alive. Gradually, Aurora's screams faded. Her body was hacked beyond recognition, with only her face and head still somewhat intact. Her limbs and torso were a bloody mess.

Aurora was still alive, but the pain made her teeth chatter, and the fear of death made her feel as though her insides were being torn apart.

The faces of those around her were filled with murderous rage. They raised their knives and axes, bringing them down upon her body. The stench of blood filled the air, and the sight of it reminded her of the day her soldiers slaughtered the villagers. Back then, her soldiers had done the same—raising their swords and knives to hack at the unarmed villagers. Blood soaked the ground, and its scent filled the air. It was a smell that, for a brief moment, filled her with a twisted sense of exhilaration.

She didn't see them as mere innocent villagers. Their refusal to betray the young general, even under threat of death, was enough to show that his identity was no ordinary one.

Aurora was the first female general, a position that demanded military accomplishments to back it up. She even entertained the thought that she could rise to the rank of duke or even minister, just like any man.

Why not? Women could achieve great feats, too.

As heads rolled at her feet, she simply kicked them aside. Her expression was cold as she ordered, "Continue killing them. Don't stop until they come out."

As her consciousness gradually

blurred, she suddenly remembered

this scene. A deep sense of terror overwhelmed her, as if she no longer recognized the person she once was. That monster couldn't have been her! She must have been possessed by evil spirits to commit such atrocious acts.

The roar of the villagers around her gradually turned into the screams from that time. They cursed her in words she couldn't understand. The more vicious their words, the angrier she became. She remembered how, with a single swing of her sword, she had decapitated a child no older

than seven or eight.

The severed head had rolled a few paces, blood spilling from it, the child's eyes still wide with the terror and fury of death.

A flash of cold steel crossed her

as

vision. As she curled into herself in fear, she felt a sharp chill at her neck, followed by a sudden pain on her scalp. However, it wasn't painful as she expected. She was lifted, and then she saw it her own body, severed from her head.

Her head had been severed from her body!

Her eyes were wide with horror.

Soon, she lost consciousness and fell into boundless darkness.

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In Starhaven, Barrett woke up from a nightmare, his whole body soaked through as if he had been pulled out of water.

Chapter 1066

Barrett gasped for air, his chest tightening as though gripped by a massive hand, making it impossible to breathe. "What's wrong with you?" Viola had been woken by the commotion. She looked at him sitting up, clearly in a daze. "Another nightmare?" she asked impatiently.

Lately, he had been having nightmares every night. Viola couldn't help but wonder how much guilt weighed on him to make it happen so often. What frustrated her most was that he often called out Aurora's name during these nightmares.

When he didn't respond, still clutching his chest and gasping for breath, she sneered, "Dreaming about Aurora again? Did she die in this one too?"

"She's dead," Barrett murmured, his face drenched with either sweat or tears-it was hard to tell. "It felt so real... I dreamt that the villagers hacked her to death. She died miserably. Her head was severed, and there was blood everywhere. Her body...was torn apart." Hearing him say this in the middle of the night made Viola's skin crawl.

"Enough!" she snapped. "Whether she lives or dies is none of your concern. Just go back to sleep."

Barrett swung his legs off the bed and stood up, his body heavy with exhaustion. "You sleep. I'm going to the study."

Viola's frustration flared. "You always go to the study. What do you think the servants will say about me?"

Barrett didn't even register her words. He stood, clinging to the edge of the bed for support. His mind was consumed by the echoes of Aurora's screams in his dream.

He stumbled out of the room, the sound of rain hitting the roof catching his attention. It had started raining without him noticing, the relentless downpour rolling down in streams.

As he walked down the corridor, the flickering lamps outside swayed violently in the wind, their light casting eerie shadows. His silhouette was distorted, at times looming like a monstrous figure, at other times swaying like a ghost.

The wind and rain combined into a mournful chorus that sounded like wailing spirits. The thought of Aurora's anguished cries from his dream made his chest ache. It felt as though his heart had been tossed into a boiling pot of oil-painful, searing, unbearable. He had intended to go to the study, but his feet seemed to have a mind of their own, carrying him instead to the Blessed Haven.

By the time he pushed open the door, he was drenched through.

In just a month or two, the once well-kept residence had become overgrown with weeds. The servants no longer came in to clean, and the place was engulfed in darkness. The only light came from the lamps outside, casting faint shadows that barely illuminated the courtyard.

The wind howled, and the rain poured down in sheets. Barrett stood in the yard, not moving another step.

He stared at the closed doors of the hall, the same ones he had passed through countless times before.

Each time, Aurora would emerge

with a mocking expression, her voice sharp as she asked, "So, you still remember the way to Blessed Haven?"

But she would never ask that again.

A strange feeling twisted in his chest. Was it pain? Or discomfort? Perhaps it was relief.

He wasn't sure if Aurora was truly dead, but this dream-it had been too real. It was more vivid than any nightmare he had ever had.

In his dream, he had seen her head fall, her eyes wide with terror and hopelessness. He had even heard her voice calling his name.

The memories of when they first met flooded his mind. Even now, he couldn't tell if he had ever truly loved Aurora. He felt like he still couldn't understand what love was.

When he returned from Victory Pass,

he told Carissa that he didn't know

how to love until he met Aurora. Aurora had made his heart race. When he held her hand, his pulse quickened. He wanted to be close to her. Seeing her bright, carefree face, his gaze followed her instinctively.

Barrett knew Aurora wasn't beautiful, nor was she gentle. But there was a wildness about her, like a wildflower blooming in his heart. Her boldness made him smile and made his eyes sparkle with affection.

As for Carissa, had he ever loved her?

The question gnawed at him, hammering at his mind.

He opened his mouth; the cold rainwater splashed into it, but it did nothing to ease the ache in his chest. The pain was sharp-so sharp it brought him to his knees.

He didn't know why, but the thought of Carissa brought an overwhelming sorrow. He remembered lifting her white veil, that moment when he had felt like the luckiest man alive. Collapsing into the overgrown weeds, he howled in grief until his voice was hoarse.

Whether he loved them or not, he had lost both of them. One would never turn around to look at him again, and the other was gone forever.

"What are you howling here for? People never appreciate what they have until it's lost. Isn't that pathetic?"

Viola's angry voice broke through his despair. She stood behind him, holding an umbrella and dressed in her nightgown.

What frustrated Viola even more than Barrett's sorrow was that after marrying him, she felt as though she had become a shrew. Everything seemed to irritate her, and nothing ever felt right.

Chapter 1067

Barrett ignored Viola. He staggered to his feet and stumbled up the stone steps to the door.

Inside, it was pitch black. He fumbled around for a long while before finding the matchstick and lighting a lamp. The tiny, flickering light cast dancing shadows across the room in Blessed Haven. The place was bare. The furniture-simple, everyday pieces-offered no comfort. The only things of value were the doors and windows that had been reinforced with ironwood.

He sat there, dazed, as Viola continued to rant outside.

She yelled for a while, but Barrett didn't respond.

After a moment, Viola snapped in a burst of frustration, "If you're still thinking of the past, then there's no need for us to keep wasting time. Let's get a divorce."

The word "divorce" struck Barrett like a blow, pulling him out of the suffocating memories he had been lost in. He looked up-but the dim light couldn't reach his eyes, which were lost in shadow. "Divorce?" he repeated.

"Yes!" Viola shouted, throwing her umbrella and lamp aside as she stomped into the room, soaked from the rain. Her face twisted in madness. "I've already been divorced once! I don't care about a second time. Barrett, you don't care about me, and I don't care about you. Thomas hasn't married yet, and he's my true husband. I'll go to him."

Barrett was stunned. "Thomas?"

"He's a thousand times better than you!" Viola snapped. "I was always meant to be his wife. He died on the battlefield, and that's why we missed our chance with each other. But now that he's alive again, I can go to him."

Slowly, Barrett's mind started to clear. He should have been angry, but for some reason, he wasn't. In fact, he found himself mocking her.

"Thomas doesn't want you anymore."

Viola winced, the words cutting deep. Without thinking, she blurted out, "Then I'll go to Silas!"

"Silas?" Barrett didn't know who she was talking about, but it seemed like such a familiar name on her lips. "Who's he?"

Viola froze for a moment after saying the name, recalling that reckless time. Somehow, she found herself feeling a bit nostalgic. She had never truly cared for Silas, but now, looking back, she realized that he had been the one to offer her warmth when she had needed it most.

"Who's Silas?"

Barrett stared at Viola, his heart

devoid of jealousy, envy, or anger. He no longer felt those emotions. Instead, he thought to himself that if such a person existed, then he should let her go. It would be better for both of them, so there would be no more unrest in their home.

Men like him didn't deserve a wife.

"It was just a random name," Viola snapped, her tone defensive as she plopped down onto a chair, turning her face slightly to hide the unease in her eyes. "I just want to make it clear that I am not someone who needs you. I'm your primary wife, but you never showed me even the most basic respect! You're a worthless failure. What right do you have to throw your tantrums at me?"

Barrett sat silently, listening to her bitter words. His heart grew heavier with every insult. He had long believed that he was no longer of any worth, and with Viola coming from a noble family, it

only made sense that she looked down on him. "If you want to go after whoever that man is, then go," he said, his voice flat. "I agree to the divorce."

Initially, Viola was just venting in anger. She had hoped that he would beg her to stay and try to fix things.

When he actually agreed...she was stunned.

He really agreed!

All the hurt and humiliation she had felt over the years rushed to the surface. What had she gained from marrying into the Warren family? Only constant insults and neglect. Even the simplest respect in a marriage had been denied to her. She let out a wail and collapsed onto the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. She cried for a while, but Barrett didn't comfort her.

Her rage grew. "Fine! If you're agreeing to the divorce, then let's do it!"

Barrett stood up and walked over to her, gently helping her to sit in a chair.

His tone was serious as he said, "Alright. Take whatever you want from the estate. I won't stop you. The dowry you brought with you, I won't touch a single coin. But Aurora's three thousand silver coins-those cannot be taken." Viola was in disbelief. "You really want a divorce?"

"If that's what you want, then I respect your decision," Barrett replied, his eyes filled with guilt. "Viola, I'm sorry. I've let you and so many others down. I don't want to burden you anymore. Let's part ways cleanly. There's nothing left here for we'll

you to stay for. From now were for

go our own way in life. I pray you will find a better husband."

At that moment, Viola felt a kind of despair that crushed her to the core.

Did she really want the divorce? No. She had only been pushing Barrett to appreciate her, to make him realize her worth. She had been using this method to force him to cherish her.

When she saw the sincerity in his eyes, everything went black. Unable to bear it anymore, she fainted.

Chapter 1068

Viola's life had been a mess lately.

Barrett was incompetent and careless with his duties, which made the king dislike him. To make matters worse, someone actually went to Skye Embroidery at this time. Amelia, a woman Viola had always looked down on, had a workshop named after her even after her death. To make things worse, Viola's sister-in-law was spreading rumors that Amelia's death was somehow connected to her. It made Skye Embroidery feel like a thorn lodged in her throat, uncomfortable and irksome.

Then there was Serena. She had been sent back to her family by the Marquis of Ironridge's family, and she should've been keeping a low profile. Instead, she was acting as if nothing had changed. She walked around as arrogant as ever, her head always held high as though she were too good for everyone.

It was infuriating.

And now Serena, of all people, was trying to find another husband. It was laughable! She had once mocked women who were divorced, first targeting Carissa and then Viola. But now, Serena herself was divorced. To make matters worse, she was a discarded concubine- not even a legitimate wife.

Yet, Serena still had the nerve to come around and make snide comments. She said that as the elder sister-in-law, Viola should arrange her match.

Serena's expectations were ridiculously high. She still dreamed of marrying into a prestigious family, even if it meant becoming a concubine. Her looks weren't anything special, and she had been cast out once. She wanted to secure a high marriage despite all the gossip circulating about her. She should be grateful if someone would take her at all!

It was the definition of delusion.

There were times when Viola truly wanted to leave the Warren family. She had thought about it more than once. When she actually suggested it to Barrett that night and he agreed without hesitation, she was crushed.

She never expected him to agree so quickly.

The Warren family had fallen into ruin-it lacked both the status and the wealth it once had. It was just a shell now. Frankly, no respectable family would consider marrying into it, let alone accepting a woman from there into their family.

On the other hand, Viola was the third daughter of a noble family. The Prince family had deep roots in the capital, something the now-dilapidated Warren family could never compare to.

Having fallen so far, Barrett should've clung to her. She could've written to her eldest brother, asking him to help Barrett find a better future in the capital.

Instead, Barrett truly wanted a divorce? It was as if he had no attachment to her at all!

Poppy was standing by anxiously and asked, "Madam Viola, are you truly going to divorce Deputy Commander Warren?"

Viola hadn't really passed out, but for a moment, she didn't know what to say. Her heart was heavy with anger and sadness. Barrett's words had caught her completely off guard. Unable to respond, she simply pretended to faint. Now lying in bed, Viola remained wide awake, her heart heavy with a mix of frustration and helplessness she couldn't put into words.

When she heard Poppy's question, she couldn't bring herself to face her. Instead, she replied coldly, "Should I really waste my life on a man like that?"

Poppy was concerned and said, "But... What about Madam Zoey? She might not want to see you divorced and return to the estate."

Viola's voice turned bitter. "Is that decision up to her? If I want to return to my family, my mom and my brother will support me."

Poppy hesitated, wanting to offer a

little more advice. "But Deputy Commander Warren doesn't truly want a divorce. He's just said it in the heat of the moment. Maybe you should ask him again? Or have Madam Zoey come to speak with him on your behalf?"

Recalling how her sister-in-law had laughed at her multiple times, Viola could barely stand the thought of calling Zoey for help. Deep down, she was truly losing hope. What had she done wrong? Why was Barrett treating her this way?

Valor Estate had nothing-nothing at

all. Even their expenses were being cut back. The fine silks and jewels she used to have at her fingertips had become luxuries she had to scrimp on. Her wardrobe had shrunk to the bare minimum. During the harsh winter, they could only afford to burn two small trays of silver charcoal.

It was downright pathetic.

Was this truly the best she could hope for anymore?

The more Viola thought about it, the more unjust it felt.

Barrett had been lucky to have her as his wife. What could he possibly have to complain about?

However, Viola wasn't someone who ignored reality. Her marriage to

Barrett was her second one, and she had an unspeakable history with Silas. Although it hadn't become public knowledge, her slip of the

tongue tonight might lead to rumors

spreading.

If she were to look for a third marriage, what kind of man would want her now? Thomas had made it clear that their connection was over, and there was no going back. What was she supposed to do, marry Silas? Forget it. She didn't think much of Silas, anyway. Besides, even if he didn't already have a wife, he was still far from someone she could entrust her life to.

Chapter 1069

Viola didn't know what to do, so she decided to let the cold war drag on.

After all, it was she who brought up divorce. Barrett only agreed in a moment of impulse. If they really went through with it, he would never find another wife.

Who would want him? The only chance he'd have would be to marry a merchant's daughter or a commoner. No family with any kind of status would ever accept him. "Let's not speak of tonight again," Viola said, sounding tired as she closed her eyes. "Tomorrow, send for the physician. Tell them I'm unwell and need to rest for a few days." "Yes, Madam Viola." Poppy was unsure whether her mistress truly wanted a divorce, or if she was just venting in frustration. She fell silent and didn't dare to press the matter further.

The next morning, Barrett stood waiting at the gates of Hell Monarch Estate. This time, he was there to seek an audience with Rafael, not Carissa.

When Rafael emerged, he saw Barrett standing by the corner with his horse, his face pale and drawn. He waved for Dylan to approach and inquire. Barrett immediately led his horse closer, bowing his head in respect. "Your Highness."

"What do you want?" Rafael asked, sizing him up.

Barrett gathered his courage and asked, "Your Highness, might I ask if the people of Westhaven have dealt with Aurora?"

Rafael was still irritated at how Barrett had stopped Carissa outside the royal study, and he couldn't muster any sympathy.

"How would I know? Ask someone else," he responded coldly.

"Your Highness!" Barrett quickly stepped forward, blocking his path. He bent low in a more urgent bow, pleading. "I know you're the first to hear news like this. I admit I've made countless mistakes, but please, for the sake of my cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, tell me what you know."

Rafael's frustration turned into amusement. "Barrett, your 'cooperation' with the Ministry of Justice is your duty as a subject and your way of protecting your position and family. Don't try to make it sound like you're doing me a favor. If you want favors, go to the Ministry of Justice."

Barrett realized that Rafael wasn't responding to his plea and lowered his head further to apologize. "I misspoke, Your Highness. I simply wish to humbly plead that you would share what you know."

Perhaps it was due to the nightmares that had been haunting him lately, but Barrett's complexion was worse than ever. His eyes were sunken and his posture was slumped, as if the weight of his life was pulling him down further.

Rafael wasn't interested in speaking with Barrett any longer. He gave a dismissive wave and said, "If there's news, I'll have someone send word. As of now, I haven't received anything. You may leave." "But-"

"But what? Just leave for now,"

Rafael cut him off, urging him to leave. He didn't want Barrett lingering around and possibly running into Carissa, which would surely stir up gossip.

And gossip, as always, would only harm the woman.

"Your Highness, please remember, if you hear anything, send word to me. Otherwise, I'll have to come back," Barrett insisted.

Rafael could hardly contain his frustration. It was becoming absurd.

"Just go!" he snapped.

Barrett bowed and turned, leading his horse away. As he reached the gates, he stole a glance back.

Rafael, cold as ever, stared him down. "Still here? Do you want me to force you to leave?"

With that, Barrett quickly mounted his horse and rode off.

Rafael watched him leave for a moment, ensuring he wasn't returning. Once satisfied, he turned to Dylan. "Keep watch. If he turns back, send him on his way. No pleasantries." After giving the order, Rafael mounted his horse and hurried off. He needed to check in at the office.

When Barrett came asking about Aurora, Violet noticed him. She had been on her way to the workshop, but paused at the gates for a moment before turning around to find Carissa. Violet's voice dripped with sarcasm. "Oh, if I didn't know better, I might think he's some kind of devoted man."

When Carissa heard Violet's words, she couldn't help but think back to the time before their divorce, when Barrett had returned from Victory Pass and told her about Aurora.

Back then Barrett had seemed to be

in love with Aurora, but that was before she had revealed her true, ugly nature beneath the mask. Once the illusion of love had shattered, Barrett's feelings faded too.

Even so, the bond they had shared on the battlefield-fighting for survival together-had left

something behind, something that couldn't simply be erased. His

confession in the Ministry of Justice, where he felt responsible for betraying Aurora, had added a layer of guilt he could never shake.

"Let's not dwell on their business," Carissa said, trying to push the thoughts aside. "I should be getting back to the Capital Guard headquarters."

Chapter 1070

News of Aurora's death quickly reached Starhaven.

Winona and those from Skywing Spire had witnessed firsthand how the common folk vented their anger, and how Aurora had met her tragic end. The letter didn't arrive by carrier pigeon, but by swift horses sent from Skywing Spire, making its way directly to Hell Monarch Estate.

The details were described vividly. Winona made sure to include extra information specifically for Carissa.

Aurora was the cause of the Sinclair family's massacre, and Carissa hated her with all her heart. But because the events involved Fawnrun City, she couldn't exact her own revenge. So, Winona had written all the details down, hoping to give Carissa some sense of closure.

Carissa read the letter once. Then again. She recognized the handwriting-it was Winona's.

After reading it, she sat in a daze for a long time before letting out a deep sigh. Then, she broke down and cried in Rafael's arms.

Rafael held her close, gently patting her back, feeling a deep sorrow for her. At least, now, she could cry freely. Yet, while the vengeance was satisfied, the pain would stay with her for a lifetime.

As he wiped away her tears, Rafael whispered softly, "The debts have been repaid. Aurora and the spies from Westhaven will face your parents' judgment in the afterlife."

Carissa rested her head against his chest, the weight of the past years playing out in her mind, each memory sharp and painful, as if tearing her heart apart.

Outside, Lulu sat on the doorstep. She stared at the sunset as it painted the sky in fiery hues, like a burning flame. Her heart still ached, knowing that even though Aurora was dead, the pain would never truly fade. She imagined Carissa felt just as she did. Violet had also read the letter. Inside, a feeling of satisfaction stirred. She muttered under her breath, "Finally, she's dead. Good riddance."

Jacob then instructed Dylan to go to Valor Estate and inform Barrett of the news.

At this, Violet scoffed. "Tell him? Does he deserve such an honor? Why bother sending Dylan?"

"When some people are in a foul mood, they don't care about anything. It's better to tell him now so he doesn't come asking later," Jacob replied.

Some people were best kept at a distance, and Barrett was clearly not in a state of mind that could be considered normal.

Violet thought about it and agreed with the decision. It was better to avoid Barrett coming to the estate again. It would be one thing if he were simply to interrupt Rafael, but it was far worse if he persisted in clinging to Carissa.

The news had even reached Helen, who made a special trip to Orchid Hall.

She gently pulled Carissa out of Rafael's arms and into her own, holding Carissa tightly. Using her limited words, she offered what little comfort she could.

"Evil has its own reward. Her time is up-she's on the road to the underworld, while you're on the path to a long life of joy and happiness. From here on out, your life will be free from sorrow."

After speaking, Helen pressed Carissa firmly against her chest and let out a heavy sigh. For a mother-in-law to care so deeply, it was rare indeed.

Rafael watched and couldn't help but think his mom was being ridiculous. Wouldn't it be better to just let Carissa cry her heart out? Now, thanks to her, Carissa couldn't even shed a tear. Carissa really couldn't cry anymore. In fact, she found the whole situation almost laughable. Forget about crying-she could barely catch her breath.

When Carissa stopped crying, Helen thought her comforting had worked. She sat down, held Carissa's hand, and launched into one of her long-winded speeches about life's lessons.

The words were the same advice

Victoria often gave-don't dwell on the past, keep looking ahead, those lost would never come back, but they watch over them from above, and the ones living must live joyfully so that the dead could rest in peace.

Regardless, Carissa eventually managed to stop the tears. However, her eyes were red-rimmed. Helen sighed, feeling a pang of pity for her.

"From now on, treat me like your

mom," Helen said softly. "I'll love you

as if you were my own daughter. As for Kiera well, she's heartless.

Always running about, and once she married, she hardly ever visited me. I

can count the number of times she's come back on one hand

Carissa felt a twinge of gratitude and said softly, "Thank you, Mother."

Rafael shook his head, a little dismayed. If they were going to say such touching things, why drag Kiera into it? It made it sound as though Carissa was being treated like a daughter simply because Kiera had neglected Helen.

"By the way," Helen added, "you've

yet to open all the gifts your third aunt brought for you. I know you don't want to face your seventh uncle's sacrifice, but inside those gifts are his feelings for you. You should at least look through them."