

War Song 1091

Chapter 1091

Carissa glanced at the young women, all dressed in elaborate outfits.

The woman speaking wore a pale pink satin gown with delicate golden embroidery along the edges and a flowing turquoise blue underskirt that swayed as she walked. The outfit was youthful yet exuded nobility. Around her neck hung a delicate necklace with intricate gemstones. A small blue sachet, embroidered with the letter 'Q', was tied at her waist. At a glance, one could tell her status.

The others were similarly dressed in expensive, elaborate attire. There was no doubt these were the troublemakers.

They were laughing, but Carissa didn't even smile.

"You're at the age where laughter comes easily. Well, stand here and laugh for two hours. You can leave once the time is up," she said in a calm, measured tone, though her expression remained friendly. When Carissa clapped her hands, Mabel appeared from around the corner.

She nodded and respectfully greeted, "Your Grace."

Claire, Lillian, Iris, and Mabel were all people whom Winona had left behind in the capital. Claire handled investigations, and Mabel usually accompanied her. Though most of the time, her help wasn't necessary. Today was different.

Carissa had agreed to let Rosalind handle things on her own, but now that the girls had come to her, she wasn't about to let this opportunity slip by.

"Mabel, keep an eye on them. Let them laugh for two hours. Anyone who can't manage to do so will be expelled from the academy," she instructed coolly.

Jocelyn suddenly stepped forward to block Carissa's path, her face cold as frost. "Who are you to kick us out? We've been properly enrolled with an invitation. We're legitimate students."

"You've broken the rules of Gracewood Women's Academy. You've provoked and mocked the headmistress. You've earned your expulsion," Carissa calmly replied.

Without another word, she turned and began walking away.

"We didn't laugh at you. Don't you dare take it personally! What's there to laugh at?" Jocelyn snapped, clearly dissatisfied.

Carissa turned back, her smile almost imperceptible. "I may not be the one being laughed at, but you will be. Once you're kicked out of the academy, you'll be a joke for at least a month." Jocelyn huffed. "My grandfather was the previous king's tutor, my cousin is the queen, and my uncle is the Civil Minister who oversees promotions for Starhaven officials. What gives you the right-

Carissa interjected, "Your grandfather, cousin, and uncle may all be impressive, but what about you? What are you? You've achieved nothing. How dare you act up in front of me?"

She turned to Mabel and added, "Don't pay attention to anything they say. Just keep an eye on them. Let them laugh to their heart's content. Anyone who doesn't laugh enough-take them away. Don't bother reporting to me." With that, Carissa turned and walked away.

Mabel's expression was stone-cold, and the small scar that ran across her forehead gave her a terrifying look when she wasn't smiling. As her gaze swept over the girls, they instinctively shrank back.

Jocelyn, still defiant, opened her mouth to protest, but Mabel's cold voice stopped her in her tracks.

"I'll count to three. If you're not laughing by the time I'm done, I'll have you thrown out. One... Two..." "Haha... Haha..."

Mabel's cold eyes and stern voice were too much for them to resist. By

the time she reached "two", they had no choice but to burst out into forced, fake laughter. Within moments, their throats grew sore and they were all crouched on the ground, coughing and gagging.

Mabel paid them no mind, continuing her count, "First warning. Second warning..."

These noble girls had never been threatened in such a way before.

Skilled in martial arts, Cassidy could not stand being humiliated. She saw Mabel as nothing more than a servant and thought it was outrageous that someone like her would dare to order them around. Cassidy stopped laughing, then stepped forward and raised her hand to slap Mabel. "If I don't teach you a lesson, you'll never know your place!"

There was no change in Mabel's expression as she swiftly grabbed Jocelyn and yanked her over. With a slight twist of her shoulder, the slap intended for Mabel landed heavily on Jocelyn's face, sending her head snapping to the side.

Jocelyn had never been struck in the face before. She screamed in pain, temporarily disoriented. She didn't even know who had hit her. In a rush of anger, she swung her hand, only to end up slapping Cassidy across the face instead. Both girls were stunned, too shocked to speak.

Before they could react, Mabel's cold voice rang out again, "Last chance. Laugh, or leave!"

Jocelyn burst into tears, but even as

she sobbed, she kept up the

laughter. She couldn't afford to be expelled. Though coming to Gracewood Women's Academy hadn't been her choice, her cousin had told her it would help stir up trouble. So, she couldn't leave, no matter how much she hated it. Even if Carissa might not truly kick her out, she wasn't willing to take that risk.

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Jocelyn and the others' faces had become stiff from forced laughter. They had never been humiliated like this before. Being made to laugh for two whole hours by Mabel was an immense insult and a great source of shame for them.

They immediately went to report the incident to Catherine, who was known for being kind and gentle. She usually taught etiquette, bookkeeping, managing people, and overseeing the household. She hadn't yet begun teaching anything more advanced, as she was considering the girls' backgrounds. Whether they married high or low, they would need to know how to manage a household.

Most of the girls had already learned the basics of etiquette, so Catherine only needed to guide them slightly to ensure they would behave properly when hosting guests or interacting with others. As for

managing accounts, it was a woman's essential skill and knowledge. After all, in this world, women still handled the household. Once they mastered these basics, they could learn more.

For women, it always took more effort to be heard by men. True equality in conversation was still out of reach.

It was Catherine's way of teaching that led Jocelyn to believe she was part of a noble family, where class distinctions were clear. Servants-no matter whose household they served-were always inferior. Jocelyn was certain that Catherine wouldn't allow any maid to insult noble young ladies like them.

After listening patiently to Jocelyn's complaint, Catherine's warm smile slowly faded, her expression growing serious.

"So, you think the headmistress' punishment was wrong?" she asked.

Jocelyn paused, caught off guard by Catherine's lack of support. Without thinking, she replied, "Lady Catherine, even the headmistress shouldn't have been allowed to humiliate us like that."

Catherine's face hardened slightly. "Humiliate you? I see it as punishment. As students, you are expected to listen to your teachers. Lady Carissa is the headmistress of Gracewood Women's Academy, and even we must listen to her.

"So, what were you laughing at? You disrespected her. Do you know what the penalty for disrespecting your teacher is? Go ask your grandfather, Lord Gerald. See if today's punishment was too light or too harsh. The headmistress gave you a chance. Had the matter been in my hands, you'd be packing your bags and leaving the academy right now."

Catherine's words were stern, offering no room for mercy. Whether someone was from the Quinton family or the Xavier family made no difference to her.

Jocelyn and the others were clearly intimidated. They stood frozen, not daring to argue. They had never encountered Catherine being this strict before. She exuded an air of dignity that was not to be challenged.

She continued with a sharp

reprimand, "There's one more thing. I've heard that you've been speaking ill of Ms. Young. I haven't heard it with my own ears, so I won't deal myo

with it for now. But if I hear one word from your mouths, you'll be leaving Gracewood Women's Academy.

"As for whether Ms. Young will hold it against you, that's not my concern. But let me warn you- don't mistake her youth for weakness. She is your teacher and your primary instructor; she has every right to punish you. If you don't listen, she can even take it up with your families.

"This is the natural order of the world. If you've sworn to honor your teacher, then leave your pride at the door. Even the king respects the royal chancellor. If you don't

understand the most basic of el

manners, you might as well

home. Don't embarrass yourselves and give your spot to someone who knows how to behave."

Cassidy was clearly displeased and about to speak, but Jocelyn grabbed her sleeve, silencing her.

With great effort, she swallowed her frustration and said, "Yes, Lady Catherine, we understand. We were wrong. It won't happen again."

"It's best that you know your mistake, or you'd bring so much shame that even the Quinton family's good name wouldn't be able to cover it.," Catherine replied, raising her hand. "Now, go. Don't be late for class tomorrow." The group bowed and left.

Once outside, Cassidy scoffed. "We came here to be students, not servants. What's the big deal? If they want to expel us, let them. I don't even like studying. I'd rather be practicing martial arts."

"Shut up," Jocelyn snapped. "The queen dowager played a key role in founding Gracewood Women's Academy. If we get expelled, what do you think that will do to our chances of marriage?"

Hailey didn't dare to say anything when she heard that it would affect her marriage prospects. Like the others, she followed Jocelyn's lead. Since she said it was not worth pursuing, Hailey didn't want to make a fuss out of it.

Chapter 1093

Before leaving the capital, Yuvan went to the palace to bid farewell to Ruth.

Her eyes were brimming with tears as she spoke, "If you truly care for me, you'll petition His Majesty to allow me to go to Valken with you. At least then we wouldn't have to endure this separation, never knowing when we might see each other again." Yuvan knelt before her, his voice choked with emotion as he replied, "Mom, I don't want to leave you either. But Valken is nothing like the palace. Your body wouldn't be able to bear the long and exhausting journey."

Ruth dabbed at her tears. "There was a time when your sister could stay in the palace and look after me. But now that she's been sent to the Heritage Bureau and you're returning to Valken, what hope do I have left here? Besides, I'm much better now. The hardships of the journey won't trouble me. If you won't petition His Majesty, then I'll do it myself. He's kind hearted. I'm sure he'll allow us to stay together."

"Mom, we'll be reunited soon, I promise. Just give me a little time."

Ruth reached for his hand, her frail fingers like brittle branches yet gripping him tightly.

"My son, the country is at peace now. The people are safe and living stable lives. The Southern Frontier has been reclaimed, and the fighting at Victory Pass has ceased. You must work hard to govern your territory well.

"Starhaven can become the prosperous and peaceful realm your dad envisioned, a place where everyone thrives. Nothing is more important than that. I've spent most of my life in this secluded palace, and I've seen so little of the world. But even I know that the people want nothing more than to live in peace and security."

Yuvan's expression faltered for a moment, but he forced a smile. "Mom, you've spent your life in the palace. The things you've been told were filtered before they ever reached you. What you see isn't the full picture.

"The capital may be prosperous, but do you know how many people still live in misery? They go hungry, lack proper clothing, and sell their children or pawn their wives just to survive. The heavy taxes and labor levies leave them overwhelmed."

Ruth started to shake her head, but Yuvan clasped her hand tightly, continuing, "And do you know about the Sinclair family-father and sons-who died on the battlefield at the Southern Frontier? His Majesty could have sent Rafael to the frontlines earlier, but he hesitated. He feared Rafael might grow too powerful, and that delay cost the Sinclair family their lives."

"No, you've only heard rumors," Ruth said firmly. "I may lack experience, but even I know how complicated the situation at the Southern Frontier was. The Duke of Northwatch reclaimed the region once, but Sandoria's counterattack caught them completely off guard. "That wasn't something His Majesty or the court officials could have foreseen. And don't forget, His Majesty had only just ascended the throne. Who could have predicted such a swift reversal of fortune?"

Her frail hands suddenly clamped

tightly around Yuvan's wrist, tears streaming down her face. "My son, listen to me. Valken is a wealthy domain. It will bring you and your children a lifetime of prosperity. Do not take unnecessary risks don't gamble with your life

family's."

Yuvan frowned, his tone sharpening as he said, "Mom, what are you talking about? What do you think I'm planning to do? I was only pointing out some flaws in the system. It's just a casual conversation between us, nothing more."

Her cloudy eyes met his, a strange mixture of laughter and sorrow in her gaze.

"A casual conversation," she murmured. "Yes, just idle chatter. I know your heart is kind. If you're unhappy with your princess consort or your concubine, then take more women into your household.

Surround yourself with those who can warm your heart and brighten your days. Life could be so good-don't give me reasons to worry about you."

Yuvan's expression darkened slightly. "Who's been whispering nonsense into your ears, Mom? Who's been spinning tales to make me out as some sort of traitor? I am myself, and Eleanor is Eleanor.

"I hold justice in my heart; I am no rebel or usurper. And let me tell you this if ever someone raises their sword against the capital, it will only be because the king has become corrupt and unworthy of the throne."

Ruth trembled at his words, withdrawing her hands slowly.

"I am an old woman," she said weakly. "I shouldn't meddle in such matters. Let's pretend I never heard that or asked about it. But remember this-I am your mom, and I still live in this palace."

Yuvan was silent for a long moment before he spoke softly, "Mom, don't worry. The queen dowager is merciful. No matter what happens, she'll see to it that you live out your days in peace." Ruth smiled faintly, though tears glistened in her eyes.

"Good, very good," she said with a bitter laugh. "A son who places his mom's fate in the hands of someone else's mercy-such a devoted son I have."

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Guilt flickered in Yuvan's heart, but so did a hint of impatience.

"Why do you speak like this, Mom? I can't stay by your side in the capital, so of course, I hope the queen dowager will be kind and look after you. That way, I won't spend my days worrying about you."

"Enough. Don't say any more. Just go. Be safe on your journey," Ruth said, waving him off.

She had raised this son herself how could she not know his temperament? How could she not see through his expression?

"Mom, forgive me for not being dutiful. It's the peak of summer and the heat is unbearable, so I can't take you with me to my fief. Besides, what would His Majesty think if I brought you along? Even if I've done nothing wrong, with how suspicious he can be, he'd probably find some reason to accuse me."

Ruth simply nodded. "I understand. Go now."

Yuvan nodded before calling in Molly, Fiona, and his children to say their farewells. Ruth showed little affection toward her daughters-in-law and grandchildren, her expression distant and

unreadable. Once they had all left, she coughed softly a few times. Oscar Grant, the chamberlain who had served her for many years, knew how upset she was and tried to comfort her.

"The weather really is too hot for travel, Your Grace. Taking you along wouldn't be good for your health. His Highness is thinking of you. Please don't dwell on it too much-it's not worth hurting yourself over."

Ruth sighed heavily. "You watched him grow up. How can you not know what kind of person he is? If he were truly so dutiful, why didn't he leave for the fiefdom back in March or April, when the weather was cooler? Why wait until the height of summer?"

"All those fine-sounding reasons he gave they're just words. He's always been like this since he was a boy. He doesn't do what should be done, but is a master at finding excuses. He'll spin a thousand reasons to make himself seem good, to make others believe he's done the right thing.

"He cherishes his reputation too much. He won't tolerate even the slightest stain on it. But with that kind of personality, combined with his scheming, he's bound to fail. I'm just a woman who doesn't know much about the world, but even understand that great achievements require letting go of small things. If you want to pull off grand schemes but still crave a spotless reputation, you'll end up losing both in the end."

Oscar quickly shushed her. "Your Grace, please! You mustn't say such things. These are treasonous words. If someone overhears them, it could be disastrous!"

Ruth waved her hand weakly and

gave a bitter smile. "Do you still think it's a secret? Now that Eleanor has been sent to the Heritage Bureau, many things have come to light. He didn't want me to know, but do you think don't understand my own son? Or the daughter I raised? Why did Eleanor scheme and plot like that? Wasn't it all for her brother and for her ridiculous revenge?"

"I won't meet a peaceful end. I should've passed last year. Instead, I've wasted so much of the palace's fine medicine, not to mention the rare herbs and treasures Yuvan brought back from Valken to keep me alive. Was that really being dutiful? No, it was just a message to the king-to remind him that Yuvan wouldn't dare act rashly because he still has his old mom here in the capital. But do you think such petty schemes fool anyone?"

Oscar knelt on the ground, his face pale. "Your Grace, please stop thinking about these things. It will only cause you more pain. You've already cried yourself blind in one eye over the former grand princess." Tears streamed down Ruth's face. "She's in the Heritage Bureau, living a life worse than a dog's. Thank goodness she has Florence by her side. Think of a way to send her some food, or maybe a few pieces of clothing. Let her live a little more comfortably, won't you?" "It can't be done, Your Grace. It's far too dangerous to risk such a thing."

"What is there to fear?" Ruth said with a hollow laugh. "I've stopped caring whether I live or die. I know I won't be able to see her again. While I felt a bit stronger these past two months, I made her two sets of clothes. If you can send them to her, it would at least let me fulfill this one last duty as a parent."

She looked at Oscar intently. "I heard you have a younger sister who works with Lady Helen. Go and beg her for help. We don't need to meet Eleanor-just ask your sister to deliver the clothes and some pastries for us. Since she's at Hell Monarch Estate, it should be easier to get Prince Rafael's help."

Oscar knew it was almost impossible, but the pleading in Ruth's eyes softened him. He nodded.

"Yes, Your Grace. I'll speak to her soon."

He thought to himself that whether or not Gillian agreed to help, he would return and tell Ruth the clothes and pastries had been delivered.

Chapter 1095

When Yuvan brought his family to the queen dowager's chambers to bid farewell, Salvador was also present.

The uncle and nephew each harbored their own thoughts, though neither voiced them. Victoria was aware of the underlying tension, but chose to act as if nothing was amiss. She chatted with them about ordinary matters, reminiscing about the past. With a deep sigh, Victoria began to speak about the late king's fond memories of Yuvan and his brothers in their younger days.

"During the autumn hunt one year, you brothers accompanied King Sigmund," she said, her voice tinged with nostalgia. "You were so full of youthful energy back then, Yuvan. You insisted on riding a fiery horse that was as tall as you were."

"Who would have guessed the horse would go mad and nearly throw you off? King Sigmund rushed to your side, whipping his riding crop around you to keep you steady, but you both ended up falling."

Her gaze distant, she continued, "Luckily, he shielded you with his own body. You didn't suffer serious injuries, but his back was cut open by the rocks, leaving several deep wounds that bled profusely."

She paused, her expression softening. "He always said that among all his brothers, he cherished you the most. You were clever, considerate, and dutiful. Whenever he had something good, he always made sure to set aside a share for you. When it came time to divide the lands, he gave you Valken, hoping you could live a peaceful, prosperous life as a man of leisure."

Victoria smiled faintly as she spoke, though deep down, she knew these words wouldn't change anything. Still, Sigmund's intentions deserved to be voiced. Whether Yuvan chose to acknowledge his brother's affection or not was entirely up to him.

For his part, Yuvan adopted a look of deep reflection. He even shed tears at the emotional moments.

However, Salvador remained detached, almost like an outsider. He suddenly turned his attention to Randall and asked, "I've heard you're well-read and knowledgeable. Have you ever considered entering court as an official?"

Randall froze, clearly caught off guard by the king's question.

Before he could respond, Yuvan quickly interjected, "Randall, thank His Majesty for his kindness!"

Randall immediately knelt and said, "Your Majesty, I humbly thank you for your gracious offer. If there is any way I can serve you, I would gladly oblige. But as for becoming an official, I must confess that I lack both talent and skill. I fear I am unworthy of such a responsibility."

"Skills can be learned," Salvador said

firmly. "If you think you lack ability, then you should stay in the capital and learn. In the meantime, you can also fulfill your duty by caring for your grandmother. And since you're still unmarried, I'll have someone Keep an eye out for a suitable match for you."

With that, Salvador settled the matter, leaving Randall no choice.

Randall was Yuvan's eldest son, born to a concubine but raised by Avis in his early years. His biological mom had been a maidservant. Meanwhile, Fiona had two sons of Lucian and Raymond, the latter of whom had not

her

accompanied them to the nital

this time.

On the surface, Lucian seemed brash, reckless, and utterly useless. As for Raymond, he was greedy and obsessed with women-hardly a man to be relied upon. That left Randall. Among Yuvan's sons, he was the only one with decent potential. Of course, Salvador wasn't one to judge a person based solely on appearances.

Randall cast a glance at his father, hiding the bitterness in his eyes. Then, he knelt and said, "Thank you, Your Majesty."

He understood perfectly well that

staying in the capital was not a matter of learning or marriage-it was to serve as a hostage. Yuvan had never explicitly explained these things to him, but after all this time, Randall had pieced together most of the truth. And because he

understood, he had never been in a

rush to marry.

If Yuvan succeeded in his plans, the best Randall could hope for was to become a prince. Maybe he would even be granted the title of a county duke and be given a fief. But if Yuvan failed, Randall's life would be forfeit. Why involve an innocent woman in such an uncertain fate?

By Randall's assessment, the odds were heavily stacked against his father. With the kingdom stable and its military strong, Yuvan's chances of success were slim. Yet, blinded by years of scheming and ambition, he seemed convinced victory was within his grasp. Victoria had said everything she needed to say, and Salvador had no more to add. Anything else would only be empty pleasantries, and there was no point in that now.

Salvador didn't know the exact size of Yuvan's private army, how much grain he had stockpiled, or what weapons and armor he possessed. But he wouldn't act hastily.

Without concrete evidence, there was no justification to execute Yuvan. A baseless accusation of treason would tarnish the royal family's reputation, while holding Yuvan in the capital indefinitely could backfire, giving his followers time to act.

Chapter 1096

Before leaving the capital, Molly made another trip to Hell Monarch Estate to see Violet and ask her for the letter she wanted to write to her father.

Having been warned by Carissa, Violet didn't entertain Molly's request. She didn't give her the letter and quickly dismissed her instead.

Molly tried again, but only embarrassed herself. But this time, she didn't seem angry. Instead, her eyes brimmed with tears.

"Violet, I know you look down on me, but I truly see you as my little sister. While we were in the capital, we bought so many things that we can't take back with us. If Skye Embroidery can use them, I'll send everything there." Violet crossed her arms, her tone skeptical as she asked, "Are you really this generous?"

Molly bristled at the accusation. "I'm a woman too. Naturally, I want to help other women. Besides, it's all things we don't need anymore-grain, clothes, fabrics, embroidery supplies, and even flowers. It's impractical to bring them back to Valken. If you don't believe me, you can oversee it yourself as I have the items delivered."

If Molly hadn't been annoyed, Violet would have suspected ulterior motives. But seeing her irritation now, Violet figured her cousin wasn't entirely insincere more likely, she just wanted to win favor.

Still, the items would be useful. The flowers from Edgeview Estate, in particular, were stunning and diverse. They would be perfect for Leona to tend to. They would surely brighten the spirits of Camila and Soraya too.

"I'll wait until Carissa gets back and go with her," Violet said cautiously.

Either way, Carissa usually stopped by the workshop every other evening.

Molly frowned. "Then, send someone to ask when she'll return. We can't wait that long, we'll be leaving the city in two hours. Or how about this-I'll leave you the key, and you can send someone to collect the items yourself?" "That won't work," Violet replied. "If something goes missing, you'll blame me for stealing. I'm not falling for that."

Violet glanced at the clock. It wasn't even midday yet, but Carissa likely wouldn't return from the Capital Guard headquarters until evening. With the Garrison Unit having just finished an overhaul and starting a new round of assessments, she was quite busy.

Seeing Violet's stubbornness, Molly grew impatient. "Forget it. If you don't want to watch, I'll have someone from the household bring the items over. Stop being so fussy-it's just some stuff. I'm giving them all to you. It's not like I'm asking for anything in return. It's exhausting to deal with you when you're being so difficult."

Violet immediately objected, "That won't do. I can't trust all of you to just walk into the workshop like that. I need to inspect everything first."

Molly scoffed, "Fine! Wait at the gate

of Edgeview Estate, and I'll have my people bring everything out. You can inspect each item yourself, and once you're satisfied, I'll have it sent to the workshop. You can even ride along with the cart if that makes you feel better. Is that safe enough for you?"

Violet considered this. It sounded reasonable. Most of the items weren't a concern, but the flowers needed to be moved carefully. If they were left behind in Edgeview Estate without anyone to tend them, they would surely wither.

"Alright, that works. I'll ride my horse there."

Violet still had her guard up. She wasn't about to ride in their carriage.

As she prepared to leave, she ran into Travis. He didn't ask too many questions since Violet often went out, but after a moment of thought, she decided to tell him.

"I'm heading to Edgeview Estate. They've got some fabric, clothes, and grain they're donating to the workshop."

"Cari specifically said you're not to go to Edgeview Estate," Travis said, immediately on alert.

"I'm not going inside," Violet reassured him. "I'll stay at the gate, inspect the items, and then accompany the cart to the workshop. I don't trust them to deliver everything to the workshop themselves." "Why not wait until later?" Travis suggested. "I have an errand to run, but I'll be back in two hours. I can go with you then. It'll be safer that way."

"No need. I'm not going inside," Violet said as she led her horse away.

Making such a big deal out of something so small only made it look like she was afraid.

Travis frowned but relented. "Be careful. Don't go into the estate, and don't eat or drink anything they offer you. That Wayne fellow is very suspicious."

"I got it," Violet said as she mounted her horse. She left through the side gate and joined Molly's carriage, heading for Edgeview Estate.

When they arrived, Violet stayed outside, just as planned. Molly and Fiona directed the servants to dig up the flowers, carefully wrapping the roots in damp cloth before arranging them neatly. There were numerous fabrics, many of them luxurious and expensive. Violet counted over fifty bolts in a variety of colors.

There was also grain, smoked meat,

and staples like oil, salt, vinegar, and coffee. Violet took out a silver needle to check everything carefully. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but she made a mental note that once the items

arrived at the workshop, they would need to be inspected again by either Ivy or Rowan, just to be sure.

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It took five carts to fit all the items. The flowers and plants were transported on a wagon. Almost everyone from Edgeview Estate had been mobilized to help.

As they were leaving, Yuvan himself came out. He greeted Violet with his usual charm, exuding masculine charm and looking compassionate.

"I hope these items will be of use to your workshop. There are also many different types of silk threads in the manor, perfect for making high-quality embroidery. If you'd like, you're welcome to come inside and take a look, Ms. Spencer." Violet's guard immediately went up. "No need for that. Just have them all brought out, and we'll take it from there."

Yuvan didn't push the matter. Instead, he turned and gave orders to his servants.

"Bring out all the silk threads and load them onto the carts. If there aren't enough carts, send someone to hire more."

The servants quickly headed back inside to retrieve the silk threads.

Meanwhile, Yuvan's gaze lingered on Violet. She wore a soft lavender dress with a simple green ribbon at the waist, the fabric flowing gracefully around her. The outfit was both fresh and charming, giving her a delicate, youthful appearance.

His expression softened as he said, "Vivi, you must be thirsty. Shall I have someone bring you coffee and some pastries?"

The way he addressed her made Violet's stomach churn. She barely managed to suppress the urge to gag.

"No, thank you. I'm neither thirsty nor hungry," she replied politely, forcing herself to remain composed. "But I appreciate your kindness, Your Highness."

Yuvan's gaze lingered on her for a moment longer, then he said, "Very well, I won't insist. Carry on with your work. I have some matters to tend to inside, so I'll take my leave."

Violet dipped her head slightly. "Please don't trouble yourself, Your Highness. There's no need for you to concern yourself with these small tasks."

Normally, Violet wasn't so mild-mannered, but ever since becoming the head of the workshop, she had made a conscious effort to be more mindful of her words and actions. She couldn't afford to bring any negative attention to the workshop-it had already weathered far too much criticism.

As for the various donations, Violet,

Carissa, and Hannah had discussed the matter thoroughly. They decided to accept anything that could be put to use. The workshop hadn't turned a profit yet, and with so many mouths to feed, they needed all the help they could get. Accepting donations also fostered goodwill and brought more attention to their cause.

Of course, the responsibility of receiving donations fell solely on them. They wouldn't let Camila or Soroya be subjected to such tasks.

The silk threads were brought out in bundles quite a lot of them.

Violet noticed this and asked Molly, "Why did you buy so much silk thread?"

"In the capital, I had nothing to do and no friends to pass the time with," Molly replied. "So, I thought I might try my hand at some

embroidery. Since we didn't knowet

when Lady Ruth would recover bought more than I needed. But neither Sabrina nor Stephanie was interested, and Lady Fiona and I didn't feel like doing it after that. So, now it's all left over. It was

expensive and I paid for it myself, so I can't just throw it away."

As she spoke, a look of regret crossed her face.

Seeing this, Violet said, "If you don't want to donate them, I can buy them from you at a lower price, including the fabrics and silks."

Molly waved her hand. "No need.

Anyway, we're using the Spencer family's money for everything, and used my dowry funds. Talking about money feels awkward, so just take everything. The workshop will need it all. As long as it's useful, there's no waste."

Violet was a little surprised by Molly's sudden change of attitude. But still, she thanked Molly sincerely. Molly looked at her earnestly, then suddenly stepped forward and took Violet's hand.

"Violet, I'm not as bad as you think. I didn't marry Prince Yuvan to climb the social ladder. The Spencer family is prosperous, and I'm not struggling for food or clothing. If I felt it was too much of a compromise, I wouldn't have agreed.

"I truly like him—that's why I married him. As for the things about him and Lady Avis you mentioned in your letter, I asked him about it. He treated her well, but Lady Avis was the one who insisted on going to Verdant Monastery to recover." Violet gave a quiet, skeptical laugh, not believing a word of it. However, there was no need to argue with Molly—it seemed like she was only trying to convince herself.

"Well, I wish you happiness," Violet said, trying to escape the scent of the perfume that Molly wore. Once everything was nearly packed, she mounted her horse. "I'll go with them. You don't need to come. Safe travels."

The other carts and wagons had already gone ahead, and only the two carts with the silk threads and embroidery frames were left behind. Violet had to catch up quickly.

Chapter 1098

Carissa knew that Yuvan and his family were leaving the city today, so she gave orders to the Garrison Unit to keep an eye on them. After they left the city, they were to report back.

Max personally led a team to keep watch. As they saw several of Yuvan's carriages leaving Edgeview Estate in a grand procession, they didn't stop them. Because of Yuvan's status, he didn't need to be checked when leaving the city. However, Yuvan still lifted the curtain of his carriage and nodded politely. The officer at the city gate raised his hands in a salute as he saw Yuvan off. There was no order to check, so no one dared to. With Yuvan's emblem, they didn't even need to show their face to be allowed to pass.

Once they were gone, Max and his team returned to the Capital Guard headquarters to report to Carissa.

When Carissa heard that they had left, she finally felt at ease.

Recently, the Garrison Unit had been conducting fitness tests. Even after clearing out some people, the Garrison Unit couldn't be called elite. It was disappointing, especially considering the many who had come from the Mystic Army. Years of neglect had corrupted many, and some thought that just showing up and collecting their pay each month was enough. Why work harder?

Of course, there were still a few disciplined ones and those who hadn't forgotten their Mystic Army roots, but they were in the minority. Most couldn't resist temptation. It was like a drop of ink falling into a bowl of clear water-it darkened the whole bowl. But a drop of water in a bowl of ink? It changed nothing.

Carissa was working hard to reorganize the unit because she knew that her time as commander might not last long.

The laziness of many was a serious problem, so she often had to supervise them herself. Max's authority hadn't taken root, which frustrated her. During today's training, she took part herself—running, jumping, climbing, and fighting. She even encouraged anyone to challenge her.

Violet had once said that the Garrison Unit was full of lazy soldiers who hadn't taken their training seriously. She couldn't do anything about them, so Carissa had to take charge.

Under the blazing sun at the training ground, Carissa fought one opponent after another with her bare hands. When a few soldiers fainted from the heat, she moved the training to the evening.

After several days of training, Carissa's fair skin had changed. What had started as redness and peeling was now a healthy, golden tan. By midday, her clothes were soaked with sweat, and even two towels would be drenched enough to wring out water.

"Commander Sinclair, you should drink some herbal soup," Max said as the training paused. He motioned for Carissa to come inside and rest. "The cook just finished it, and it's cooled down. Now's the perfect time to drink it." Carissa wiped the sweat from her brow. A chilled bowl of herbal

soup would be wonderful right now. Though chilled wasn't an option, a cool bowl would do just fine.

She followed Max inside and said,

"We still need to keep training. The soldiers' stamina is too weak. They can't handle the heat or the hard- work. They're not even as strong as farm women. If a real battle broke out how long could they hold out?"

Max laughed. "They're just garrison soldiers. How could they be expected to fight? If it came to that, the Capital Army would step in."

Carissa shook her head. "You can't

think like that. When we fought at

the Southern Frontier, wasn't the

Mystic Army called up? Didn't you feel

ashamed when you had choose from the Garrison Unit? How many of your Garrison Unit soldiers did you pick?"

Max looked embarrassed. It was an old story he didn't want to talk about. Now that they had gotten rid of some of those soldiers, they could improve with enough practice.

"If we're training tonight, I'll ask the cook to prepare dinner," Max offered.

"I already gave the order," Carissa replied. "With so many people to feed, how could we not plan ahead? I had a few people help out in the kitchen. It's easier to make large pots of food, and we have plenty of meat and vegetables." She fanned herself. The air she moved with the fan was hot, and her body felt sticky and uncomfortable.

Max smiled. "You've really thought of everything, Commander Sinclair."

Perhaps it was the heat or the restlessness in her mind, but Carissa couldn't shake the feeling of unease. She wasn't sure what was bothering her, but after thinking it over, she realized it was probably because of Yuvan's departure today. She thought for a moment before sending someone to Hell Monarch Estate to ask if Violet had returned yet.

Chapter 1099

About an hour later, the person Carissa sent to inquire returned.

Carissa's heart skipped a beat.

"Ms. Spencer is not at Hell Monarch Estate. I asked the people at the estate, and they said she went to Skye Embroidery. I went there, but she wasn't there either. They did say that some supplies had arrived from Edgeview Estate today, but Ms. Spencer didn't personally inspect them. They're all piled outside, and they won't take them until they're checked."

Supplies from Edgeview Estate were sent to Skye Embroidery? What about Claire and the others? Had they gone with Violet?

She quickly stood up and ran out, calling for Mabel. She waited a while, but Mabel didn't come out. That was strange-Mabel had been with her today. Where had she gone?

Something was off-very off.

"Commander Sinclair, what's wrong?" Max came running after her. "Are you looking for Mabel? I saw her when I came back. She seemed to have left in a hurry."

"Where did you see her?" Carissa asked quickly.

"Right outside the Capital Guard headquarters, as I was coming back through the city gate."

"Wasn't that when Prince Yuvan was leaving the city?" Carissa's heart sank. She quickly rushed to the stables, calling over her shoulder to Max, "Cancel tonight's training. Everyone is to come with me to find Violet. Call Deputy Commander Brown and his team to follow us!"

She wasn't sure if something had happened to Violet, but her unease was growing stronger by the second.

Max followed closely. "Commander Sinclair, even though Sage Violet isn't at the estate or the workshop, she might have gone somewhere else. Don't worry too much."

"That's why we're going to find her!"

Carissa led Lightning from the stable and mounted her horse, galloping away. She went first to Glimmering Tower. Skywing Spire had a branch there, and she hoped to find out if Claire was there.

The shopkeeper of Glimmering Tower said they hadn't seen Claire. None of the other scouts were there either, and they didn't say anything before they had left.

Max and his men caught up with her.

Carissa said urgently, "Go to the workshop and ask if Violet went there today. Send someone to Hell Monarch Estate as well to ask if anyone there knows where she went, other than Edgeview Estate."
"Yes, Commander Sinclair!"

Max rarely saw Carissa this anxious. Worried for his mentor, he quickly turned his horse and rode off to carry out the orders.

Max went to the workshop and confirmed that Violet hadn't come. Outside the workshop, several carts were piled with goods. He took a look and saw that they were bags of rice and cloth. He asked Alana, and she told him that the goods were delivered from Edgeview Estate, but she hadn't seen Violet.

Carissa rode out of the city. When she reached a rest post, she saw Mabel riding toward her from the front.

She quickly stopped her. "Mabel, have you seen Violet?"

"I'm not sure, Your Grace." Mabel's

face had gone pale. She had been on her way back to the capital to find Carissa, but when she saw Carissa Kere, she quickly explained, "Over two hours ago, Lillian found me and told me to follow

her out of the city to track Prince Yuvan's carriage. Claire was supposed to be with Ms. Spencer today, but when we reached the alley, she suddenly disappeared."

Carissa didn't care that her face was drenched in sweat; she asked quickly, "Why the alley? Wasn't she supposed to deliver the goods to the workshop?"

"Yes, Claire said Ms. Spencer was standing at the entrance of Edgeview Estate, watching the staff unload the goods. She was supposed to escort them, but when she was following behind the cart with the silk thread, she just vanished." "How could she vanish? Didn't she ride a horse?"

Carissa felt a chill run through her body. Remembering Yuvan's strange, knowing gaze made her skin crawl. Fear began to rise in her chest.

"Did she drink any water at Edgeview Estate? Eat anything? What about Claire?"

Mabel answered each question in turn, explaining, "Claire said Ms. Spencer only stood at the gate and never drank or ate anything at Edgeview Estate. She didn't step inside the estate, and the goods were only lightly checked. MS. Spencer planned to inspect them properly when they got to the workshop.

"Claire has been following Prince Yuvan's carriage, and the scouts from Glimmering Tower have been spread out looking for her. She asked me to come back and tell you what happened. She suspects Ms. Spencer was taken, but it's just a suspicion. There's no proof."

Chapter 1100

Carissa quickly sorted through the information in her mind. Her thoughts were in chaos, but she forced herself to stay calm and asked, "Is it just Claire chasing after her?"

"Iris is with her. But if Prince Yuvan really took Ms. Spencer, he would have many skilled people with him. They wouldn't be able to match him. That's why I came back to get help, but we still don't know for sure if Ms. Spencer was taken," Mabel replied. Carissa knew there was no time to waste. Lightning should be able to catch up. If Violet was still in the capital, she would probably be safe the danger would be if Yuvan had taken her.

She turned to Lillian. "Go back and tell Deputy Commander Brown to search the city. Then, go to Hell Monarch Estate and find Mr. Mullen. Have him gather people and follow me. I'll leave markers along the way."

Claire had always been with Violet, but now Violet had disappeared right before her eyes. This was no ordinary situation, and Carissa couldn't afford to take it lightly. She had to catch up with Yuvan.

With that, Carissa snapped her whip and galloped off.

Lillian rode back to the capital. The Capital Guard and Garrison Unit were already searching. Even Alistair had sent some people from the Royal Guard. Kevin had even called on some people from the Nightsteel Guard to help. Violet was their mentor, and with her missing, they were all worried.

The Capital Guard didn't have the authority to seal the city gates, so Michael went straight to the Supreme Court to find Rafael, who was the last to hear about the situation. When he learned that Carissa was chasing Yuvan alone, he frowned. "She went alone?"

"Yes, Your Highness," Michael replied. "The urgent matter now is to seal the gates, to prevent Sage Violet from being taken by Prince Yuvan or hidden somewhere. He might try to slip out of the city during the confusion while we're searching." Rafael frowned with concern. It was dangerous for Carissa to go alone.

Rafael first ordered the gates to be locked under the pretense of hunting down criminals. People were still allowed to enter, but those leaving the city had to be thoroughly checked, whether they were nobles, merchants, or commoners. He also stationed guards on the mountain paths leading out of the city.

Then, he ordered Matthew to lead Supreme Court officials with official documents to search the city. He was worked that Violet hadn't been taken out of the city but had been taken by the suicide soldiers, and they were waiting for the right moment to sneak her out.

His biggest concern was that while Carissa was chasing Yuvan, the suicide soldiers might already have escaped with Violet through the mountain paths. Some routes were difficult for ordinary people, but not

for suicide soldiers.

The capital wasn't naturally well-defended. Though soldiers were guarding the main exits, Rafael knew the other routes were poorly watched.

He gave out several orders, including

one for the Supreme Court to work

with the Garrison Unit and Capital Guard to search the city and mountain passes. Then, he sent people to inform Travis and Kyle. They were to ride out of the city and catch up with Carissa.

On the main road, several horses kicked up dust as they rode fast. As they rode, Rafael quickly explained the situation to Kyle and Travis. Travis already knew, but Kyle was still in the dark. Now, it wasn't just about worrying about Violet. They also had to worry about Carissa. Yuvan was no longer in the capital, where he was a meek cat. But outside, he could turn into a beast.

Carissa rode furiously, and Lightning seemed to understand her urgency. Its hooves barely touched the ground, running like it was flying. The sky darkened, and she knew the danger was closing in. But her bigger fear was arriving too late-Violet would be in danger. Violet, the one who, no matter what happened, would rush to Carissa's side without a second thought at the sound of her voice. Carissa couldn't let anything happen to Violet. She would risk her life to make sure Violet stayed safe.