

War Song 1111

Chapter 1111

Yuvan's reputation was ruined, and now, he was being sent back to the capital for treatment.

The procession that left the city was grand, but it returned in defeat, escorted by the soldiers of the garrison outpost.

Wayne claimed it was because he had fallen for a woman, but Thomas was as cautious as ever. He insisted that no conclusions could be drawn until a thorough investigation was done. The matter must be looked into carefully.

The suicide soldiers had surrendered without a fight. Two had been caught before during a mission, and they were tough-refusing to say a single word. But now, they couldn't reveal themselves to be suicide soldiers. If they did, their presence near the garrison outpost would give Thomas grounds to accuse them of plotting an attack on a military outpost.

So, they claimed to be Yuvan's household soldiers from Horizon Estate, and were there simply to escort him to the capital and then back to Valken. The special status of these soldiers meant they couldn't enter the city itself, which was why they had stayed at an estate at the western mountain pass.

It made sense, in theory. But their all-black attire gave Rafael and Thomas enough room to question them further.

As they were escorted back to the capital, Carissa and Violet rode together.

Violet shuddered at what had happened. "Cari, I'm so glad you came just in time to save me."

"You should thank my guild senior. It was actually Isaac who saved you first," Carissa replied.

Violet tilted her head. "Wasn't it you who rushed in to save me?"

Carissa shook her head. "It was Isaac."

Violet glanced over her shoulder, craning her neck to catch sight of the tail of the procession. She spotted a donkey trotting slowly in the distance. The distance made it look strange, as the donkey looked like a dog carrying a monkey on its back.

Violet turned her gaze away, but the image lingered. Now that she thought about it, it had indeed been Isaac who had carried her away. He also used some foul-smelling water to get rid of the poison inside her.

"Isaac saved me? But we're not exactly on good terms..."

"Isaac can be surprisingly generous," Carissa remarked, but her eyes were searching the crowd.

She hadn't seen Rafael since they set out. Where was he?

"I'm sorry, Cari." Violet's voice broke as she spoke, feeling a wave of regret wash over her. "I shouldn't have gotten so close to Edgeview Estate. It caused so much trouble for you all to come to rescue me."

"Fool!" Carissa turned back to Violet,

offering a soft smile. "It was an accident. You were careful, didn't enter Edgeview Estate, and didn't eat or drink anything from them. You can only blame their cunning how far they were willing to go. And, of course, you didn't expect your cousin to be capable of such deceit. You let your guard down for a moment."

Violet's guilt lingered, her lips pressed into a thin line. "I shouldn't have accepted anything from them. It wasn't that I couldn't afford it, but I worried that refusing would hurt the workshop's reputation."

"We've been wanting to teach him a

lesson for a while, and now we've finally done it. And this time, he's lost dearly, Carissa comforted Violet. "Even if the charge of assaulting a common woman doesn't stick, he can never wash away the stain of it. For someone who values his name so much, losing it like this is the biggest

punishment he could get."

Violet's lips quivered, her expression betraying her sadness. "I never thought... Even after being so careful, I still fell for it. Just thinking about his foul-smelling mouth makes me want to vomit... I can't even think about it." "Don't think about it," Carissa urged quickly, cutting off Violet's thoughts.

Meanwhile, Rafael and Kyle remained at the camp, inside the tent. They had discovered what seemed like a small, scorched hole.

"A hidden weapon? No, that's not it!" Rafael immediately thought of the dart wristlet Carissa's seventh uncle had given her.

Still, no dart could make a hole like this. He pinched the edges of the hole and then brought his fingers to his nose.

"Gunpowder... It smells like gunpowder, almost like a matchlock." He looked toward Kyle. "Our army doesn't use matchlocks, so could it have been someone from Yuvan's side?"

The matchlock had a distinct

drawback-it could only fire one shot at a time, and its ignition was

troublesome. On the battlefield, it et

el?

was less effective than other weapons, and its short range made

it impractical in many situations.

When Kyle heard Rafael mention a matchlock, he chuckled. "It's probably the improved matchlock that Isaac brought. Sage Adrian's been working on it for some time." "Improved matchlock?" Rafael's eyes lit up. "What improvements?"

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At his core, Rafael was a military man. He had always been fascinated by weapons. His interest in them ran deep, and he often found himself eager to spend hours studying and improving them.

Kyle didn't answer Rafael's question and gave him a small smile instead. "Let's head back. You and Carissa had a bit of a quarrel, and she probably doesn't know yet."

Rafael felt a tightness in his chest. "It wasn't a quarrel. Isn't everything fine?"

"Sure. Come on, let's go," Kyle urged, nudging his horse forward.

Rafael led his horse for a few paces before mounting and catching up with him. However, his heart still felt heavy.

Why, when things happened, was Carissa's first thought never of him?

He was always the last to know. She hadn't even bothered to send word. Instead, she had ridden out of the city alone without telling him.

Though she had sent word to Travis, she hadn't sent a messenger to the Supreme Court, leaving it to the Capital Guard to seek him out only because they needed to seal the city gates. If the gates hadn't needed to be closed, would she have simply let him find out when Violet returned and casually told him what had transpired?

Before this, Rafael had already felt that Carissa couldn't fully trust him. Even though there were many moments where they appeared close, even affectionate, something always seemed missing.

What was missing, though?

Trust? Carissa certainly trusted him to some extent.

Affection? He was sure she liked him, even if she never said it aloud.

Understanding? He believed they shared a silent understanding, one that worked both in their private lives and when it came to their duties. It was a bond that felt almost as strong as the one he shared with Jacob.

"Do you think she's not the same Carissa you once knew?" Kyle asked, his voice carried by the wind.

Rafael thought about it for a moment before answering, "After all that's happened, it's only natural that she's changed. As long as she's still herself, that's what matters to me. But... I can't help feeling like she's wearing a mask when she's with me."

"I see. You think she's wearing a mask," Kyle said thoughtfully. "If so, do you think you're wearing one too?"

Rafael paused, taken aback. "Me? How could I be wearing a mask? I've been sincere with her-I truly mean it."

"No one doubts your sincerity," Kyle replied, his voice steady. "But because of what she's been through, you tread lightly around her. You're a young couple, but you don't have little spats or arguments, and there are no real-life struggles. You don't dare to be angry, feel slighted, or ask for more than she's willing to give. When you get used to this way of being together, it feels like the most comfortable arrangement. But is it really comfortable? Are you truly content with it? Think about it."

"She's not that fragile," Rafael muttered, almost to himself.

Kyle didn't respond at once. He cracked his whip and urged his horse forward, leaving Rafael alone with his thoughts.

The words "treading lightly" hit him harder than he expected.

It was true.

He and Carissa had always been

careful with each other. He measured every word before speaking and thought through every action before taking it. He feared saying the wrong thing or making a wrong move that would bring up painful memories for her, make her sad, or worse, cause her to pull away.

When he said Carissa liked him, it was a statement that lacked confidence. He felt guilty because he didn't truly feel it. Sometimes, people were good at deceiving themselves, and he had deceived himself too. This time, her safety was at stake, so he dared to show his frustrations toward her. But if it hadn't been about her safety, he probably wouldn't have had the heart to be angry.

When they returned to the capital,

the palace gates were already locked for the night. Yuvan and his group were temporarily sent back to Edgeview Estate for medical care. Although Thomas had taken charge of the matter, Rafael couldn't shake his unease. After all, there were still some suicide soldiers unaccounted for, hiding in the shadows.

And there was something else to investigate what had happened at the western mountain pass? Wayne's plan had been executed with some care, but Rafael knew they had to send someone to uncover more details. Meanwhile, Carissa and Violet had returned to Hell Monarch Estate. Having heard about the ordeal, Helen had been anxious the entire night. Now that Carissa and Violet had safely returned, her heart could finally settle.

Still, she turned to Violet and said, "Some say I'm foolish, but I think you're even more so. What was the point of chasing after those trinkets from Edgeview Estate?"

Violet lowered her head, feeling a pang of shame.

Helen didn't press the matter further. She simply pressed the skin around her eyes lightly, smoothing out the wrinkles with a practiced hand.

"Since you're all back safely, I'll go to sleep now."

Staying up late was never part of Helen's routine. She couldn't afford to compromise her beauty.

Chapter 1113

After a few baths, Violet had finally washed away the dirt and grime. When she emerged, she couldn't help but indulge in a little more time with Carissa, allowing herself to be pampered.

Lulu arrived with a tray of snacks. As soon as Violet saw the food, she abandoned Carissa to rush toward the table.

"Lulu, has Isaac been settled in?" Carissa asked.

"Mr. Luke handled it personally," Lulu replied. "He's in Fortune Hall. I just heard from Mr. Luke that Mr. Isaac had two large bowls of ravioli."

Carissa smiled. "He has quite the appetite. Make sure he's settled in early. Vivi and I will thank him properly tomorrow."

"Understood." Lulu gave a small bow before retreating.

The two women sat down to eat. Joy and Pearl were nearby, ensuring Violet had plenty of herbal soup.

"Lily says this herbal soup will help you sleep. She's worried you might have trouble sleeping tonight."

Violet was eating peacefully when she suddenly heard Joy's words, and tears started falling from her eyes.

Seeing her reaction, Carissa opened her mouth to comfort Violet.

However, Violet quickly wiped her tears away and continued eating, though her sniffles didn't stop. Like a whirlwind, she finished her meal in silence. Then, she placed her cutlery down before looking up at Carissa with red-rimmed eyes.

"Hell Monarch Estate feels just like home. Everyone here treats me so well. Can I stay here forever, Cari?"

Carissa smiled softly. "I'd love nothing more than that."

Violet's eyes welled up again. "I've never suffered such a blow in my life. No wonder Soraya thought about ending hers. Cari, if you've never experienced it, you can't truly understand how terrifying it is. It's worse than murder. I just wish there would never be such a thing again."

"It won't happen again. Don't worry," Carissa reassured her gently.

Violet looked at her with intense

sincerity. "It's not just for me. I hope no woman ever has to go through such a thing again. Murder may be a quick end, but when a woman is violated like that—there's no way for her to continue living in this world. It's like a slow death. That's why it's worse than murder."

Carissa's eyes were filled with compassion. "Yes... I hope there will never be another." "How does the law handle something like this?" Violet asked.

Carissa fell silent for a moment before saying softly, "The harshest punishment is beheading. But... very few people actually go to court. Trials take forever, and often, the abuse is executed without much legal process. As for the woman who's been wronged... She usually doesn't survive long enough to see justice."

Violet's eyes reddened further, her confusion apparent. "Then, what should we do? Even though we don't want something like this to happen, it's inevitable. For all we know, while we're talking right now, it might be happening somewhere else. And the women who are hurt don't dare report it—what will happen to them?"

Carissa didn't have an answer. Sometimes, the actions of one person, or even a few, couldn't change the course of the world.

"Maybe the real question is, what can we do?" Carissa said quietly.

"What can we do? Just like with me..." Violet mumbled. "Even though he didn't succeed, I still have to cover it up somehow. The Spencer family is a prominent name, and if something happened to me, my elders would probably be ashamed of me." Carissa reached out and took Violet's hand, her gaze firm. "We're not helpless. There are things we can do. Don't you think so, Ms. Heroine?"

The nickname made Violet look up sharply. Their eyes met, and for a moment, Violet hesitated.

"You're an official. Don't say things like that."

"It's just a casual conversation, nothing serious," Carissa said with a smile.

"It better be! As an official, you have to follow the law. We both know that." Violet withdrew her hand, crossing her arms, her expression darkening slightly.

It was impossible to avoid paying some price. It couldn't be that easy, and it couldn't happen!

Chapter 1114

Carissa remained silent, her eyes filled with a trace of regret.

Every martial artist, at some point, likely harbored a dream—a dream of roaming the world with a sword, stepping in to right the wrongs they encountered, and having people call them "heroes" wherever they went.

Carissa had often dreamed of such things as a young girl, especially when she had first started her martial arts training and seen a glimpse of her own potential. In those days, she had been proud and certain that she was destined for greatness.

In her dreams, she was a peerless warrior, slaying countless evildoers. Even when they begged for mercy beneath her blade, she would still say, "This is for the sake of justice in the world."

As she grew older, she realized that it wasn't that simple. Being a hero, dispensing justice on one's terms, was actually against the law. A heroine had no authority to enforce the law. She wasn't a member of the official courts or government.

Also, to kill someone, there must be solid evidence. Even if one had personally witnessed a criminal committing a crime, one still needed to provide proof to the authorities. After the authorities reviewed the case, if the sentence was death by beheading, it still had to be confirmed by the Supreme Court before execution.

It was a tedious process, with investigations and checks designed to prevent wrongful convictions. However, it also allowed those with power and influence to manipulate the system to their advantage.

Carissa remembered how Winona had once talked to her about it. Even if the crime was proven beyond a doubt, if the criminal's family had enough money, they could suppress evidence or discredit witness testimony. Whether the sentence was reduced or completely overturned depended entirely on the amount of money offered.

The realization had shattered Carissa's ideals. How could the world be this way?

She hadn't believed it at first, and argued with Winona for a long time. The law, Carissa insisted, existed to punish the wicked. How could it be twisted by money?

Officials were paid by the government, and the government's money came from the people's taxes. They were public servants, supported by the people, and should act on behalf of the people.

She had even gone to ask Adrian.

He had gently patted her head and said, "Winona is right. But in truth, the current system is as good as it gets."

Carissa had been confused. "This is as good as it gets? That's a sad thing to hear."

Adrian had sighed and said, "There's no such thing as an absolutely good world, because the world is made up of human hearts. There is good, there is evil, there is selfishness, and there is hypocrisy. Everyone blames the state of the world, but few consider how they themselves contribute to it. The world has become this way because everyone has a part in it."

She then asked Adrian, "If this is the best world we can have, then what does a bad world look like?"

Adrian had thought for a moment before answering, "A bad world is one filled with endless war, with internal strife and external threats. There will be natural disasters and man-made calamities, where people are scattered and displaced. The dead will pile up in the streets, and even the living are forced to eat the flesh of the dead."

Carissa had been shocked. "Is that what war causes? But my dad still goes to war..."

Adrian had smiled gently. "Your dad goes to war not for rebellion, not for land, and not for conquest. He fights to protect his homeland and to reclaim what is rightfully the kingdom's. Sometimes, war is fought to prevent further war." Carissa hadn't understood then, but now, she did.

At Edgeview Estate, Yuvan's injuries were severe.

His head and face were swollen, though the damage was only superficial. However, his ribs were broken and his leg was fractured. Though the wound on his abdomen was shallow and merely bled a little, it left him particularly weak. Ultimately, the injuries were treatable.

Yet, after several physicians had examined him, including the one who had accompanied him on the trip, they agreed that his condition was grave. They all believed that he would never be the same again.

The physician Rafael brought in

explained that, based on the details of the incident, the injury occurred because Xuvan had been attempting to assault the woman. At that time, his nether region was already engorged. When the unknown hero intervened to save her and kicked Yavan, the injury was exacerbated, making it more likely to cause serious damage or further

complications.

The physicians were all regretful, saying that this particular injury was beyond repair. However, they remained oddly optimistic. One of them told Fiona and Wayne that the other basic function of that part-urination-should not be greatly affected.

Even then, the physicians couldn't guarantee anything. They said there was a possibility that it wouldn't be affected. If it was, the result might be difficulty or discomfort while urinating. However, this could be managed by adjusting positions-like squatting to urinate, which might help.

Chapter 1115

Rafael listened quietly, then sighed deeply.

"At least you're alive, Uncle Yuvan. The unknown hero showed restraint. As for the rest... Well, nothing is more important than life. I'll report this matter to the king myself. If the woman doesn't press charges, then this will likely be forgotten.

"As for the hero who harmed you, there's no need for me to pursue him unless you insist. Should that be the case, the Royal Citadel and the Capital Guard will cooperate fully. However, these men of the martial arts world are elusive. After all, none of you could even identify him. My suggestion? Let it be. Peace is the best outcome."

Yuvan's body trembled with a mixture of pain and rage. His eyes no longer hid the cruel, vicious look as he hissed through clenched teeth, "Leave!"

"Then, I won't disturb you any longer, Uncle Yuvan," Rafael said, putting on a concerned expression. "You should focus on resting. The capital is prosperous, so staying another month or two shouldn't be a problem. But you just sent everything to Skye Embroidery earlier today, so the estate is empty. Do you need to have everything returned?"

Yuvan closed his eyes, veins bulging as he used every ounce of strength to suppress his pain. After asking Rafael to leave, he had no intention of speaking further.

Rafael looked deeply concerned for them. Since he didn't get an answer, he had no choice but to call Wayne to the side hall to ask. When Fiona saw this, she hurried over to stand at the door to listen in.

Rafael took a seat at the head of the room, his tone gentle as he said, "As for who's right or wrong in tonight's events... Let's put that aside. What matters is that justice has been served. In the grove, you said Uncle Yuvan only stationed himself near the tent for the woman's sake, not for any ill intentions. I'll make sure the king hears that, but whether His Majesty believes it is not something I can guarantee."

Wayne pushed down his anger and said, "In the end, it's just another one of Prince Yuvan's affairs. It hardly warrants such a commotion."

"Exactly," Rafael agreed with a nod. "That's exactly my thought. But people talk, and rumors spread. It's not good for Uncle Yuvan's reputation."

"What exactly do you want to say, Your Highness?" Wayne's eyes had returned to calm, and he looked at Rafael. He was careful not to let anger control him, wary of falling into a trap.

"I just want to assure you that my people are very careful with their words," Rafael replied. "If word were to get out, it would be because of a lack of discipline at Edgeview Estate, not due to any lapse in my control."

"You needn't worry about that, Your Highness," Wayne responded coldly. He narrowed his eyes and sneered "Or are you worried it might affect Ms. Spencer? With so many people talking, who knows what kind of rumors might spread?"

Rafael feigned surprise. "What does Ms. Spencer have to do with this? If she's involved, this could become a

much bigger issue! The Spencer family is not only a royal merchant, but they also provide warhorses and weapons for court. If you offend them, what do you think awaits you?"

Wayne's voice remained composed as he replied, "Your Highness, there's no need for further reminders. This matter has nothing to do with the Spencer family, nor does it concern Ms. Spencer. That will be the official stance from Edgeview Estate. As for any rumors floating around about Prince Yuvan, we'll accept them. After all, there was indeed an attempt to forcibly take a common woman. Fortunately, no harm was done."

Rafael gave a satisfied nod. "Yes, you're right. Accepting responsibility is the best way forward."

Once Rafael had left, Fiona hurried into the room, her face full of concern. "Mr. Wayne, what did he mean by that?"

Wayne let out a heavy sigh. "He intends to spread the news about Prince Yuvan forcefully attempting to take a common woman."

Fiona's eyes widened in disbelief. "But he just said his people are careful with their words!"

Wayne scoffed. "He wants to spread the rumors while blaming it on us, claiming it was our people who let it slip. This way, as Prince Yuvan's nephew, he avoids being seen as the one tarnishing his uncle's reputation." Fiona's fists clenched in anger. "How can he be so malicious? Mr. Wayne, isn't there anything we can do?"

Wayne's complexion was ashen. "What can we do? They caught us red-handed."

Fiona's nails dug into her palms, stifling a wave of bitter sadness. "Prince Yuvan was too hasty. If he intended to use the Spencer family, he shouldn't have rushed it. He could've taken Violet away first!" Wayne glanced at her but said nothing. It wasn't just about using the Spencer family-Yuvan clearly had his eyes on Violet as well.

But with how shrewd Fiona was, how could she not already know that?

When the palace gates opened, Rafael and Thomas entered to meet Salvador.

The king was in the midst of his breakfast, and he beckoned them to sit. Everyone, except for Derek, was waiting outside in the hall.

By the time Rafael and Thomas arrived, they had already coordinated their statements. They would tell Salvador everything, except for the fact that they had concealed the appearance of Alistair and Kevin outside the city.

Alistair was less of a concern, as he wasn't accompanied by many men. However, Kevin had just been promoted and was now part of the king's Nightsteel Guard. His reckless actions going out and attacking people without regard might not draw the king's immediate ire, but it would certainly cause discomfort. In time, it could even affect his career.

After hearing their report, Salvador remained silent for a long time and continued to sip at his bowl of millet porridge. Setting his spoon down, he started taking bites of a pastry. Though quiet, his mind was already at work, weighing his thoughts on the matter. Without raising his gaze, he asked calmly, "Are his injuries serious?"

"It's nothing too serious, Your Majesty," Rafael replied. "But he likely won't be able to perform his duties to have any more children in the future."

Salvador smiled faintly and continued eating his pastry. He didn't speak again until he finished the whole thing.

Then, he said, "Let's handle it as though he kidnapped a common woman. That way, the Spencer family's reputation remains intact. And when the common woman was saved, he... got a good beating from the unknown hero. That seems like a fitting punishment. What's left is to issue a reprimand and conduct a formal investigation, and we'll close the matter with that."

As he spoke, he stood and turned, flashing them a brief smile. "You two continue eating. Have more, you've worked hard."

Rafael and Thomas were indeed famished after a long night, and they accepted the invitation without hesitation.

"Thank you, Your Majesty."

Salvador's breakfast was simple, and he ordered more to be brought for them.

He instructed Derek to draft an edict reprimanding Yuvan. Once the edict was issued, it would be impossible to hide. In just a few days, the entire capital would know about Yuvan's attempted assault on a woman, how he was struck down by a passing hero, and that he had failed in his attempt.

What pleased Salvador the most was uncovering some of the hidden suicide soldiers. These suicide soldiers had been stationed in the capital with the sole purpose of carrying out assassinations, which posed a significant threat to him.

Furthermore, these suicide soldiers couldn't take their own lives now. If they did, it would confirm that they were part of the same group as the earlier suicide soldiers, making it clear that all of them had been sent by Yuvan. Salvador was still willing to let Yuvan play ignorant.

Yuvan had big ambitions, but his abilities were mediocre. He had only risen through the support of others. His status made him suitable to be pushed into the spotlight, especially since he had an influential elder sister, a grand princess, in the capital. Anything that Eleanor could help him with, it was likely that others couldn't.

This was something Rafael had reminded Salvador of.

Earlier, they had suspected that the private army was in Stonebridge County. But after sending people to investigate, nothing had been found. This meant that Rafael's suspicion had been correct—Yuvan, who believed he was in control of everything, was nothing more than a pawn in someone else's game.

When the king's edict reached Edgeview Estate, the story of Yuvan's attempted abduction of a respectable woman spread like wildfire.

Yuvan's name was an unfamiliar one. Despite his long stay in the capital, the people barely knew him. He kept a low profile, and his family rarely attended social events. Even when there were celebrations in the city, no one thought to invite them.

This was also apparent when the incident with Skye Embroidery occurred, and Molly was implicated. As the Marquis of Ironridge's family bore the brunt of public scrutiny, Yuvan and his household quietly avoided attention.

In the public's mind, Yuvan was a vassal prince who had been assigned to Valken. His return to the capital to care for his ailing mom was seen as a favor from the king. His reputation was generally good, and his late princess consort, Avis, was seen as an upstanding

woman.

As the rumors began to spread, someone revealed that his current princess consort was a woman from the Spencer family in Ebonflow. It was said that not long after Avis passed away, Yuvan married a new wife.

People of noble rank certainly knew

about Yuvan's marriage to a woman

from the Spencer family, but few knew what had really happened to his first wife. It was rumored that he had remarried at the request of his dying wife, who had insisted that the family could not be without a

madam to manage the estate.

However, more gossip leaked.

Some speculated that Avis had pushed for this marriage out of spite, fearing Fiona's rising influence. Her actions were seen as an attempt to suppress Fiona's chances of becoming the primary wife and princess consort.

Chapter 1117

Rafael returned to Hell Monarch Estate with Thomas.

When Thomas saw Violet as cheerful as ever, he felt a small measure of relief.

When Travis had come to the garrison outpost to find him the night before, Thomas had been genuinely frightened. He had immediately rallied his men and ridden out in haste. He had planned to scold her, but seeing her smiling with red-rimmed eyes, he knew she had been just as terrified. So, he couldn't bring himself to reprimand her.

Instead, he simply told her about Yuvan's current condition. Aside from his injuries, he had been beaten so badly by Kevin that he would never be able to live a normal life again.

Violet was aware of the chaos of the previous night-how her apprentices had rushed out of the city to rescue her, especially Kevin, who had even resorted to violence.

A bitter mix of sorrow and gratitude filled her heart. Among all her apprentices, Kevin had always been the most focused on his future and the most rational. Yet, he had thrown caution to the wind at that moment, only wanting to vent his frustration on her behalf. Although Thomas didn't want to upset her further, he still gave her some advice.

"No matter who you encounter or what happens, always remain calm and composed, especially with those you already know to be deceitful. No matter what they say or do, don't trust them easily. If you're unsure, you can always come to me or consult Prince Rafael, Lady Carissa, or Mr. York."

"I understand," Violet said, looking genuinely serious now.

Thomas watched her, his admiration for her growing. "You almost ran into a real problem this time, but luckily, it was nothing more than a scare. You've worked so hard for the workshop, and its success is thanks to your efforts. I'm proud of you, Violet."

Thomas knew her heart was loyal and full of righteousness. He had met many like her-people with grand ambitions to change the world. But too often, they were blind to the struggles of those close to them.

Violet and Carissa were both very practical. They didn't focus on distant ideals, but on the people and events right before them, taking action where possible. It was far better than spending every day chasing lofty goals without seeing what needed to be done in the present.

If this had been before, Violet might have basked in the praise. But after everything that had happened, she realized how foolish she had been, thinking that her skills and wisdom could protect her from anything.

There was one thing she had never dared to tell Carissa. At one point, she had seriously considered going to Edgeview Estate herself to settle things with Yuvan.

How lucky she hadn't acted on that thought!

The mere thought of it made Violet shiver in fear. If Carissa hadn't insisted so strongly, she might have gone.

In Orchid Hall, Carissa brought

Rafael a cup of chilled fruit punch, observing him with a careful eye.

"It's such a hot day. You must be

exhausted. You didn't sleep at all

last night, did you? Drink this and then take a rest."

Rafael took the cup from her, drinking it quickly before setting it aside. He sat there without saying a word.

Carissa picked up the cup and handed it to Lulu, thinking of asking her to leave. But then she hesitated, wondering what she and Rafael would talk about once Lulu was gone. So, she asked, "Was that enough? Should I ask Lulu to bring you another cup?"

"No need, I'll bathe first," Rafael replied.

"Oh, then... Let me tell Sydney to prepare it for you," Carissa said quickly.

She hurried out to speak with Sydney, leaving Lulu standing there in confusion. Why hadn't Carissa asked her to leave? Why did Carissa leave herself to find Sydney? Rafael's shoulders slumped slightly. He wanted to ask Carissa-why hadn't she told him when all this had happened? Had she not thought of him at all?

But then again... She had brought him the chilled fruit punch. And she was still smiling.

How could he ask her anything now? It would spoil the mood and make him seem insensitive. And yet, there was a knot of frustration tightening in his chest. He couldn't simply pretend like nothing had happened.

"Raf," Carissa called, stepping back

into the room. She walked over to him, twisting her hands nervously as she asked, "Should we bathe together? I didn't get a chance to bathe last night either."

Rafael looked up, meeting her gaze. A subtle mix of charm and guilt lingered on her face, her cheeks flushed with a hint of shyness that tugged at his heart. For a moment, he felt his heart flutter.

He sighed inwardly. What a mess he had gotten himself into!

She hadn't come to him when things went wrong-how could he truly claim no blame in this?

She had gone off on her own to track down Violet, disregarding the danger. But wasn't that because he hadn't arranged for anyone to protect her?

Chapter 1118

The steam from the bath enveloped Rafael and Carissa. The water was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right.

Carissa had indeed reflected on it herself. Rafael was probably upset because she had left the capital to track down Violet without considering the danger.

She placed her hands gently on his chest and explained softly, "At the time, I was so anxious, I feared something terrible would happen. You know, she came to the capital for me. She's always supported me in everything, and I couldn't let her get hurt." Her voice was soft and filled with endless apologies, her face flushed slightly from the warm water. The sincerity in her tone, laced with a hint of guilt, made her sound even more fragile, like a soft feather brushing against Rafael's heart. Rafael thought to himself that Kyle was just a meddling fool. He was still single and alone-what did he know about love? What did he understand about marriage? It was a bit ridiculous for him to try and act as someone's guide in matters of the heart. But none of that mattered now. What

was real and undeniable was that Carissa was his wife. Whether it was her heart or her body, everything about her belonged to him.

They lived together as husband and wife in Hell Monarch Estate, which they called home. They walked through the same door, slept in the same bed, and would one day be buried together in the same tomb, destined to be together forever. Why should he be jealous or petty? It only made things more difficult for himself and for her as well.

"I'm not upset," he murmured. "You did the right thing saving Violet. I thought about it, and there was nothing you could have done differently. The Capital Guard is under your command, and you have people at your disposal. You made thorough arrangements.

Rafael wrapped his arms around Carissa's slender waist, pulling her closer, his body pressed against hers.

"If you needed my help, your men would've come to me. When the city gates needed to be locked, didn't they come to me? Whether I knew sooner or later, it didn't matter. Even if I hadn't come, you would've solved everything. The Capital Guard would have gone to you, and you would have sent someone to General Farrell. Things would've gone the same way. So, you did nothing wrong. There's no need for an apology."

He chuckled slightly, his voice warm as he added, "And before I got there, I was just following the script you already set up. My arrival just added a nice touch. If I hadn't come, everything would've played out just the same."

Carissa fluttered her damp lashes, her voice soft but sincere as she said, "No, it wasn't the same. When you showed up, I felt reassured. With Claire and Iris held hostage and so many people around, I was terrified I couldn't hold on much longer. I'm just glad you came." Rafael gently brushed his fingers over her flushed cheek, his eyes filled with affectionate amusement. "If I hadn't come, the Capital Guard would have. Anyway, it's over now, so let's not let this cause any rift between us."

"Then, there won't be any rift," Carissa said softly. "As long as you're not angry with me, I'll be happy."

"I'm not angry," Rafael replied, shaking his head, his eyes reflecting the faint unease on her face.

He had always wanted to marry her, and now that he had, why should he be angry?

He wouldn't be angry, not anymore.

Carissa pressed her forehead gently against his, a quiet sigh escaping her lips. "Raf, you're the best."

Rafael lowered his head and kissed the side of her ear. See? If he had been upset, they probably would've been in a cold war for days. But now, in broad daylight, he could boldly show affection for her.

Travis had spread the word that Rafael was upset with Carissa. Since Travis had gone along, he didn't understand why Rafael had been acting so cold to Carissa. So, he spoke to Kyle, who explained that Rafael was upset with Carissa.

Travis then told Isaac and Violet, and also Luke and Jacob. Luke told Lily, who lamented about it, and the rest of Carissa's personal attendants also found out.

Lulu had already sensed something was wrong. When she learned that Rafael was upset with Carissa, she furrowed her brows in worry.

What were they supposed to do now?

Isaac had planned earlier on to meet Rafael. When he saw Lulu daydreaming in the hall, he asked, "Where are your master and mistress?" "Mr. Isaac!" Lulu quickly stood. "They're bathing right now."

"Bathing? In broad daylight?" Isaac raised an eyebrow, clearly surprised.

"They've been busy all night," Lulu explained. "His Highness just returned and was exhausted, so he went to soak in a hot bath to relax."

"In this heat? Soaking in a hot bath? Surely, something's wrong with him." Isaac shook his head, sitting down in the main hall of Orchid Hall to wait.

Lulu actually wanted to suggest

waiting in the outer courtyard, or at

least going to the central courtyar

since this was part of the inner quarters. But then she remembered

how everyone in Meadow Ridge treated each other like family, and so she let the matter be.

Chapter 1119

Isaac sat back in the armchair, propping one leg up and resting his elbow on his knee, eyeing the pair before him with some confusion.

"Are you two really that tired? You look drained. You didn't even stop to eat when you got back?"

Rafael and Carissa awkwardly turned their faces, each clearing their throat lightly.

After clearing his throat, Rafael said, "We've eaten already. It's just that we're a bit w-worn out... Yes, we're exhausted from the whole night's work. I also went to the palace, then came back and bathed. It was all just...very tiring." Isaac furrowed his brows, looking at Carissa with confusion. What was this? Was Rafael really stammering now?

Carissa avoided his gaze and quickly asked, "Have you eaten yet, Isaac?"

Isaac perked up immediately, clearly enjoying the change of subject. "Since last night, I've had three meals already. By the way, Lily's ravioli is fantastic-better than any delicacy from the mountains or sea!"

"Yes, it's really good," Carissa agreed, and then her gaze fell to the strange object Isaac was holding. "Is that a matchlock?"

"Yep, something our mentor has been tinkering with. He asked me to bring it over for Rafael to see if it's something the Ministry of Defense could mass-produce."

Rafael's eyes sharpened at the sight of the matchlock-it was different. It was longer, with some kind of mechanical latch on it. And there was no match cord to be seen.

"How has this matchlock been improved?" Rafael asked, his curiosity piqued. "Can it fire multiple rounds-two, maybe three in a row?"

"Six," Isaac replied, grinning. "This one uses gunpowder, so no need for a match cord anymore. You just pull the trigger, and... Here, I'll show you."

He disassembled the matchlock, revealing an intricate mechanism.

"It has a fire-discharge device. Most matchlocks only fire three times, but this one can shoot six. Sage Adrian finished the three-shot version years ago, but he said three wasn't enough. Six was better. He's already working on a ten-shot version, but that's still in development." "Six shots?" Rafael's weariness melted away instantly.

His interest surged, and he quickly moved closer to inspect the weapon. Though he had never studied matchlocks much-after all, they were unreliable and prone to misfire, not to mention requiring a match to ignite he couldn't deny his fascination. "How far can it shoot?"

Isaac shrugged. "Supposedly pretty far, but Sage Adrian didn't bother measuring it. He said you could test it after I delivered it to you."

"Give it a try," Rafael said. He was unsure how to reassemble it, but was unable to hide his excitement.

Isaac swiftly reassembled the

matchlock. "Kused it once in that little grove over there. Oh, and here's something called a

'sight' supposedly, you can aim and shoot with it. Normally, you'd look through this little hole, and if you spot an enemy's head, you just pull the trigger."

As he explained, Isaac held the matchlock up and pointed it directly at Carissa's head. "If I fired this right now, Carissa's head would explode like a melon."

"Don't point it at her." Rafael's hands shook as he quickly covered the dark muzzle with his hand. "Let's go outside to test it."

"Definitely can't aim it at her," Isaac said with a smile, clearly finding the situation amusing. He turned to ask Carissa, "Are you scared?"

Carissa met his gaze with a playful smirk. "Scared? Of course. I'm scared Sage Adrian might maim you."

Isaac's smile faltered for a moment before he straightened up, raising his hand in a dramatic gesture. "Alright, let's take this outside."

It wasn't really suitable outside, so they needed to go to an open field where they could set up targets to measure the shooting range.

Rafael called Dylan, Travis, and even

Jacob to join them. They went to an empty field on the outskirts of the

capital, setting up a target every hundred feet. In total, there were three targets, to see if they could hit a target as far as 300 feet away.

Rafael doubted it would reach 300 feet. After all, the older model had a range of only about 100 feet, with the usual range being around 50 to 80 feet.

Isaac raised the matchlock, and the group stood by, watching as he placed one eye against the sight. He pulled the trigger...

The group waited for a sound, but there was none. They stared at the target in confusion, until they realized there had been no gunshot.

"Ah, sorry, I forgot to load it. Let me try again." Isaac chuckled, quickly reloading the matchlock with swift efficiency. He aimed again. Bang!

A cloud of smoke puffed up from the barrel, quickly dissipating into the air.

Dylan took off running, first checking

the 100-foot target, then the 200-foot one, and finally the 300-foot target. When he saw the hole in the 300-foot target, he could hardly believe it. en

"My god, that's 300 feet!"

Chapter 1120

Isaac watched as everyone's eyes nearly popped out of their heads in shock. To him, it was no big deal.

After all, he had seen plenty of these things in Meadow Ridge, and they had been broken more times than he cared to count. So, when Adrian said this would be useful to Rafael and Carissa, Isaac didn't give it much thought. He just figured if it could keep them safe, it was worth bringing over. Rafael wanted to give it a try himself, and Isaac was more than happy to teach him.

This time, instead of aiming at the target, Rafael aimed at a rock that was at least 200 feet beyond the 300-foot mark. The sight wasn't necessary-Rafael had perfect vision, and his archery skills were good. He decided not to use the sight and just fired the matchlock directly.

Under everyone's watch, he missed, and the shot landed on the grass about 10 feet from the large rock.

But that didn't dampen Rafael's excitement-because this was 500 feet!

500 feet!

That meant if an enemy commander was over 500 feet away, Rafael could take him out in one shot to the head.

After the excitement wore off, he realized there was a problem-once the gunpowder pellets ran out, what was he supposed to do?

Isaac, ever perceptive, pulled out a small book. "Everything you need is in here. Just follow the instructions, and you can make more yourself."

Rafael took the book eagerly and flipped through it. It wasn't much help at first, the symbols and instructions nearly impossible to decipher. But he didn't mind. The Ministry of Defense had plenty of weapon smiths who could help. He planned to take the six-barrel matchlock to Davis and let that old guy see what it could do.

Without so much as a word, Rafael mounted his horse and galloped off, leaving the others behind.

Jacob knew where Rafael was headed, so he didn't chase after the latter or ask questions. Instead, he went with Isaac to the grass, where they found the scorched reeds. It was incredible, and he couldn't help but marvel at it.

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At the Ministry of Defense, Rafael arrived like a whirlwind. He appeared in front of Davis so quickly that the older man nearly stumbled, unsure of what was happening.

Davis hadn't even realized it was the Hell Monarch grabbing him. For a split second, he thought he was being kidnapped. Before he could get his bearings, Rafael dragged him into the back courtyard, practically radiating excitement. "Look at this, Mr. Lloyd! Take a look at this!"

Davis was yanked around so violently that he was still disoriented. Just as he was trying to steady himself, a metal rod was pressed against his chest, nearly cracking his ribs.

He quickly took a few deep breaths and said, "Calm down, Your Highness! What's going on?"

When he finally got a good look at the matchlock in his hands, he was puzzled for a moment, but then his eyes lit up. In no time, he disassembled it with quick, efficient movements. After all, that was how he became the Minister of Defense he was well-versed in matters regarding armory.

As he fumbled with the matchlock, confusion overtook him. He held it in his hands, inspecting every part with growing bewilderment.

"What is this? What's this here? Why are there three gunpowder pellets inside? Does it use gunpowder? No steel pellets? This is a matchlock, right? But it doesn't look like one How far can it shoot? Who made this? Is this a three-barrel

matchlock? Oh my god, ano

three-barrel matchlock has been made?"

Davis was overcome by disbelief. He jumped to his feet, one hand over his mouth, eyes wide and gleaming with unshed tears. He looked at Rafael as though seeing a ghost. "The three-barrel matchlock is real? Who made it? Tell me quickly-bring them to the ministry! Money is no object-bring them here!"

Now, it was Rafael's turn to stay

calm and correct him. "First of all, this isn't a three-barrel matchlock. It's a six-barrel matchlock. And, secondly, you can't hire this person. He won't come to the capital unless there's something serious.

"Six-barrel...?" Davis froze, his excitement turning to pure disbelief.

He crouched down, covering his face with his hands. He let out a low, mournful cry. "Is this a dream? If it is, I'll wake up and kill myself."

Rafael's own eyes shimmered with unshed tears. He nodded slowly, his voice low but sure as he confirmed, "It's not a dream. It's real. I've tested it myself. It can shoot as far as 500 feet. Yes, 500!"

Davis gasped, his reaction somewhere between a snort and a squeal, then slapped his legs in triumph. He sprang up, his hands gripping Rafael's shoulders, his face contorted with excitement. "Your Highness, do you know what this means? Do you understand?!"

Rafael smiled. "I know."

It meant that with this weapon, the soldiers could be spared unnecessary deaths if war came the matchlock itself could become the key to victory.

It took Davis nearly an hour to regain his composure. Finally, he looked up and said, "We're going to the palace. Immediately! We need to see His Majesty!"