

War Song 1131

Chapter 1131

Silverstone Estate was in chaos.

Riley had slapped Viola across the face several times. Aside from the patients in Arcane Sanctum, passersby also witnessed the scene and stopped to stare.

Poppy mentioned that amidst the confusion, someone had shouted that a princess consort was inside Arcane Sanctum, advising everyone to stop before they acted disrespectfully.

Zoey was surprised at first, but then realized the princess consort in question must be Carissa, who frequently visited Arcane Sanctum. But no matter which princess consort it was, the news had already spread. The reputation of the Earl of Silverstone's family was now completely ruined.

Zoey took a moment to drink a cup of coffee in the outer courtyard. She sat there for quite a while before finally going to see her mother-in-law.

Evelyn grabbed Zoey's hand, tearfully pleading, "Just tell me what we can do. We have to cover this up somehow, or find Mrs. Lewis and give her whatever she wants. Let her clear things up and say it was all a misunderstanding. Only then can we put an end to this." Zoey listened, knowing that though Evelyn was distraught, she had already thought through a few options. This was the only one that might work. She glanced at Luna, who sat quietly beside her with a flat look on her face, already numb from the ordeal. Luna and Caspian were a loving couple with children. As a family, their fortunes were tied this scandal would affect them all. Even if the matter was too shameful to mention directly, no one could bear to talk about it openly. Luna felt powerless, so she simply waited to see how her elder sister-in-law would handle it.

Zoey sighed. "Right now, that is the only option. I'll go look for Mrs. Lewis."

Zoey was seething with anger. If not for the risk to her children's futures, she wouldn't care at all. Let Viola's reputation sink for all she cared.

Her voice was cold as she added, "There's only one thing to keep in mind. You need to prepare yourself, Mother. If Barrett finds out, he won't settle for just a divorce. He might even cast Viola out directly instead. Once that happens, it won't matter if Mrs. Lewis clears things up or not."

"If she clears things up, then surely Barrett won't cast Viola out?" asked Evelyn, who had stopped crying.

She knew her eldest daughter-in-law wouldn't ignore this matter. Zoey had the means to handle it and would take care of it.

"Clearing it up doesn't change the facts. It's just for appearances. Barrett may be slow-witted, but a man cannot abide such a scandal. And don't forget, Viola was the one who kept threatening to divorce him over Serena's return to her family," said Zoey.

To put it bluntly, Viola had a dirty conscience herself but was quick to criticize her husband's shortcomings. She blamed him for being incapable and complained about her sister-in-law being cast out. True, Barrett and Serena weren't exactly worth defending, but Viola should have first taken a hard look at her own faults.

Some things couldn't be buried as if they never happened. It was nothing but self-deception. Even a bird's call left a trace, so how could water pass without leaving a ripple?

Now in a panic, Evelyn wrung her hands. "What should we do, then? If Viola gets cast out, how will our family ever keep a foothold in the capital? What will become of the children's marriages?"

That was a blow to Zoey, hitting her where it hurt most. She clenched her teeth in anger. She was trapped in this situation with no means of escape, yet she couldn't let Viola keep relying on her for everything.

In a calm but distant tone, she said, "There's nothing to be done. If it doesn't work out, the men may marry women of humble origins, even from the lowest ranks. A woman of any background may be taken as a wife." Evelyn's eyes widened in panic at her words, and she turned to Luna for help, silently pleading with her to speak up.

But Luna's thoughts had always

aligned with Zoey's, so she clenched

her jaw and remained silent. There was nothing to say. If things reached a breaking point, Zoey's words were the reality they would have to face.

Seeing that neither her eldest nor second daughter-in-law would speak up, Evelyn trembled, her frustration building to a boil.

"Perhaps we should just cast Viola out. Let her die on the streets. We will provide a coffin for her and that will be the end of it. It's the least I can do out of motherly love," she snapped. Zoey's voice was cold as she replied, "If you truly decide on that, I'll have someone take her away."

Evelyn sighed heavily, but remained silent.

A long moment passed before she

spoke again, this time in a quieter voice, "Zoey, please. For my sake, let's just resolve this matter first. No

matter what mistakes children, make ultimately, it's their parents' fault for not teaching them properly. The responsibility falls on me and her dad."

Chapter 1132

Zoey had wanted Evelyn to adopt this attitude, but when it came down to it, she couldn't help but feel uneasy.

Evelyn was usually sensible, but became completely biased in matters concerning her children. Her anger and harsh words lasted only a moment before her concern took over.

On the other hand, Zoey felt the weight of the situation more deeply, as it was something she had to face. She had hoped Evelyn might help her. But after seeing how she acted in this situation with Viola, it was clear that Evelyn knew Oliver was planning to take a concubine and was probably expecting Zoey to endure it.

Evelyn understood everything else, but had endless tolerance for her own children.

Though Evelyn had vowed not to interfere when Viola caused a scene, Zoey knew the truth-those words had been repeated too many times. In the end, Evelyn always stepped in.

"With a mom like you, Viola's truly fortunate," said Zoey.

Evelyn squeezed her daughter-in-law's hand, her face softening into a look of tenderness. "I treat all of you the same. If Oliver dares to mistreat you, I will not tolerate it." Zoey lowered her gaze, softly replying, "Thank you, Mother."

But how could Evelyn treat them equally? That wasn't how she had acted when Oliver had so many concubines while he was still in the capital.

Back then, Evelyn had only ever said, "That's between you and your husband. As your mother-in-law, I can't interfere."

Evelyn suddenly seemed to remember something. Her face turning pale, she quickly grabbed the thin quilt she was embroidering, her eyes darting between Zoey and Luna.

"I must say this now. If this matter cannot be resolved and the Warren family insists on casting Viola out, then she will return to us. If you both find her intolerable, I will buy her a separate house. Our family will still provide for her."

This was a decision Evelyn made on her own, not something she was discussing with her daughters-in-law.

Zoey and Luna merely nodded in silence, not saying anything.

Perhaps it was because they could empathize with the struggles of women. So, even after everything Viola had done, as long as Evelyn was willing to let her return, they wouldn't oppose it.

They both understood that the true damage wasn't whether Viola returned to the Earl of Silverstone's family. It was the entire situation itself. Even if she didn't return, she was still a woman from the Prince family. People always liked to trace others back to their origins. Ultimately, Zoey had to step in and speak with Barrett.

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Barrett had first heard of the matter from Serena. When she learned the news, she acted like a flustered hen, flapping all over the place before placing her hands on her hips and angrily cursing, completely losing her composure.

After Serena had been cast out and

returned to Valor Estate, her relationship with Viola had completely fallen apart. They now hated each other with a burning passion. And now, with Viola having made such a monumental mistake, Serena was determined to make sure everyone knew it.

When Zoey arrived at Valor Estate with Jane, Serena stormed out ahead of everyone.

She pointed her finger accusingly at Zoey as she shouted, "What kind of disgraceful woman did the Prince household breed? How dare she act like she's above my brother? She's worse than a courtesan! At least they're paid for their services-this one's just giving it away without a second thought!"

Having been sent back home in disgrace, Serena no longer cared about her dignity. She was ready to say whatever would hurt the most and strike the deepest. However, Zoey was unshaken.

Vas

She sat down gracefully, casting a cool glance at Serena. "I wonder what methods you used to get into the Marquis of Ironridge's family as a concubine, Lady Serena. Whether services are paid for or freely given, they don't compare to your skill in attaching yourself like a leech and not letting go." Content belongs to

Though Zoey called it a skill, it was more of a lowly act-but she would never say that aloud.

Instead, she lightly added, "I almost forgot... you're no longer a concubine, so I don't need to address you as 'Lady Serena'."

Serena's face contorted in fury. She stammered for a moment before finally managing to spit out, "How dare you compare me to her? At least I never betrayed my husband!"

Zoey coolly reminded her, "Trying to seduce someone else's husband isn't much better. Do you really want to compare who's more disgraceful?"

Chapter 1133

Barrett snapped at Serena to leave, then instructed Tara to dismiss all the servants, allowing only his father and older brother to remain in the room.

Lately, Barrett had been drinking more than usual. His complexion appeared sallow and haggard. His hair was a mess, like wild grass growing unchecked. His beard, likely only shaved a few days ago, had already grown out in a thin, patchy circle around his pale, cracked lips. To any onlooker, he resembled a wild, mangy dog.

His clothes were wrinkled, and the lingering smell of alcohol on him was unmistakable.

Zoey couldn't help but think back to the day when Barrett had married Viola. Though he wasn't exactly brimming with youthful vigor, he had been a handsome and gallant young man. Yet now, he was reduced to such a pitiable state.

He resembled a flower that had withered too soon-its once vibrant bloom now faded, its countenance heavy with ruin.

He remained silent, and it was Jonathan who spoke first.

"Mrs. Prince, word has spread far and wide that Viola had already committed a grave mistake when she was part of the Farrell family. The rumors are rampant, and it's become impossible to maintain any peace. Though our family may not be what it once was, we cannot tolerate a woman who brings disgrace upon her marriage," he said.

Zoey had expected this. She hadn't come here to plead with Barrett to not divorce Viola.

Instead, she asked only one question, "I won't press on other matters, but may I ask if it's possible to delay the divorce until next year?"

"You're quite the strategist, Mrs. Prince," Jonathan replied, his voice carrying the rare weight of paternal authority. "If we delay the divorce until next year, our family's reputation will be ruined beyond repair. Besides, hasn't she already been asking for a divorce? Why not fulfill her wish?"

"They've been at odds since their marriage, without a moment of peace. Even when she finally conceived, the child was lost. Clearly, they were never meant to be together. Why force it any longer?"

Jonathan was once a reckless man who feared nothing, but had become more calculating with age. When it came to matters of family honor and moral standing, he was uncompromising.

His son was already ruined. If they kept such a wife in their family, what kind of future would they have?

Taking charge of the situation, he declared, "Though we're casting her out, we won't touch her dowry. Whatever she brought with her, she can take back. Not a penny less."

It did sound reasonable, didn't it?

If Zoey hadn't been representing the Earl of Silverstone's family, she might have asked why they had insisted on withholding half of Carissa's dowry when they cast her out in the past. But of course, she didn't ask that. Instead, Zoey directed her next words to Barrett, who had been silent all this time, with Jonathan speaking on his behalf.

"If we can't delay it until next year, perhaps we could wait just a few more months? What if we aim for the end of the year? Whatever compensation you seek, please let us know and we'll consider it. There's no need to rush into a decision," she said.

Barrett slowly lifted his head, his eyes lifeless. Actually, I already knew. When the child couldn't be saved, the physician said it was due to a previous miscarriage that had damaged her body. I've inquired, and she never carried a child while she was at the Farrell household."

"You knew?" Jonathan gasped. "Why didn't you say anything sooner? You fool."

Zoey was equally stunned, staring at Barrett in disbelief. He knew, but never asked Viola about it. Zoey should have taken the opportunity to press him—did he not want to divorce Viola? But for some reason, she couldn't bring herself to ask. Barrett continued, his expression numb as he spoke slowly, "Instead of asking me, why not ask Viola directly if she still wishes to remain with the Warren family?"

"Kindly convey this to her—I intend to return to the barracks. His Majesty has not stripped me of my eligibility to serve in the military. He has only demoted my rank and title. So, may return though I must start again as a common soldier. Ask her if she's willing to stay with me. If she is, I won't divorce her and we can continue as we were."

Zoey knew that Viola had caused a scene over wanting a divorce; it had been quite a spectacle. But after everything that had happened, Viola was likely to reconsider. If Barrett promised not to divorce her, then perhaps they could resolve things by asking Riley for help.

But given Viola's temper, Zoey couldn't guarantee it would work out. All she could say was that she would ask and return tomorrow.

Chapter 1134

This was Zoey's first time seeing Viola after everything that had happened recently.

Viola lay in bed, her face hidden beneath a thin blanket. Her posture sent a clear message she didn't want to see anyone. From beneath the blanket, she trembled slightly as a servant brought over a chair, setting it next to the bed for Zoey to sit. "Now that we've reached this point, what do you plan to do?" asked Zoey, getting straight to the point.

Her voice was firm as she explained, "Avoiding the situation won't help. It must be dealt with. Mother wants me to go to Mrs. Lewis and ask her to clarify things on your behalf. I don't know if she'll agree.

"As for Barrett, I went to Valor Estate today. He said he'd known about your situation for some time but never mentioned it. He said if you agree to stay married, everything can be forgotten and you'll live together as before. But there's one condition-he insists on returning to the army."

The blanket shifted, revealing Viola's swollen, pitiful face. Her eyes, red from crying, were still puffy. They were barely open and filled with a tremor of disbelief.

"He can't have known. How could he possibly know? What does he want in exchange for not divorcing me?" she asked.

"I told you-he said he's going to return to the army," Zoey replied.

"He wants me to live as the wife of a lowly soldier?" Viola's eyes filled with tears again. "I might as well return to my family. Mom said she would take care of me. No matter what, I'm still the third daughter of the Earl of Silverstone's family. My dowry will be enough for me to live on for the rest of my life. Why should I endure such hardship, struggling through days mired in poverty?"

She lay there on the bed, her neck still bearing faint red marks, tears trickling from the corners of her eyes as her breath came thick and heavy through her nose.

"I know you all look down on me, but I've thought it through again and again-where have I erred? Is it wrong to make plans for myself and to consider my own future? In your eyes, that makes me selfish, but who among us is not?

"Is it such a crime to want a better life and refuse to suffer in silence? I was born into an earl's household and blessed with better fortune than most. With such fortune and the strength of my family behind me, why should I abase myself?"

She took a breath, her voice trembling as she continued, "And I know what you think, even if you don't say it out loud. You think I'm always comparing myself to Carissa and Kayla, but who doesn't compare themselves to others? Who doesn't have a little vanity? I'm a woman who was once divorced and remarried, just like Carissa. Why can't I compare myself to her?

"Besides, it's not like I didn't want a peaceful life after marrying Barrett. Not only did he have Aurora, he also couldn't let go of Carissa. He didn't have a shred of affection left for me. Isn't it strange, Zoey? Even after finding out about me and Silas, he doesn't care and is still fine with staying married to me.

"What does that mean? It means I don't matter to him at all. Perhaps I matter even less to him than that cursed Aurora! What have I done so terribly wrong for him to treat me like this? And for all of you to treat me like this?"

After she finished speaking, Viola buried her face in the blanket and began to sob uncontrollably.

Zoey remained calm as she listened quietly.

People always tried to justify their actions, to make sense of what they'd done, or else life would be unbearable.

She let the crying go on until the sounds faded, then asked, "Answer me one thing. Were you going to buy Snowdrop Pills for Mother, or were you planning to meet Mr. Lewis? Tell me the truth. If you lie, I'll find out." The sobbing stopped abruptly. Viola threw the blanket off, staring at Zoey in shock.

Her lips trembled with anger. "How could you think that of me? Has someone said something?"

"No one has said anything," Zoey replied coolly. "But I know how you think. All these years, I've covered for you. You have no strategy or foresight. You simply act on impulse and do whatever comes to your mind."

"Are you truly trying to drive me to my death?" said Viola, who could hardly believe that Zoey would think like that.

After pouring her heart out, she had gained not even a shred of sympathy or empathy.

Zoey continued, "No one is trying to kill you-you're doing it to yourself. Why hang yourself at all? If you must, why not do it quietly at night? Why make a spectacle of it in broad daylight with so many people around?"

"Those bruises on your neck aren't

even deep enough. If you were truly

serious, you would have tied a

proper noose. You should take life seriously, and if you choose to end it, you should do it properly as well. Otherwise, what's the point of all this drama?"

"You caused a commotion in the household, and for what? Just so you can mutter about how everyone is selfish? Was Mr. Lewis the one who forced you? Did Barrett force you to marry him? Didn't you know about his divorce

Didn't you know Aurora you wed?

was already in the estate?"

Viola's self-justifications crumbled under Zoey's words. She could only pull the blanket back over her head and cry again.

"If you don't want to answer, then don't. If you insist on divorcing, I won't bother seeking out Mrs. Lewis anymore," Zoey concluded, done with the conversation. With tears still streaming down her face, Viola begged, "Please go to her and clear up the misunderstandings. When I was with Silas, he wasn't married yet. This isn't entirely my fault. Besides, you're already helping your daughter find a match. If this isn't resolved, how will you find a suitable match in the future?"

Zoey's eyes hardened, her voice still calm but carrying an underlying edge as she spoke, "Your life is what it is. You say you were born into an earl's family and have been blessed, but your niece wasn't as lucky. She was also born into that same earl's family, but she has to make do with less. It's not wrong to think of yourself, but don't drag others down with you."

"What do you mean by that? Are you forcing me back to the Warren family?" Viola asked.

Zoey didn't answer. She turned away and walked out.

It wasn't her problem anymore, and she didn't care.

If Viola was determined to divorce, then even getting Riley's help wouldn't change anything.

Once something like this happened, it was like a tattoo. Unless the flesh was cut away, one would never be rid of it for the rest of their life.

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At Hell Monarch Estate, Violet listened to Carissa's recounting of the events. Her mouth fell open in shock, and she was unsure of how to respond.

After a long silence, she finally said, "Why is it that some people, who aren't truly evil, can make you despise them so much? She and Barrett actually seemed to suit each other."

Carissa replied, "I'm afraid some people may have seen me at Arcane Sanctum today. After all, I only left after they did, and there were still many people inside."

"It's nothing. I'm sure they'll just gossip a little. No harm done," Violet tried to offer comfort.

Normally, as an onlooker, one wouldn't be subject to such talk. However, Carissa's status was different-she had once been Barrett's wife. With Viola's affair and subsequent remarriage to Barret, even his former wife was bound to be dragged into the gossip. Her reputation would be tainted alongside theirs.

"Yes, it's nothing. But when those two were fighting, I was just stunned," said Carissa.

"So, was Riley really formidable?" Violet asked.

"I imagine this has been building up inside her for some time. Once it burst out, she didn't care about her dignity or reputation. She just wanted to vent her frustration and curse at someone," Carissa replied. Violet sighed wistfully. "I wish I had been there."

"Being there would have been awkward. Watching women fight-Mr. Lewis was like a bystander too. He was too afraid to intervene, and he didn't get involved in the brawl."

"Technically, shouldn't Thomas have given Silas a good beating? I hope this hasn't affected his own marriage prospects." Violet leaned in closer, her curiosity piqued. "What do you think of Jacob's sister as a match?"

"Jacob has already arranged a marriage for her. He is a well-off scholar with a decent family background. His household is simple-his eldest aunt is married, he has no brothers, his father-in-law passed away early, and his mother-in-law is a kind, virtuous woman," Carissa explained.

Violet sighed. "Such a shame."

"What's such a shame about it? Your godbrother has his own fate," Carissa said with a shrug.

Violet's face darkened slightly. "But with this mess Viola's caused, things might be more difficult. When Thomas first returned to court, so many were eager to align with him. Then, when the king delayed assigning him a post, everyone started pulling back. It was only after he became a general that things settled a bit. And now with all this, I fear it's just another complication."

Carissa smiled and said, "You always talk about not wanting to get married, yet now you're worrying about someone else's marriage prospects. I don't bother myself with other marriages. Look, none of my senior guild members have wives, but I'm not anxious for them. They surely have their own plans."

"Children of noble families are different from us martial artists," Violet replied. "We are freer, while

Violet bound by rules. For them

they

not marrying and having children is considered a great disrespect Cari, I think I understand now- people live differently, but no way of living is easy."

"We're not even into fall yet, and you're already mourning the passing of spring?" Carissa teased, a playful smile on her face.

Violet forced a smile in return. "The more I experience, the more I see... The more difficult things become. It's hard to stay optimistic when problems keep arising."

Chapter 1136

"Violet, when did you become so pessimistic?" Isaac's voice came from behind them, sudden and unannounced. He stood behind them, looking dashing in his attire.

"There are people far worse off than you, yet they keep pushing forward with optimism. You've got wealth, talent, and beauty-everything a woman could dream of. And yet, here you are, sulking over one setback. Do you really think you're honoring the gods who gave you such a fortunate start in life?"

Violet turned around to face him. His towering frame seemed to swallow her up, his chiseled features still carrying that reckless, carefree air. In the dim light of the lamps hanging along the corridor, his sun-kissed skin gleamed faintly. His dark eyes, almost pitch-black, were impossible to read-was he lecturing her seriously or simply teasing?

"Come on, let me show you something," Isaac added, before reaching out and grabbing her wrist.

With one swift leap, he soared into the air, gliding effortlessly as if carried by the wind. Stunned, Violet stared at him in shock. Was Isaac's Lightfoot Skill that amazing? She had always thought he was just half-hearted in everything he did. Carissa tilted her head as she watched them leave. Had Isaac really not noticed her presence? He hadn't even glanced at her or acknowledged her.

Isaac took Violet all the way to the top of Glimmering Tower, where they hung suspended in mid-air. They gazed at the sprawling city below, the city lights twinkling like stars. Before they ascended, Isaac had stopped at the base of the tower to fetch two bottles of wine- one for Violet, the other for himself.

The night air was cool, refreshing after the heat of the day. With the darkness around them, it was hard to make out their features. Drinking in such obscurity felt a bit intimate, so Isaac pulled a Night Pearl out of his sleeve. With a soft click, the entire top of the tower illuminated as though the moon itself had settled there.

"Look at the lights from the thousands of households," Isaac said. "Each light represents a home, a family, and a collection of troubles. Whether you're born with royal blood or into a common household, everyone faces their own set of struggles. Yours? It's nothing." Violet pursed her lips. "I wasn't asking for your sympathy. No need to bring me up here to comfort me or pour me wine."

She wasn't in need of sympathy. She was fine.

Isaac's gaze deepened as he turned his head to look at her.

"Who said I was here to comfort you? I brought you here to comfort me and to keep me company," he said, his voice low and almost wistful.

Remembering the debt of gratitude she owed him for saving her life, Violet didn't get angry. Instead, she asked, "What do you need comforting for?"

Isaac swayed his legs, taking a swig of wine. "Do you know my name?"

"Of course I do. It's Isaac Prince."

"That wasn't always my name."

His voice dropped a little, and under the glow of the Night Pearl, his expression darkened slightly.

"Then, what were you called?" Violet asked, intrigued.

Isaac remained quiet for a while before slowly murmuring, "Seraphina Prince."

Violet almost lost her balance. Seraphina?

Isaac may not be known for his strictness, but he was definitely famous as a smooth talker and a ladies' man. And yet, his name was Seraphina, which often implied someone who was pampered and cute?

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"Don't you dare laugh!" Isaac shot her a severe look. "If you laugh, I'll push you off this tower and silence you for good."

Violet thought back to the day she was captured by Yuvan's men, then slapped herself to hold back her laughter. That was the only way she could force the urge to laugh down. "What's so funny about that? It's a nice name."

Though she held back her laughter,

she still couldn't help but feel puzzled. Why was Isaac telling her this? Didn't he worry she might run off to Meadow Ridge and spread the word?

Seeing that she wasn't laughing, Isaac relaxed a little and asked, "Do you know why I was called that?"

Violet thought for a moment. What other reason could there be? Maybe his dad had some kind of grudge against him. But she didn't want to say that outright.

"Maybe... your dad had a bit of a... conflict with you? Like some kind of bad luck or taboo?"

"Quite the opposite." He paused before adding bitterly, "When I was born, my dad inherited the family's title, earned military honors, and was rewarded by the king. It was

because of me that he gained all

that."

Violet's eyes widened. "Inherited the family's title? You're from such a prestigious family? Which family is it?"

Isaac met her gaze and asked, "Is it really so hard to guess?"

Violet hesitated. Though she felt it might be a bit intrusive, she couldn't help but ask, "Your dad passed away, and then your brother inherited the title, didn't he?" Isaac nodded, his expression flat.

Violet covered her mouth and stared at him for a long time before finally managing to ask, "Then, who's your mom? Is she still alive?"

Chapter 1137

Isaac was silent for a long moment. He took a deep drink from the wine bottle, then tucked the Night Pearl away, wrapping it carefully before placing it in a small box. The glow faded, leaving only the faint light of the moon and a sky full of stars. Violet hadn't expected Isaac to have such a background. Carissa had never mentioned it before.

He had always been someone who lingered in brothels, either listening to the courtesans sing or playing music for them himself, a carefree and roguish sort. How could he possibly be a nobleman's son?

As Isaac remained silent, Violet's mind began to form an entire drama about a family rivalry behind closed doors.

He had said that he was born in a way that benefitted his dad. That surely meant he was well-loved, but a concubine's son gaining favor was a challenge to the legitimacy of the first wife's children.

As for what kind of woman his mother was, that remained unclear, but one could surmise she didn't seem to have much influence. Otherwise, how could Isaac have ended up wandering the streets without a home to return to? "Was it Evelyn who didn't want you to go back? Was she afraid you'd compete for the inheritance?" Violet ventured cautiously.

"They don't even know I'm alive," Isaac said, a carefree smile on his lips. "It's probably for the best. The Earl of Silverstone's family seems prosperous on the outside, but it's full of danger. They're better off not knowing I survived. If I had gone back, I would've had to face the mess they made there."

"But in just a few days here in the capital, I learned of my sister-in-law's troubles. I couldn't just ignore it. She might be the lady of the house, but to the Earl of Silverstone's family, she's still an outsider. A lot of responsibilities shouldn't be hers to bear."

Violet listened to him ramble on, trying to make sense of his words. After a moment, she asked, "So, you want to help Madam Zoey?"

"I can't help her. And it's because I can't help that it weighs on me," Isaac replied, his tone heavy.

"But how could you help? Your mom probably doesn't even acknowledge you. If you stepped in, she'd be wary of you and afraid you'd come back to claim something from them."

Isaac's voice turned cold as he added, "What do I care about the Earl of Silverstone's family? I've got everything I need. But if my sister-in-law were smart, she'd secure a future for herself. The capital isn't the only place to stay. She should take her children and find somewhere else to go. That's what we in the martial arts world would do. But she won't listen. So, I don't waste my time on it."

Violet was now curious and asked, "Is Viola your younger or older sister? She has blood ties to you, so why don't you care about her?"

Isaac snorted. "She's older than me. I'm the youngest in the family. As for her problems-why should I get involved? It's all her own choices. She's not like Zoey, who's been dragged into this mess."

Isaac seemed to breathe a little easier after talking about this matter. He pulled out the Night Pearl again, holding it up to Violet's eyes as if to use it to intimidate her.

"You can't tell anyone about this," he said seriously. "Not even my seniors and juniors in the guild know. Only Sage Adrian and Sage Everett are aware of it."

Violet raised an eyebrow. "I can't do that. Carissa and I have no secrets. Honestly, if you have a secret you can't share, then maybe you shouldn't tell anyone at all. I can't be the one to keep it for you. That's too much torture for me, and I don't want to do it."

"I saved you," Isaac reminded, his voice tight with frustration.

Violet was unruffled. "You saved me, so I'll repay you. Anything you want in the capital-food, drink, women anything I've got you covered. Just tell me which establishment you want, and I'll pay to bring whoever you fancy back for you."

"Violet, you used to boast about how discreet you could be," Isaac growled.

Violet bounced back, landing lightly on her feet, eyes gleaming mischievously. "Oh, I am discreet. I just don't talk. And when I do talk, how can I be discreet with my words?" Isaac grabbed her by the arm, pulling her into the air and holding her upside down.

His voice was dark as he threatened, "If you dare tell anyone, I'll throw you off this tower."

Violet wasn't scared at all. Instead, she crossed her arms defiantly while hanging upside down.

"If you didn't threaten me, maybe I'd have kept your secret. But now? Impossible you've got the guts, go ahead and throw me." She straightened her body slightly, her eyes sparkling in the moonlight. "A dark night with dim moonlight and a high wind. It's the perfect night to throw a body over the edge-how thrilling! Go on, toss me."

Furious, Isaac suddenly flung her backward. She twisted in the air, landing gracefully on the ground with her hands behind her back.

"Not tossing me, huh? Well, in that case, I'm leaving. You won't get another opportunity like this."

Isaac scowled, clearly frustrated. "This is how you repay your benefactor? Come on, let's have some drinks."

Violet sauntered toward the railing, resting her hands on it. The night wind tousled her hair, revealing a delicate, graceful face. Her expression was somewhat playful yet innocent.

"Alright, but you have to answer my questions first. Why did the Earl of Silverstone's family kick you out? What about your mom? And how did you end up at the Pathfinders Guild?"

Isaac didn't respond, focusing instead on drinking in silence. His bottle was empty in a few swigs, and he reached for Violet's. She figured he had drunk enough, so no matter how much he insisted, she wouldn't let him take it. Soon, the two of them were chasing each

other around the top of Glimmering Tower, the earlier tension forgotten.

Violet never did tell Carissa about their conversation, though she hadn't promised to keep Isaac's secret. He didn't want people to know, and had treated her as a good friend when he confided in her. It wasn't her place to spread rumors and stir up trouble-that wasn't how

people of the martial arts world behaved.

But lately, Isaac had been seen lingering around Silverstone Estate, drawing the attention of the Garrison Unit.

Max told Carissa, who found it strange. Why did Isaac keep going to that place? Did he know someone there?

Later that evening, when they sat down to eat, Carissa couldn't help but ask, "Isaac, what have you been busy with lately?"

Isaac looked up. "Nothing, just wandering around."

"Around Silverstone Estate?" she pressed.

Isaac's gaze shot over to Violet, who froze and quickly defended herself, "I haven't told her anything."

Carissa studied the two of them-one looked angry, the other looked innocent. It almost seemed like they were hiding something.

She was about to ask when Rafael served her more food. "Have more to eat."

Carissa glanced suspiciously at the two of them. They both had their heads down, eating in perfect sync.

"The other night, those two went to Glimmering Tower for drinks. They were laughing and shouting, making all sorts of noise," Kyle said casually.

Carissa looked at them with wide eyes. "Was that the night he said he wanted to show you something?"

Violet shook her head. "There was no shouting or laughing. He just kept trying to steal my drink."

Isaac shot Kyle a suspicious look, immediately panicking. "How do you know all this? Were you following us? Did you eavesdrop? How could you do that? How could you follow us?"

"Who followed you? You two were making such a racket-did you think the people downstairs were deaf?" Kyle eyed him suspiciously. "Why are you so nervous? It's not like you did anything shameful. Or is it that you two-" "Stop right there!" Isaac cut him off loudly. "There's nothing going on between us. I'll never get married!"

His outburst was so loud that the servants peeked in curiously. Isaac quickly realized he had overreacted and settled back into his seat, clearing his throat as he adjusted his clothes.

"My apologies."

Kyle calmly said, "What are you talking about marriage for? I'm asking if you two were sneaking drinks. Did you pay for them? Sage Everett keeps strict accounts. If even a single coin doesn't add up, he'll lose his mind." "Pay?" Isaac blinked in surprise. "Oh, no. I didn't pay. I'll pay later, just put it on my tab for now."

"That's theft," Kyle declared firmly. "You'll have to explain that to Sage Adrian when the time comes."

"No need for that, Kyle! I'll pay for it later," Isaac pleaded, clearly nervous at the thought of reporting to Everett.

"No, rules are rules. You need to respect the truth. I won't cover for you."

Kyle remained strict and by-the-book, refusing to leave any room for Everett to find fault.

Isaac instantly lost his appetite,

while Violet eagerly asked him, "You don't want to get married either? That's a great mindset! I feel the same way. Isn't it better to live our own lives peacefully? Why invite trouble by adding another

person—and not just one person, but

a whole family? You need to stick to your beliefs. Stand firm and don't waver!"

Isaac eyed her for a long moment, considering Ker words before responding, "You've got a point. But sometimes, it depends on the situation. If someone's alone, with no family burdens or in-laws to take care of, then getting married isn't so bad."

Violet shook her head. "No, still no. Isn't childbirth painful? What husband's family wouldn't expect me to have children?"

"True enough, Isaac agreed with a

nod. "But if, on top of all that, there's

a man who doesn't expect children takes the lead on everything, protects you, and always goes along with you, then marrying wouldn't be so bad."

Violet snorted with laughter. "Such a man doesn't exist!"

She turned to Carissa, her eyes gleaming with mischief. "What do you think? Is it possible?"

Carissa glanced at her, then at Isaac, suspicion creeping onto her face. But she still said, "It's rare, but not impossible."

Chapter 1139

After dinner, Rafael and Carissa cornered Kyle and dragged him into the study, one on each side, leaving him no chance to escape. He was pushed into a chair without ceremony.

"This is undignified-utterly undignified!" Kyle complained, his tone reeking of scholarly pretension now that he was a teacher. "Stop all this pushing and shoving."

Despite his protests, he was soon seated, pinned down by the eager, curious gazes of his junior guild members.

He sighed and grumbled, "If you have questions, just ask them already."

Rafael spoke first, "First question: We've noticed Isaac has been spending a lot of time around Silverstone Estate lately. Is this because Sage Adrian or Sage Everett has given him an assignment? Is it something to do with Marshal Prince?" Carissa asked more seriously, "Second question: I noticed that Isaac was looking at Vivi strangely tonight, and he's not opposing her anymore. It's a bit unusual. Do you know what's going on?"

As usual, Kyle knew when to speak and when to hold back. It was fine to hide Isaac's background from others, but it wasn't necessary to keep it from the two people in front of him now.

Adrian had told Kyle about Isaac's past a long time ago and suggested he occasionally give some advice. Life could be long or short; one never knew what might happen tomorrow. Some things should not be held on to too tightly.

He had talked to Isaac about it, but the latter said that everyone in the Pathfinders Guild was like family to him, and others didn't matter.

"Isaac is the youngest brother of Oliver and Caspian from the Earl of Silverstone's family. Viola is his elder sister, and Zoey is his sister-in-law. Recently, he's been going back and forth because there's been trouble at the estate. Evelyn has fallen ill and needs Snowdrop Pills. He has some, so he's likely just checking on how to deliver them," Kyle explained.

Rafael and Carissa were left stunned. They had thought of countless possibilities, but never this.

Carissa put both her hands to her mouth in shock. After a moment, she lowered them and asked, "How did he end up at the Pathfinders Guild then? Did his dad send him? Is Madam Prince his mom? Why hasn't anyone come looking for him?"

Kyle said, "It's a long story, but I'll make it brief. His dad, David Prince, the previous Earl of Silverstone, was obsessed with spiritual practices. When Isaac was born, David had just earned military merit and returned to inherit his title.

"For Isaac's Lunar Blessing

Ceremony, David invited a spiritual master to read his fortune. The spiritual master said the boy would bring great fortune to his parents, but the boy's own life would suffer because of it. So, the spiritual master suggested naming him Seraphina and raising him as a girl to preserve his life and ensure long-lasting fortune."

Frowning, Carissa interrupted, "If Isaac's fate was supposed to be damaging to himself, why raise him like a girl?"

Kyle hesitated, his brow furrowing. "The spiritual master said girls were worthless and easier to care for."

Carissa almost spat out a curse but caught herself, remembering this wasn't the first time she had heard such a story. Back at the Pathfinders Guild, whenever they traveled to the nearby villages, it wasn't uncommon to see young boys dressed as girls and given feminine names.

She didn't understand at first, so she asked the elders in the village. They explained that boys' lives were precious, so people pretended they were girls to avoid jealousy and bad luck. It was like how women hid their pregnancies for the first three months to avoid attracting the attention of jealous spirits.

The common folk believed it, and even the Earl of Silverstone's family followed it.

Kyle continued, "When Isaac was four or five, he still wasn't in good health. No matter how many physicians they brought, none could cure him. The spiritual master was really just a charlatan. He claimed Isaac needed to be raised in a temple, where the gods would bless him and his health would improve.

Just how worthless could a girl be?

"So, at five years old, Isaac was

taken to the remote temple the charlatan was from. That delicate child was suddenly taken away from home and forced to work like a laborer. His fragile health couldn't handle it. After only a few months, they threw him out, but the charlatan still collected money from the Prince family every year.

"Later, Evelyn missed him dearly and insisted on visiting him. The charlatan realized he couldn't hide the truth any longer. But when Evelyn arrived, she found that the temple had caught fire. A novice priest ran out, claiming it was Isaac who had set the temple ablaze. He couldn't escape, and a few other novice priests died in the fire with him."

Kyle had left out a lot of details in his story. The few months Isaac spent at the temple were some of the most painful and unforgettable memories of his life.

Chapter 1140

Kyle continued, recounting the rest of the story.

After Isaac was cast out, the charlatan assumed the child would not survive. Whether he lived or died didn't matter. Eventually, wolves would eat him, and there would be nothing left.

But by chance, Adrian passed through that area. One night, he heard a faint baby-like cry and got curious. Thinking he had found a spirit, he followed the sound, only to be disappointed when he found Isaac. First, it wasn't a baby-it was a five or six-year-old child.

Second, it wasn't a spirit-it was a sick child on the brink of death. Having been abandoned there for who knows how long, one of his toes had been gnawed off by rats and his foot was covered in blood. Worse still, there were poisonous snakes nearby. Luckily, Isaac was so sick he barely moved, and the snakes didn't approach.

What incredible luck the child had. Barely breathing, he was still alive when Adrian found him. Despite his misgivings, Adrian took Isaac back with him. After a few days of light food and two doses of medicine, he actually started to recover.

In the capital, David had consulted many physicians who could not make Isaac any better. Yet, just a few bowls of soup and two doses of medicine had worked wonders.

It was extraordinary.

Adrian wasn't too impressed, though. The kid was so thin, with barely any flesh on him. Isaac was nearly six years old, but looked like he was only three or four. Adrian realized raising him would be a lot of trouble.

He thought about sending Isaac back, but then remembered how the kid didn't scream when surrounded by poisonous snakes. He figured the child must be bold, and having courage was the most important thing in life. With that thought, Adrian decided to keep him. The rest would depend on the boy's fate.

At that age, a child could already remember things. Once Isaac trusted Adrian enough, he shared his story. Adrian sent people to investigate and soon learned the full details.

After the fire at the temple, the Earl of Silverstone's family thought Isaac was dead. However, Adrian found the charlatan and took him back to Meadow Ridge. Saying the cool autumn day was a good time for drying cured meat, he set up a long pole and tied the priest to it. The priest's tongue was no good for

eating, so he cut it off first.

No one knew exactly when the charlatan died, but he hung there for three months before being taken down. Burial was out of the question, and they couldn't waste a mat to wrap him in. Digging a hole felt too disrespectful to the earth itself, so they simply threw his body to the wolves. Strangely enough, even the wolves rejected him. If it hadn't been for the need to store fat for the winter, they wouldn't have touched him at all.

The charlatan had lived in the

or

temple Isaac had been taken to, and it was almost laughable how a noble family with a long history of military honor believed the lies about borrowing the power of some deity. It was one thing for the ignorant common folk to fall for it, but the Earl of Silverstone's family believed it completely. They even handed over their five-year-old son, placing him in the hands of a monster.

Isaac-that was the name Adrian had given him. He hoped the boy's future would be full of music and joy, free from the hardships of his past.

"As Isaac grew older, Sage Adrian asked him if he wanted to return to Silverstone Estate," Kyle continued. "But he refused, saying there was no need. Seraphina had died in that fire, and once a person is dead, they cannot come back."

Carissa's heart tightened, tears welling up in her eyes. She couldn't stop the grief from spilling over. When she thought of Isaac, she thought of Ryan. And then, thinking of Ryan's tragic fate, she couldn't help but imagine the torment Isaac must have endured in that temple.

A five-year-old child, once coddled and cherished, was suddenly abandoned to a cruel charlatan. He had been tortured, nearly dying in a few short months. Then, to be thrown away as if his life meant nothing—who knew what else the charlatan had done to him? "I think if he doesn't want to acknowledge them, then don't," Rafael said, clearly angry. "Who knows if they really sent Isaac away hoping he would live, or if they just wanted him to carry on the family's fortune?"

After all, the Earl of Silverstone's family had fully believed in the charlatan's lies.

"That's probably something Isaac has wondered about himself," Kyle replied. "But he never dared ask. The truth is, how could he not feel anything for his mom? He was her precious child for five years, and even after everything, she came looking for him. Because of that, he always had a soft spot for her."

Rafael thought for a moment, then added, "But wait—Marshal Prince inherited the title. That means their dad never did. And Marshal Prince had some disabilities when he inherited, though not serious. The last time I saw him, it seemed like they were all healed."