

## War Song 1271

### Chapter 1271

When the news reached Valken, chaos erupted at Horizon Estate.

Yuvan was beside himself with fury, and he hurled a glass cup across the room.

"Useless fools! 5,000 private soldiers-how could they be wiped out without a word of warning? What is Tiberius even doing? So many men went to Lunvale, and he had no precautions in place! Not even a messenger to report this!"

His face was contorted in a fury so terrifying that even Harvey, standing quietly nearby, dared not speak. This was a blow they had not seen coming.

Yuvan's group had been solely focused on the private army in Stonebridge County. None of them ever imagined that problems would arise in Lunvale.

Stone Village had been concealed so carefully. How could it have been discovered?

Lunvale should never have drawn any attention in the first place!

Its terrain was perfect-hidden tunnels and a stronghold backed by mountains on three sides. Yuvan had always thought that should their plans fail, they could retreat there and remain safe for years, gradually plotting their next move through the tunnels. The natural defenses were so formidable that they had been certain no one could reach it.

But that naturally fortified position-so easy to defend and nearly impossible to breach-had been taken down just like that.

The situation was grim, and Wayne spoke with a solemn air. "Your Highness, anger will not change what has occurred. What matters now is swift action. They will focus on Lunvale, and it's clear the mistake lies with Tiberius. If he is captured and brought back to the capital, he will most certainly reveal your involvement."

Yuvan's brow furrowed deeply. "They are acting under the pretense of eradicating bandits. They suspect, but they have no solid evidence. The only link to me is Tiberius. What if we get rid of him on their journey back to the capital?"

Wayne immediately rejected the idea. "We shouldn't consider that at all. The men Prince Rafael has now are all from the martial world. How many suicide soldiers do you think would need to die for such a cause? Forget killing General Tiberius-we'd be lucky to even sneak in for a glimpse."

Yuvan stood abruptly, too quickly-his injured body protested, pain jolting through him. He gritted his teeth, barely suppressing a wince as he sank back into his seat, agitated.

"Just Tiberius alone isn't enough to tie this to me."

"Don't forget they've already captured those suicide soldiers," Harvey added.

"Suicide soldiers are notoriously tight-lipped," Yuvan replied dismissively. "If they could have been coerced, they would have spoken by now."

Harvey shook his head. "The problem is, everyone knows the suicide soldiers were captured. The suicide soldiers are in their hands, and they can claim whoever they want as a suicide soldier. Our men won't confess, but theirs will. And just like that, those 'confessions' can be used to back up General Tiberius' testimony. That's enough to brand you a traitor, Yuvan."

Yuvan sneered. "Me? How clever you are, Harvey. You've cleaned your hands of the matter. Why aren't you mentioning 'us' now?"

Harvey flushed with embarrassment. "A slip of the tongue, of course I meant 'us'."

Wayne stepped forward and bowed deeply. The fire in his eyes spoke of unwavering resolve.

"Your Highness, even in old age or difficult circumstances, one remains ambitious and determined to

achieve great things. We've planned for years and held back all this time. Now, we are at the edge-there

is no retreat left. Please make your decision. We shall follow you to the death."

Harvey quickly joined him and said, "Yuvan, if we do not act now, when will we?"

A vision of the sky griffin throne flashed in Yuvan's mind, symbolizing absolute power. It was the driving

force behind all his schemes. No matter how difficult, he had endured. He held on to the dream of one day sitting upon that throne, gazing down upon the world from above.

But now, he was silent.

He felt it wasn't the right time.

There had been better opportunities before, ones where the chances had been higher. Yet, he had refrained from acting.

Now, with Eleanor's fall, all their efforts in the capital had been destroyed. The private army in Lunvale had been wiped out. The Spencer family's warhorses and weapons had not yet arrived, and all contact with Westhaven had ceased.

This was far from the right time to act.

But now, they had been pushed into a corner.

Wayne and Harvey exchanged a glance. They both thought the same thing-Yuvan was indeed a coward.

All these years, Yuvan refused to make a move. He claimed it was because he didn't want the stigma of

being labeled a traitor, insisting he would wait for the chaos to naturally create the perfect opportunity. But the truth?

Yuvan had the ambition to plot a rebellion-but not the courage to act on it.

## Chapter 1272

In the study of Horizon Estate, the lamp had burned through the night.

Yuvan had called together all his strategists, hoping to find someone who would agree with him.

He truly believed now was not the right time-it would only lead to their deaths.

If Tiberius were killed, there would be no hard evidence to accuse him of treason.

Yet, all the strategists, as well as the officials from Valken who worked alongside him, were united in their opposition to killing Tiberius.

The force that wiped out 5,000 private soldiers with ease was now escorting Tiberius back to the capital. With an escort like that, how could they possibly succeed in killing him?

Rather than expend all their energy on that, it would be wiser to simply rise.

Saul Harper, Valken's governor, said, "Your Highness, since we've missed the best opportunity, we should not delay any longer. The cost of maintaining the army is high, and with no financial aid from the capital, we cannot sustain this much longer. If we wait, morale will falter."

Saul had once been a deputy minister of the Ministry of Finance. After making a few minor mistakes, Sigmund had demoted him and reassigned him to Quarath. Later, he aligned himself with Yuvan, and with Eleanor's financial influence, he was eventually reassigned to serve as the governor of Valken. However, his term was ending the next year, and Malcolm had a lot of criticism about him. Their relationship had been strained even during their time in the capital. Once his term expired, Saul feared he would be reassigned to another post.

Once that happened, Salvador would likely send his men in and Valken might no longer be under Yuvan's control.

Everyone took turns persuading Yuvan, saying it would be better to start small rebellions in different places rather than wait for Salvador's army to take action. Each person's argument made sense and fit the current situation.

But Yuvan still hesitated. After a moment's thought, he said, "Let us wait until tomorrow. More people will arrive by then, and we can discuss it further. For now, you may return."

The room was filled with men who had entrusted their lives and fortunes to Yuvan. They had spoken until their throats were dry, yet he remained indecisive. It was enough to leave them disappointed.

Observing the scene, Wayne couldn't help but shake his head. He rose and said, "I will see the gentlemen out."

He exchanged a glance with Harvey and several other strategists. They understood the silent message- once the officials were escorted out, they would find a place to continue their discussion.

Most of Valken's officials were loyal to Yuvan, as he had secretly promoted many of them.

But Wayne held a high position in Valken, as everyone knew he was Yuvan's most trusted confidant. He was the head of the strategists. Many of Yuvan's decisions were made with his counsel.

So, when he invited everyone to continue their discussion, avoiding Yuvan, no one thought anything amiss. In fact, they believed that since their positions aligned, they should try to persuade Yuvan. However, once they arrived, Wayne's expression was one of helplessness as he vented his frustrations. He revealed that Yuvan's resolve had been broken in the capital, and now he was filled with doubt. Wayne also shared something even more shocking-Salvador had prepared a retreat for Yuvan. If he chose to turn back now, he would face nothing more than a demotion to a remote, desolate place, stripped of his title as prince. But, he would be allowed to live out his days in comfort and wealth. If this had come from anyone else's mouth, no one would have believed it.

But because it came from Wayne, no one doubted him. After all, Wayne had followed Yuvan the longest, pouring his heart and soul into the cause. Without him, Yuvan wouldn't have the power he held today. Even when Eleanor was operating in the capital, Wayne had been there, offering advice.

A chill swept over the group. What did it mean to "turn back"? It meant Yuvan would lay down his flag and surrender, handing over those who had conspired with him.

Stripping Yuvan of his princely title was too light of a punishment for someone who had planned a rebellion.

"This can't be! If he truly backs down, won't we all be doomed?"

The one who spoke was Samson Judd, Fiona's brother. The Judd family had invested everything they had into Yuvan's cause-money, influence, and lives. He had once been one of Yuvan's most loyal followers. But after Avis' death, when Yuvan failed to elevate Fiona to a rightful position, Samson began to harbor resentment.

The Judd family had sacrificed everything, hoping to rise above their merchant origins and attain the title of marquis. But it was clear now that Yuvan had grown accustomed to their support-and in truth, he looked down on them.

Yuvan would rather marry a woman from the distant branch of the Spencer family than make Fiona his true consort.

While their familial ties might seem unshakable on the surface, in reality, they were on the brink of collapse.

Chapter 1273

The following day, Horizon Estate grew even more crowded, with several noble families from Ebonflow arriving.

These noble families, by all rights, should have been the most opposed to upheaval, for only in times of peace and prosperity could they enjoy their wealth and titles.

However, after decades of existence, their titles had dwindled from dukes to marquises. Some even faced the looming possibility of having their titles stripped away. Naturally, anxiety began to creep in. After all, they had once been at the height of their power.

Of course, not every noble family aligned with Yuvan's cause. Some sought only to live quiet lives in their own corner of the world, and while they were keenly aware of Yuvan's machinations, they preferred not to involve themselves. For them, the key was never to offend anyone-so they chose to turn a blind eye. Since not everyone had arrived yet, Yuvan decided to delay matters further, claiming he would make his decision only once everyone had gathered.

This further confirmed Wayne's earlier thoughts-that Yuvan was still undecided, wavering between rising or surrendering.

Meanwhile, on the Lunvale side, Rafael waited for the arrival of Ebonflow's military forces. When they finally reached there, he handed over the prisoners.

The commanding officer of Ebonflow's garrison was Chester Murray, a former officer under Dominic. In fact, Dominic had once nearly taken him in as an adopted son. After earning merit in battle, Chester was recommended by Dominic to oversee the garrison at Ebonflow, where he was tasked with maintaining order and preventing bandits from disturbing the peace.

Though Rafael and Chester had little direct interaction, the former knew enough about him. Chester, influenced by Dominic's principles, was a man of honor and loyalty. There was no way he would ever join Yuvan's faction. If Chester had been swayed, Yuvan would not have needed to waste his resources on recruiting soldiers.

Chester came personally to collect the prisoners.

After greeting Rafael and Carissa, both of whom bowed in return out of respect for Dominic's legacy, Chester wasted no time on pleasantries. His first question concerned the state of Dominic's affairs in the capital.

Back when Dominic had been summoned back to the capital, Chester wanted to return too. But as a garrison commander, he had been forbidden from leaving without orders. Although he sent agents to gather information, he could never learn everything. Even the letters he sent to Dominic were carefully filtered, with good news reported and bad news withheld.

Rafael mentioned the important things, emphasizing that Salvador had shown special leniency and didn't pursue the matter further.

Rafael's words were carefully chosen, as Chester considered Dominic to be a father figure. If Rafael failed to mention it, resentment might stir in Chester's heart, making him vulnerable to manipulation.

Rafael wasn't afraid of Yuvan-it was the person behind Yuvan that gave him pause.

Chester heard that Dominic had spent his 70th birthday alone in Sullivan Estate and couldn't help but feel tears well up in his eyes.

"It was his 71st birthday a few days ago, and I still couldn't be there in person to wish him. I can only hope to be granted a favor next year, that they allow me to visit Victory Pass just once."

Dominic's birthday was on the 19th of February. Back when Carissa was in the capital, she had already arranged for a gift to be sent in advance.

But a gift was just a gift-it could never replace being there in person.

Hearing Chester's words, she replied with sincerity, "Yes, I hope next year you can be there with him to personally wish him well."

After sharing pleasantries, Rafael finally shifted the conversation to business.

When Chester heard the prisoners being handed over were actually rebel soldiers, he was taken aback. "Could the private soldiers part of Eleanor's rebellion have been holed up in Lunvale all this time?" "Eleanor has been maintaining them, but the true mastermind behind the rebellion is Prince Yuvan. General Murray, there are several locations you need to be wary of. Be cautious and watch for signs of rebellion."

Rafael handed Chester a list of places. These were the locations mentioned by Randall-places Rafael could no longer investigate himself, and so he entrusted them to Chester.

"Prince Yuvan?" Chester murmured, recognizing the name. He had heard whispers, but had never truly believed it. Although he didn't interact with Yuvan much, he always thought the man was weak and ineffective.

But it was hard to say. Some people were masters of deception, hiding their true nature behind a facade. "If he harbors such rebellious intentions, why not simply kill him? Why allow him to return to Valken in the first place?" Chester asked.

He was aware of the suicide soldiers he had heard of their deployment when Dominic was returning to the capital. Back then, however, he had no idea they were Yuvan's men.



But no matter how many suicide soldiers there were, could they really not have killed Yuvan? And if Salvador knew of his betrayal, why would he have allowed Yuvan to return to Valken?

#### Chapter 1274

Rafael had intended to mention the person behind Yuvan's actions, but upon reflection, he chose to hold back. He didn't want to plant wild suspicions in Chester's mind.

Instead, he said, "At the time, there was no concrete evidence. If Prince Yuvan had been killed without cause, the king would have earned the reputation of mercilessly slaying his own kin.

"That would have only fueled the rebellion further. After all, rebellion is never the work of one man. With the reach Prince Yuvan's power has gained, someone would inevitably step forward to carry his banner. As for allowing him to return to Valken, it was to prevent him from reconnecting with those who had ties to Eleanor."

Chester hadn't thought too deeply before Rafael's explanation. "I see."

"If my suspicions are correct, they're planning to rise. They'll find some excuse to incite an uprising in various places. Once chaos erupts in Starhaven, they'll rally their forces under the pretext of quelling the unrest. That's why you must remain vigilant, General Murray. Ebonflow is the heart of Starhaven's food supply and trade. If it falls, the consequences will be dire."

Chester took the warning to heart, his expression hardening. "Rest assured. Even if it costs me my life, I won't allow them to take Ebonflow."

With the matter settled, Rafael knew it was time to return to the capital. Not a moment could be wasted

now.

Meanwhile, Tiberius was being escorted back to the capital. Throughout his lifetime, he had always been concerned with appearances, with making a show of his position. Now, surrounded by an impenetrable ring of guards, he was finally getting the kind of display he had always craved-though it was hardly the victory he had envisioned.

As they stopped to rest, Carissa carefully placed the steel needles back into her bracelet. When they had been clearing out the private soldiers, she had used up all the needles. She had to admit, they were incredibly useful especially in mountain warfare, where enemies were scattered.

Once they were spotted, she didn't even need to use Lightfoot Skill to chase after them-the steel needles could shoot quite far.

They worked really well.

However, she had fallen a few times on the mountain, which caused the bracelet to get a little bent. So, Rafael asked the people in the garrison to borrow some tools and helped her fix it.

If it wasn't fixed, the angle would be off, making it hard to accurately shoot.

As they neared the capital, word reached them that Barrett, in the Southern Frontier, had finally arrived at Victory Pass.

It was an order from Oliver, who had personally tasked Barrett and his companions with delivering birthday gifts to Dominic. The three people who went with Barrett were all familiar with him from their time in the Southern Frontier.

Barrett had been reluctant to go at first, but Oliver's word had been final. Despite efforts from Louis and Timothy to intervene on his behalf, Oliver would hear none of it.

Barrett sighed, resigned to his orders. There was little he could do but comply.

He knew exactly why Oliver had sent them to Victory Pass. The four of them had been quietly

investigating Oliver's embezzlement of military funds. Barrett had confided in Timothy about what they

had uncovered, and Timothy had instructed them to continue looking into it.

However, it seemed Oliver had caught wind of their suspicions and decided to remove the threat by sending them away.

Barrett had handed over everything he had gathered to Timothy. It turned out that Oliver had inflated the number of soldiers under his command, pocketing the excess military funds meant for the soldiers he had claimed but never had.

The Southern Frontier army was composed of the original Southern Frontier troops, the Sinclair Army, the Hell Monarch Army, and various temporary soldiers recruited during the war.

Many of these temporary soldiers had long since returned home, but Oliver continued to report their numbers as if they were still in service. This allowed him to claim much more in military funds than was rightfully his.

Timothy and the others hadn't been aware of the full extent of the fraud-after all, they never had access to the accounts. Now that Barrett had uncovered the truth, Timothy and the others became more alert and continued to investigate.

Amid their investigation, Timothy received urgent news from Rafael. He was to be wary of Oliver and, even more so, to watch out for Sandoria's movements.

The old generals in the Southern Frontier had already grown disillusioned with Oliver. It was clear he hadn't come to the Southern Frontier to defend it. Rather, he was there to enjoy the spoils of his position. In the past, his behavior had been terrible-he had seduced several Southern Frontier women, promising them that if they followed him, they could return to the capital and become noble wives. His actions had caused a great deal of scandal and turmoil at Redstone Manor.

Now, with Cece-Madam Spencer-by his side, he had toned down his antics, but only in the public eye. Behind closed doors, he lavished her with extravagant gifts. Since she had borne him a son, there was nothing he wouldn't give her he would have plucked the moon from the sky had she asked for it. The soldiers called Cece a siren, a temptress who had ensnared Oliver with her charms. However, Timothy believed that Oliver must have had some fault or weakness for Madam Spencer to have gotten involved with him.

After all, Oliver was never a good man to begin with.

What was concerning was Cece. Barrett had already seen her acting suspiciously in the past, meeting with people in secret.

Chapter 1275

Cece Spencer, of course, was none other than Celeste Kingsley.

After the birth of their son, she had blossomed anew. Her figure was as slender and graceful as ever, untouched by the weight of motherhood. Despite the harsh winds and biting cold of last year's winter in the Southern Frontier, she had flourished. Her complexion was as smooth as silk, and she radiated a delicate allure that made it impossible to look away.

In the estate, everything of value seemed to be reserved for her. Each day, she indulged in camel's milk stews and royal jelly soup, soaking in sheep's milk baths-luxuries she had no qualms about enjoying even after the flow of money from the capital had dried up.

To Oliver, she seemed almost impossibly delicate. Holding her soft, fragile hand stirred something deep in his chest.

He knew it was unusual-after all, he had spent his life surrounded by women of all kinds, from those of exceptional beauty to those of quiet sweetness. Yet it was this woman, with her natural, irresistible charm, who had truly captured his heart.

Timothy had said Celeste's identity was doubtful, and that Oliver should be more cautious.

Oliver had no patience for such warnings. After all, Celeste had already told him everything about her past. She had come to the Southern Frontier only to find a way to survive, never intending to attach herself to him. She had known of his wife's cruel nature and wanted nothing more than to avoid trouble, especially the kind she had fled from in the capital.

So, it wasn't that she had seduced him-it was he who had pursued her relentlessly.

To win her over, he had used every trick in the book. He even offered to take her in as his goddaughter. Eventually, they married, and still, during their nightly activities together, she would call him "Daddy" in a way that always made his heart flutter.

Now, with a happy son who is chubby and healthy, and a delicate and charming wife, Oliver felt like he could live his whole life in the Southern Frontier and still be extremely happy.

He didn't feel at all guilty for the way he had treated Zoey. Over the years, she had run the household with an iron grip, managing the family's finances with absolute control. Since he had been leading the troops outside, people held her in high regard. In the future, any titles or recognition that came her way would be for her, not for Celeste.

Forget guilt, he was also dissatisfied with Zoey.

Celeste had worked hard to give him a son, and had only asked to be elevated as a rightful wife. Yet, Zoey kept making excuses and showed no dignity as the lady of the house.

No one could know the agony Celeste had endured during her pregnancy. Every whiff of meat made her gag. She was such a delicate woman, and she held a spittoon every day during that time.

Could Zoey ever understand that?

"My lord, sit down. I have something to discuss with you," Celeste said, reclining on the luxurious chaise longue. She had slept through much of the day, and her hair was tousled, exuding an even more intoxicating beauty.

Oliver placed their son in the nursemaid's arms, then approached Celeste with deliberate steps. He sat down beside her, drawing her frail, soft body into his embrace. Lowering his head, he teased with a smirk, "And what would you like to tell me? That you've cleaned up?"

Her pale skin flushed pink at his remark, and a faint blush spread across her delicate features, even tinting the corners of her eyes. Her voice was soft and a bit hoarse as she replied, "Must you always think of such things? Can't you be serious for once?"

With a light kiss on her cheek, Oliver chuckled. "Since you were nine months pregnant, I've been acting like a priest. Now that you've recovered, it's only natural my thoughts would turn back to...those matters." Her face reddened even further. He stifled his laughter, gently guiding her shoulders. "Alright, tell me what you really need to say."

Celeste pulled out a letter and handed it to him. "My adoptive father has written to say that he's heard rumors that Sandoria is planning to strike back. Of course, the information may not be true. But if it is, I don't want you going to the battlefield."

Her voice faltered and she leaned into him, her arms wrapping around his neck. Tears began to fall from her eyes. "I can't bear the thought of you in danger. I can't stand it, not even a little."

Seeing the tears of the beautiful woman he held in his arms, Oliver's heart ached. He kissed her and soothed her, his hands gently caressing her. "Where did your adoptive father hear this about Sandoria? It's all nonsense."

Celeste's tears slid down her chilled cheek, making her look even more fragile and pitiable.

"Even if it's not true, I can't help but be afraid. Promise me, if the Sandorians come, you won't go to war. So many soldiers have died on the battlefield here in the Southern Frontier. Even General Sinclair and his sons died here. You must not go! You cannot."

"Alright, I promise you. I promise," Oliver said, holding her tightly, though a quiet sigh escaped him. He thought back to his departure for the Southern Frontier battlefield when Zoey had only given him words of duty-telling him to serve the kingdom well and to lead the army properly. She never once expressed concern for his safety.

Perhaps

her eyes, he was just a tool to earn a better future and wealth.

Chapter 1276

Upon hearing his promise, Celeste's tears finally ceased. Yet, her fingers still clutched tightly at his garments, her body pressed against his chest.

Though her face was streaked with tears, her eyes had hardened into cold disdain, a far cry from the fragile, sorrowful image she had projected earlier.

She loathed this old man. She also despised every person who had used her beauty and her body for their ends. She didn't want to be a pawn in anyone's game, and she was weary of the role. She had never received a shred of genuine affection.

Yet, there was no other path for her. If she had to marry a lowly merchant or commoner, she wouldn't be able to endure that hardship. Though she had been used in the past, she had lived well enough. After leaving the capital and wandering for a few days, she realized she could never escape the life of wealth and luxury.

When that man came to her, she agreed without hesitation. At that time, it had seemed like her only escape.

Her background meant she could never be properly married into a wealthy family as the primary wife. Samuel had once professed his undying love for her, yet had never managed to secure her a legitimate position in society. In the end, she had remained just another concubine.

And now, thinking of that spineless coward, she felt nothing but revulsion.

In essence, Oliver was no different than Samuel. He had a virtuous wife, but he didn't treat her properly, indulging in pleasures while neglecting his duties.

Celeste didn't feel guilty toward Zoey. On the contrary, Zoey should be grateful to her for revealing Oliver's true nature what a dishonorable man he was!

Despite her thoughts, the words that came out of her mouth were filled with sensitivity and vulnerability. "Though I know what my adoptive father says may not be true, if it is, I just want the three of us to stay far from the battlefield. Even if life is harder, as long as I have you and our son by my side, I will fear nothing." "Alright, I promise you," Oliver replied, his heart growing more tender. "If war does break out, we'll leave here. I won't need any title, not even that of a marshal. Don't worry, I won't let you suffer. We have enough money. Wherever we go, we will live well."

Celeste clung to him, though resentment simmered beneath her composed exterior. The mission that had been assigned to her was not this-this was a compromise, a task born out of necessity, not choice. The man had hoped that Oliver would take part of his forces from the Southern Frontier and assist him. Unfortunately, Oliver was utterly useless. He had been wounded on the battlefield once, and it had stripped him of any courage he might have had. The thought of rebellion, of standing against the Sandoria forces, was far too much for him. Even if war were to break out, he wouldn't dare step foot on the battlefield.

Celeste had thought that since Oliver was a military general, even if he couldn't compare to Rafael, he wouldn't be so useless and weak. Little did she know, calling him weak was actually a compliment-he was nothing but a waste.

Having this child was originally to better control him. Since he wanted a warm family, she would give him one. In the end, everything she gave him was just an illusion-her affection and even the child.

Once the task entrusted to her was done, she would simply leave. She wouldn't even take the child with her. Whether he lived or died was up to his fate.

From the moment the child was born, she hadn't held him much. She refused to form any emotional bonds, not even the smallest hint of maternal attachment.

She had witnessed the misery of mothers bound by their children. Her mom had been such a woman, unable to die even when death seemed the only release, bound by the care for her two daughters. Only at the end, after much suffering, had she finally found peace.

Now, Celeste was eager to finish her task and claim what was rightfully hers. Then, she would be free- no longer tied down by false pretenses. The world would be her oyster, and all she needed was to indulge herself, to care for herself as she saw fit.

How glorious those days would be!

The wind in the Southern Frontier was particularly bitter this time of year, a late spring chill that made both the citizens and soldiers shiver.

The wheat harvested last year had sprouted. In the southern regions, wheat was now being harvested, and the grains could be ground into fragrant flour. Unfortunately, there were too few places suitable for growing wheat.

Above, a graceful eagle soared across the sky, the vibrant blue stretching far beneath it. The land, once plagued with unrest, now seemed to find some measure of peace as the people lived in orderly prosperity. The elders of the Southern Frontier often said with a sigh, "It's good not to have war."

## Chapter 1277

When Barrett arrived at Victory Pass, he made his way to the marshal's residence, Stormwatch Keep. He had braced himself for a harsh reception to his surprise, the Sullivan family merely sent someone to collect the gift and ushered them to their quarters. No one came out to berate him or discipline him. He stood in stunned silence for a long moment before dragging his weary feet back outside.

"The marshal's residence here is nothing like ours at the Southern Frontier," remarked Glen, one of the soldiers accompanying him. "It's grand enough, but it's so bare and simple-there's not a single fine thing here."

"Don't compare General Sullivan to Marshal Prince," Barrett said.



Inwardly, he thought that Oliver wasn't worthy of being compared.

Thinking Barrett was cautioning him against criticizing Oliver, Glen quickly fell silent.

For the moment, they had been settled in the large camp, sleeping in the communal barracks. Of course,

if they wanted to return to the Southern Frontier sooner, they were free to do so.

None of them dared say that returning to the Southern Frontier wasn't an option. When they left, Oliver sent someone to inform them that they were to stay here and learn from the Sullivan family's military training methods, then return after the new year.

While Oliver had said this, he had not provided any formal documentation. So, they were still soldiers of the Southern Frontier. Even if they stayed here, the local commanders would likely never truly accept them.

Barrett knew full well the reputation he had at Victory Pass. For now, there was no choice but to settle in and figure something out. As soon as spring came the next year, they would immediately set off to return to the Southern Frontier.

-

-

Meanwhile, Rafael, Carissa, and the others had made it back to the capital by 15th March, after the Spring Remembrance Festival. The people from Meadow Ridge had already returned home. Everett had originally intended to stay in the capital for a few days, but knowing that everyone was busy, he decided against it as he didn't want to make things uncomfortable for them.

Once they arrived, Rafael first had Tiberius imprisoned at the Supreme Court, then went to the palace to report in, while Carissa was free to return to the estate on her own.

Jacob saw how weary they all were and quickly ordered hot meals to be prepared. There were more pressing matters to deal with later. First, he assured Carissa that Solomon and Ryan had already visited the Sinclair family's graves during the Spring Remembrance Festival, so she didn't need to

worry. Carissa was relieved to hear that, knowing the rituals had been completed. Tomorrow, she would visit the family chapel at Northwatch Estate to offer flowers herself.

Everyone was exhausted, so after the meal, they quickly bathed and retired for the night.

But Kyle and Carissa, after eating, washed their faces and immediately joined Jacob in the council hall. They shared the basic details of the situation with him.

After hearing their account, Jacob didn't say much. He had already expected as much.

In the royal study, Salvador listened to Rafael's report, his brow furrowing as he asked, "When do you think they'll make their move?"

"I suspect there will be activity within a month," Rafael replied.

"Should we strike first?" Salvador said. Then he shook his head, clearly frustrated. "The problem is, we don't even know who they are. We still haven't located the private army from Stonebridge County, and we have no idea how their forces are growing."

Rafael found that odd as well. The private army in Stonebridge County had been developing for quite some time. At this point, it likely numbered at least 20 to 30 thousand men.

"The rebellion itself isn't what worries me," Rafael said. "What I'm truly concerned about is the possibility that the person behind Yuvan has ties to Sandoria. Sandoria may not be a threat now, but if they attack the Southern Frontier while we're dealing with internal turmoil, it could deal a crippling blow to us." The Southern Frontier was what Salvador cared about the most. If he were to lose it again, any achievements from his rule would be erased, and he would be condemned by the people.

Though he considered the chance of Sandoria rising again to be slim-at most, they might stir up some unrest along the border just the thought of it made his heart race. The possibility, no matter how remote, was enough to unsettle him.

He absolutely could not allow anything to happen to the Southern Frontier again.

Salvador knew Rafael had endured a long journey, but he still kept him in the palace and summoned the Defense Minister, his deputy minister, and Thomas to discuss matters.

It was essential to consider all possible scenarios, make multiple predictions based on the current situation, and then organize their forces accordingly.

Above all else, Salvador's greatest fear remained the Southern Frontier, but when Rafael mentioned Leroy from Westhaven, Salvador's expression faltered.

"It's impossible for someone to have the capability to collude with both Sandoria and Westhaven," he said, his unease evident.

Starhaven's relationship with Westhaven had always been delicate, and their negotiations hadn't fully concluded. There was still a debt to settle with Westhaven that loomed over them.

But that wasn't the greatest concern.

The real issue was that if the true mastermind behind the rebellion truly had the skill to forge such alliances, then how long had they been biding their time? How long had they been plotting?

Davis' eyes widened as he repeatedly looked at the maps. He was very familiar with these terrains in his mind. If private armies or bandits were hiding in these areas, rooting them out would be no easy task. He turned to Rafael. "What's the plan for dealing with these bandits?"

"We deal with them as they come," Rafael simply replied.

Davis blinked, incredulous. He couldn't believe Rafael had given such an unsophisticated answer. Who didn't know that they should deal with them as they came? The problem was that there needed to be a strategy!

"Your Highness, is that all you have? Are there more private armies we should know about?"

"There are," Rafael replied. "We haven't discovered where the private army from Stonebridge County has moved for now. I suspect they're waiting for a signal to reunite, so we shouldn't waste time looking for them. When the rebellion starts, the private army will make itself known."

The Ministry of Defense officials studied the maps and compared them with the distribution of the troops. The forces stationed at the Southern Frontier and Victory Pass couldn't be moved. The garrisons outside the capital were also off-limits.

That left only the troops at Brightport and Ebonflow available for deployment.

Salvador listened intently, but his mind wasn't focused on Yuvan's rebellion. What truly worried him was the possible threat to Victory Pass and the Southern Frontier.

Suddenly, he realized that while he had been obsessively guarding against Rafael, the true rebels had been quietly plotting and scheming. It struck him that he had done everything, yet had still missed the mark.

A sense of resignation settled within him, and for a moment, he felt utterly defeated.

It wasn't until late in the evening that Rafael finally returned to Hell Monarch Estate.

Carissa had someone keep the food warm for him. As soon as he came back, she immediately ordered the meal to be served.

She had already eaten, but stayed to keep him company, as eating alone felt lonely.

Rafael didn't eat much. He placed his cutlery down and sighed. "Today, I caught His Majesty looking at me several times. His eyes... They were full of complexity. I could tell there's some guilt there."

Carissa handed him a cup of hot coffee. "Don't worry. Once everything's settled, he'll still keep a watchful eye on us."

Rafael smiled softly. "Your words strike true."

Carissa tilted her head, considering. "If I were the king, I'd probably always worry about someone with power trying to take my throne. After all, too many people want to rule."

Well, such rebellious words shouldn't be said out loud.

Rafael seemed disinterested, his expression weary. "Being a king is exhausting. I saw His Majesty's hair graying at the temples today."

Carissa thought about replying that their lives weren't any easier, but then decided it was true—they were still in a better position than Salvador.

Jacob and the others came by to check on them. Seeing their exhaustion, they decided not to disturb them further. It had been a long day.

Exhausted as he was, Rafael didn't slack off even a little in bed.

He pulled out all his tricks!

He unlocked new techniques!

Carissa had endured a long ride back on horseback. Her legs were sore and chafed, and now she had to keep up with an overly hungry man, stretching and moving as if the day hadn't been taxing enough. It was exhausting!

Two hours later, she felt like she had been trampled by a mule. Every part of her body ached terribly.

Finally, Rafael collapsed in exhaustion. He held Carissa in his arms and quickly fell into a deep sleep. His mind was still somewhat active, and he remembered that he had wanted to speak to her. But his eyelids were heavy, and his mouth too dry to form words.

Never mind. It was time to sleep first!

Chapter 1279

By noon the next day, both Rafael and Carissa awoke lazily, their bodies still heavy with the remnants of sleep.

Their eyes met, and Rafael's gaze darkened. The sleep had restored him completely, filling him with energy. He pulled her close, his lips brushing her ear.

Carissa quickly pushed him away. "We need to get up!"

Lulu was waiting outside. When she heard noise from inside the room, she feared they would be distracted again and hurriedly called out, "Your Highness, Your Grace, Lady Helen has sent someone three times already."

Rafael reluctantly withdrew his hand from its resting place, his gaze still burning with intensity. His tone was commanding yet playful. "I'll listen to you now, but tonight... You'll listen to me."

The night before, Rafael had returned too late to greet Helen.

Normally, she never fussed about where he went, even if it was to the battlefield.

It wasn't that she didn't know the dangers of war, but Helen had always had complete faith in her son's invincibility.

However, this time, with most of the household sent away and the atmosphere tense, she too had become nervous.

When Carissa returned the night before, Rafael had not been around. Although Carissa had said he was in the palace, Helen hadn't actually seen him, and worry gnawed at her.

Even today, after sending people to check multiple times, she was told they still hadn't gotten up. She could hardly believe it since when were those two so lazy? Even when there wasn't a morning court session, they would usually be up by dawn.

Now, Helen truly experienced what it meant to be anxious and worried.

At last, she saw them appear hand in hand, both dressed in formal clothes-the man exuded authority, and the woman radiated elegance.

Never before had Helen been so patient, waiting for them to properly complete all the formalities before finally allowing them to rise and take their seats.

This time, the worry had been too much. She felt it took a toll on her. Even if they were to take their time and slowly offer their greetings to her, she would endure it.

After the formalities, the two of them went their separate ways-Rafael to the Supreme Court, Carissa to the Capital Guard headquarters.

Today, they needed to properly interrogate Tiberius.

Tiberius was nothing but skin and bones now, his body so thin that even with all the dirt and grime, he barely weighed 120 pounds.

He was constantly on edge, asking every day if Salvador would have him executed. He kept insisting he was innocent and had only been greedy for a bit of money.

For someone like him, there was no need for a harsh interrogation. A simple question was enough: "Your life depends on how much truth you reveal."

With those words, Tiberius' already malnourished brain kicked into overdrive, and he spilled everything he knew without hesitation.

His confession was long-winded and full of unnecessary details, but the one thing that could be confirmed was that the private soldiers were indeed under Yuvan's command.

At first, Tiberius hadn't known that Yuvan was behind it. It had been Wayne who made contact with him, promising 5,000 silver coins a year to find reliable people to transport grain to Stone Village. Tiberius hadn't bothered to investigate the village himself. It wasn't like he needed to pay for the grain anyway. Plus, he was getting a villa as well as 5,000 silver coins annually-it seemed like a foolproof deal.

Later, when Yuvan secretly came to Lunvale, Tiberius accidentally ran into him. It was then that he noticed Wayne by Yuvan's side and realized that the people from Stone Village were working for Yuvan. Realizing he couldn't keep it hidden any longer, Yuvan came clean. He told Tiberius to keep supporting those men and promised to continue the annual payment of 5,000 silver coins of silver. On top of that, he made an even bigger offer-if their plans succeeded, Yuvan would make Tiberius a prince.

After confessing, Tiberius broke down in tears before Rafael. "I never cared for his promise of a princely title. It's just the expenses! I was just trying to make a living with those 5,000 silver coins a year. I'm no traitor-I swear I'm loyal!"

Tiberius sobbed, his face streaked with tears and snot. "Believe me, my nephew! I have no intention of treason. I've told you everything I know. You have to help me please! I'm innocent!"

Seeing the man sobbing and rambling the same excuses over and over, Rafael realized he didn't know much about Yuvan's rebellion. He ordered his men to lock Tiberius up to prevent any suicide attempts and reassured him that he had nothing to fear.

Reporting this information was a meritorious act, and Salvador wouldn't have him executed. Rafael added that if anything else came to mind, Tiberius should report it immediately.

The hope in Tiberius' eyes flared up at that. He stopped crying, nodding eagerly. "I will. I'll think hard. We cannot let these rebels succeed!"

Randall had been watching the entire exchange. At first, he had been afraid-afraid of being caught up in this mess, afraid that others might accuse him of betraying his dad for personal gain.

But as he watched Tiberius' disgraceful behavior, a sudden calm washed over him. If it came down to it,

so be it he would rather face death than stoop so low and lose all dignity like that.

At least he would hold onto his pride as a man.

## Chapter 1280

Tiberius had confessed, the "suicide soldiers" had been interrogated, and even Eleanor, before her death, had left a letter of repentance admitting her regret over aiding her brother's plans for rebellion.

These pieces of evidence together nailed Yuvan's treason firmly in place!

Salvador acted quickly. He issued a royal edict summoning Yuvan to return to the capital and face his crimes. Alongside this, a second edict was sent to Valken's governor, ordering Yuvan's arrest and transport to the capital.



At this point, Yuvan had no choice but to revolt.

But it wasn't the clean, decisive uprising he had envisioned. Instead, his hesitation and lack of resolve

were laid bare before his allies, and whatever respect or authority he had was swiftly eroded.

In such moments, those conspiring alongside him began to hope for someone more decisive and capable

to replace Yuvan as their leader. This wasn't mere wishful thinking-they knew there was such a possibility.

Wayne had planted that seed of hope. Both he and Harvey had been working behind the scenes, laying the groundwork for such a transition.

Before Yuvan raised his army, rumors began to spread. It was said that the Southern Frontier military officers were colluding with the people of Sandoria. They were allowing Sandoria soldiers to invade the Southern Frontier, and a war was on the verge of breaking out.

Almost simultaneously, bands of bandits emerged in multiple regions, seizing control of the mountains, killing indiscriminately, and sowing chaos. The court faced widespread criticism, with accusations of negligence and incompetence flying from every direction.

Amid this turmoil, Yuvan raised the banner of rebellion in a fit of anger. He issued a proclamation condemning Salvador as corrupt and inept, accusing his generals of cowardice and his ministers of treachery. Yuvan claimed he was acting in the name of justice and righteousness, calling for all those with a sense of purpose to join his cause.

After the proclamation was sent out and he raised his army, he discovered there were only a few bandits causing trouble far from the large-scale disturbance he had expected. Also, his private army had been reduced to just 3,000 men. Even with the 500 household soldiers from Valken, they only added up to a little over 3,000.

Previously, there were about 35,000 private soldiers who had been moved out of Stonebridge County, led by Craig Morris. According to their earlier agreement, once Yuvan issued the proclamation, Craig would rally the private army and capture the three districts of Sableton, Montfield, and Glenmoor.

These districts were strategically chosen-they were the farthest from the garrisons in Ebonflow and could be easily taken with Craig's forces. Three districts and more than 30,000 men-it was supposed to be a guaranteed victory.

But there was no sign of Craig. When they sent people to search, Craig and the private army had vanished without a trace.

Originally, the private soldiers had been moved out of Stonebridge County in several batches, spread across these various districts. Most were hidden in the mountains, with supplies stockpiled in advance, awaiting Wayne and Harvey to deliver further provisions.

While not all local officials in these areas had been bribed, Yuvan's men controlled the critical checkpoints. Years of meticulous planning had ensured there would be no missteps in this part of the operation.

Yuvan was about to lose his mind. He stormed through Horizon Estate, smashing anything in his path. His eyes were bloodshot as he snarled at Wayne and Harvey, "Where are my soldiers? Where is Craig? He's been hounding me day and night to raise my banner. Now that the proclamation is out and I've declared a rebellion, where are my men?"

Like a caged lion, he prowled back and forth in the chaos of the study, ignoring the lingering pain from his injuries.

Wayne and Harvey looked genuinely bewildered, fear etched across their faces. They insisted they had no idea why Craig hadn't mobilized the troops.

"Your Highness, please calm yourself," Wayne said, dropping to one knee. "I will leave with Prince Harvey at first light to find Craig. We will ensure he raises the army and takes control of the three districts immediately."

"There's something wrong. Something is definitely wrong," Yuvan muttered, his bloodshot eyes darting wildly as though piecing together a puzzle. His expression twisted into something monstrous. "Craig wouldn't dare defy me. Someone must have gotten to him!"

His finger shot out at Wayne as he accused, "It's you! You've betrayed me!"

Wayne looked horrified and shouted in protest, "Your Highness, I would never betray you! The private soldiers exist solely to overthrow King Salvador and secure your ascent to the throne.

"You are a prince, and you have a rightful claim to it! I am nothing but a commoner. Even if I have control

of the private army, that's only a few thousand people! I could never rally enough support to challenge the king!"

Yuvan stared at Wayne, his breath heavy.

The reasoning made sense-Wayne didn't have the influence to betray him on such a scale.

Even if Stone Village hadn't been destroyed, the forces there amounted to no more than a few thousand men, including the "bandits" scattered across the districts. Many of them were little more than an unruly mob, lacking proper weapons and armor.

That was exactly why their strategy depended on the "bandits" to create chaos first. By spreading rumors of an impending war and heightening the sense of crisis, they hoped to stir public resentment against Salvador's reign. The goal was to turn this unrest into support for Yuvan's cause.

But for such a plan to work, the leader of the rebellion had to be from the legitimate royal bloodline. Yuvan, the son of the late Augustus and the younger brother of Sigmund, had this pedigree, which made the rebellion appear just.

Without it, the common folk would have little reason to risk joining an uncertain cause. After all, there were too many people struggling just to survive in the world.