

## War Song 1311

### Chapter 1311

Astral Prison was located within the Supreme Court, but was not under its jurisdiction. Those held there were typically the worst offenders, members of royal families, or influential officials.

Being sentenced to Astral Prison often spoke volumes about the severity of one's crime. Few were ever released unscathed.

Zoey could only hope for a sentence of exile. At least that might spare their lives. She had sent Cedric to train with Travis for this very reason-so that he might develop a strong enough body to endure the harsh journey to their place of exile, with hopes of returning to the capital once the pardon came.

As long as they survived, she had plans for the future.

On the other hand, Viola could hardly believe what had befallen her. She had been peacefully residing at the family's countryside villa when guards from the Royal Citadel arrived to take her away. She had been thrown into Astral Prison without explanation.

At first, she was in a daze. Only when Evelyn rushed to her, sobbing uncontrollably, did she ask, "What's happened? Why are we here?"

Evelyn was too overcome with emotion to reply coherently.

Viola looked around at her family, a growing unease settling in her chest. She raised her voice, "What's going on? They've brought me here without even telling me what I've done wrong! Where is Caspian? Where is Cedric?"

Zoey sat in a corner holding Courtney, her face blank. "Caspian and Cedric are in a different section. They've separated the men and women."

"What's happened?" Viola's panic deepened. Was this some kind of disaster for the whole family? Was there no one left to help them?

Luna's eyes were swollen from crying, and she said hoarsely, "Your eldest brother fled in battle. His Majesty issued an order to imprison our entire family in the prison. The officials from the Royal Citadel have already seized Silverstone Estate."

Viola stood frozen, as if struck by lightning. After a long pause, her lips trembled as she whispered, "But what does this have to do with me? I'm a married woman."

Zoey's voice was cold and sharp. "Have you forgotten that you're no longer married to Mr. Warren?" "Either way, this has nothing to do with me!" Viola scrambled to push her mother away, grabbing the iron bars of the cell and shouting, "You've got the wrong person! A woman follows her husband after marriage! Even if I'm divorced, I don't live at Silverstone Estate. I don't know anything! I am innocent!"

The jailer outside said coldly, "It wasn't a mistake. You're all the same."

If one was guilty, they were guilty together. If innocent, they were innocent together.

"No! No, we're not the same!" Viola screamed, the sound sharp and almost unbearable.

"Save your breath, Viola. It's His Majesty's orders," Luna said, her voice trembling. She was afraid too, but she knew that shouting and losing her composure would not help.

When they had been taken away, Zoey had warned them not to act out, not to be stubborn, and not to over-dramatize

anger the people in the dungeon. They were to stay calm, maintain hope, and conserve their strength. No matter how awful the food was, they had to eat it.

There was hope only as long as they were alive.

So, everyone kept quiet. Screaming and causing a scene would only drain their strength and break their will without serving any real purpose.

Seeing that crying and shouting were in vain, Viola dropped to her knees, crawling over to Zoey and grasping her shoulder. Tears poured down her face like a torrent.

"Zoey, you have a way out, don't you? Even if you don't care about us, you must care about your children!"

Zoey didn't even bat her eyelids. "If I had a way out, I wouldn't be here."

Viola shook her head violently, tears mixing with snot as she pleaded, "No! You and Carissa are close,

aren't you? Haven't you asked her for help? Have you sent someone to beg her?"

Zoey stared at Viola for a long time before she suddenly let out a soft, almost amused laugh. "Viola, you've always looked down on Lady Carissa. Why would you want me to beg her now?"

"I've never looked down on her! When have I ever done that?" Viola covered her face, wailing in despair. "I can't die here. This is unfair!"

"Who here hasn't been treated unfairly?" Zoey snapped.

Zoey couldn't be bothered with Viola. She hugged Courtney and turned away, not sparing Viola another glance.

Chapter 1312

When Carissa returned to Hell Monarch Estate, she immediately heard the news-Silverstone Estate had been seized, and the Earl of Silverstone's family had been imprisoned.

In fact, she already knew. The word had reached her while she was still in the palace.

Or perhaps, she had suspected this even earlier, when news of Oliver's desertion reached her. She had known then that this would be the inevitable outcome.

The people sent to seize Silverstone Estate were not only carrying out the punishment for Oliver's crime, but also hoping that he would turn himself in voluntarily. The confiscation of the estate and the stripping of titles were routine measures in such cases.

It would be impossible for such a scandal to erupt and for the title to remain intact, allowing the family to continue in wealth and comfort. noveldrama

But what would happen next?

Even Carissa couldn't predict Salvador's next move.

Isaac had already begun making his rounds, seeking assistance, but not from the powerful or the nobility -he was turning to the common folk.

Zoey had foreseen this, so she spent money to set up a food distribution stall outside the city, helping the poor and offering assistance to those who were seriously ill.

Luna had once mentioned in Skye Embroidery that both Evelyn and Viola had opposed Zoey doing this, thinking it was a waste of money for the sake of building her reputation. But now, the only way to assist the Earl of Silverstone's family was through two conditions-a great victory at the Southern Frontier, and the people's spontaneous support for Zoey.

Supporting Zoey was different from supporting Oliver.

So, Isaac had already ordered rumors to be spread-that Oliver had abandoned his wife, running off with his concubine and the child she had borne him. Oliver had not only neglected his military and political duties, but he had also betrayed the king, the court, and, worst of all, his wife and children.

Isaac wasn't just concerned with creating a reputation for Zoey as a virtuous woman-he was also building the narrative of a woman cruelly abandoned by her husband.

They claimed that Oliver had long intended to divorce Zoey. But being stationed at the Southern Frontier, he couldn't find the right excuse, so he delayed the decision.

Rumors from traders traveling to the Southern Frontier spoke of Oliver having a young, captivating wife at his marshal's residence-one who possessed an enchanting beauty so powerful that those who saw her were said to fall under her spell.

Jacob had no doubt been fanning the flames of these rumors. But he focused on how, despite being rejected by her husband, Zoey still had a loving heart. The food distribution stall at Silverstone Estate continued without fail, feeding the poor outside the city in all kinds of weather.

Gradually, the common people began to form a clear impression of the lady of the Earl of Silverstone's family.

She was dignified and graceful, a capable manager of her household, compassionate, and generous in charity. However, her own life wasn't easy; her mother-in-law was demanding, and her sister-in-law, Viola, was troublesome. Everywhere, both inside and outside the estate, there were burdens weighing on Zoey's shoulders.

It could be said that since Zoey married Oliver, she had never known a day of peace. Oliver had never shown her affection or respect, and there were more than a dozen concubines in the household. Even though Zoey was good at managing things, her life was not as good as those of other noble families. She had never experienced the luxury Oliver's name could bring, and now, she was suffering from the consequences of his actions.

Truly, it was a pitiable fate.

The weak always drew sympathy, and with Zoey's reputation for virtue, the public rallied behind her. For a time, it seemed everyone was outraged by the injustice she had suffered.

As public opinion began to swell, Carissa saw that things were taking shape. She immediately sought out Meredith.

That evening, Meredith returned to her husband's house for dinner and casually mentioned a few things

to her father-in-law Irvin, the Oversight Minister. Irvin paid close attention to public sentiment, and the voices of the people were always of great importance to him.

The next day, he took it upon himself to visit and inspect the food distribution stall Zoey had established. To his surprise, it was still running.

He found it odd-how could it continue operating when its benefactor had been imprisoned?

He immediately sent someone to inquire, learning that Zoey hired the people outside Silverstone Estate to run the food distribution stall. They were not part of the household staff. The people she hired were originally poor citizens who came to the stall for food.

The person in charge of the food distribution stall, Charlie, explained that Zoey trusted him and had given him one thousand silver coins to continue the charitable work. Even though Zoey had been imprisoned, the funds remained, and the overseer would continue to buy and provide food for as long as he could. Irvin couldn't help but be deeply moved when he heard this.

Charlie was a man who had once known hunger and cold. He had lived a life of poverty and hardship, and he knew that he would never come close to earning one thousand silver coins in his lifetime. He could have taken the money and run.

Instead, he chose to honor Zoey's compassion and continue the work she had started.

Compassion-true compassion-had the power to touch hearts and inspire others.

Chapter 1313

The following morning, Irvin brought the matter before the court.

Jeremiah nodded in approval and said, "I've heard of Mrs. Prince's good deed of setting up the food distribution stall. It's rare for a woman, confined to the inner chambers of the household, to have such a chance to do good. Yet, despite her circumstances, she has remained true to her heart, doing good deeds and accumulating virtue.

"It's something worthy of praise and should be spread far and wide to set an example for the people. Though, it's truly regrettable that such a virtuous woman should be dragged down by her husband and trapped in Astral Prison, her fate uncertain."

Malcolm stepped forward and added, "The common people have been speaking of nothing else these past few days, and many are speaking out in support of Mrs. Prince.

"Your Majesty, I believe that while Mr. Prince's actions are unforgivable, punishing his family by stripping their titles and confiscating their property is already enough. I urge you to show mercy and consider a lighter sentence for them."

Salvador wanted to use Oliver's family to lure him into surrendering, so they couldn't be released, nor could anyone say they would receive a lighter sentence.

"I will consider it carefully," he said. "I will issue another arrest warrant for Mr. Prince and post a notice saying that if he surrenders on his own, his family will receive a lighter sentence."

Zoey's good deeds were truly a model for noblewomen, and even Salvador was deeply moved. Anthony stepped forward and said respectfully, "Understood, Your Majesty. I will carry out your commands.

Carissa had not yet returned to her official position-she was still on leave. However, this gave her a certain freedom, allowing her to move about as needed.

The royal edict had already been sent by swift riders to the Southern Frontier. Although the Southern Frontier's military trusted Rafael, having a royal edict in hand would make everything much more legitimate.

The Ministry of Defense had also shipped the newly produced six-barreled matchlocks to the Southern Frontier. This was their first use on the battlefield, and there was great anticipation for what they might bring to the fight.

The war at the Southern Frontier had begun to stir a sense of urgency in the capital.

Curfews were imposed, and inns and taverns were strictly inspected. Even the more disreputable places, like the brothels, were under scrutiny. The Sandorian spies uncovered at the gentlemen's retreats had raised suspicions that others may still be operating in the city.

Though Carissa was on leave, Michael and Max occasionally kept her informed of the situation. It was Max who brought her the news that Salvador had decreed that if Oliver turned himself in, his family might receive a lighter sentence.

Carissa felt frustrated. Even now, Salvador failed to understand Oliver.

Didn't Oliver know that this flight would bring ruin to his family?

He knew, but he didn't care.

Oliver was disloyal, unjust, lacking in compassion, neglectful of his duties to his family, and without a shred of decency. Such a man couldn't possibly be relied upon to surrender voluntarily.

Carissa went to the Arcane Sanctum and collected several medicinal preparations from Sebastian before personally visiting Astral Prison.

The Earl of Silverstone's family, with its elderly and children, could manage with meager food and drink. But if they fell ill, their chances of recovery were slim. Without proper care, they would only wait for death. Galen personally oversaw Astral Prison. If someone were to send a random servant in, they would never be allowed entry. So, Carissa had to go herself. Although Galen didn't dare to stop her, he was still cautious and asked to inspect the medicines she brought in.

He sent for the physician, who examined the remedies and said, "These are common medications: treatments for colds, heatstroke, summer heat, diarrhea, vomiting, as well as some ointments for itching and poison removal."

Seeing that the medicine contained no poison, Galen immediately allowed her to proceed.

However, Carissa had one more request. She wished to meet with Zoey alone and asked Galen to bring her to the interrogation room.

Galen was well acquainted with Kevin and knew that Kevin's master was Violet. Though he did not dare to approach the Hell Monarch's household himself, the connection made him feel a little familiar with them. He immediately agreed and personally went into the prison to get Zoey.

When he announced that he would take Zoey to the interrogation room, Courtney and Luna grew nervous. They insisted on accompanying her, and even the daughters of the concubines from the household, though frightened, clung to Zoey. noveldrama

However, Viola stepped back and hid behind Evelyn.

Galen noticed this and calmly said, "Quiet down. It is Lady Carissa who wishes to see her."



Upon hearing Carissa's name, everyone sighed in relief. Evelyn immediately struggled to her feet and grasped Zoey's hand, saying, "Lady Carissa has come to see you-it's a good opportunity! You must ask her to save us and inquire about Oliver's whereabouts."

Zoey quietly withdrew her hand, offering no response. Her eyes were cold and indifferent. As Galen opened the prison door, she lowered her head and stepped out, offering only a simple thank you.

Galen observed her, noting that Zoey was truly adaptable. If she had maintained her usual arrogance upon entering the prison, the guards would have tortured them beyond endurance.

#### Chapter 1314

It had been six days since the Earl of Silverstone's family was imprisoned, and not a single tear had fallen from Zoey's eyes.

But now, in Carissa's presence, her eyes suddenly reddened. She quickly turned her head, her voice breaking as she whispered, "Thank you, Your Grace, for visiting a prisoner like me."

Carissa looked at Zoey, who was dressed in coarse prison garb, her disheveled hair concealing a face grimy with dirt. The dignified and graceful woman she once was seemed barely recognizable.

"You have suffered, Madam Zoey," Carissa said softly.

Zoey quickly masked her sorrow and replied, "I'm not concerned for myself, but I fear for the children."

Your Grace, what does His Majesty intend to do with us? Will we be executed?"

Carissa gently pulled her into a seat. "If His Majesty sought to execute you out of anger, he would have done so by now. He means to use you to draw Mr. Prince back. If he surrenders, your punishment will be lightened."

Zoey shook her head. "Impossible. He will never surrender."

"He won't, but we're doing everything we can to bring him to justice."

Carissa opened her bundle and pulled out a packet of medicine, placing it before Zoey.

"Do not worry about the outside world. Focus on protecting yourself. My senior guild member has sent

people to find Mr. Prince, and Isaac is working on your behalf in secret. The medicine and food you gave out before have had a great effect, and now many common people are speaking out for you."

At these words, Zoey could no longer hold back the tears. They streamed down her face in a torrent. "Thank you, Your Grace, and thank you to my younger brother-in-law. I am truly grateful."

These past few days, her heart felt like it was being consumed by fire. Zoey hated Oliver with every fiber

of her being, wishing for nothing more than to tear him apart. The hatred threatened to swallow her sanity, but she managed to keep her composure for the sake of the children.

She hadn't held out much hope, as Oliver's crime of deserting his post and shaking the morale of the army was far too serious. However, hearing that Carissa and others were working on their behalf brought a glimmer of hope back to her heart and touched her.

"I've labeled all these medicines with their uses," Carissa said, tucking away the remaining packet. "I hope you won't need them. I'll send this batch to Cedric and the others. Don't worry. Deputy Commander Kimber won't be too harsh with you. Just remember-stay calm, avoid making a scene, and don't speak with defiance or anger."

"How are Caspian and Cedric?" Zoey wiped away her tears, her voice urgent with concern.

"They're both fine. You need not worry." Carissa reached out and gently adjusted Zoey's disheveled hair. She felt something crawling on the back of her hand, and she subtly brushed it off.

It was lice. The prison was crawling with them-rats, lice, and woodlice, all a misery to endure.

Looking closer, Carissa noticed Zoey's neck and hands were covered in red, swollen bumps. They were clearly from bites, and the sight of them was alarming.

"I can't provide you with other food or clothes, only medicine for survival during crucial times. I also have a few bottles of ointment that you can apply to the areas where you've been bitten by lice."

"Thank you...thank you so much!" Zoey's voice trembled with gratitude. Her greatest fear had been the illness that often plagued the prisoners, but with the medicine, she felt a bit more at ease. "As for food and clothing, there's no need to trouble yourself. The prison may be damp and filthy, but the meals are served twice a day, and we manage to eat."

Carissa didn't say much more. The suffering was inevitable-if they didn't endure some hardship, Salvador wouldn't calm down.noveldrama

She left with the medicines, choosing not to visit the men's cells. Instead, she had Galen deliver a package there. She thanked Galen sincerely, but he quickly waved it off.

"No need for such formalities, Your Grace. It's no trouble."

Carissa watched him deliver the medicine, and only when he returned empty-handed did she feel at ease enough to leave.

With that, there was nothing else Carissa could do for the Earl of Silverstone's family. As long as they could hold on, the dawn would come.

Taking Violet and Cynthia with her, Carissa made use of her leave to begin an investigation into the royal relatives, the noble families, and the influential figures in the capital.

Before Rafael left, he had mentioned someone to her-though he hadn't had the chance to verify the details. He had said there was a 50 to 60 percent chance this person was involved. He urged her to keep an eye on them and, if possible, dig into their network of connections.

## Chapter 1315

The people Rafael suspected were Hayden and his son Nicholas, with a particular focus on the latter. After all, Hayden led a very reclusive life and hardly interacted with anyone.

If there was anyone Hayden interacted with frequently, it was Carissa and Rafael.

Normally, Hayden and Chaya would eat, drink, and have fun at home. Even when they went out, it was all about eating, drinking, and enjoying themselves. Their life motto was simply to eat, drink, play, and have fun.

The last time Carissa visited, Chaya had put on quite a bit of weight. Even Hayden seemed to have gained about seven to eight pounds. Chaya's chin was now a bit more prominent when she smiled. After several days of fruitless investigation, Carissa decided to pay them a visit in person, taking Violet along with her.

Hayden was delighted to see them and immediately turned to Chaya. "Yesterday, I caught a large carp myself. Use it to prepare sashimi, but remember to drain all the blood. I don't like any red left in it." Chaya beamed with enthusiasm and hurried to the kitchen with her servants, saying she was eager to show off her cooking skills.

Violet couldn't help but comment on Chaya's rounder figure. "You've all been eating very well lately, haven't you? She looks even more rounded."

Hayden chuckled, his eyes crinkling as he smiled. "Did the Hell Monarch's household treat you poorly, Ms. Spencer? No worries-come stay at Willowbrook Estate instead. Whatever you want to eat, you'll have it." Violet smiled, settling into a chair. "If you keep offering such hospitality, I might just move in permanently, Your Highness."

"Hurry up and move in, then! I'll treat you to good food and drinks," Hayden said, waving his hand cheerfully.

Violet grinned playfully. "Well, once I get tired of staying at Hell Monarch Estate, I'll move right over. A few extra pounds wouldn't hurt."

Carissa laughed. "Why wait to get tired of it? I'll have someone send your things over tomorrow." Violet put her hands on her hips, feigning indignation. "Oh, so you've been planning to get rid of me all along?"

"You wanted to come yourself, so how can you blame me?"

Hayden sipped his coffee, his eyes full of affection as he watched them. His smile was warm and loving. The fish sashimi at lunch was delicious. Though neither Carissa nor Violet were particularly fond of raw fish, they couldn't resist eating a few more pieces.

Chaya clearly enjoyed it, finishing nearly half the plate herself. The few remaining pieces in front of Hayden also disappeared into her mouth.

After the meal, they took a stroll around the estate before finally bidding their farewells.

As they were about to leave, Hayden called out to Violet, "If you ever want to stay, feel free to come." Violet was momentarily stunned, then smiled and replied, "Alright, I will."

This visit was no different from the others. Even the joy on Hayden's face was the same as always. If there was any difference, it was that this time, he had invited Violet to stay at Willowbrook Estate. He had even reminded her of the offer as they were leaving.  
noveldrama

Was he joking, or did he genuinely want Violet to come live at his estate?

If it had been anyone else, Carissa wouldn't have thought twice.

However, it was Violet.

The Spencer family had been repeatedly mentioned amid this upheaval, always with some degree of ambiguity. Yet Yuvan had persistently pursued the Spencer family, which showed that the Spencer family's refusal wasn't entirely firm.

The Spencer family was large, and other members of the family might have allied with Yuvan.

Just like Celeste's adoptive father, a distant relative of the Spencer family. It was very likely he had already pledged his allegiance to Yuvan.

Did the head of the Spencer family, Eustace, not know about this? With his far-reaching influence, how could he not be aware? And if he knew, why hadn't he taken action to stop it?

At the moment, it was still unclear whether Hayden and Nicholas were the ones waiting to strike, and it was even harder to say about the Spencer family.

Violet also pondered matter. She propped her chin up against the side of the carriage and asked Carissa, "Do you think Prince Hayden really wants me to live with him?"

"I can tell he's somewhat sincere," Carissa replied.

"That leaves two possibilities. First, he wants to use me to control the Spencer family. Second, he's being controlled by someone and hopes I can go to Willowbrook Estate to help him."

Carissa had come to the same conclusion. If Hayden truly wanted Violet to stay, it could only be for one of those two reasons.

Go, and there was a chance of being caught in a trap. Stay away, and there was a risk of missing Hayden's plea for help.

Chapter 1316

When Carissa and Violet returned and told Jacob and Kyle about the events, both of them agreed that it would be wise to carefully investigate the people at Willowbrook Estate, including Chaya.

They had already conducted an investigation into the estate before and found no suspicious individuals. A few of them had been brought back to the capital by Hayden and had been loyal to him for many years- calling them trusted confidants would not be an exaggeration.

The rest of the staff had been purchased from a merchant during Hayden's return to the capital. Jacob had even personally looked into their identities through the merchant, tracing their family histories. He discovered that they had all been sold by their families, who were struggling financially.

Carissa and Violet had spent the day walking around Willowbrook Estate, but they found no servants who seemed skilled in martial arts. Even if there were any, they would likely be avoiding them.

Jacob suggested they conduct another round of checks at Willowbrook Estate and look for any changes in the staff.

A few days ago, when Rafael left for the Southern Frontier, he had made sure to disguise himself. He even went as far as to choose a different horse and not his own. He took a horse from the stables that was known for its endurance.

While traveling, Rafael's thoughts were focused on reaching the Southern Frontier and finding Louis. He intended to join the army as a low-ranking soldier and blend in. As soon as he entered Southern Frontier territory, news reached him that Oliver had fled with his concubine. noveldrama

Panic spread like wildfire, with rumors flying in all directions. Some said Sandoria had raised an army of 800,000, and the Southern Frontier army was bound to fall. Others claimed that the people of Sandoria had vowed to massacre the city, turning the streets into rivers of blood.

There were even reports that Salvador had killed the Hell Monarch to prevent him from leading the army. Many of the people believed these rumors and packed up their belongings, abandoning their homes in fear.

This land, just beginning to show signs of life, braced itself in its broken state for the approaching war. Such rumors spread quickly among the common folk, and naturally, they made their way into the military ranks as well.

The most devastating rumor was the claim that Salvador had killed the Hell Monarch. This infuriated the former soldiers of the Hell Monarch Army.

To them, the Hell Monarch had been a loyal and capable leader. His tragic death at the hands of the king seemed to prove that the latter was foolish and incompetent.

Why should they continue fighting for him?

Many decided to abandon their posts and return home.

Louis and Timothy tried to quell the rumors and calm the troops, but their efforts were in vain.

Among all the regiments, the Sinclair Army was the least trusting of the king. Back then, Hector had requested reinforcements. He had sent urgent reports to the capital, but the court had refused to dispatch any troops. It was only after they learned of the deaths of Hector and his sons that Salvador allowed Rafael to lead the Hell Monarch Army to the Southern Frontier.

As a result, most of the unrest came from the Sinclair Army.

Timothy and Louis, seeing the situation spiraling out of control, felt helpless and utterly despairing. Meanwhile, the Sandoria forces had already reached Simonton City. The Southern Frontier Army, still enraged, continued to curse Salvador. The first siege was a difficult battle, with barely enough strength to hold their ground. Although they managed to push Sandoria's forces back, the battle exposed the Southern Frontier army's fatigue and weakness.

The soldiers feared that when Sandoria regrouped and adjusted their tactics, the next assault could prove disastrous.

In the command tent, the mood was at an all-time low. They had never seen such disarray in the Hell Monarch Army and the Sinclair Army. It wasn't that they lacked unity, but rather that they were united in their bitter resentment of the king. The soldiers had fully embraced the belief that the Hell Monarch had been murdered.

Zachary had wounded his arm during the battle, and he still had bandages soaked in blood. His eyes were bloodshot, and his every pore seemed to express fury and frustration.

In truth, even he believed the rumors that Salvador had killed Rafael.

Homer was from the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team, and he was Zachary's relative. Over the past two years, they occasionally exchanged letters. Homer mentioned that Rafael's life in the capital wasn't easy, as the king distrusted him. Also, the Mystic Army, led by Carissa, had been repeatedly downsized. So, Zachary reasoned that perhaps the rumors had a basis after all.

Before the battle had begun, he had sent an urgent report to the capital, detailing every rumor that was circulating among the Southern Frontier Army. He asked Jeremiah to relay the message to Salvador, hoping that if the king had not truly killed the Hell Monarch, they would send him to the Southern Frontier to calm the troops and quell the rumors.

At the same time, Zachary wanted to confirm if the rumors were true or not. As long as Rafael was alive, given the current situation, Salvador would definitely send him to the Southern Frontier.

The only question was, how long would they have to wait?

The court officials sat comfortably in their high positions, unaware of how intense and brutal the battles were. Even if urgent reports were sent back, they had to pass through many hands before reaching the king. Salvador would then deliberate and hesitate, as he always did.



Didn't Hector die because of delays like this?

Now, the silence in the camp was deafening. The proposed plans had all failed. Morale was at its lowest, and the army was in disarray. Charging into battle at this point would only lead to certain deaths. They had never felt so utterly hopeless.

Chapter 1317

Alec arrived to report the casualties from the first battle: 356 dead, and 1,732 injured.

The mood among the officers immediately plunged back to the freezing point.

They had been tasked with defending the city, with archers stationed on the walls. But even with their defensive advantage, the Sandorians had managed to deploy their siege ladders and hurl stones, causing so much loss of life and injury.

This wasn't even a full-scale siege the Sandorians were simply testing their strength and the teamwork of the Southern Frontier Army.

It was clear that the Sandorians understood the situation. They weren't rushing to deploy their full forces. Instead, they were playing a psychological game, careful not to provoke a decisive battle just yet.

The Southern Frontier Army, despite their diminished morale, would fight fiercely once their lives were at stake.

But if these probing attacks continued, the casualties would steadily rise. Ultimately, the psychological toll would break the Southern Frontier Army's will to fight.

At this point, discussing battle strategies seemed pointless. Everyone's spirits were so low that they couldn't muster the strength to even consider another fight. It would be a futile sacrifice.

The military advisors had smoked nearly an entire pouch of dry tobacco, their minds unable to come up with a new plan. Even if the court decided to send reinforcements, it wasn't clear who would be chosen. For now, they just had to deal with the situation.

"Gather the soldiers tomorrow. We need to write a speech to rally their spirits. We can't let this go on any longer," one of the military advisors suggested.

Timothy rubbed his face with both hands, wiping off a layer of dust mixed with dried blood. It wasn't his blood, but the blood of a soldier who had been standing beside him, struck in the head by a stone from a trebuchet. The blood had splattered across his face.

He was feeling especially terrible right now.

"It doesn't matter how stirring a speech we give. The marshal is gone, and no one has been ordered to take his place. Everyone believes the Hell Monarch has been killed. Unless he appears on the battlefield in the Southern Frontier, the morale of the troops will continue to falter, and their hatred of the court will only grow."

Louis took Alec's pipe, inspecting it for a moment before setting it aside as it was empty.

"Another part of the problem," he added, "is the collapse of morale after Mr. Prince escaped. The soldiers no longer believe victory is possible. To them, stepping into battle now is just walking to their deaths. If the Sandorians keep up these smaller-scale assaults, our troops' morale will be crushed completely. Soon, the Southern Frontier will fall into the Sandoria's hands."

Timothy glanced at Louis, his hesitation evident. "Do you think His Highness-"

Zachary suddenly looked up, fury in his eyes. "Don't ask. If His Highness were still alive, he would have sent word to calm the troops. But there's been no word from him at all."

Louis fell silent for a moment, then shook his head. "I don't think we should be so pessimistic. His Majesty can't possibly believe His Highness is a traitor. At the end of the day, they're still brothers."

The two military advisors weren't so optimistic. Although they were far from the Southern Frontier, they understood Salvador's temperament well enough.

Salvador had never truly trusted anyone-not even Jeremiah, whom he had once tried desperately to keep in the court. Over the years, he had systematically undermined the power of the court officials. Salvador didn't need Jeremiah to advise him. He only needed the older man to sit in the council, to maintain the illusion of control and keep the scheming nobles at bay, all while solidifying his own position. The next day, Louis and Timothy called together the original Southern Frontier Army, the

Hell Monarch Army, and the Sinclair Army. The three armies gathered in the training field, standing in formation. The mass of soldiers was so dense that it seemed to stretch endlessly, much like before. But upon closer inspection, the difference was clear.

Where once every soldier had stood tall like a tree, their eyes sharp and their voices thundering, now there was no fire in their hearts. Their eyes were filled with disappointment and confusion, their bodies devoid of any fighting spirit.

Timothy sat on horseback, riding along the gaps between the ranks. He spoke passionately of the Southern Frontier Army's past victories, of how they would utterly crush the Sandorians.

His voice was hoarse, but the cheers he had once stirred up were nowhere to be heard. Instead, there were only a few scattered, lackluster shouts, lacking any energy or conviction.

Seeing this, Louis was consumed by frustration. His eyes blazed with anger. He swiftly mounted his horse and shouted, "Pull yourselves together! What's this pitiful display? Are you still the undefeated Southern Frontier Army, or have you forgotten who you are?" noveldrama

As his voice rang out, one soldier from the ranks shouted, "General Quinton, did Marshal Sanford really die at the king's hands?"

After one person shouted, many others soon started throwing their questions. Each voice was louder than the last, demanding that their anger be conveyed to Salvador.

"Why should we fight when loyal generals meet such a fate? We should disperse and go home!"

"That's right! Marshal Sanford risked his life with us to reclaim the Southern Frontier! Why did he meet such a tragic end?"

"Was Commander Sinclair also killed? The court must give us an explanation!"

"Yes, we demand an explanation! Why were Marshal Sanford and Commander Sinclair killed like this?" The roar of fury shattered the air, rising higher and higher.

The military officers looked at the dark, angry faces of the soldiers and were momentarily speechless. Amidst the thunderous shouts, the sound of galloping hooves grew louder from a distance, accompanied by a familiar, commanding voice.

"Let me see for myself if the soldiers under my command are still as brave and capable as they once were!"

## Chapter 1318

The crowd turned their heads at once and saw a horse galloping toward them, dust billowing in its wake. Its rider was wrapped in the warm sunlight, making it hard to see his face clearly.

It looked like who they were expecting, but maybe it wasn't.

Louis and Timothy both looked up sharply, their eyes instantly reddening. A lump caught in their throats, and they were too overwhelmed to even shout.

He wasn't wearing armor-just the plain, rough clothes of a commoner. From a distance, he appeared ordinary and unremarkable.

The man reined in his horse before the gathered soldiers, his gaze slowly sweeping across them. His face turned slowly, allowing the people in the front row to see it with crystal clarity.

After a long, stunned silence, the crowd erupted into jubilant cries.

"It's Marshal Sanford! The marshal has returned!"noveldrama

"Marshal Sanford isn't dead!"

"With Marshal Sanford here, we'll surely win!"

"Victory is ours!"

The cheers came in waves, each one louder than the last. It was as if the frustrations of the last battle, the smothered anger, and the hatred for Oliver had all been released at that moment.

The generals watched, tears welling in their eyes. Since Oliver's cowardly retreat, they had not seen morale so high.

Some people just needed to stand there before the crowd. They didn't need to do or say anything, yet they could ignite a spark of power and hope in everyone around them.

At the same time, Rafael's presence here was the best way to crush the rumors.

Once a lie was shattered, the other rumors would be seen as false too-everyone would think this way. Rafael raised his sword high and called out, "A mere 200,000 enemy soldiers? We've defeated them before! We are the new Southern Frontier Army! Do we fear them now? Tell me, do you fear them?" "No, sir!"

"We don't!"

The shouts echoed into the sky.

Rafael urged his horse forward through the ranks, his voice growing louder. "Tell me, can you defeat the Sandorians?"

"Yes, sir!"

The roar was deafening!

"Is anyone a coward? Step forward!"

"No, sir!"

The soldiers stood proud and tall.

The sunlight shone on Rafael's face, casting a heroic glow over him. He looked every inch the War God people claimed him to be. His voice rang out with undeniable strength, resolute and unwavering. "Now show me, with your actions, that you are all heroes!"

The sea of soldiers, stretching as far as the eye could see, raised their arms in unison, roaring at the top of their lungs, "Sir, yes, sir!"

The new Southern Frontier Army, composed of the original Southern Frontier Army, the Sinclair Army, and the Hell Monarch Army, raised their banners high, their voices chanting "Victory is ours!"

They roared over and over, until their throats were raw. Yet the fervor of their words did not wane.

The rumors had plagued them for so long, shaking their confidence. They had almost forgotten that they were once the undefeated Southern Frontier Army, feared by all.

But now, with the return of their marshal, their spirits had been reignited. It was as if the flames of their determination had been rekindled, and they longed for nothing more than to march onto the battlefield and fight with everything they had, letting their resolve spread like wildfire.

Rafael rode ahead, his voice ringing out with words of fierce encouragement.

"There are no deserters in the Southern Frontier! Those who fled are nothing but cowardly traitors, and they will be nailed to the pillar of shame!"

"Southern Frontier is our home. Every inch of land has been stained with the blood of our comrades. We will defend it with our lives!"

"If the Sandorians think they can take our land, they'll have to step over our bodies to do it!"

"No one will shake our resolve to defeat the enemy. We must fight a glorious battle, one that will make His Majesty and all his court see us in a new light!"

Rafael's voice carried across the training field, his words powered by his inner force, reaching every soldier with unwavering confidence.

In response, the air was filled with the sounds of rallying cries, hands raised in passionate cheers, lasting for nearly an hour.

The sunlight poured down like a blanket of gold, casting a warm glow on everyone's faces. The faces grew more determined, eyes sharp with focus.

The pack of wolves that was the Southern Frontier Army had returned to their full strength.

Timothy and the others had shouted until their voices were nearly gone. By the time they returned to Redstone Manor, they could barely speak. They gulped down cold well water, the cool liquid soothing their throats, bringing relief to their raw voices.

Rafael sat in the marshal's chair, his legs straight but trembling with exhaustion. The two military advisors approached, working to relax his tense muscles. It was clear Rafael had ridden for days, his body stiff from the long journey.

Rafael leaned back, his body fatigued from the long ride. He hadn't slept much, not since hearing about Oliver's escape. He hadn't even stopped for food and headed straight for Simonton City. When he heard them rallying the troops, he immediately rode over.

In total, he had spent nearly two hours leading the cheers. At least half of that time had been spent shouting.

"Marshal Sanford, now that you're here, we have hope," Louis said, still not believing it and fearing it might be a dream.

Zachary was known for his toughness and was never one to shed a tear. Yet even he couldn't hold back his emotions when he saw Rafael sitting there, whole and unharmed.

Thankfully, the rumors had been false.

## Chapter 1319

A bowl of chicken noodle soup was placed before Rafael, but it was nowhere near enough to fill the emptiness in his stomach.

Louis mentioned that he had ordered roasted lamb and skewers, and that there was no shortage of rich food now. It was nothing like the days when the Southern Frontier was struggling. Even the common folk could afford meat these days.

Rafael shakily picked up the bowl and drank the soup in one go. The broth was salty, and he followed it with a whole jug of water. Slumping into his chair, he felt his strength gradually returning, though there was still an odd sensation, as if he were still bouncing on horseback.

The faces around him seemed to blur and retreat. He had to focus to make out their features.

Alec's voice cracked with emotion. "Your Highness, you look utterly exhausted."

Rafael rubbed his cheek. "Have the medic give me needle treatment for my face. It feels like it's been blown off-kilter."

Everyone took a closer look and indeed noticed that Rafael's face was slightly askew.

Louis spoke up. "Marshal Sanford, you haven't rested the entire way at all, have you?"

"There was no time," Rafael said, then revealed a shocking truth. "I feigned illness first, then secretly came to the battlefield. All this time..."noveldrama

He sheepishly pulled out a handful of medicine, holding his head low in a way that almost looked embarrassed.

"Actually, I wasn't feigning illness. I was really sick. I've had to take these medicines along the way, and sometimes I forget. I have to take them again, or else Commander Sinclair will have my head."

The others exchanged concerned glances but didn't press further. Instead, they immediately sent for the military physician. Rafael's health came first. They could discuss what came after later.

Brandon checked Rafael's pulse. Upon feeling it, he let out a deep sigh. "How did you get in such a depleted state?"

"Is it serious?" Timothy asked urgently.

Brandon remained silent for a moment, but Rafael waved his hand dismissively. "It's nothing. A little rest, and it'll be fine."



But Brandon's face turned grave. "The body can be gradually restored with care, but this depletion of your vital energy-I'm afraid it won't be so easily fixed. You may struggle in certain...intimate matters going forward, Your Highness."

Rafael gripped the armrest tightly, his eyes widening. "It's that serious?"

Brandon looked at Rafael's young, handsome face and sighed. "Alas, your body needs rest, yet you've been riding day after day without pause. You've neglected your restorative medicines, and the prolonged sitting in one place has caused heat to build up. Naturally, it's affected...that part of you."

"Are you saying I won't be able to function as a man anymore?" Rafael gaped, stunned.

If that were the case, what use would Carissa have for him?

"It's not that serious," Brandon replied. "With Mr. Dalton's treatment, your condition will surely improve. But for a while, I'm afraid you'll have to live like...a priest."

Brandon paused and chuckled. "Perhaps a bit of chastity wouldn't be such a bad thing. After all, you're a soldier, and you've had your share of injuries. This is the perfect time to rest and recover."

Rafael looked uncomfortable for a moment, then quickly put on a stern face. "Misdiagnosis. This is a complete misdiagnosis. No word of this to anyone, or I'll have you punished by military law."

The others immediately covered their mouths with their hands, their eyes filled with deep sympathy and pity.

They understood... They all understood.

The roasted lamb arrived, and they all sat down to eat. Recently, they had struggled with appetite and sleep. But now that Rafael's steadying presence was present, they devoured the food eagerly.

As they ate, they reviewed the recent battle. Rafael insisted that as long as they hadn't been defeated, it wasn't a loss. They couldn't let the enemy shake their confidence.

However, Alec looked worried. "Your Highness, you snuck onto the battlefield. If His Majesty finds out, he might punish you."

At that point, Rafael still hadn't received the royal edict sent by Carissa. He dismissed the concern with a casual wave.

"They'll only question me after we return with a victory. Until then, let them say what they want. What matters now is the battle at hand. Anything else can wait."

Though everyone understood his reasoning, they were still concerned about Rafael facing difficulties upon returning to the capital.

Rafael scolded them. "You've all gotten more and more indecisive, just like Mr. Prince. There are times for everything, but the immediate task is the most important. What could be more important than winning this battle?"

The others quickly nodded in agreement. As they ate the roasted lamb, they discussed Oliver's actions in the Southern Frontier, as well as Barrett's investigation into Oliver's corruption.

Then, they turned to the matter of Celeste's adoptive father. It was confirmed that he was indeed a branch of the Spencer family. When Celeste had been in the Southern Frontier, they had shared information with one another. They had spies there.

Upon hearing this, Rafael asked, "Did you find the spies?"

"We did," Louis replied, pausing for a moment. "But when Mr. Prince fled, they fled too. It's possible they didn't actually run away... With rumors spreading so fast, they might have blended in with the common folk."

"Find them and kill them!" Rafael's voice was cold as he uttered those words.

## Chapter 1320

Some people were simply born for the battlefield.

On the battlefield, Rafael was far more decisive than he had been in the capital. His mind was free of the usual constraints—he didn't need to worry about who was pleased or displeased, or who might fear him. He did only what he believed was right.

Within three days, all those who had spread the rumors were captured.

They were brought before the soldiers at the training field. In front of everyone, twenty strikes with a military cudgel brought them to the ground, their bodies shaking uncontrollably. When asked, they answered whatever they could.

They didn't know who was pulling the strings from behind the scenes, only that they had been paid to spread these false rumors. They followed orders without concern for the consequences.

The rumor that Sandoria's 800,000 troops were advancing was false!

The claim that Salvador had killed the Hell Monarch? Obviously, it was a lie he was right there in front of them.

The rumor that Oliver had fled the battlefield because he knew they couldn't win? False he had simply been afraid for his life.

One by one, the lies were dispelled, and the soldiers were filled with fury. They shouted for the culprits to be executed.

Spreading rumors that disrupted the army's morale was a serious crime, deserving of the harshest punishment.

Rafael's gaze swept over the gathered soldiers. His voice cold and firm, he announced loudly, "Those of you who blindly believed these lies, take this moment to reflect. After you've done so, you will give everything you've got in the next battles."

Those who sowed discord within the ranks were no better than enemies. The blood of the enemy could wash away the setbacks from the first battle's failure and fuel their resolve to fight on.

After the culprits had been dealt with, Rafael instructed Louis to quickly send a report back to the capital, informing them that the Hell Monarch had arrived in the Southern Frontier but lacked the military command emblem.

So the question was: should the generals follow his orders?

On the third day after the report had been sent, a royal edict arrived.

Rafael was somewhat surprised, but he quickly realized that it had been Carissa's handiwork. When news

of Oliver's escape reached the capital, she would certainly want to secure a royal edict.

The reason Rafael had Louis sent the urgent report was to make Salvadore aware of the Southern

Frontier Army's stance they acknowledged the military command emblem and the royal edict, not the Hell Monarch.

It was a gesture that would, to a large extent, reassure Salvador.

In the capital, Salvador had received Louis' urgent report.

After reading it, he felt a great sense of relief.

Salvador's greatest concern had always been that Rafael's position within the Southern Frontier Army was unshakable. Now, with Louis' urgent report, he was able to prove that the Southern Frontier Army was the king's army, not Rafael's personal force.

Before Louis' report had arrived, Zachary had submitted a report, stating that the soldiers in the Southern Frontier suspected the Hell Monarch had been executed.

This news infuriated Salvador-he couldn't believe the rumors in the Southern Frontier had grown so rampant. No wonder the morale of the army was shaken and the common folk were restless!

With this matter in the Southern Frontier somewhat settled, Salvador felt a measure of relief.

But then, news from Victory Pass arrived. Westhaven had invaded the border, and the marshal leading the attack was Leroy.

Alongside the report from Victory Pass, another arrived from Chester, detailing his efforts to suppress the mountain bandits. It seemed that bandits were appearing in various regions, leaving the troops too occupied to handle the Valken region. If Valken wasn't dealt with soon, it could very well lead to disaster. After some deliberation, Salvador decided to send Thomas with 30,000 troops from the capital to Valken to lay siege and cut off their supply lines.

As Thomas marched toward Valken to quell the rebellion, the capital would need to rely once more on the Mystic Army for protection. Salvador pondered for a moment. Since he was already using Rafael, he might as well turn to Carissa.

He instructed Ian to return control of the Garrison Unit, the Capital Guard, and the Royal Guard to Carissa.

Meanwhile, the situation at Victory Pass remained unclear. No one knew what was going on in Westhaven, either. But given that Leroy had violated the border, it was clear that internal strife was escalating—who would come out on top was anyone's guess. noveldrama

Whether there was a three-way conspiracy involved could wait for a more thorough investigation later. For now, the urgent task was to put out the fires wherever they were starting.

After a council meeting in the royal study, Jeremiah said to Salvador, "Had the Hell Monarch been given full authority to investigate from the start, the tangled connections behind all this would have been clear by

now."

Salvador considered responding that he had already instructed Rafael to work with Ian on the

investigation, but then he realized that his lack of delegation had been a problem. He had always kept a tight grip on Rafael and his people, and had even kept a watch on Hell Monarch Estate. Jeremiah was well aware of all of this, so there was little point in defending his actions.

The most ironic part was that despite the surveillance on Hell Monarch Estate, they hadn't even known that Rafael had feigned illness and left the capital.

Ian's abilities were far inferior to Rafael's, and even Carissa outshone him. The once-corrupt Garrison Unit, now under her command, had transformed into an elite force.