

War Song 1371

Chapter 1371

The Astrology Department's predictions were true. This year, there was indeed more rainfall than usual. On the 18th of July, a torrential downpour began over the capital.

Outside the city, Nicholas' scouts spotted a group of people braving the rain, heading toward the capital. The scouts were posing as peasants from the surrounding villages on the outskirts, and their entry into the city wouldn't raise suspicion. When they recognized the leader of the group as Clifford, one of the scouts immediately carried a basket fruit into the city.

Such common folk were often overlooked. Every day, peasants entered the city, either to sell their goods at the market or to deliver produce to the homes of the nobility.

The scout made his way to Willowbrook Estate's back door. Once it opened, he quickly slipped inside.

In the study, Nicholas sat stiffly, listening intently to the report.

"Are you certain you saw Mr. Murphy?" Nicholas asked in a calm voice, betraying no hint of excitement. Now more than ever, he had to remain composed.

"Yes, Your Highness. I'm certain it was Mr. Murphy."

"You could see clearly, even in this downpour?" Nicholas heard the rain hammering against the roof, the noise nearly drowning out the conversation.

"I could see him clearly, and the soldiers with him wore armor and clothing just like ours. I wouldn't mistake them."

Nicholas absentmindedly twisted the red silk wrapped around his wrist, then fixed his gaze on the scout before him. "Did you notice if Mr. Murphy wore a red silk ribbon like this on his wrist?"

The scout was stunned. "No, I didn't see that. Could it be someone else in disguise?"

The scout knew that their communication was likely based on secret signals or marks. It was possible that Nicholas and Clifford had agreed beforehand that, if leading troops to the capital, Clifford would wear a red silk ribbon on his wrist.

Thinking this, he grew anxious and said, "Your Highness, if it's a deception, we need to prepare immediately."

Nicholas smiled. "If you saw him clearly, then there's no need to worry. Perhaps Mr. Murphy simply forgot to wear the red silk ribbon after such a long journey."

The scout was puzzled. If it was a signal, how could Clifford forget? But since Nicholas seemed so confident, he didn't press the matter.

Nicholas' expression grew serious. "Order the men at the city's outskirts to prepare. Once the gates open tomorrow morning, we'll attack the city immediately."

"Understood!" the scout immediately straightened, his voice sharp with resolve. "I'll take my leave, Your Highness."

Nicholas watched him depart, then picked up his coffee and slowly took a sip.

In truth, there was no such thing as a red silk ribbon secret signal.

However, Nicholas' men on the

outskirts had been left to their own devices for too long. Given the recent investigations by the Mystic Army, their identities might have been discovered. This could lead to

them being tricked into giving away information or being set up.

By mentioning the red silk ribbon, Nicholas was testing the scout. If it was a deception, the scout would have claimed he saw it. If not, it would prove the scout was speaking the truth.

Clifford had truly arrived.

Nicholas called for the Shadow Guards and ordered them to inform Hans Stone at the Waterworks Department about the action tomorrow. Hans would lead the riverworks project workers.

Hans had once served under

Dominic as a fifth-ranked general. He was punished with 30 lashes for violating military code, and was expelled from Victory Pass. The 30 lashes weren't just regular strikes-they were delivered with a heavy rod and nearly cost him his life.

Nicholas' people were the ones who helped heal Hans, enabling him to stay undercover for eight years. During that time, Hans trained soldiers and worked with Cameron to replace the riverworks project workers.

Of course, it was Nicholas who had caused Hans to break the military code in the first place.

He had long recognized Hans' potential as a general, but he knew that if he tried to make Hans honestly work for him, it wouldn't work.

Luckily, he knew Hans had a fatal weakness-his love for women.

So, Nicholas arranged for a woman to get close to Hans. After they were intimate, the woman went to Dominic to accuse Hans of assaulting her.

At first, Dominic didn't believe the woman's word and summoned Hans to confront her. Naturally, Hans denied the accusation, claiming he didn't even know her.

But then other families came

forward, claiming Hans had

assaulted their daughters or sisters

There were even witnesses-his own

personal guards. Hans never

expected his guards to betray him,

and he had no way to defend

himself.

In his anger, Dominic ordered Hans to be given 30 lashes with a heavy rod. If he had died, it would have

been deserved. But since he survived, he was thrown out of the military camp.

From then on, Hans officially worked for Nicholas.

Chapter 1372

Nicholas walked into Hayden's courtyard, holding an umbrella. He entered the house and dismissed everyone, not even allowing Chaya to stay.

Hayden had just finished his meal, and the table still had leftover food that the servants were about to clean up.

Nicholas sat down, picked up Hayden's cutlery, and started eating the leftovers. He ate gracefully as usual, which disgusted and angered Hayden.

He had been raised with such refinement, every move reflecting the casual demeanor expected of a prince. Unfortunately, he had a ruthless ambition and a cruel nature.

Nicholas finished all the leftover food, then set down the cutlery and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief. "We shouldn't waste food. I happen to be hungry as well. Surely you won't mind, Dad?"

Hayden's voice was cold. "It's fine. It was going to be fed to the dogs anyway. You may as well eat it." "You think I'm a dog, Dad? Then, what are you?" Nicholas smiled, his expression brightening. "I came to share some good news with you. We'll soon get what we want."

Hayden's heart sank, though he feigned indifference. "Throughout history, rebels have never met a good end. You won't be the exception."

Nicholas smiled. "You need not worry, Dad. I'll be the exception. You can just wait to be crowned king." Hayden sneered. "Since you're so sure of yourself, I won't say anything more. But there's one thing I've never had an answer to. Perhaps today, you can enlighten me."

Nicholas didn't ask what it was, simply nodding. "It was I who did it."

Hayden's eyes flashed with fury. He slammed his hand on the table. "Why would you do such a thing?" Nicholas sighed, his expression full of pity. "Because their original target was the Sullivan family. But if the Sullivan family was completely wiped out, there would be no one to stop General Leroy in Victory Pass. So I told them, instead of killing the Sullivan family, it would be better to kill the Sinclair family."

Hayden clenched his fists. "It's not because you were concerned about General Leroy's power. You just wanted to stir up trouble the capital and remove Westhaven's spies. With none of their spies left in the capital, you could fill the gap and make a deal with General Leroy."

Nicholas shook his head. "You're partly correct. All of Westhaven's spies in the capital were sent by General Liam, not General Leroy. I wanted to remove General Liam's people and support General Leroy to power, because only General Leroy would agree to ally with me."

Hayden felt his blood rush to his head, and a lump of phlegm got stuck in his throat. He almost passed out but managed to get it down.

He then yelled, "Do you have any idea how loyal the Sinclair family was? They were heroes, every last one of them! Father and sons-seven lives lost in the Southern Frontier! How could you do that?" Nicholas' brow furrowed slightly as he shook his head.

"Dad, you're mistaken. The Sinclair family's most capable members were already dead. Whether their widows and orphans live or die doesn't affect Starhaven much.

"But the Sullivan family still has value. When you ascend to the throne, the Sullivan family remains a shield for Victory Pass. If one family must die, why not let it be the Sinclair family? Or do you think the Sullivan family should be the one to have perished?"

"The Sullivan family would have at least had the strength to defend themselves. They wouldn't be wiped out so completely!" Hayden

slammed his hand on the table.

again matting the dishes. "Killin net

anyone is wrong. You're a prince of Starhaven, yet you can't appreciate the Sinclair family's loyalty and sacrifice-you're lower than a beast!"

Nicholas' expression remained cold and indifferent.

"They're together now, aren't they? What I did was a service to both families-a mutual benefit. But I must admit.I'm curious, Dad. How did you come to know of this? All the spies who knew about it are dead. Even those who managed to slip away were killed by General Liam. You shouldn't know about this.

You've been testing me all this time, and now I'm wondering-how did you know?"

"If you don't want others to know, don't do it in the first place." Even as Hayden spoke, he felt the weight

of his own words, as if they held no power.

Nicholas smiled, his expression

tinged with a touch of helplessness.

"Perhaps you don't know, Dad. But in your mind, whenever something goes wrong, you immediately blame me. If the Sinclair family were wiped out by Westhaven's spies without my involvement, you'd still think I was behind it."

Hayden was too furious to speak, and there was nothing left to say.

He had suspected this from the very start, even back when he was in Nerovia. He had known Nicholas

had sent people into Westhaven's spy network, and he had instinctively believed this was connected to the latter. Sure enough...

Hayden had been waiting for an answer, planning to investigate on his own. But with so many of his people dead or gone, he had no one left to rely on.

He knew Nicholas was in a good mood tonight, thinking he had everything under control and that things were going according to plan. He thought if he asked, Nicholas would surely admit it.

Even though Hayden had lost all hope in his son, part of him still desperately hoped for a denial.

Chapter 1373

Nicholas continued speaking, as if showing off how brilliant his schemes were.

"I had contact with General Liam a long time ago. I knew he wouldn't be easy to handle, so I sent someone into Westhaven to infiltrate their spy network. This way, I could learn of any news from the capital. I also thought this could give me a foothold inside Westhaven. Sure enough, it brought me to General Leroy.

"General Leroy was almost overshadowed by his older brother, but I knew of his ambition and that he was willing to sacrifice anything. When Westhaven's previous crown prince, Arthur, went to the battlefield, it was General Leroy who spread the rumors about the generals taking bribes and killing civilians to take credit for their achievements. That's why Prince Arthur went undercover to investigate."

"He went to Fawnrun City. What good did that do you?" Hayden asked.

"Naturally, I stepped in to persuade him and formed an alliance with him," Nicholas said with a hint of regret. "Unfortunately, Aurora showed up halfway through and ruined my plan. But in a way, it worked out. General Leroy got his moment in the spotlight, and he believed I had created that opportunity for him. "Once General Leroy rose to power, he aligned himself with the current king, Edmund, to take revenge for Prince Arthur. General Leroy and King Edmund formed a new faction, opposing Grand Princess Lisandra. That's the chaos I wanted. The more disarray in Westhaven, the more I could push General Leroy to act in ways that benefit me. Take, for instance, his provocation of Victory Pass right now."

Nicholas spoke in a calm tone, but there was still a hint of smugness in his voice.

"It's the same with Sandoria. Marshal Crow lost, and when he returned, he was questioned and mistreated. Didn't he want to turn things around? He wanted it badly.

"I offered him a few cities in the Southern Frontier, enough for him to make a name for himself in

Sandoria. He eagerly seized the opportunity, using all his power to force the king of Sandoria to agree to go to war. With both sides distracted by the conflict, I waited for my chance.

"Doing all this wasn't easy, Dad. I've exhausted my mind and planned carefully. If I succeed, it's what I deserve. If I fail, I accept that fate wasn't on my side.

After saying this, Nicholas got up and left. The sound of broken dishes could be heard behind him, but he didn't look back. He walked into the rain, his figure fading into the distance.

Chaya entered the room and saw Hayden's face full of rage and the room in chaos. She slowly bent down to clean up.

"Don't bother. Stop cleaning up," Hayden said quietly.

Chaya held a sharp shard of porcelain in her hand and smiled at him. "I'll take this."

Hayden laughed so hard he almost teared up. "Don't you already have a sharp hairpin?"

"Just in case someone tries to take it from me," Chaya said with a grin. "Better safe than sorry."

Hayden shook his head. "Do what you like. Let's go to the study. I feel like practicing calligraphy." Chaya wrapped the porcelain piece in a handkerchief and put it in her sleeve, then helped him toward the study.

"You practicing calligraphy is a

waste. Your writing never turns out the way you want. After you finish, you ask me to throw it away
What a waste of ink and paper!"

"I know you want to go out and have fun. I'll write for a bit, then we can go for a walk," Hayden
straightened up and paused, "But the rain is too

heavy. How are we supposed to go?"

"You promised, so we'll go even if we need to use an umbrella," Chaya said with a smile.

Hayden sighed in mock exasperation. "I can't argue with you. Fine, let's go."

An hour later, Hayden produced a pile of scrap papers. Chaya gathered them up and was about to
leave when someone approached them.

"Miss, please let me take those."

Chaya shoved the scrap papers at him. "Get the carriage ready. His Highness and I are going out."
"With all this rain?"

"His Highness said he wants to go out," Chaya answered coolly. "Prince Nicholas also said if Prince
Hayden wants to go, then he'll go. You be following us in secret anyway."

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The man didn't immediately agree but went to report to Nicholas.

Nicholas said, "Let him go. Get a Shadow Guard to drive the carriage and follow them."

The carriage was ready shortly after. Chaya changed into fresh clothes, grabbed an umbrella, and
helped Hayden into the carriage.

The Shadow Guard, now serving as the coachman, asked, "Your Highness, where would you like to
go?"

"I just want to get some air. It's too stuffy in the estate." Hayden's voice came from inside the carriage. "Let's see which shops are open and take a look around."

Chapter 1374

The rain was coming down in torrents.

After visiting a few shops, they came upon The Golden Tower, the city's most renowned jeweler. Seeing it still open, Chaya expressed a desire to buy some jewelry.

Hayden waved a hand dismissively. "Buy what you like."

Inside The Golden Tower, Nathaniel spotted Hayden and quickly ushered them to a private room on the third floor. The Shadow Guard, of course, followed close behind.

Hayden had been here with Chaya on several occasions. As a regular customer, he was treated well. Aside from Nathaniel, William and two attendants stood by to serve them.

Delicate cakes were brought out, and Hayden invited the Shadow Guard to join them for a drink while Chaya selected her pieces.

The Shadow Guard naturally didn't dare to sit down. He was there to keep an eye on Hayden, so he stood beside him. He watched Hayden chat warmly with Nathaniel, ensuring no suspicious dealings took place. Occasionally, he glanced at Chaya. Her large frame blocked the jewelry displayed on the counter, so he went over to take a quick look. Seeing her trying on bracelets, he quickly stepped back to watch Hayden again.

Their conversation was simple, mostly about the heavy rain recently. They were relieved the river channels had been cleared and dredged, or else there might have been flooding. They also expressed concern that with this much rain, many areas would likely suffer from floods, and crops would be damaged.

Crops ruined meant the people would starve, and Hayden sighed deeply, lamenting the situation. He even joked with Nathaniel, "I know your family is in the grain business as well. Make sure you don't hike up the prices when the time comes."

Nathaniel waved his hands frantically. "Of course not, Your Highness. We at The Golden Tower would never stoop to such unethical practices."

"Well, that's good to hear. A person must have a conscience," Hayden said, extending a finger toward Nathaniel's chest. "When it comes to people and actions, it's not just about what's on the outside. You have to look at their heart-whether it's good or bad-and what's really inside, do you understand?" Nathaniel winced at the poke to his chest, forcing a smile. "Yes, Your Highness, you're right. I'll keep that in mind."

On the other side of the room, Chaya had finished her selection. She chose two bracelets and a necklace featuring a gold pig charm. She draped it around her neck, the brilliant gold catching the light and drawing attention.

She walked over to Hayden and asked with a smile, "Do you think it looks good?"

Hayden nodded, smiling fondly. "If you like it, that's all that matters. Are you done picking? Just these three items?"

"Yes, I'm done." Chaya nodded. "That's enough."

Hayden rose to his feet and turned to Nathaniel. "Have someone fetch the money from Willowbrook Estate."

"It can wait until another day," Nathaniel replied.

"I'd prefer not to delay. I don't like owing money," Hayden insisted, his voice firm. "Send someone now."

Nathaniel reluctantly gave orders for an assistant to go with them, then personally saw them off as they got into the carriage.

Just as he turned back to head into

the shop, he was startled by the sight of William hurrying toward him, holding something wrapped in a cloth. The cloth was white with a hint of red seeping through

Upon closer inspection, Nathaniel realized William's hand was wounded.

"Mr. Judd, please come quickly," William said, his expression grave.

Nathaniel saw the blood on William's hand and quickly followed him into the accounting room at the back of the shop.

Ignoring the wound on his hand, William unwrapped the cloth. Inside was a handkerchief with a piece of paper, and inside the paper was a sharp shard of broken porcelain.

"At first, I thought Ms. Kingsley had left this behind by accident. When I reached for it, I was cut, so I opened it and found a letter. The first line asked us to pass it to the Hell Monarch's princess consort, and I

didn't dare read any further. "Content

Nathaniel took the letter, glanced at it, and saw the first line asking for delivery to Carissa. He also saw mentions of the Sinclair family's massacre.

His face immediately turned serious.

"The person who came with Prince

Hayden today seemed suspicious. His Highness may be under surveillance. No wonder His

Highness asked us to send

someone to collect the money

Normally, we do that at the end of

the month. It seems he's trying to distract them, making them focus on our shop's assistant while we can safely deliver the letter."

Nathaniel immediately stood up.

"Prepare the carriage! I'm going personally."

Chapter 1375

True enough, the Shadow Guard was focused on The Golden Tower's assistant.

Seeing that the banknotes given from Willowbrook Estate's account room weren't enough, the Shadow Guard searched the shop assistant's body at the gatehouse. The shop assistant was only let go after the Shadow Guard didn't find anything.

The shop assistant felt insulted but didn't dare speak up. He found it strange-The Golden Tower had been in business for many years, and many customers had outstanding debts. Usually, after collecting the debts, the master of the household would even offer refreshments.

No one had ever searched a shop assistant like this before.

The Shadow Guard reported this to Nicholas. He thought that since they had already searched the shop assistant and had been keeping an eye on things at The Golden Tower, it wasn't too important.

After all, Chaya always found ways to make Hayden buy jewelry for her, showing she was a greedy woman.

Nicholas had observed Chaya for a long time and felt she had no real cunning. She loved food, drinks, entertainment, and especially gold and jewelry. However, she didn't care much for fancy clothes-she was too overweight for them to look good on her.

Chaya fit the role she was here for perfectly. She was meant to accompany an old man just to get money. The Shadow Guard, who was now dead, had heard her conversation with Hayden, where she had said she would accompany Hayden to death in the future.

After living a long life, Hayden had been fooled by a young woman-spending every day either taking her out for food and fun, or buying her gold and jewelry.

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Did he really think that a young woman would stay with him as he grew old and died? Hayden was too naive.

After surviving the assassination attempt, Carissa still went to the Capital Guard headquarters every day. But today, the rain was too heavy. Kyle stopped her, so she didn't go out.

According to the plan, there was likely to be a major battle tomorrow, so it didn't matter whether she went to the Headquarters today. She had already given the necessary orders.

When Nathaniel arrived at Hell Monarch Estate, Carissa was there. Hearing the details, she immediately opened the letter.

After reading it, her face turned ashen.

Kyle saw her reaction, took the letter, and looked at it with Jacob. After they both finished reading, they both clenched their teeth and exclaimed in unison, "It's him?!"

"The letter is very important. William and I only read part of it. We didn't read it all-there's no need to silence anyone, right?" Nathaniel said.

"Of course not." Jacob immediately calmed his expression and bowed to Nathaniel. "We should thank you for braving the heavy rain to deliver the letter, Mr. Judd. Could you tell us again what happened? Don't leave out any details."

Nathaniel had only mentioned that Chaya had left behind a letter without going into further detail. At Jacob's request, he began to recount everything-how Hayden and Chaya, along with the so-called bodyguard, had entered the shop.

"Did the bodyguard keep his eyes on Prince Hayden the entire time?" Jacob asked.

"Yes. He only glanced at Ms. Kingsley a few times. When he saw her carefully selecting items, he withdrew. As for when Ms. Kingsley took out the letter, she wrapped it in a handkerchief. William thought she had simply set the handkerchief aside and forgot to take it with her When she left.

When William picked it up to return it, he was pricked by the sharp shard inside, which is when he opened it."

Carissa's chest rose and fell, her anger raging within her like a storm. After a moment, she calmed herself. She knew that even if it wasn't the Sinclair family, it would have been the Sullivan family. Spies were silent and stealthy in planning the assassination, and they had a high chance of success.

But still, this involved the massacre of her family. How could she not be enraged?

The fire in her heart transformed into a thirst for vengeance. Tomorrow, she would stop at nothing to crush Nicholas.

That traitor!

After sending Nathaniel on his way, Kyle stepped forward and comforted her, "Don't be upset. Tomorrow will be the reckoning. Sage Everett is already outside the city, and Eustace is disguised as Clifford. When the battle begins, Nicholas will have no way out. All the grudges will be settled then."

Carissa clenched her fists, her eyes full of anger. "I don't understand why destroy the Sinclair family?" Hayden hadn't provided a reason in the letter, but after a moment of reflection, Kyle realized the answer.

"Since he planned to ally with

Westhaven," he said, "he must first cut off Westhaven's spies in the capital. By slaughtering the Sinclair family, the Mystic Army will

eliminate those spies. Without them, Westhaven will be powerless in Starhaven, and Nicholas will have

the upper hand in negotiations."

He saw the pain in Carissa's eyes and drew her into an embrace. "The revenge you seek is within reach. There is no need for sorrow now."

Bringing up the destruction of her family once more felt like a fresh wound to her heart, but Carissa held back her tears and said, "I'm fine."

Jacob's eyes were filled with deep hatred and anger. "To him, lives are as worthless as ants. A man like that becoming king will bring nothing but suffering to the people."

Chapter 1376

The conversation turned toward Hayden's predicament. His roundabout way of sending the letter showed just how difficult his situation had become.

When Violet and the others had stayed there, they hadn't noticed anything unusual. Only upon their departure did they realize that something was off with Gordon.

"Prince Hayden is truly sacrificing everything for the greater good," Jacob said with respect.

As a descendant of the Sanford family, Hayden never wished for this rebellion, especially when it involved

his own son. The pain of it all must have been unbearable for Hayden.

They had investigated before and uncovered some of the inside details.

Jacob sighed heavily. "Prince Nicholas launched the rebellion in Prince Hayden's name, dragging him into this mess. Now, in his old age, he must bear such a stain on his reputation."

They were father and son. Though the throne had been forced upon Hayden, the world would never believe his innocence. The public would tear him apart, and the main attacks would certainly be aimed at him.

Everyone fell silent for a moment, their emotions subdued, and rational thought took over.

Carissa gave the order to be ready for action when the moment came.

The moment referred to was, of course, early the next morning. This had been mentioned during the

military training-when Carissa called out, it would signal the moment for action.

At Hell Monarch Estate, the preparations were also underway. Violet spent the night choosing her weapons; she decided that for close combat, twin daggers were best-one in her left hand, the other in her right.

Bun selected a hammer.

"One swing and their skulls crack open," he said with a grin, savoring the thought of that sound.

Cynthia chose a sword, though her skills with both the sword and the whip were equally sharp. But for a battlefield, she knew it was better to use whatever would spill blood the quickest.

Kyle didn't reach for the fan or flute he was known for. Instead, he grabbed a short dagger, ideal for close- quarters combat.

They all knew they would be in the front lines-not hanging back to provide support.

As for Travis, he went with an iron staff, claiming that with one swing, he could take down five enemies.

Laughter filled the room as they joked and chatted, the mood surprisingly light. There wasn't a trace of the looming battle's tension. They had already rehearsed this countless times. The palace guards were more than capable of holding the line.

With the battle happening in the city during the day, the common people would inevitably suffer. Carissa and the others had considered this, so they had arranged for people to evacuate the streets ahead of time.

At around nine in the evening, they went to sleep, as it was crucial to rest and gather strength.

At 5:45 AM, the small gates on either side of the city's main entrance swung open.

Normally, unless there was a special military operation, the main city gates wouldn't be opened. Only the small gates on the sides would be opened for the citizens to enter and exit. Today, just like usual, only the small gates were opened to allow the people to pass.

However, shortly after the small gates were opened, a group of people rushed in and forcibly tried to open the main gates of the city, which led to a conflict with the city guards.

The city gates were under Michael's control. He had already instructed the guards to resist any forceful attempts to open the main gates. However, he also made it clear that they were to allow the intruders to enter.

The intruders were none other than Eustace, disguised as Clifford. He led a small but well-equipped army, and after a brief but intense clash, the gates were finally thrown wide open.

The army poured into the city!

A scout quickly brought the news to Nicholas, whose expression darkened with resolve.

"Mobilize the troops. Our final objective is the palace," he commanded coldly.

The battle to storm the palace had begun.

The riverworks project workers, led by Hans, split into four groups to march toward the palace district. Nicholas was still disguised as Gordon. Along with the Shadow Guards, he headed to meet with Hans.

In the early morning, the streets of the capital, cleaned by the rain over the past few days, glistened in the soft light. The rain had lessened, and the street food stalls had already started opening for business.

The Garrison Unit rode through the streets on horseback, urging shopkeepers to close their shutters and hurry home. They also urged everyone to close their doors and windows, warning them to stay inside as rebels had entered the city.

The tense atmosphere quickly spread, and the citizens hurriedly fled to their homes, locking the doors and windows.

Chapter 1377

At Willowbrook Estate, a light drizzle pattered from the eaves, leaving the entire estate damp and misty. Hayden stood under the corridor, listening—was that the sound of fighting, or just the rain?

He stood there for a long time before finally turning and entering the house.

Sonny lived here now. His legs were shattered, and he would never stand again. In addition to his leg injuries, his face bore fractures, and the constant pain tormented him. The pain from broken bones was excruciating.

Hayden didn't visit often because every time he came, Sonny pretended to be fine and hid his pain. It was an act that made Hayden's heart ache every time.

Inside, Chaya was tending to Sonny. She wiped his face and massaged his hands and back to prevent sores from forming after lying too long.

Seeing Hayden enter, she took the basin away and said, "I was just about to feed him some millet porridge. Have you eaten?"

"No," Hayden replied. "Bring another bowl. I'll eat with him."

He pulled a chair to sit beside the bed.

Sonny smiled weakly, his cracked lips still swollen and far from healed. Each smile threatened to reopen the wound.

"Don't smile," Hayden said gently, tapping Sonny's shoulder. "If it hurts, just say so."

Sonny's smile was brittle, and he seemed to struggle to keep it there. "It doesn't hurt."

Hayden took the bowl and fed him.

Sonny's eyes reddened, but he opened his mouth to eat. He didn't eat much, just a few bites. Although Nicholas had hired a physician for him, he hadn't really received proper treatment.

Hayden didn't wait for Chaya to bring him another bowl of millet porridge. He just ate from Sonny's bowl. "It's dirty," Sonny said.

Hayden kept eating, not noticing that something fell into the bowl. "Sonny, we've been together all our lives."

Sonny stared at him, his bruised face showing signs of sadness.

"We've been together our whole lives. You don't mind that I'm useless. Why would I mind you?" Hayden continued, only to realize the tears falling into the bowl were his own.

"Does it hurt?" He took another spoonful of millet porridge and began reminiscing. "I remember when I was 57, I fell off a horse and hurt my waist and legs. The pain was so sharp, I still fear it when I think back on it."

Tears slid down Sonny's cheek, and he whispered, "This old servant feels no pain."

Hayden finished the millet porridge and glanced outside. The rain had intensified, and the Shadow Guard who had been watching over him was still there. Just now, when he had

Shadow Guard had mirrored his actions.

on the corridor, the

The man really was a persistent shadow.

Chaya entered, carrying a bowl. "Here's yours."

"No need," Hayden said. "I've already had Sonny's."

He placed the bowl down and had Chaya stand in front of him, just enough to block the view of the Shadow Guard outside.

He took a small pill from his sleeve and gently placed it in Sonny's mouth. "Take it. Once you do, the pain will be gone."

Chaya froze for a moment. Wasn't that pill meant for himself? The medicine would allow Hayden to leave the world without pain.

Sonny seemed to know what the medicine was for and swallowed it dry. The pain was unbearable, and every moment was agony.

Yet, he truly couldn't bear to part with Hayden. His eyes filled with longing and tears that never stopped.

Hayden pulled out a shard of porcelain and looked at Chaya, whose face had gone pale. Then, he smiled and said, "I found a piece too."

Chaya suddenly covered her mouth, tears streaming down her face.

"You stand here and watch while! talk with Sonny about the past," Hayden said, then sharply dragged the porcelain shard across his wrist with such force that it was clear he had the intent to die.

His hand rested on Sonny's bed, and his blood seeped into the sheets, staining them a dark red. Chaya stood in front of him like an immovable mountain, her body still as stone, tears streaming down her face like a relentless rain.

"Didn't you want to ask him if he regrets it?" she whispered, covering her face with her hands. Her voice was so soft it was almost drowned out by the sound of the rain outside.

"I don't need to ask anymore. I know

everything need to," Hayden said with a look of relief. He glanced at Chaya, his expression tinged with reluctance. "Live well. Someone will come to love and care for you sincerely."

Chaya shook her head violently, hands still pressed to her face.

The Shadow Guard outside seemed to have heard something. He peeked in, but his view was blocked by

Chaya's back, so he could only tell that they were talking.

What they said didn't matter to Nicholas. What mattered was ensuring Hayden stayed alive.

No matter the outcome, Hayden was Nicholas' backup plan.

If they succeeded, Hayden would have to endure the shame of being accused of usurping the throne. If they failed, Hayden would bear the crime of being the leader of the rebels.

Chapter 1378

As Nicholas rode out, he saw Clifford in the distance, which finally put his mind at ease.

He knew how fearless Clifford was once people were willing to give their all and feared nothing, they could achieve anything.

This was the war Nicholas had dreamed of the battle for his great cause.

All the calmness he had once carried disappeared. The suppressed fire in his blood surged through his limbs, and the desire to rule the world filled him with an overwhelming strength and conviction.

He believed that ambition was the most powerful force in the world, and that it was unstoppable.

What he didn't realize was that ambition wasn't the strongest force. The greatest forces were love and hate, justice and unity.

It was the patriotism of Carissa, the commander of the Mystic Army!

It was the hatred of Carissa, whose family had been slaughtered!

It was also the union of soldiers and martial artists, working together to expel the rebels and uphold justice for the people!

Nicholas quickly realized something was wrong. The soldiers led by Clifford had all taken off their military uniforms, revealing civilian clothes underneath. Embroidered on the fabric was the Spencer family's crest. They were from the Spencer family!

He realized he had been tricked. It wasn't Clifford who had arrived, but the Spencer family's people, along with a group of martial artists.

No matter how skilled Nicholas was, he was trapped and couldn't even command his troops once Adrian appeared.

However, the rebel army led by Hans was incredibly fierce. They pressed forward, fighting their way from the river to the two main streets. Beyond that was the Royal Street.

Carissa led them toward Royal Street. It was the closest street to the palace, with few civilians, so there wouldn't be any innocent casualties.

The gates of the noblemen's estates in the capital were shut tight, their most trusted guards stationed to prevent any rebels from breaching and taking them hostage.

Some brave souls were not afraid of death and had climbed up to the walls to watch the battle. Though terrified and their legs were shaking, they couldn't help but reassess Mystic Army's strength.

As it turned out, the Mystic Army was this strong!

Yes, many people in the capital had forgotten just how formidable the Mystic Army once was, especially after a group of idle nobles had made the Garrison Unit a mess. The people had completely lost hope in the so-called Mystic Army.

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On top of that, their commander had even been replaced-it was no longer the Hell Monarch.

Now, they saw it- though this wasn't the Mystic Army led by the Hell Monarch, it was still just as fierce. Carissa and her subordinates were covered in blood-enemy blood. They all felt conflicted- they had to kill, but it still hurt to do so.

This battle was completely different from the one fought at the Southern Frontier, especially for Carissa. Even though she was filled with hatred, it wasn't the same as when facing the Sandoria soldiers.

These were people from Starhaven-citizens of the kingdom. They had just been used by the rebels and led astray.

And the price they had to pay for being led astray was death.

Within the palace, the gates were heavily guarded. Messengers continuously entered to report the progress of the battle to Salvador.

At first, when he heard the news that the forces were closing in on Royal Street, his heart sank. He began to doubt Carissa's ability to handle the situation. But as more reports came in, saying the Mystic Army was closing in on the rebels and victory seemed near, his worried heart eased slightly.

In contrast to his restless pacing, Victoria, who had come specifically to keep him company, remained remarkably calm. She even comforted him.

"There's no need to worry. With the Mystic Army here, the rebels stand no chance."

Victoria knew her son was burdened with worries, so she spoke carefully. She didn't mention the

Pathfinders Guild or Carissa, but emphasized the strength of the Mystic Army.

Either way, the glory of the victory would belong to the one who earned it no one could escape that. This time, Salvador praised, "With Carissa here, I can rest easy."

Victoria glanced at him, hoping that was truly what he thought.

The rain washed away the bloodstains on the main streets, and the entire capital seemed to carry the scent of blood.

Adrian and Nicholas had clashed, but Nicholas had managed to escape. It took a great deal of effort for Adrian to track him down.

It wasn't hard for Adrian to kill him,

but capturing him alive was more challenging: Nicholas was skilled in evasion, and his Lightfoot Skill was remarkable. He escaped several times, but in the end, he couldn't get away.

Adrian fired two shots from his six-barreled matchlock, hitting Nicholas in both legs. He could escape no

longer.

With Nicholas caught, the Mystic Army rode around shouting, "The rebel prince is captured! Drop your weapons and surrender, and you may still have a chance to survive!"

But Hans was beyond reason, his eyes filled with rage.

With his large blade raised, he

shouted, "Charge into the palace and

kill the damn king! That's the only way we'll have a chance to survive!

Don't believe their lies! Throughout history, rebels never end well!"

Chapter 1379

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Under Hans' command, the private soldiers didn't retreat. Instead, they fought increasingly harder. They weren't Yuvan's soldiers. Over 10,000 of them had been carefully selected by Nicholas over the years, trained through countless battles.

Many of them carried tragic pasts, lives marked by pain and loss. They harbored deep resentment against the world and saw this war as their chance to turn the tide of their fate. As long as someone was leading them, they would not easily surrender.

The Mystic Army would win, but it would not be quick, nor would it be without heavy losses.

Carissa knew that if they didn't surrender, the bodies would pile up-more lives would be lost with each passing moment. So she chose a team of elite soldiers, including the Meadow Ridge squad, with the mission to take Hans' head.

Without a commander, the enemy's forces would be much easier to defeat.

Carissa devised a plan-Bun and Travis would first break through their formation and clear a path. Then, she and Violet would advance swiftly, take the enemy commander's head, and retreat just as quickly. Taking the enemy general's head amidst thousands of soldiers was no easy task, especially since the enemy was fighting with bloodlust. A slight hesitation could lead to being overwhelmed by a barrage of strikes.

Hans was a battle-hardened veteran, and he quickly saw through Carissa's plan. He deliberately exposed a weakness to lure her and Violet in. What he sought was the same as what Carissa wanted to capture the leader to defeat the army.

Carissa wanted to take him out, and he wanted to do the same to her.

Once the opening appeared, he leaped forward with astonishing speed, his blade coming down in a deadly arc.

Carissa and Violet had chosen short-range weapons, designed for close combat. But to use their Lightfoot Skill effectively in this situation, they needed some distance, which gave Hans' large blade an advantage. In that split second, they moved in perfect synchrony. Violet charged forward, slamming into Hans' abdomen, diverting his strike. His sword grazed Carissa's shoulder, while Violet was struck by one of his soldiers.

Bun and Travis arrived just in time. One wielded a meteor hammer, the other a long staff. With a

resounding strike, both weapons slammed into Hans' skull. There was no grunt, no cry of pain-only the sickening splatter of blood and brain matter as he crumpled to the ground.

With Hans dead, the rebel army fell into chaos and began fleeing in all directions.

Carissa, clutching her bleeding shoulder, shouted, "Pursue them!"

These men were driven by madness, their minds clouded by rage. The city gates were locked, but the real fear was that they would seek refuge in the homes of the common people.

The officials of the third rank and above had gathered at the Knowledge Sanctum in the palace. They had known of the planned action, which was why they had entered the palace last night to attend to Salvador. However, Salvador had not called upon them, so they waited in the Knowledge Sanctum, where the Ministry of Defense also provided reports on the situation outside.

Carissa quickly bandaged her wound and took Nicholas into the palace to report on the battle herself. The officials at the Knowledge Sanctum were also summoned then. Upon seeing Nicholas tightly bound, they all sighed in relief.

Salvador gazed at Carissa, who was covered in blood. He couldn't tell which was hers and which was from the enemy. It was clear that it had been a difficult battle.

"You've worked hard, my loyal commander," he said softly.

Carissa replied, "It is my duty, Your Majesty."

Looking into her determined eyes, Salvador felt a wave of nostalgia. He was reminded of his old friend from the Sinclair family-Carissa's second brother, Nathan.

He choked up, his voice trembling as he ordered, "Summon the royal physician. Have them treat her injuries first."

Carissa accepted the gesture with gratitude. As Derek guided her, the officials present gave her respectful looks. She was led to Victoria's chambers.

Upon seeing Carissa in such a state, Helen's tears flowed freely. She hurried to carefully wipe the blood

from Carissa's face with a

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handkerchief and asked t

did you get hurt like this? Does it hurt?" .

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She thought any place with blood meant a wound and was careful not to rub the dried blood too hard. Carissa smiled, her eyes lighting up. "Mother, that's all the enemy's blood. I only hurt my shoulder." She was pleased-they had won the battle.

Helen's tears intensified, her voice trembling as she replied, "What do you mean, you only hurt your shoulder? Is that not serious enough?"

Her gaze fell on the bandage wrapped around Carissa's shoulder, now soaked with blood. She couldn't bring herself to imagine how deep the wound must be.

Victoria chuckled. "Well, it looks like my little sister has finally learned to care for others. Alright, let's have a female physician rebandage it later. Don't cause a fuss. Ryan is still outside, and if you keep crying, he'll think his aunt's injury is much worse than it looks."

In the main hall, Nicholas was bound tightly and was lying in a very strange position.

With deep sorrow in his voice, he said, "I beg your forgiveness, Your Majesty. My dad committed treason, which cannot be tolerated. However, he is still my dad. As his son, I failed to stop him. I am guilty, and I am willing to bear all the blame for my dad. I ask for mercy on his behalf due to his old age, and I plead for his life."

Chapter 1380

Salvador looked down at Nicholas from his lofty position, undisguised hatred brimming in his eyes. "Is that so? You claim you wish to bear your dad's punishment, yet I cannot let an innocent man suffer in your place. As for who truly plotted treason and sought to usurp the throne, I will investigate that thoroughly myself."

Tears welled in Nicholas' eyes. He spoke with deep sorrow, his voice trembling. "Your Majesty, there's no need for an investigation. My guilt is certain. My dad was simply a fool for a moment."

Salvador sneered. "You disappoint me. Is this truly the best you can do? Where is your sense of honor? The self-awareness that the victors write history? You are no great leader. With such character, how dare you even think of claiming the throne and ruling a nation? Nicholas, don't make your followers regret ever supporting you."

Nicholas ignored Salvador's words, repeating his heartfelt plea to protect Hayden. "I am willing to bear my dad's sins!"

The officials didn't believe him and started calling him out for his selfish ambitions. But he didn't care about their insults-if one was tough enough, they could ignore anything people say.

Nicholas still looked very sorrowful as he went on, "Please stop blaming my dad. He just made a terrible mistake in a moment of confusion. As his son, I'm willing to take on any punishment for him."

The officials were furious. Their anger seemed to be bouncing off him.

How could Nicholas be so shameless?!

Salvador's cold voice cut through the room. "You've been plotting for years, thinking you're the smartest and most cunning. Yet, you couldn't even break into the palace gates. Even a fool like Yuvan could probably manage better than this."

Nicholas had always prided himself on being more clever and capable than Yuvan. In fact, after taking in Yuvan's supporters, he had mocked Yuvan, looking down on the latter as little more than a piece of rotting refuse.

So when Salvador made the comparison, implying that even Yuvan might have succeeded where he failed, it was a blow to his pride.

But Nicholas only briefly flinched before repeating, "I'm willing to take the blame for my dad." Davis could no longer hold back.

Furious, he bellowed, "Shut your filthy mouth, traitor! If you're too cowardly to face the consequences, don't try to cause chaos like this! You should crawl back into a hole like the spineless worm you are! "You don't even have the backbone to take responsibility for your actions. What kind of man are you that you would dare to dream of ruling this empire? You're nothing but a disgrace! You should be publicly executed, your eyes gouged out, and your tongue cut from your mouth! The historians should record your every vile act so your name is cursed for generations to come!"

Davis' words hit a nerve.

Nicholas had shifted the blame for everything onto Hayden. Besides hoping for a chance to escape the death penalty, he was also worried about his reputation.

He had always prided himself on his balance of military and scholarly pursuits. Having read the records of treacherous ministers in his youth, Nicholas had condemned them for their foolishness. He was

determined not to be remembered the same way.

No matter how tightly Nicholas controlled his emotions, hearing Davis' sharp reproach only darkened his face further.

Still he said, "I said I'm willing to take on my dad's punishment. There's no need for you to insult me like this, Mr. Lloyd."

"To bear the punishment for your dad's sins means bearing the insults as well. What, can't handle a few insults? How will you handle anything else?" Davis scoffed, unrelenting.

Though Nicholas was in a humiliating situation, he remained proud.

"Kill me, torture me-do whatever you want. I've lived my life honestly and followed my ancestors' teachings to value kindness and devotion to family. No matter how much you investigate, I only

have one thing to say: my dad's actions were due to a moment of confusion. Even if he admits to treason, it's because I, as his son, failed to persuade him," he said boldly.

His confidence was so strong that it unsettled the rest.

Whether or not Hayden was involved in the rebellion, everyone in the room present likely already knew. Carissa had already investigated and informed them about it.

Logically, Hayden wouldn't admit to something he hadn't done. But why was Nicholas so certain Hayden would shoulder the entire blame?

Jeremiah, unsure, said, "Your

Majesty, this treasonous plot has shocked the nation, and the truth must be made clear for the people's peace of mind. I propose that the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Justice conduct a joint investigation and interrogation. The guilty will be revealed, and the innocent shall be exonerated. The truth will come to light soon enough."

Salvador shared the same thought.

Nicholas insisted that Hayden was the mastermind behind the rebellion, and that he would take the blame for his dad. Even though many wouldn't believe that Hayden was the true mastermind, that didn't mean everyone would think the same.

Until the investigation was complete, Hayden would have to carry the blame for Nicholas.

Just as Salvador was about to issue an order, a voice interrupted from the outer hall.

"Your Majesty, Deputy Commander Brown requests an audience," the court attendant announced.

Michael, who had been sent by Carissa to Willowbrook Estate, entered the court with Chaya and knelt before Salvador.

"Your Majesty, Prince Hayden has committed suicide," Michael reported. "This woman is Chaya Kingsley, Prince Hayden's goddaughter. She has come with a message-Prince Hayden's final words.

