

War Song 1381

Chapter 1381

Upon hearing that Hayden had taken his own life, Nicholas was momentarily stunned.

Then, he cried out in a voice filled with despair, "Dad, you didn't have to die for your crimes! I promised I would take the blame for you!"

Chaya hadn't planned on living anyway, having resolved to follow Hayden to the grave. So, when she heard Nicholas' words, she fearlessly rushed forward and struck him on his head.

Her fist was powerful, landing squarely on the top of his skull. Nicholas felt as if a bolt of lightning had struck him. For a long moment, his head buzzed. Finally, he looked up and glared at her, a venomous look in his eyes.

Chaya spat at him and coldly said, "You wretched man! You've used the lives of Nerovia's people and the old retainers of the estate to blackmail Prince Hayden into taking the fall for you. Prince Hayden never had any intention of rebellion. Even under your strict surveillance, he tried to send word to Commander Sinclair. Don't you dare tarnish his name!"

After Chaya finished speaking, she dropped to her knees. With tears in her eyes, she pleaded, "Your Majesty, please see the truth. Prince Hayden never plotted against you. It was Prince Nicholas who said that if his plan succeeded, everything would be fine. If it failed, he would have the people of Nerovia slaughtered.

"That is how he has always manipulated Prince Hayden. Nicholas killed all of Prince Hayden's allies; there are hardly any left now. Prince Hayden said he was ashamed of raising such a villainous son and couldn't face the world. So, he chose to take his own life. Please, Your Majesty, send help to Nerovia. The people there will die!"

As Chaya spoke, she remembered Hayden's final moments, and her heart ached with unbearable sorrow. She began to weep uncontrollably, her cries echoing through the hall.

Concerned that her grief might cause her to lose her composure, Davis quickly spoke up, "Ms. Kingsley, please don't cry. The people of Nerovia are safe. A messenger carrying Prince Hayden's emblem was sent there long ago. The court has already taken control of Nerovia. No harm will come to its people." Nicholas jerked his head up, his face ashen.

"Impossible!" he blurted out.

The emblem was in his hands. How could the officials in Nerovia fail to recognize the real one? If they saw it was fake, they would never allow the messenger to leave the city, unless... unless the army was involved.

But there couldn't possibly be enough soldiers to surround the city!

Sensing Nicholas' confusion, Davis smiled coldly. "Oh, you didn't know? We've already taken over Nerovia. Otherwise, how would we know about your secret code with Mr. Murphy? How else could Mr. Spencer have impersonated Mr. Murphy to deceive you?"

Davis deliberately mentioned

Eustace, as he hoped to remind

Salvador of the Spencer family's

loyalty. This was meant to offset the

actions of the third son of the

family's collateral branch, who

secretly helped Nicholas steal 500 warhorses.

Nicholas could no longer claim he wanted to take the blame for his dad. Never in all his plans had he predicted that Nerovia would fall.

That place had been his stronghold.

He had never forgotten that Nerovia had once revered Hayden above all else. But before taking action, Nicholas had already secured the emblem. Looking back, he realized he had taken it too late.

He had been careless. He thought that since Hayden left Nerovia so long ago, nothing would stir up trouble. He had never expected that a single emblem could bring it down.

Nicholas' lips moved, but no words came out. He lifted his gaze to Salvador, fixating on the throne where the king sat. His eyes burned with longing and frustration.

It was so close just one step away-but now, it was beyond his reach, forever.

And without that, death was all that awaited him.

Salvador's sharp gaze fixed on Nicholas. His voice rang out coldly, "Take him to Astral Prison. Once all the rebels are captured, we will execute them."

Nicholas was dragged away. His eyes, once dull and lifeless, flickered with a faint spark at Salvador's words.

Yes, not all of his men had been caught yet. At least Clifford was still free. As long as that man lived, there was still hope.

Clifford harbored more hatred for Sigmund than anyone else. Naturally, that hatred extended to Salvador, Sigmund's son. Clifford was determined to see the favored child of the late king dragged from the throne.

As Derek escorted Chaya out, all the officials present watched silently, aware of her identity and too cautious to address her in the king's presence. However, Derek wasn't leading her out of the palace; he was taking her to Serenity Palace. With Carissa there, Chaya would be well cared for.

When Carissa heard of Hayden's suicide, she paused for a moment as a wave of sorrow washed over

her.

In this rebellion, he had been the one to suffer the most, enduring torment and anguish like no other. Yet, from beginning to end, his loyalty had never wavered.

Her eyes reddened, and despite her efforts, she couldn't hold back the tears that silently streamed down her cheeks.

Chapter 1382

It took five days to finally wipe out the remaining rebels.

News soon came from Thomas and Chester. Having captured the traitor, Clifford, alive, they were now on their way back to the capital. Also with them were the rebel leaders, including Yuvan, Harvey, and Wayne. They would arrive in the city in a matter of days.

With the exception of Oliver, the remaining targets had mostly been caught.

On July 25, the Royal Management Department organized Hayden's funeral. Due to the treason committed by Nicholas, the funeral was a modest affair. Salvador convened a council to discuss whether Hayden could be buried in the Princes' Mausoleum. Though he had been innocent, Nicholas' crime had stained his entire family.

Carissa was not summoned to participate in the discussions. Instead, she, along with Hell Monarch Estate's staff, made their way to Willowbrook Estate to mourn.

The funeral was kept quiet and understated, with no officials attending. Unless Salvador granted

permission for Hayden to be buried in the Princes' Mausoleum, no one would dare show up.

Dressed in black, Chaya knelt before the coffin and arranged some flowers. Hayden's body had been placed in the coffin, though it had not yet been sealed. When Carissa, Violet, and the others arrived, they could still view his remains.

Three coffins were placed together-one for Hayden and another for Sonny.

The third was empty.

Chaya had kept Hayden's body preserved in the ice cellar. So, when people came to pay their respects today, there was no smell of decay.

Hayden was dressed in a blue velvet tunic, richly embroidered with intricate bat motifs-a symbol of protection in many cultures. His cheeks had been lightly dusted with rouge, but it did little to mask the unnatural pallor of his skin.

Chaya's voice was thick with emotion as she said, "This was the outfit he chose for himself. He said he wanted to wear it when he was buried. I did the embroidery myself."

With tears streaming down her face, Violet asked softly, "Had he already planned to end his life when Nicholas started the rebellion?"

"We agreed to die together," Chaya replied, her voice hollow. She had grown thinner, and her eyes were void of life. "When he took his life, I stood by his side. Sonny was the first to go. His Highness held on for a while longer before he passed. He told me to live well."

Carissa glanced at the empty coffin and asked, "Did you prepare that one for yourself?"

"I've had it prepared for some time," Chaya said, wiping her tears, her eyes swollen and red. "When they brought his coffin, they brought mine along with it."

"He wanted you to live well. You're still young, and there's so much life ahead of you. If you truly miss him, you can do the things he always wanted to but never could," Carissa said softly.

Chaya's eyes were distant and filled with sorrow.

No one would ever treat her as well as Hayden had. She wasn't afraid of death. What was there to fear about it? In the past, her life had been worse than a dog's. She had wanted to die but couldn't.

But Hayden had wanted her to live well.

"Why don't you stay at Skye Embroidery for a while?" Violet suggested.

"No, I won't," Chaya replied, shaking her head.

After a moment, she turned to Carissa and asked, "Where will he be buried? Wherever he is, I'll build a small house nearby to stay with him."

"We don't know yet. If he's buried in the Princes' Mausoleum, you won't be able to go there," Carissa replied.

The Princes' Mausoleum was near the Royal Mausoleum, an area restricted within a three-mile radius.

"To be making funeral arrangements

but still not know where he will be buried..." Chaya's heart sank even further," he can't be laid to rest in the Princes' Mausoleum, where will he be placed? I asked the Royal Management Department, but they wouldn't say."

She numbly returned to arranging the flowers, tears streaming down her face as she did so.

Carissa and the others made their offerings of flowers and candles then sat nearby, also arranging the flowers. Before leaving, they asked Lulu and Pearl to stay behind to help and keep Chaya company.

Violet had been staying at Glimmering Tower over the past few days. With both her father and mentor in the capital, she wanted to be with them as much as possible.

When she had time, Carissa would also head to Glimmering Tower. She hoped to keep Adrian around a little longer and not let him return to Meadow Ridge so soon. But she was often too busy.

There were many details to take care of, and with the battle having resulted in heavy casualties for the Mystic Army, the follow-up compensation had to be handled properly.

After a discussion with the court

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officials, Salvador decided to find a suitable burial site for Hayden near the Royal Mausoleum, though it would not be within the grounds. Ultimately, Hayden could not be buried in the Princes' Mausoleum.

Chapter 1383

The burial site, chosen by the Royal Astronomer, was indeed a place of serene beauty-lush mountains and clear waters, with two villages nestled nearby. Though it was said to be next to the Royal Mausoleum, it was actually ten miles away.

After the funeral, Chaya came to bid farewell to Carissa and Violet. She told them she planned to stay in one of the nearby villages and build a small hut, in order to guard the grave of her godfather.

Violet asked if she needed financial help, but Chaya said she didn't. She explained that selling the jewelry she had purchased would provide enough for her to live comfortably on her own and still have some wealth to spare.

The day she left, Thomas arrived in the capital, with Yuvan and the others in his custody.

Standing at the city gates, Chaya watched the prisoner cart carrying Yuvan and Harvey. A surge of hatred rose within her, but as she saw the common people angrily throwing rotten vegetables at them, her anger faded.

They had brought this upon themselves-karma had caught up with them.

As for herself, she was finally free, no longer bound by anyone or anything.

Along with Yuvan and the others, some officials from Nerovia, as well as Clifford, were being escorted back. To Carissa's surprise, Celeste was among them as well.

Carissa and Matthew, the deputy minister of the Supreme Court, had come to oversee the transfer of prisoners. When asked if he had seen Oliver, Thomas replied that he had not. It was only after the city was sealed and reopened that they had tracked down Celeste and arrested her.

No one had questioned anyone for information yet. Salvador had issued an order to transfer the most serious criminals to the Supreme Court. What would happen to the rest was to be decided by the Capital Guard.

Yuvan, Harvey, Clifford, Wayne, Saul, and Samson-these six were undeniably the most severe offenders. They were to be handed over directly to the Supreme Court and imprisoned in Astral Prison. Whether they would be interrogated depended on Salvador's will.

As for the remaining officials from Nerovia and Valken, as well as Celeste, they were to be questioned first by the officials at the Capital Guard headquarters. If their involvement proved serious enough, they would also be sent to the Supreme Court.

After bringing Helen and Ryan back to Hell Monarch Estate, Carissa immediately threw herself into the interrogations. She started with Celeste, hoping to extract any information about the crimes Oliver had committed, as well as his current whereabouts.

Celeste had arrived in the capital in a prisoner cart. She was no longer the proud, aloof woman she once was. She looked weary and haggard, her hair sticking to her scalp in tangled strands, giving her a disheveled appearance. After days of traveling under the scorching sun, her face was reddened and peeling, the skin raw from the exposure.

Beauty, after all, needed careful upkeep. Without the resources to maintain it, it faded quickly, losing its former luster and vitality.

She denied all accusations, her voice cold and detached as she said, "I am but a plaything, like all my other sisters. Since His Majesty pardoned them, I should be pardoned as well."

Carissa was already aware that Celeste would never admit to her actions easily, so she didn't rush her. She calmly followed protocol and asked the necessary questions.

"Who instructed you to approach Mr. Prince?"

Celeste raised her chin slightly, her gaunt appearance giving her a sharp, almost cruel edge.

She spoke with a hint of sarcasm, "When life in the capital became unbearable, sought other

opportunities. It was no secret that Oliver had an eye for women. I knew that with my beauty, I could make him-forget his old hag of a wife. As it turned out, I was right."

"And after his escape, did you continue to be with him?" Carissa asked, flipping through the notes provided by Thomas, already aware of Celeste's lavish home in Nerovia. "Did you purchase that house together? Where is he now?"

Celeste sneered. "He's a spineless

coward. How could I ever truly care for him? He ran when things got tough, so he had no use for him. His subordinates were after his money, so they stole from him and ran off in the night. Naturally, I ran as well. The house was mine and mine alone."

"Where did the money to buy it come from?" Carissa asked.

"I earned it myself," Celeste replied.

"How?" Carissa pressed.

Celeste glanced at her with a mocking smile. "Obviously, with my looks and body. A woman's beauty is

her biggest asset. You're also quite pretty, Your Grace. I imagine you could make a fortune if you chose to sell yourself."

"How dare you?!" Michael shouted angrily from the side.

Celeste smirked. "Oh, that's right. I

almost forgot. Lady Carissa comes from a good family and married well. She'll never run out of money. She can live a hundred lifetimes and still live to be rich. Naturally, she doesn't have to sell herself to make a living like I do."

Michael felt a surge of anger. This was the first time he ever had the urge to hit a woman. But when he saw Carissa motion for him to calm down, he restrained himself. Instead, he simply let out a cold snort. Celeste's words were meant to be an insult, but Carissa just smiled and nodded. "You're right. The things you struggled so hard to achieve, I can have with a snap of my fingers. As for your residence in Nerovia, I can buy as many residences like that as I please."

To strike at the heart—who couldn't do that?

Chapter 1384

Celeste's

fists tightened, and there was a sharp glint in her eyes. "That's why I say the heavens are unfair. How could this happen?"

"You said it yourself-it's all about one's birth. Even the woman you call an old hag also comes from a noble family," Carissa replied calmly, her voice carrying a subtle sense of superiority.

Celeste hated that attitude more than anything, for it reminded her of Eleanor-the one who stood in the clouds while Celeste could only crawl in the dust below. Her anger flared, her chest rising and falling sharply.

"So what if she's of noble birth? She was still rejected by her own husband," Celeste taunted.

"Mr. Prince? She never cared for him at all," Carissa said dismissively. "It's only you who treats him like some precious gem."

"He's no gem to me, he's a waste of space," Celeste spat, her expression hardening.

Carissa smiled contemptuously. "What I know isn't quite like that. You even had a child with him. Knowing full well that desertion is a grave crime, you followed him without hesitation. I've seen enough people like you people who say one thing and do another."

"That's nonsense!" Celeste yelled, her face turning scarlet with rage. But then, she composed herself and laughed bitterly. "Ha, so you want to trick me? Fine. Yes, I loved him. I couldn't stop myself from running away with him. So what?"

Carissa shrugged nonchalantly. "Alright, you caught me. But it doesn't really matter. I was just going through the motions. The scribe will write the confession we need, and I'll be able to file my report." Celeste sucked in a sharp breath. "You're trying to frame me?"

Carissa's face darkened, her voice cold as ice as she said, "It's not framing-it's the truth. Mr. Prince embezzled military funds because you incited him to do so. He deserted his post, which was your idea too. After he fled, you ordered his men to steal his wealth and silence him. There's nothing here that isn't true."

Celeste's nostrils flared, her fury bubbling over. "Don't you dare twist the truth! I didn't make him do anything! He's the one who embezzled the military funds because he wanted to indulge in pleasures. He's the one who ran away from the battlefield out of fear for his life. After fleeing the Southern Frontier, he didn't honor his promises.

"He didn't share the money with his men as he said he would. He treated them like slaves, not even giving them decent food. They were angry and all did was help them get a bit of profit. And no, he's not dead. We didn't take all the money. We left him one hundred silver coins to raise his child. He's in Stonebridge County! You can send someone to find him there!"

Even if Celeste had seduced Oliver, leading him to do many foolish things in the heat of passion, her

crimes didn't warrant death. But if

everything was pinned on her-if- they said she had incited him, or even plotted to steal from him and murder him-then there was no way she could keep her head.

Her anger flared as she finished speaking. But as she saw the flash of light in Carissa's eyes, she realized she had been baited into confessing. Her face twisted with fury as she glared at Carissa.

"So, it seems that high-born ladies are just as good at manipulating others. In that case, why do you look down on me?" said Celeste.

Carissa wiped the disdainful expression from her face, returning to her usual calm demeanor. "I don't look down on you. You've broken the law and I'm here to question you. That's all."

Celeste didn't relent. Her voice was ice-cold as she sneered, "Why all the pretense? You people, sitting up there on your high horses, make me sick. Stop pretending to be virtuous. Do you think sending my sisters to a monastery makes you some kind of saint?"

"The suffering they've endured can't be erased with a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee. Spare me the act. You're just using them to boost your reputation, but you won't succeed. Sooner or later, someone will see through your hypocrisy."

Carissa rose from her chair, pushing it aside.

She hadn't wanted to speak more, but when she saw Celeste's eyes burning with malice, she paused and said, "I wasn't the one who caused their suffering. Whether a cup of coffee or a bowl of soup brings them peace, that's for them to decide. And as for a good reputation... I don't think I need it.'

Eyes steady, she paused, then

added, "As for the suffering you mentioned,

0 in this world doesn't

face hardships? It's a matter of degree and how one chooses to break free from it. Your body and your beauty are yours to use as you wish. Apart from the mother who gave you life, no one has the right to dictate that. And by the way, your mother defended you until her dying breath."

Having said that, she glanced at Celeste's pale face one last time before leaving with Michael. There was no need for further questioning. They needed to send someone to Stonebridge County to search for Oliver. Celeste would be sentenced according to the law, but one thing was certain-killing one's own mom was a capital offense.

She resented the unfairness of fate, yet she always found comfort in the suffering of others. Did she not realize that what she called the unfairness of the heavens was often the harm people inflicted on one another?

Chapter 1385

Oliver's situation caught Carissa off guard. She had assumed he would have taken trusted allies with him, at least people capable of keeping themselves hidden for two or three years.

Who would have thought he would be robbed halfway through, losing everything, including the mistress he doted on, who ended up abandoning him? In that moment, did he regret his reckless choices?

To think that, at his age, he still believed in true love. He even dared to cast aside the wife who had worked tirelessly for over ten years to care for him, only to be discarded himself. Perhaps that was his karmic punishment.

But his punishment didn't end there.

Knowing Celeste's temperament, Carissa imagined that she had likely humiliated Oliver when she left, just as she had once done to Samuel. Celeste used her beauty as a tool but despised the men who coveted it.

Carissa didn't think Oliver would stay in Stonebridge County. Given his fugitive status, he couldn't risk revealing his true identity, and he certainly wouldn't stay in one place for too long. He would be forced to hide, and he still had a child with him.

Carissa wondered when he had nowhere else to turn, would he try sneaking back into the capital? Despite Oliver's foolishness, he wasn't entirely stupid. He knew the most dangerous place was often the safest. As a military official, he likely had the means to forge a fake identity. If he came back to the city with his child and changed his appearance, the guards at the gates might never recognize him. With that thought in mind, Carissa ordered Max to keep an eye out for men traveling with a child. She then went to Skye Embroidery to see Zoey and tell her of this possibility, so the latter could keep an ear out as well.

If reporting Oliver could earn them some credit, it would be a huge benefit for Zoey and her entire family. Still, there was concern that someone might soften their stance. After all, a mother might forgive her child's catastrophic mistakes with just a few pleas and some tears.

Zoey frowned after hearing about Oliver's situation. From what she knew of her husband, he wasn't the type of man who would be a good dad. When he was desperate, he wouldn't want the burden of a child. Especially when he needed to stay on the move, a child would only slow him down. He would likely abandon the child without a second thought.

"He may not even bring the child with him," Zoey mused. "So, we can't just focus on men with children." Carissa blinked, surprised. "You mean he might leave the child behind?"

Carissa didn't believe Oliver had any genuine fatherly affection. Rather, she thought that carrying the child might help him avoid some scrutiny. But upon reflection, she realized it was widely known that he had fled with his child and concubine, so he might very well abandon the child after all.

And considering that the child's mom had already turned her back on Oliver, it could be a significant blow

to him. He may well be able to discard the child without hesitation.

So, the instructions Carissa had given Max about keeping an eye on men with children weren't entirely accurate. She needed to reconsider her approach.

"How is Madam Prince? Has she gone out recently?" Carissa asked, concerned that Evelyn would show Oliver mercy.

"She visits Arcane Sanctum three times a month-once every ten days. Viola always accompanies her. Counting the days, she's due to go out tomorrow," Zoey replied.

Carissa nodded thoughtfully. "Keep

a close eye on her. If you happen to find any trace of Mr. Prince, report it to the Capital Guard headquarters immediately. If your tip-off leads to something, Cedric and the others might be able to come back sooner."

Zoey, who had once wished for Oliver's downfall, now found herself hoping he would survive.

She nodded. "Thank you, Your Grace. I'll keep an eye out. But please don't send anyone to follow my mother-in-law and Viola. If Oliver does return to the capital, he won't dare show himself if he knows we're being watched."

"Understood. I'll leave that honor to you, but only if he actually sneaks back into the city," Carissa replied with a smile.

"If he's really backed into a corner, he'll come crawling back," Zoey said with conviction.

She knew him better than anyone. Oliver didn't have much in the way of ability. In the past, whenever trouble arose, he always turned to her to fix it. He had always believed that, no matter what he did, she would forgive him without question, and even be glad to help him pick up the pieces.

In the past, she really would have done it. After all, her son's career and her daughter's marriage depended on maintaining their family's reputation. So, she had to cover up all those messy things. However, with the fall of the Earl of Silverstone's family, she had nothing left to worry about.

Zoey chose not to tell Evelyn or Viola about her plan. The next day, as they set off for their routine visit to Arcane Sanctum, Zoey disguised herself as a peasant woman and quietly followed them.

She trailed them the entire way. From the moment they left to when they returned, no one came close to their donkey cart, and it didn't even make a single stop along the way.

After returning to Skye Embroidery, Viola immediately began preparing medicine. At the workshop, no one had servants. Everyone took turns cooking. When Viola first arrived, she was utterly inexperienced. It took three days of practice for her to even be able to start a fire, and the first meal she cooked was barely edible.

The people at Skye Embroidery were cooperative but also fond of teasing. They joked and said Viola carried herself like a lady of high status but didn't have the luck to actually live that life.

At first, Viola was furious and felt unjustly treated, as though the others were deliberately targeting her. She couldn't understand why she had to endure this. But one day, when Jessica came to visit Skye Embroidery, she personally cooked a meal. Though it wasn't perfect in taste or appearance, it was well-seasoned and balanced.

Seeing that, Viola fell silent. She knew exactly what kind of person Jessica had been a once-arrogant duchess, so proud and untouchable. After being divorced and taken back into the family, she somehow managed to swallow her pride and even cooked meals for this group of abandoned women.

The surprising part? Jessica actually knew how to cook.

But that wasn't what truly shocked Viola. Even Leona, a guest staying at the workshop, could step into the kitchen and whip up an incredible meal. Viola was dumbfounded.

From then on, even if she wasn't the one cooking, she would always help in the kitchen. She picked up the tasks and learned as she went. Now, her skills had surpassed Jessica's.

Camila entered the kitchen just in time to see Viola lost in thought, staring at a boiling pot, completely unaware of the bubbling liquid.

"Viola, the medicine's about to boil over. Didn't you notice? Pull the coals back and let it simmer," Camila cautioned.

Viola hurriedly lifted the lid of the pot, but the scalding steam rose up, burning her hand. She quickly dropped the lid, which crashed to the ground, splitting into two pieces.

Camila quickly fetched a bowl of cold water from the water pot and brought it over. "Put your hand in here to soak, or it'll blister."

Viola dipped both hands into the water, the coolness helping to ease the sting. "Thank you, Ms. Moore." "Are you alright?" Camila asked.

"I'm fine. Nothing to worry about," Viola said, shaking her head. However, her eyes still seemed unfocused.

Camila moved to the stove, pulling out the firewood and leaving just a few pieces of coal burning. "How is your mom? Better?"

"Much better." Viola glanced at the medicine pot, frustrated. "How much medicine is left? We need to simmer it on low heat for another hour... I don't think there's enough of it left now."

Camila looked at the uncovered pot. "There's enough, but you can't simmer it without a lid. All the medicinal vapors will escape. You'll need to quickly buy a new one."

Viola hesitated, her gaze turning pleading. "Ms. Moore, could you go buy one for me? I don't know where to get it."

"I could, but why don't you go

yourself?" Camila gave her a pointed look. "It's just down the street at the general store. Didn't you go there yesterday to buy a stew pot? How could you have forgotten already?"

Viola scratched her head awkwardly under Camila's curious gaze. "Oh, right... I forgot for a moment. I'll go buy it now."

Camila moved to the stove to make barley porridge. The weather had warmed up, and everyone had lost their appetite. She decided to make some barley porridge, which helped cook the body and settle the

Ov

stomach. It was a soothing meal that everyone could enjoy,

She had soaked the barley beforehand. After working for a while, Alana entered with the new medicine pot. It needed to soak in water first, so she placed it straight into the water basin.

"Ms. Alana, why are you the one buying it? Wasn't Viola supposed to go?" Camila asked as she looked up from the stove.

"She said she burned her hand and asked me to help her," Alana replied casually. "It's nothing. It's not that far."

"I see." Camila didn't think much of it and added, "The new pot can't be used yet. It'll need to soak overnight. Today's medicine is probably useless anyway."

"Without the lid, the pot is completely useless," Alana said with a tinge of sympathy.

"It's fine. We can use it for salt storage," Camila replied.

The two of them worked together

for a while. Alana then took the

medicine out and delivered it to Evelyn. When she entered the room, she was taken aback. Both mom and daughter had grim expressions.

Surprised by Alana's entrance, Viola immediately exclaimed, "You didn't knock? How rude!" "The door was open," Alana replied, glancing around. "What? Afraid I'd overhear your private conversation? Don't worry. Even if I knew where you hid your secret money, I wouldn't take it." With that, Alana set down the medicine and left.

Chapter 1387

Viola knew that Alana had misunderstood, but she wasn't in a hurry to explain. Her mind was too clouded with confusion.

She closed the door and carried the medicine over. "Mom, drink the medicine first. We'll figure out the rest slowly."

Evelyn shook her head and looked at her daughter with weary eyes. "Viola, be honest with yourself. How has your older brother treated you all these years?"

Viola furrowed her brow slightly. "Mom, we don't have the means to help him. We're still living at Skye Embroidery, and the money for your medicine is all from Ms. Spencer."

"You're wrong. That money came from Isaac. He may not acknowledge us, but he has been working tirelessly for us these past days," Evelyn replied.

"Even if the money came from him, we have no right to ask him to give it to Oliver," Viola said.

Evelyn's face tightened, and with clenched teeth, she finally spoke the truth, "That money... it isn't his. When he returned, Zoey suggested giving him some compensation. So, we transferred some estates and shops to him."

"Since we've already given it to him and he has been looking after us in secret, do we really expect him to give it back? That wouldn't be fair to him, Mom," Viola countered.

Evelyn's face grew pale. "We've already wronged him enough. He resents us, but let him resent us, then. Your older brother may have made mistakes, but is now at the end of his rope. Am I supposed to stand by and watch him die?"

Viola looked down sadly and set the medicine aside. "Mom, perhaps you should tell Zoey. She's always the one with the most ideas."

"Absolutely not," Evelyn snapped immediately. "He's already made a fool of himself with his thoughts of divorce at the Southern Frontier, breaking your sister-in-law's heart. If she finds out, she'll definitely tell Lady Carissa. Do you know what the punishment is for running away like that? It's a death sentence. Do you want your brother to die?"

Evelyn's voice trembled from fear as she continued, "He's in grave danger right now. We need to get the money together and send him away as soon as possible. He only needs 3,000 silver coins. Find a way to get it to him.

"Go to Isaac and tell him that I can't stay at Skye Embroidery anymore because my condition has worsened. We need to buy a place for me to recuperate. I know he may seem indifferent, but he still misses me, and has been dutiful in his own way."

Viola sat down, remaining silent for a long while.

"Why are you sitting there? Go quickly," Evelyn urged.

Viola finally looked up. "I've made many mistakes in my life, Mom. Every time I return to our family, someone has to cover for me."

"You know that, don't you? Your older brother has always been good to you," Evelyn said, her voice softening a bit.

Viola shook her head, her eyes suddenly clear and determined. "Mom, the one who has always covered for me isn't my brother-it's Zoey. Oliver only ever talks. When I returned home after Thomas died in battle, Oliver resented me and didn't accept me back.

"It was Zoey who said, 'What else can we do now? Should she just be left out in the cold?' She told him that if I'd made a mistake, I could change. It's her who gave me a chance, again and again. I was the one who wasn't up to the task. I was the one who wasn't mature enough."

Evelyn froze, then sharply replied,

"So what? Your brother still accepted you. Without his word, Zoey couldn't have done anything. And you,

child, have always had a strained

relationship with your sinet

Why are you defending her now? Don't forget, she's scolded you plenty."

"She scolded me because she cares about me." Viola's eyes reddened with unshed tears. "I almost died once, in Astral Prison. That battle between life and death taught me the difference between sincerity and falsehood.

"It made me realize that Zoey,

though not my sister by blood, is the

one who has always stood up for me when it mattered. Even when she spoke harshly, she was there when it counted. Mom, you could've stepped in, but you didn't. Why? Because you feared being embarrassed. Did you think Zoey didn't feel the same way?"

For a moment, Evelyn was silent.

Then, she said, "You're right to feel grateful to her. You'll have plenty of chances to repay her. But this time, don't tell her about this. She'll sacrifice your brother for her children's future, you know she will. Your brother didn't go to her for reason. You need to listen to me. Go to Isaac, just like I told you."

Viola remained seated, unmoving. Something about the situation didn't sit right with her, though she couldn't quite place what it was.

"Go!" Evelyn's anger flared. She reached out and knocked the medicine bowl from Viola's hands. "If you won't go, then I won't drink the medicine. Let me die!"

Viola's tears burst forth, her red, burned hands only adding to the flood of emotions. She felt utterly wronged, overwhelmed by the injustice.

So, this is what it felt like the humiliating and painful feeling of being forced to do something against your will. How many times had Zoey done things she didn't want to do for the Earl of Silverstone's family? How many times had she lowered herself to beg others?

Chapter 1388

Viola didn't go to Isaac. In the past, she might have shamelessly believed that as a member of the Earl of Silverstone's family, it was his duty to help when the family faced hardship and was in need.

But now, she couldn't think that way.

She had come to understand certain truths. When the Earl of Silverstone's family was thriving, Isaac had never shared in any of its glory. Now, when it was in trouble, expecting him to step in felt wrong. She couldn't bring herself to do it.

As for whether she should tell Zoey about this, she hesitated. No matter what, she didn't want her brother to die.

Viola sat under a tree, staring off into space for a long while. Just then, Alana came by carrying a basket of silk thread. Upon seeing Viola, she immediately took a turn, clearly not wanting to speak with her. Viola remembered the misunderstanding from earlier and quickly called out, "Ms. Alana, I'm sorry about what happened earlier. I didn't mean it like that."

Alana glanced at her. "I see."

Then, she made to leave.

Knowing that these women from the martial arts world were straightforward and didn't dwell on things too much, Viola asked, "Ms. Alana, may I speak with you for a moment?"

Alana paused, hesitated, and then returned to sit on the wooden bench under the tree beside Viola. "What is it?"

Viola wasn't sure how to begin. She glanced at the basket of silk thread Alana was holding and asked, "Did you buy this?"

"Mrs. Lloyd had someone send it over. I went out to pick it up," Alana replied.

"Mrs. Lloyd is really thoughtful. She's always keeping Skye Embroidery in her thoughts," Viola murmured absently.

"Everyone is good," Alana replied.

"Yes, you're right," Viola answered.

"What is it you wanted to say?" Alana asked. She had a lot to do.

Viola forced a smile. "I was just making small talk, nothing important... Oh, by the way, I heard that you and Ms. Leah aren't taking any payment for your work here Back when you were with Lady Leona, you didn't take any payment either. Don't you feel it's unfair?"

"We didn't protect Lady Leona well. The promises we made weren't kept. How could we, in good conscience, accept payment?" Alana answered firmly.

"Promises?" Viola turned her head, puzzled. "What promises?"

"The promise to protect her," Alana replied, her tone terse. "We didn't keep it, so we have no right to accept any payment."

She didn't like repeating herself, and her patience was running thin. "If there's nothing else, I'll get back to work."

"Is a promise really that important?" Viola pressed, seemingly unfazed by Alana's hint that the

conversation was over. "Isn't it men who need to keep their promises?"

Alana's brow furrowed in

annoyance. "What do you mean by that? Are women not human? Are the words we speak just wind? If you make a promise, you have to follow through. Is it only men who have to defend the kingdom? What about Carissa and Violet? Didn't they fight tooth and nail for it too? Are their efforts somehow less worthy?"

Viola froze, as though struck by a sudden realization, her body stiff and unmoving. She finally understood where the discomfort had been coming from.

Evelyn had said Oliver would die. At first, the thought had filled Viola with panic. But after reflecting on it, wasn't it true that he had broken the law? He had nearly caused the loss of the Southern Frontier.

The land, bought with so many lives, hadn't even had time to settle before it was plunged back into war by the collusion of enemies both inside and out.

Oliver was a marshal, yet he didn't think about defending their land. He just ran off with his concubine, even embezzling military funds. How many people had his actions put in danger?

Suddenly, Viola felt a deep sense of shame. As a noblewoman raised in the household of an earl, she realized she understood less about loyalty to her kingdom than a woman from the martial arts world.

All her life, Viola's heart had been

consumed with her own personal gain and loss. What she thought she understood had only been

half-formed. Her sister-in-law nee

had

truly cared for her, but she had been

too muddled to realize it before.

In her entire life, she had never done a single thing for anyone else, not even something trivial, let alone considered matters as grand as duty to the people or the kingdom.

Though she had grown up benefiting from the support of the common people, she always thought herself superior, striving to be the best at everything. But now, she came to a realization-without the people, who was she, really?

Without thinking, she stood up abruptly, walking quickly toward her sister-in-law's room. She didn't even say a word to Alana, who got up as well. Muttering about how strange Viola was behaving, she also left the area.

Chapter 1389

Zoey was sitting at the table, sewing a new dress for her daughter. Once the dress was finished, she planned to embroider some decorative patterns. After all, her daughter was now living at Hell Monarch Estate; it wouldn't do for her to rely completely on the royal household for everything, especially her clothes.

Her mind was in turmoil. The words Carissa had spoken kept circling in her thoughts, and she couldn't shake the feeling that it would come to pass.

If Oliver found himself without options, he would surely return to the capital. Whether or not he would immediately come looking for her afterward was uncertain, but she had a sense that he would first try to find Evelyn.

He wouldn't turn to Zoey unless he was certain that Evelyn could offer him no help. But Evelyn was deeply attached to her son and would go to any lengths to try and assist him.

Zoey had followed them the entire day, and while nothing had happened, that didn't mean it wouldn't happen in the days to come. If Oliver returned to the capital, it would only be for money. He wouldn't have the intention of staying in the city for long.

Evelyn had no money, but after years in the capital, she had cultivated certain connections. She could borrow a little here and there, pulling people into her troubles without them realizing it.

However, Evelyn couldn't go out by herself. She was too ill to leave the house, and she couldn't bring herself to go and ask for help. Most likely, she would have to send Luna or Viola to do it.

As Zoey pondered these things, Viola entered the room quickly.

Zoey looked up and asked, "What's wrong, Viola?"

Before Viola could answer, tears were already streaming down her face. "Zoey, I've done so many foolish things in the past. I've caused you so much trouble, embarrassed you, and even harmed my nephews and nieces. I regret it deeply now when I think about it. I truly do."

Zoey, who had noticed the change in her sister-in-law since her ordeal in Astral Prison, could see the difference clearly now. Viola no longer carried the sharpness and bitterness that once defined her. While there had still been remnants of her spoiled demeanor when she first arrived at Skye Embroidery, she had long since softened.

However, she never expected her sister-in-law to come personally to apologize. In truth, her children were connected to Viola by blood. They would always be family, no matter what. If Viola could recognize her past mistakes and humble herself enough to say thank you, Zoey should simply accept it.

"It's all in the past. Look ahead. Things will get better," Zoey replied gently.

With tears still streaming down her face, Viola said, "Hearing you say that brings me peace, Zoey."

If anyone else had said it, Viola wouldn't have believed them. After everything that had happened, how could things possibly get better? But if Zoey said it, she believed it-because the older woman had the strength to make it happen.

Zoey handed her a handkerchief. "Wipe your tears. You're not a child anymore, what's with all the crying?" Viola took it, dabbing at her eyes, and then noticed the dress Zoey was making. The fabric was soft, a playful shade probably for her daughter.

"Courtney is living in Hell Monarch Estate now, right? Is she settling in well?"

"She is. The people at the royal residence have been very kind to her," Zoey answered with a warm smile. Viola froze for a moment, realizing how foolish she had been, always comparing herself to Carissa, whether openly or in secret. The thought made her embarrassed. Quickly, she turned her attention to her sister-in-law and got to the point.

"Zoey, there's something I need to

tell you. Olive has returned. I saw him yesterday, when I was at the general shop on the next street. He asked for 3,000 silver coins and told me to get it for him as soon as possible. He also warned me not to tell you."

Zoey's hand, holding the needle and thread, trembled slightly. Though her face remained calm, her heart was storming with fury.

When he went looking for Viola,

Oliver must have already known that

their family had been punished because of his cowardice. The Prince family's men had been exiled, while the women were sent to Skye Embroidery. They were in such dire straits, without even a home to return to.

Yet, he had the nerve to ask for 3,000 silver coins?!

What kind of scoundrel had Zoey married?

She forced down her raging anger and asked, "Does Mother know about this?"

"She does. She said I shouldn't tell you and that I should go to Isaac for the money," Viola replied. Zoey's anger flared in an instant. "Why should we?"

"Mom said she gave him several shops before the family assets were seized. Now, asking him for 3,000 silver coins would simply be us asking for the family's money-at least that's how she put it," Viola explained.

Zoey sternly said, "What belonged to Oliver has already been confiscated by the court. The portion given to Isaac is his own. No one has the right to demand it.

"Whether Isaac would actually give

us the money doesn't matter. If he does, it would be considered as him aiding a known criminal's escape. That's a crime. If you and I are caught up in this, we could end up back in Astral Prison, living a fate worse than death."

The mention of Astral Prison made Viola shudder, a deep dread filling her.

She quickly shook her head. "No, I don't want to go back there."

She hadn't realized the gravity of the situation. Thankfully, she had told Zoey. If she had agreed to help

Oliver escape, even by just giving him some money, it would have been a serious crime!

Chapter 1390

Zoey questioned Viola in detail, asking how she had come across Oliver, what state he was in now, and whether he had brought his child with him.

Viola recounted, "I was out yesterday to buy a stew pot, hoping to make some medicinal broth for Mom. After I purchased it, he came up me. I was startled at first, thinking it was some pervert.

"But when he called my name, I recognized his voice. His face was so dark and haggard, and his eyebrows were shaved off. He has lost so much weight. If I hadn't carefully examined him, I wouldn't have believed it was Oliver."

Viola paused as she recalled the encounter and Zoey's earlier words, still feeling a sense of unease.

She continued, "He didn't have a child with him. He was alone. He told me he was forced to flee, and now there are arrest warrants for him everywhere. He has no money left, and with a child to support, things are really difficult for him. He asked me to talk to Mom about gathering 3,000 silver coins."

Zoey quickly asked, "If you did manage to get the money, how were you supposed to give it to him?" Viola shook her head. "He didn't say. He just told me to get the money and he would find a way to come to me."

Zoey cursed inwardly. Oliver didn't take precautions against outsiders, but the little bit of vigilance he had was all directed at his own family.

She mulled over Viola's words, then asked, "He doesn't have eyebrows?"

"Yes, it looks like they were shaved off. Oliver's eyebrows were thick and easy to recognize. If he shaved them off, who would think it's him?" Viola said.

Zoey nodded thoughtfully. It made sense. If his eyebrows were missing, he would be harder to identify. But now that they knew, they could use it to their advantage. She could tell Carissa to keep a watchful eye.

However, eyebrows could be drawn on. If they only focused on looking for people with no eyebrows, they might miss him entirely.

"You should go out tomorrow," Zoey suggested. "Try the Ministry of Defense and see if you can get a meeting with Isaac. If Oliver is still around, he might try to follow you. I'll have Ms. Alana speak with Lady Carrisa and have her increase the patrols. It'll put pressure on him to reveal himself sooner." Viola nodded. "Got it."

Then, she hesitated, asking, "How should we deal with Mom in the meantime?"

"Tell her that Isaac has agreed to help but we're still gathering the money by selling off some of the shops," Zoey replied.

Viola looked uncertain. "But why lie to her? Why not just say Isaac refused to help? Wouldn't that be easier?"

"If we tell her that, she'll go to Isaac herself. We can't let her do that," Zoey said firmly.

Viola thought for a moment, then agreed. Given how much Evelyn favored Oliver, there was a real chance she would drag her sick body to Isaac if she knew he had refused. And if she did, it would bring attention to his family ties, causing his businesses to be seized by the court.

"Alright, I know what to do now," Viola said, standing up and heading for the door.

Zoey also set down her work and went to find Alana. She briefly

explained the situation and instructed her to pass the word along to Carissa, trusting that she would know what to do. Alana didn't ask any more questions and left immediately.

The next day, both the Capital Guard and the Garrison Unit launched a city-wide search, claiming to be after the escaped traitor.

Following Zoey's instructions, Viola went out the next day, sneaking around as if she were up to something.

Oliver was aware of Isaac's identity. One of the letters sent to him from home had informed him of this fact. If Oliver was secretly following Viola, he would naturally assume she was working on things on his behalf.

Carissa arranged for the Capital Guard to disguise themselves as commoners and follow Viola in shifts. She gave strict orders that if any unfamiliar man approached her, they must not intervene, as it could very well be Oliver testing them. They were to wait until the man left, then send someone to discreetly follow him and verify his identity.

Sure enough, a man approached Viola on the third day. He was about the same height as Oliver and wore a wide-brimmed hat. The man spoke a few words to her before turning to leave.

Michael had someone tail him and quickly determined that he was not Oliver. As expected, the Capital Guard didn't intervene, but they kept following him for a while. When he entered a gambling den, they followed him inside.

The people in the gambling den greeted him as Timmy, teasing him about having money to gamble again. He explained that he had met a fool who had given him a small sum just for some casual conversation. Worried that Oliver might be nearby, the Capital Guard feigned interest in gambling and won a little money, then left.

Carissa reported the details to Alana, who quickly relayed the information to Zoey. As soon as Viola returned, Zoey asked if she had encountered anyone unusual that day.

Viola answered honestly, explaining that a man had approached her, trying to sell some perfume. She had refused, but he had insisted, annoying her until he finally left.

Zoey nodded grimly. "That was your brother's test to see if anyone was following you. He's worried you might betray him."

The word "betray" made Viola's heart sink with discomfort. But when she thought of that dark, hellish prison, she couldn't help but feel that Oliver deserved what was coming for him.