

War Song 1471

Chapter 1471

Still on her knees, Carissa felt like a lifetime had passed before she heard Salvador's soft sigh, followed by a quiet chuckle.

"You little fool. Why are you throwing a tantrum?" he said.

A sense of relief washed over Carissa.

At first, anger and frustration had driven her to speak recklessly. After that, what she said was more of a gamble. But deep down, she had been scared. She couldn't imagine how ruthless a king, whose life was nearly at an end, could be when he became cold-hearted.

But when he asked that question, nothing she said could have changed anything. Her only option was to throw a fit, raise her voice, and make a scene.

Perhaps, just perhaps, it might work.

"Get up," Salvador instructed in a softer tone.

A faint smile touched his thin, pallid face. "You're just the same as you were as a child. Always so proud, never willing to let anything slide. I barely asked you a question and you turned it into a scolding. I can't do a thing with you."

He looked at her, his gaze deep and weary. "Tell me, why argue with a man who's almost dead? Are you not afraid I'll tell Nathan you've been picking on me? Don't forget, once upon a time, you used to see me as an elder brother. And I am still your elder brother now."

Carissa turned her head, tears welling up despite herself.

Now, he called himself an elder brother.

"Your Grace, please, get up," Derek cut in, making a motion to help her.

Carissa rose, quickly wiping away her tears.

Salvador groaned in pain, his suffering becoming unbearable. He raised a hand, signaling her to leave. Moments later, he called for Desmond.

The muffled sounds of his pain filled the space as Carissa stood there, rooted for a long while before finally turning to leave. Her feelings for the king were tangled. Sometimes, he felt like both a ruler and a brother, but at other times, she found him particularly detestable.

Didn't he feel awkward about it?

Perhaps after Sebastian's treatment, there would be a conversation between Salvador and Rafael. At this point, Carissa hoped the two brothers could be open with each other without hiding anything-it was too painful.

When she arrived at Serenity Palace, Keith personally greeted her.

"Your Grace, you've come just in time. Please, join Her Majesty for breakfast and try to comfort her," he said, his voice breaking.

Carissa paused in surprise. "It's already late. She hasn't had breakfast yet?"

"Not just breakfast. She didn't eat last night either," Keith replied with a weary smile.

Quickly entering the palace, Carissa saw Victoria leaning against a soft cushion, her head wrapped in a yellow embroidered headband,

looking weary and worn out. As net

Carissa approached and curtsied, the queen dowager gave a faint, strained smile and patted the space next to her.

"No need for formalities. Why are you here at this time? Come to steal a moment of peace from me, have you? Have a seat."

Carissa moved to sit, gently asking, "Are you feeling any better?"

"Much better." Victoria sighed, her hand resting on her forehead. "I suppose age has caught up with me. A little cold, and now I'm all aches and pains. I've made all of you worry for nothing."

"Your health and wellbeing are a blessing to us younger ones," Carissa replied.

"I'll take better care of myself, don't worry," Victoria reassured her.

Carissa glanced up at Keith, smiling as she said, "I left early this morning and haven't had breakfast yet. I wonder if Serenity Palace has any leftovers left to fill my stomach?"

Keith immediately shook his head. "How could I allow you to settle for leftovers, Your Grace? Since Her Majesty hasn't eaten yet, why not join her for a meal?"

Without waiting for a response, he excused himself and left the room.

Victoria usually had a light breakfast. Since she hadn't eaten the night before, the cooks had already prepared a pot of simple

porridge made with sweet potatons

and millet, along with a few savory side dishes. As Carissa was present, two plates of freshly steamed honeyed cakes with dried fruits were also served.

Carissa watched as the queen dowager took only a few bites of porridge and some side dishes before putting down her cutlery. She simply couldn't eat more. A cup of herbal infusions was brought to her instead.

With a reassuring smile, Carissa said, "Raf has already gone to fetch Sebastian. Don't worry too much." Victoria blinked, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. "If Sebastian does his best and puts his heart into it, perhaps His Majesty can live a little longer."

It wasn't as if she hadn't considered

asking Sebastian herself, but what happened with Sigmund previously made her hesitant. She feared Sebastian might come, but out of reluctance. In that case, he wouldn't give his full effort, and it would be pointless.

Chapter 1472

"If Sebastian is willing to enter the palace, he will surely do everything in his power," Carissa said softly. Victoria's gaze became distant, and soon, tears began to fall. "He can try his hardest, but even with all his effort, there may be no hope. Now, I only wish for His Majesty to live long enough to set things in order, to secure the future of the kingdom."

Seeing her cry, Carissa couldn't help but feel sorrow as well. She had once heard her mom speak of Victoria as a woman of great strength, someone who wouldn't shed a tear even in the face of the greatest challenges. Tears from her were precious, and now, seeing them fall made everything feel heavier. Carissa didn't know how to offer comfort. It seemed that what Victoria needed wasn't soothing words, but quiet companionship. So, Carissa sat by her side in silence.

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Meanwhile, Rafael had gone to Arcane Sanctum, where he found Sebastian already prepared. After Rafael and Carissa had been summoned to the palace, Jacob had gone ahead to inform Sebastian. So, he had been expecting the visit.

This time, Sebastian didn't bring any of his apprentices but went alone with Rafael. Ivy and Rowan had tried to follow but were sternly ordered back.

As they traveled in the carriage, Rafael assured, "I will ensure your safety."

Sebastian was inspecting his medical supplies. Without looking up, he replied casually, "It doesn't matter. If my head is to fall, it's my own choice."

"It won't come to that," Rafael insisted firmly. "Since I'm escorting you to the palace, I will make sure you return safely."

Sebastian closed the medical chest with a click, locking it securely. He leaned back against the plush seat, his gaze dark and distant, lost in thought. For a long while, he didn't speak, and when he finally did, his voice was low, reflective.

"His name was Jonah Claude," Sebastian began, his eyes unfocused. "At three, he could recite the medicinal rhymes. By five, he knew every herb by name. By sixteen, he had already mastered his craft, and by twenty-five, he was renowned across the land.

"Though there are others who hold the title of Miracle Healer, including me, Jonah was the true Miracle Healer."

Rafael sat up straighter, his expression serious, quietly listening.

"Physicians are supposed to be compassionate, treating all who come to them without prejudice, be it beggars or nobles. Jonah did just that. If a patient couldn't afford the fee, he'd still offer his medicine at no charge. That's why he was always poor.

"In his most destitute year, he had to pawn his winter coat. I scolded him for it, but he just grinned and said it didn't matter how poor or miserable he was. The more he saw, the more he learned. It was all part of his journey.

"There were actually many ways he could have made money. When nobles came to him for treatment, he could've taken advantage and charged exorbitant fees. But he didn't. He always said the prices were fixed, and he couldn't bring himself to overcharge.

"For patients who couldn't afford the cost of medicine, he refused to turn them away, even if it meant his own suffering. He couldn't bear the thought of watching someone die simply because they were poor." Sebastian's voice faltered for a moment, but he quickly regained control, continuing, "When King Sigmund called him to the palace for treatment, I was in Yorandia gathering herbs to make Snowdrop Pills.

"By the time I returned to the capital

and went to see him, his medical establishment had been destroyed. The sign was shattered and had been trampled by others. King Sigmund called him a quack, so no one dared to speak his name after that. Slowly, the world forgot about him."

Sebastian lifted his gaze, his eyes bloodshot and filled with a quiet fury. "This time, I'm going to the palace

with a purpose. I intend to clear his name. Jonah Claude was a Miracle Healer, not a quack."

Rafael felt a wave of guilt wash over him as he listened.

When Sigmund passed away, Rafael had been too young to fully comprehend the situation. He remembered meeting Jonah once but his memory of him wasn't very clear. The only thing he remembered was that the man had been very thin and wore a faded blue cloak with several patches.

This impression stuck with him because Helen had privately muttered, "What kind of renowned doctor wears patched clothes?"

It was only much later that he learned Jonah had been executed.

"I will speak to His Majesty. I'll convince him to clear Mr. Claude's name," the prince said softly.

"Don't bother," Sebastian replied

coldly. "As I said, Jonah treated

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every illness, regardless of who came to him. To gain more experience, he even treated many cases of lung disease. The methods I use to treat such condition@are his. If the king refuses to clear his name, I won't use that method."

Rafael felt both excited and conflicted.

If there was a prescription, even if it couldn't cure the illness, it might at least extend the king's life for a while. What made it complicated was that Sigmund had killed Jonah, and now Salvador needed his treatment method to survive.

It was a cycle of cause and effect, but the true victim of it was only Jonah.

Chapter 1473

Inside Salvador's residence, Dawnspire Palace, Desmond and Robert stood silently to the side. Meanwhile, Rafael and Derek remained at the king's bedside, waiting as Sebastian examined him.

After a long moment, Sebastian withdrew his hand and asked for the previous examination records and prescriptions.

Robert immediately retrieved them and handed them over with great respect. "Here, Mr. Dalton, please have a look."

Though Sebastian held the title of Miracle Healer and should have been called Healer Dalton, barely anyone dared to use that term of address after the Royal Medical Department had previously been purged of all Miracle Healers.

Sebastian accepted the records, flipping through them page by page. The room was so silent that even the faintest sound of turning parchment seemed deafening.

Everyone held their breath. This was their last hope. If even Sebastian said Salvador only had three months left, then that would be the final word.

Salvador appeared calm, but his eyes were slightly narrowed and his palms were damp with sweat. He was waiting for his sentence.

After carefully examining every detail, Sebastian looked up and stated, "The records indicate that His Majesty has suffered pain for over a month, is unable to sleep at night, and has lost his appetite."

It was a simple observation-nothing more than what was already written in the records. The others nodded in confirmation, but what they truly wanted to hear was whether he had a solution.

However, Sebastian offered nothing further. Instead, he turned back to the beginning and read through the treatment records again.

Desmond and Robert tensed, worried that he would disapprove of the medication that had been administered. Several of the treatments had been experimental, not the conventional prescriptions. They had been desperate to find something, anything, that might work. But the results had been discouraging. Finally, it was Rafael who broke the silence.

"Sebastian, what do you think?" he asked, his voice tight with tension.

Without realizing it, he had seated himself at the edge of the bed, his broad frame instinctively positioned as if to shield the king. It was an unconscious gesture, one he hadn't considered whether or not was appropriate.

Salvador did not rebuke him. On the contrary, he felt a rare warmth settle in his chest.

Sebastian closed the records and set them aside. "The previous treatments have helped slow the disease's progression. But with this illness, deterioration is inevitable. When I say it's worsening, I mean the lung condition is starting to spread to other areas. It's already showing signs of spreading, and it's happening very quickly. If I had been called earlier, there might have been more hope."

His final words struck everyone like ice water poured over their heads, leaving them chilled to the bone. Salvador's eyes darkened briefly with disappointment, but he quickly composed himself.

"Mr. Dalton, just speak plainly. How much time do I have?" he asked, his expression as warm and serene as ever.

Sebastian didn't answer right away. His mind was already calculating which combination of medicines could be used to treat the condition.

However, Salvador mistook his hesitation for reluctance and forced a weak smile. "Speak freely. Three months? Five months? I can bear it."

Sebastian deliberated for a moment before raising his gaze to meet the king's directly. "If I use my own methods you may have a year. But if I apply Jonah's formula-along with the cases he documented and the treatment methods he devised-then, conservatively, you could have three."

A flicker of light sparked in Salvador's eyes, but it quickly dimmed. He knew exactly who Jonah was.

When Sigmund had fallen gravely ill,

Salvador, as the crown prince, had

remained by his bedside day and night. He had witnessed firsthand how Jonah, a famed physician from outside the palace, had been summoned in a desperate attempt to save the ailing king.

But Sigmund had condemned him as a fraud.

The mention of Jonah's name made Desmond falter as well. He remembered it clearly. Back then, he was not head physician yet and hadn't overseen Sigmund's treatment directly. However, he had been present during the medical discussions.

Jonah had consulted with them, and

it had been evident that he was extraordinarily knowledgeable, well-versed in medicinal theory, and

experienced in treating co

illnesses. His prescriptions had even shown signs of stabilizing

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Sigmund's condition. But the

disease was a beast, relentless and merciless.

A physician was not a god. He could not perform true miracles.

Jonah had died unjustly. His reputation had been too great, his name too revered. Sigmund had pinned all

his hopes on him, and when he had ultimately failed to save the king, Sigmund's rage had sealed his fate of death by execution.

Now, Salvador faced an impossible choice.

If he accepted Jonah's treatment method, he would be acknowledging that his father had wrongfully condemned the man. If he refused, then the three months left to him-perhaps even less-would be his final days.

But in truth, it was no choice at all.

Salvador gave his answer without hesitation: "I trust you and Healer Claude, Healer Dalton."

The words nearly brought tears to Sebastian's eyes.

Jonah should never have been burdened with the label of a quack.

Regaining his composure, Sebastian said, "I must reside in the palace. It would be best if I stayed within Dawnspire Palace. If you have concerns, you may assign men to watch over me, Your Majesty." The room went utterly still.

Sebastian's request was nothing short of outrageous.

Dawnspire Palace was the king's own residence. Though its outer halls could accommodate guests, no

one would dare make such a request. Who would even dream of having such an honor?

Yet before anyone could react, Sebastian went further, adding, "If you cannot allow it, then I ask that you move to Arcane Sanctum, Your Majesty. You will need me close at all times."

Chapter 1474

Salvador remained silent for a moment before giving his orders, commanding that the side hall be prepared for Sebastian. Physicians from the Royal Medical Department were assigned to serve him, while Kevin and Galen were tasked with protecting him and accompanying him wherever he went.

Salvador knew that Kevin was Violet's apprentice, so by putting him in charge of Sebastian's protection, the king was offering a layer of reassurance to the physician. But Salvador himself also needed reassurance, which was why he sent Galen as well.

He also issued a royal edict: the entire Royal Medical Department was to follow Sebastian's orders as law. It was an extraordinary amount of authority to grant, but in truth, Salvador's intent was clear—he wanted all medicines to come from the department's stock.

Sebastian didn't concern himself with such matters. So long as his instructions were carried out, he was satisfied.

Yet, Salvador's selection of Kevin and Galen spoke volumes. He did not even trust his own harem.

Their fates were now bound together. If Sebastian died, Salvador would die. If Sebastian lived, Salvador would at least have three more years.

Three years.

It was not much time, but it was enough to set many things in order.

Once Sebastian's living arrangements were settled, they gathered in the royal bedchamber to discuss the treatment plan. Every physician from the Royal Medical Department was present, standing like eager students around Sebastian, listening intently.

"The first priority is pain relief. If the pain is not controlled, then living is nothing but suffering," he stated.

What Sebastian did not say-though they all understood-was that unchecked pain would make it impossible for the king to govern. In such a state, survival would be nothing more than a slow, agonizing decline.

Salvador's expression tightened. struck deep.

long since reached his limit, those words

Sebastian continued, "There are two methods for pain relief. Given His Majesty's condition, we must use both in tandem-one through medicine, the other through needle treatment to numb the pain. That is why I must stay in the palace. Needle treatment alone cannot suppress the pain for long. The effect will wear off after four hours and must be reapplied."

He opened his medicine chest and retrieved a small vial, passing it to Desmond. "This is a pain-relieving pill infused with Lunarthorn Root, Starflower Essence, and Nightshade Amber. The Royal Medical Department likely has a similar medicine, but I have enhanced it with additional ingredients. I call it the Tranquil Pill. Verify it as you will."

Desmond accepted the vial with both hands and poured out a single pill. He considered dissolving it in water to examine its properties. However, knowing the value of Sebastian's medicines, he merely lifted it to his nose for a cautious sniff. Before he could say anything, Sebastian spoke again, saying, "Take one. It will help with your chronic headaches as well."

Desmond froze for a moment. "You know I suffer from headaches?"

Sebastian glanced at him. "Since I entered, you've pressed your temple several times. Your complexion also gives it away."

Desmond couldn't help but feel admiration. Diagnosing through sight alone was the sign of a true master physician.

Without hesitation, he swallowed a pill, using the opportunity to test the medicine himself. The Royal Medical Department had headache

remedies, but they were only mildly effective. But within 15 minutes of taking the Tranquil Pill, the pain in his temples eased significantly. Stunned, he quickly acknowledged its remarkable effect.

"Pain varies in severity. For you, this medicine works wonders. But for His

Majesty, it will only dull the pain, not eliminate it entirely. Needle treatment must

be used alongside it to truly relieve the suffering," Sebastian replied, reaching into his medicine chest and retrieving a needle kit.

At once, Desmond and the other physicians turned away, averting their eyes.

In the medical field, certain

techniques were closely guarded secrets. Physicians rarely shared details about needle treatment, especially the advanced techniques of needle insertion, with those who weren't their direct apprentices. Watching without permission was considered a grave breach of etiquette.

But then, Sebastian said, "All of you here are skilled physicians. Watch carefully. If

you notice anything amiss, feel free to point it out."

Desmond's eyes widened in disbelief. "Mr. Dalton, you mean... we may observe your technique?"

"Why not?" Sebastian said evenly. "You all understand the fundamentals."

The gathered royal physicians knew full well that understanding needle treatment

in theory and applying it in practice were two entirely different things. The selection of energy points, the depth of insertion, and the precise combination of needle placements required meticulous judgment.

And then there was acupoint

sealing-the art of numbing pain by temporarily restricting energy flow through specific points. It was not true paralysis, for sealing an energy point completely was dangerous. The skill lay in knowing exactly how much to suppress and how much to release, a mastery achieved only

through years of experience.

Chapter 1475

Just as the gathered royal physicians were brimming with anticipation, they quickly realized that whether they watched or not made little difference.

Sebastian held a needle between each of his fingers. In the blink of an eye, all four were inserted. It was as if they had only seen the fleeting blur of his hand, and in that instant, the procedure was already complete.

Four energy points, each spaced apart. Typically, a physician would need time to locate each one precisely before carefully inserting the needles. Even for an expert, no matter how swift, it should take at least a moment.

Yet, Sebastian had done it in the time it took to blink.

After administering the needle treatment, he handed Salvador a Tranquil Pill to ease the pain. The effect was immediate. Color returned to the king's face; he was no longer so deathly pale.

Once the needles were removed, Sebastian prescribed a treatment plan. Then, reaching into his medicine chest, he retrieved a small porcelain bottle.

"Most believe Snowdrop Pills only strengthen the heart, but they also nourish the body and support the internal organs.

"The upcoming treatment will require aggressive medication, and Snowdrop Pills will help protect His Majesty's liver and kidneys. Normally, one pill should be taken every seven days. But with supplies scarce, even my personal reserves are dwindling. For now, this will have to suffice until I can gather the ingredients to make more."

Everyone understood the rarity of Snowdrop Pills. Given the current shortage at Arcane Sanctum, this bottle was likely one of Sebastian's most prized possessions.

For Salvador, merely having the pain alleviated was already a great relief.

He opened his mouth to reward Sebastian, but before he could speak, the physician cut in, "I thank Your Majesty for granting me rest. I happen to be quite exhausted."

Salvador hesitated. Gold and silver seemed far too common a reward. Seeing that Sebastian had no further requests, the king ordered someone to escort him to his quarters for some much-needed rest.

When only Rafael remained in the hall, Salvador instructed Derek to bring the reports. Now that the pain had eased, he had the energy to tend to state affairs once more.

Rafael pulled a chair over, seating himself where Carissa had knelt earlier. Salvador studied him carefully. Since returning to the capital, Rafael had not regained any weight, remaining as lean as ever.

Carissa's words of how her husband had been too anxious to sleep or eat properly echoed in the king's mind. It seemed she had spoken the truth.

"Would you like something to eat?" Rafael asked, noting the hollowness of his brother's cheeks.

The king had grown so thin, with barely any flesh left on him.

"I'm not hungry. Sit with me for a while," Salvador replied, slowly pushing himself up.

Rafael reached out to steady him, slipping a soft cushion behind his lower back.

No sooner had he settled than he said, "I need to relieve myself."

"I'll call someone to bring a chamber pot-"

Salvador waved him off, a look of distaste crossing his face. "No. I want to walk.

My feet haven't touched the ground in days. Walk with me."

The moment his feet touched the floor, it was as if he had stepped onto clouds. Unsteady, his legs numb and weak, he nearly lost his balance. But with Rafael supporting him, he managed a few steps. Gradually, the feeling returned to his legs and his strength grew.

He let out a faint laugh. "I should thank you for bringing Healer Dalton to the palace. Tonight, I might finally sleep well."

"I dare not take credit," Rafael replied.

Slowly, they made their way to the side chamber. Rafael intended to accompany him inside, but Salvador waved him off.

"Wait here. I'll manage on my own."

Rafael knew his brother's pride. Though worried that Salvador might stumble, he had no choice but to wait outside. Only when he heard faint rustling sounds from inside, followed by the halting trickle of urine, did he feel at ease.

When Salvador finally emerged, he no longer needed support. Though his steps were unsteady, he made his way back to his bedchamber and eased himself onto a chaise longue, reclining halfway.

His breathing remained faintly labored, but a wry smile played at his lips. "When

you went to fetch Healer Dalton, Carissa scolded me."

Rafael handed him a cup of water. "Don't hold it against her. She's always been blunt, but she means no harm."

"She was right." Salvador took a sip before waving the cup away, then turned his gaze toward Rafael. "She said I should be the one who knows you best." Rafael set the cup down, his expression unreadable. "We are brothers." Salvador's eyes softened as he murmured, "Yes... You are my brother."

Chapter 1476

Salvador sat in silence for a long while, his expression gradually turning solemn. "Healer Dalton says I have three years left to live. The royal physicians once told me I had a year, yet it turned out to be only half that. I've come to realize that whenever physicians predict my lifespan, I must cut it in half. So, at best, I may have a year and a half... perhaps not even that."

"Your Majesty, do not despair-"

Salvador raised a hand, silencing him. "Listen to me. My mind is clear. I am not muddled. The matter of succession must be settled, and swiftly. However, I don't know whom to name. The future king will require a regent for years, and the prime minister is growing old. I don't trust anyone with the kingdom's future... except you."

Rafael said nothing. He knew well that his brother's trust and suspicion came in unpredictable waves, never following reason or pattern.

Salvador continued, "I have three sons. Since my eldest son was born of my queen, there should be no question of succession. But Connor is mediocre. If that was his only shortcoming, it would be of little concern.

"But he is lazy, willful, self-indulgent, and without ambition. He lacks resolve, his mind is weak, and even at seven years old, he behaves like an infant yet to be weaned. His grandmother and tutor have tried to mold him into something better, but at best, they are only able to restrain him. They can't change him. The moment Kylie dotes on him, he reverts-worse than before.

"Caden, on the other hand, is sharp, quick-witted, and devoted. He is barely five, yet already speaks with the eloquence of a scholar. It is clear that Grace has guided him well.

"As for Cecil, he is but three. Too young to judge."

Rafael listened as Salvador assessed his sons' virtues and failings. It was evident the king held little hope for Connor, though he had not yet reached the point of despair.

Salvador went on, "If I do not name Connor as crown prince, I must send him far away, bestow him with a princely title, and let him live in idle luxury. But even that would not ensure stability. The moment one of his brothers takes the throne, as my eldest son, Connor's very existence becomes his greatest crime."

He exhaled slowly. "Caden's natural gifts are undeniable. If I am to judge fairly, he

is the most suitable. In ability and virtue, no one could find fault with him. And yet..."

His voice trailed off. His brow creased ever so slightly.

"And yet what?" Rafael prompted.

Salvador let out a faint sigh. "His brilliance is unquestionable, his character flawless. And yet... There is something too perfect about him. He lacks the heart of a child. Every gesture, every word-it is as if he has been carefully molded, meticulously rehearsed.

"In my presence and in front of his grandmother, he is the picture of humility and obedience. But when Carissa passed by, he suddenly let slip hints of childish innoc And

there are always eyes upon him. It's not hard to guess what that implies."

Rafael was already aware of this matter as Carissa had spoken of it. Caden had not hidden away in that spot merely because he liked sweets and was secretly eating them. No, he had placed himself there deliberately, ensuring that Carissa would see him and be moved to pity.

There were two possible motives behind his actions.

First, to win Carissa's sympathy by making her believe Caden had been forced into precocious obedience, robbed of a child's simple joys. Second, to praise Carissa as a hero on Grace's behalf, a phrase meant to flatter her and draw her closer.

And both of these objectives rested on one crucial assumption: that Grace already suspected Salvador's health was failing, and that the Hell Monarch's household would hold sway in the matter of succession.

It was not a particularly intricate scheme, but it had been set into motion far too

soon. Undoubtedly, they had been quietly courting other ministers as well.

Rafael considered this for a moment before asking, "What do you think of Lady Grace, Your Majesty?"

Salvador glanced at him. "You

always manage to ask the right questions. That is precisely what I cannot understand. Grace has always been gentle and

unassuming, never one to grasp or contend. Her family is far weaker

than Kylie's-the Quinton family

wields far greater influence.

"Even knowing Caden's potential, she shouldn't have revealed it so openly. If she were truly as calculating as this suggests, she would also know that such maneuvering would only harm Caden in the long run."

Rafael nodded. "That does seem to be the case."

Salvador let out a wry laugh. "I had my men look into it. And do you know what they found? Caden enjoys spending time with Cecil. Nearly every day, he visits Sylvia's palace."

Rafael hesitated. "You think... Lady Sylvia is behind this?"

Salvador's tone was measured but cold as he said, "Connor and Caden are at odds, just as Kylie and Grace are. And who stands to benefit from their conflict?" The answer was clear.

It would be the third prince, Cecil.

Chapter 1477

"Then, what do you plan to do now, Your Majesty?" Rafael asked.

"At first, I thought that if I only had three months left to live, I would name Connor as my heir, appoint you as regent, and select a council of ministers to assist in governance. Caden would be sent to the Southern Frontier, and the queen would be deposed. That way, the Quinton family's influence could be weakened," Salvador replied.

Rafael lowered his gaze. "I fear I am not fit to bear such a heavy burden."

He knew that if he were named regent, there would inevitably be conditions attached. The most obvious one was that he would be required to remain childless. That way, even if he seized the throne, it would ultimately return to the right royal bloodline.

Salvador studied his brother for a long moment before sighing. "You see through everything. Yes, I had considered making you swear a solemn oath that you would never father children. I know it is selfish of me, but I have no other choice."

Rafael understood the king's reasoning. He could even sympathize.

But he wouldn't agree.

Having children was not a decision he could make alone. Carissa had a right to choose whether to bear a child or not. As the one who stood beside her, Rafael had no right to promise something that was not his to decide, nor would he bind himself with an oath he could not keep.

As if fearing he had not made himself clear enough, Salvador continued, his voice measured but firm.

"You understand what this means, don't you? For as long as you live, you will hold the power of the king. Even if you ascended the throne, no one could oppose you. That was my original plan-to ensure that though you would have no heirs, you would wield royal authority."

Rafael met his gaze steadily. "That was your original plan. And now?"

Salvador's eyes lingered on his brother's face, but he couldn't see any interest in the position of regent.

At last, the king said, "For now, we will see whether Healer Dalton's treatment has any effect. But his presence in the palace will stir the court. Ministers will press me to name a crown prince, and both the harem and the court will soon be thrown into turmoil."

What he left unsaid was clear. Even now, that same plan remained his best option.

Whether Salvador had three months or three years left, his sons were still too young. The kingdom would require a regent. Without one, the throne would be surrounded by wolves. Keeping it secure-keeping his heir alive-would be impossible.

One only had to look at the ambitions of Yuvan and Nicholas to know that the royal family had never lacked those with designs on the throne.

Rafael was silent for a long time before he finally said, "Your Majesty, have you considered that there may be no need for a regent at all? The queen dowager and the future king could rule together."

Salvador let out a weary sigh. "You think I haven't considered that? But Mom isn't in good health; she can't bear the burden of ruling. More importantly, a son will always lean toward his mother. Unless Kylie is dethroned in favor of a new queen, the future king will naturally favor his mom.

"When Mom first ascended to the throne, she distanced herself from her family to avoid the appearance of favoritism. Her relatives live in

comfort, far removed from court et

politics, and they've lost all their political power. Her family holds no real power, and without them as a counterbalance, the Quinton family will be impossible to contain. In this situation, the power might fall into others' hands."

If power was going to fall into someone else's hands anyway, Salvador would rather hand it to Rafael. At least then, the throne would remain in the Sanford family's grasp.

However, Rafael's repeated refusals made Salvador feel more at ease. The king had always viewed everyone from the perspective of power, forgetting that his younger brother had never been interested in it. Rafael had always said he wanted to be a chivalrous hero, fighting for justice.

Carissa had accused Salvador of misunderstanding his brother, and now, memories from their youth stirred in his mind.

"You need not trouble yourself with such matters right now, Your Majesty. Focus on your health. There is still a chance for things to turn around," said Rafael.

Salvador gave a tired nod, though his gaze lingered on Rafael for a beat longer before he suddenly asked, "You and Carissa have been married for some time now. Why hasn't she conceived? Could it be that despite your impressive appearance, there's something lacking in that area?"

He just had to bring up the most awkward topic.

Rafael straightened his back and replied loudly What are you saying, Your Majesty? Of course, there's nothing wrong! Carissa has not conceived because I took a

short-term infertility tonic prescribed by Sebastian. She has only just

begun her official career-pregnancy would interfere with her future."

Salvador let out a chuckle. "So, children are not a priority for you."

Rafael shook his head. "This is not a matter of importance but of choice. The decision to bear children is Carissa's. She may choose never to have them, and that is her right. But I will ensure that if she ever does wish for a child, she will have one. That's why I will not swear an oath of childlessness for the sake of the regency."

Salvador stared at his brother for a long time, his expression unreadable.

Suddenly, he understood why Carissa's love for Rafael was so unwavering. Perhaps it was because he gave her something that many men never could- respect.

Chapter 1478

Rafael noticed the weariness in Salvador's expression, and with Derek having

taken the reports back, he decided it was time to speak.

"Your Majesty, I have a matter to request your approval for."

Salvador glanced up. "What is it?"

Rafael's gaze was cool and distant. "I wish to visit Everspring Palace."

At once, Salvador's mind raced. He knew exactly what this was about. The consequences of this matter had almost cost Irvin his life.

Salvador didn't want to deal with it but simply nodded. "Go, then."

Rafael promptly took his leave, making his way to Everspring Palace.

Kylie was well aware of his visit and had someone summon him in. She knew that Carissa's refusal to allow him to take a secondary wife was driven by jealousy and selfishness. But men, as Kylie

saw it, were never quite the same as women. No matter how loudly they proclaimed otherwise, men always had their flaws.

Salvador, diligent as he was, hardly visited the harem. However, that didn't mean he was above it. Didn't he still keep the harem and concubines? And when a woman caught his eye, it was not uncommon for him to visit her several times a month.

Kylie didn't believe there was a man alive who wouldn't indulge himself when the opportunity arose, Rafael included.

She had always thought that Carissa's marriage to Rafael was a step up-an ambitious second marriage for a woman who had once been discarded. Even if they had affection for one another, her jealousy would always make it difficult for him to tolerate her.

Though the plan had failed, Kylie was determined to make sure Rafael knew that she, as his sister-in-law, was only looking out for him, out of concern about his legacy and heirs. Even if he didn't appreciate her intentions, he would have no choice but to acknowledge them.

With this in mind, she sat upright in her golden-threaded chair, watching Rafael enter with the same poised, strong stance he always had.

Etiquette couldn't be ignored, so Rafael inclined his head and said, "Greetings, Your Majesty."

Kylie smiled warmly. "No need for such formalities. Have a seat."

Then, she turned to Lydia and instructed, "Bring in some refreshments."

However, Rafael straightened up, replying, "I won't stay long. I've only come to say a few words, then I'll leave."

Kylie raised an eyebrow.

"Why so serious? Do you have some misunderstanding of me?" she asked, her tone half teasing, half serious.

Rafael was bound to find out about it sooner or later, but how Carissa had spoken about it in private or how much she had twisted the truth-was anyone's guess.

"I'm also worried about misunderstandings, which is why I've come personally to speak to you, Your Majesty. Did you originally intend to have Lady Xavier from the Earl of Southstead's family be my secondary wife?" Rafael asked.

Kylie nodded without hesitation. "I did. Lady Xavier is a woman of great virtue. She is both graceful and wise, with a kind and dignified manner. She's a fine match for you."

Smiling, she continued, "I'm always thinking of the both of you, Rafael. You and Lady Carissa have been married for so long, and yet there's still no sign of a child. I'm sure Aunt Helen is growing anxious, but your wife's stubborn nature likely makes it hard for her to discuss it. So, I thought I might step in and help. I didn't realize..."

She shook her head with a bitter smile. "Lady Carissa was furious when she

heard about it. She even scolded the messenger I sent. I'm afraid she's now upset with me as well. Honestly, I only meant well, but now I've ended up being the villain. I'm truly at a loss..."

Rafael interrupted, "Your Majesty, please stop with your so-called good intentions."

"Your wife... What did you say?" Kylie was about to continue but suddenly realized something was off. She looked up in surprise and asked again, "What did you just say?"

Rafael's eyes were cold, his jaw tight with restraint meant that you've meddled where you shouldn't, Your Majesty. Whether or not I take a secondary wife, or whether my wife and I have children, is no concern of yours. It's between my wife and me. Your interference has only caused harm to our marriage. You've truly played the villain."

The words hit Kylie like a slap. Her face flushed red, then pale, as anger and embarrassment flooded her all at once.

"Have you lost your mind? I did it for your own good, and you're being ungrateful? You don't even appreciate it?" she snapped angrily.

"I appreciate the intention, but I don't accept the interference," Rafael said coldly. "Because of your suggestion, Carissa, has been upset for days. Doing something bad with good intentions is foolish, but if there are ulterior motives behind it, that's unforgivable."

He didn't give the queen a chance to respond. With a stiff nod, he turned and began to leave.

"You're mad! You're truly mad!" Kylie's voice cracked with frustration and disbelief. "Rafael, you ungrateful fool! I was only trying to help you secure an heir!"

Rafael's steps faltered for just a moment, and he glanced back over his shoulder.

"You can't even manage your own son. What gives you the right to meddle in someone else's affairs?" he retorted, his voice sharp.

Without another word, he walked out.

Chapter 1479

Kylie had never been humiliated like that before. Even when Salvador was furious with her, it had only ever resulted in a few sharp reprimands or perhaps a temporary house arrest.

"Who does he think he is? How dare he come here and behave like that in front of me?" she fumed, her face flushed with anger.

"I've been concerned about his heirs because of his military service. And this is how he repays me? Thinking I have nothing better to do than meddle in his affairs? If he doesn't want a secondary wife, there are plenty of men who would be happy to have her."

Her head throbbed with the pressure of her indignation. She had never encountered someone so ungrateful.

Lydia could only watch in bewilderment as the queen seethed.

Wasn't the original plan to use finding a secondary wife for the Hell Monarch as an excuse to summon Carissa to the palace and pressure her into compliance? How did it suddenly turn into the queen genuinely caring about the royal family's heirs?

Lydia thought Kylie was making excuses out of anger, but such excuses seemed unnecessary and only served to agitate herself.

"You need not be so upset, Your Majesty. You weren't really trying to help him find a secondary wife, were you?" Lydia ventured cautiously.

Kylie shot her a sharp look, her frustration growing. "Regardless of my personal feelings, I at least pretended to care for his sake. And what does he do? He doesn't appreciate it and shows no respect. He dared to speak so disrespectfully in front of me! His insolence is unforgivable. And you-what nonsense are you speaking now? Do you think everyone can treat me like this?"

Lydia immediately fell silent, realizing that any further words might make the situation worse. But deep down, she was worried. Kylie always dreamed of achieving great things. But if she couldn't even handle a small setback, how would she ever succeed?

The plan to manipulate Carissa had failed, but that didn't mean it was the end. There were always other ways.

The more Kylie thought about it, the more furious she grew.

"He clearly doesn't respect me. If he doesn't, then he certainly doesn't respect His Majesty either. You'll go see Connor tonight, won't you? When you do, make sure to offer your greetings to the queen dowager on my behalf as well. And tell her what happened. The queen dowager is a woman of great sense and will not tolerate such disrespect."

Lydia nodded, agreeing to pass on the message when she made her evening visit to Serenity Palace. When she relayed the story to Victoria, the latter barely reacted.

Without lifting her gaze, she coolly said, "Our queen is certainly an interesting one. His Majesty wants to see the Hell Monarch's line end, but Her Majesty, with her great benevolence, seems more concerned about her brother-in-law's heirs than her own son. How very thoughtful of her. She truly is an admirable sister-in-law."

Lydia froze, her shock palpable. She quickly dropped to her knees in apology, explaining that it was all a misunderstanding.

Victoria's gaze remained fixed on her. "You're a clever woman. Let me give you some advice: Keep a close watch on your mistress and make sure she doesn't make the same mistake again. She should use

wit of hers-the same wit that got her to where she is-and think carefully about everything. She needs to know what to do and what not to do, whom she can offend and whom she cannot. She must be aware of her limits."

The queen dowager dismissed Lydia with a wave, even forbidding her from seeing Connor.

When she returned to Everspring Palace, she passed on Victoria's message.

Kylie sat in stunned silence for a long moment, her mind racing. Finally, she murmured, "His Majesty wants to end the Hell Monarch's

line? What does that mean? Hine

Majesty isn't that cruel, is he? Does he not want Carissa to have Rafael's children?"

Lydia sighed, watching as Kylie struggled to piece it all together. "My dear queen,

if the Hell Monarch has no sons, then there's no threat to the throne."

Suddenly, Kylie's mind seemed to latch onto a single thread of understanding, and a heavy weight settled in her chest.

"The king's illness... is worse than we thought," she muttered.

"Since they also called Healer Dalton... It doesn't look good," Lydia added softly. Kylie's thoughts were jumbled with worry. "But why hasn't His Majesty appointed the crown prince? Shouldn't he be securing the succession for the kingdom first? "Moreover, I'm still under house arrest, and Lady Grace's son has started attending classes in the study. Although he's not taught together with Connor, it's clear His Majesty is intent on nurturing him."

"Your Majesty, why not invite your mom to the palace? Prince Connor cannot be left without support," Lydia suggested.

Kylie's eyes filled with resentment.

"Having my mom come to the palace won't help. Only by meeting my dad and explaining the stakes to him will he assist me. Our family should rise and fall together. I am already the queen. With just a little effort from them, Connor could secure the position of crown prince. But they're too timid and always hesitating, which truly disappoints me."

"It's not easy for your dad to enter the inner palace casually. Better to invite your mom and speak to her openly. What mother wouldn't feel for her daughter?" Lydia

said.

Kylie's emotions were tangled, but she knew her only option now was to turn to

her family. In her current position, locked away with no real power, they were her only source of support.

Chapter 1480

Marjorie entered the palace with a quiet determination, having been sent by Malcolm to make his position clear.

Kylie's fury flared when she learned that her father intended to remain neutral.

"I've always supported our family when asked, without hesitation. But now, when I need help, you all retreat. I don't understand. If Connor becomes king, doesn't that benefit the Quinton family? Does Dad really believe everything will be smooth sailing for our family in the future?" Kylie said, her voice sharp, her eyes cold.

Marjorie sighed. "Your dad wishes to remain a loyal subject, to follow His Majesty's wishes."

Kylie's anger was so intense that she almost barked a laugh. "A joke! He's knee-deep in filth and still dares to talk of loyalty? Why didn't he say that sooner? It would have saved me from being sent into this royal family, left to fight and struggle all alone."

"Your dad's private life may be in question, but in his years of service in the Civil Department, he has served the throne faithfully. He has never been involved in bribery or corruption," Marjorie responded.

"Whether he's been corrupt or not, he knows the truth. What do you know? He's kept a mistress and even had children with her. Don't pretend you didn't know," Kylie said with a sneer, her words laced with bitterness.

She knew how to hit her mother where it hurt the most.

"Your Majesty!" Lydia interjected quickly, sensing the escalation.

Marjorie's face remained unchanged, though the words stung. That betrayal, though painful in her past, would not define her forever.

She calmly replied, "Your dad believes that the matter of the crown prince is one the Quinton family should not meddle in. His Majesty is already tightening his grip on our family. It could make matters worse if your dad were to intervene. His Majesty would grow more suspicious and resentful. That would only further diminish Prince Connor's chances of claiming the throne."

Kylie's frustration boiled over. "Excuses! Dad has many students and allies in court. All he needs to do is speak, and many would follow him. There's no need for him to intervene directly."

Marjorie didn't respond to that. Anyone with a bit of reason would understand the precarious position the Quinton family was in, as well as Kylie's own.

How could Salvador not be wary of the Quinton family? He was even wary of his own brother.

As pointed out, Malcolm had sat at the head of the Civil Department for the years. Countless officials, both in court and in distant provinces, were his and Gerald's students. Moreover, as the father-in-law of the king, Malcolm's involvement in the matter of the crown prince would immediately cast the Quinton family as a threat in Salvador's eyes.

As for Kylie herself, she would face severe consequences and likely be eliminated if she meddled.

The best course of action was to avoid any interference and let Salvador make his own decision. If Connor were appointed crown prince, the Quinton family would then take the initiative to prune their own influence to ease the king's suspicions.

This, of course, was not something Marjorie could admit outright. For one, Kylie would never believe it. She would dismiss it as the Quinton family's excuse to avoid

responsibility. And another reason was that if these words reached Salvador's ears, the charge of

presuming to guess the king's

intentions would be enough to bring serious trouble upon the Quinton family.

This wasn't the first time the mother and daughter had clashed. After Marjorie left, Kylie flew into a rage. But she didn't realize that as soon as her outburst ended, word of it, as well as of the conversation between the two women, made its way to Salvador.

Hearing it, he smiled coldly. "It seems the Quinton family understands the situation. When will Kylie finally grow a brain?"

Everspring Palace had long been under his watch, with informants planted to report every detail, no matter how small. Everything was relayed to Derek, who would sift through the information and pass on only the most critical updates to the king. Even the words Rafael had spoken to Kylie were reported to him in full.

"Her Majesty seems to be growing impatient," Derek remarked.

"Of course she's impatient-she's learned of my illness. But her impatience is misplaced. What she should be worrying about is why Connor hasn't shown any significant improvement," said Salvador.

He didn't expect Kylie to care for him, to fret over his health, or be consumed with worry about his condition. They were husband and wife, but theirs was no ordinary marriage. He had never offered her exclusive care or tenderness, so he would never demand such things from her in return.