

Chapter 1583

It was during the Verdant Hunt that Connor fell out of favor with Dad, who scolded him harshly before we left the hunting grounds. Once we returned to the palace, Connor fell ill. Ryan and I were both terribly worried, but Mom was delighted.

She held me close that evening, her smile sharper than usual. "After this, your father is sure to be tired of your brother."

She told me I must work harder than ever, and to listen closely to the royal chancellor and my uncle.

"Study better than anyone. Earn their praise. And most importantly, outshine your brother," she said.

My heart felt torn. Mom often spoke of the rewards that came with being crown prince, and I won't lie, I was tempted. However, those were all distant things.

At the time, I was close to Connor, Ryan, and even our youngest brother, Cecil. We all got along so well. How could I possibly hate my older brother?

Those thoughts tangled inside me, day after day. I lost focus. My studies slipped. I made mistakes during riding practice, more than once.

Strangely, Mom didn't scold me for it. She let me stay idle for several days and even took me to visit Aunt Jeanette often. Every time we went to see her, Dad was there too. But after only a few visits, Mom's mood turned cold.

She told Lyra we would not be going there again, adding, "Let's see if that woman can give birth without my help. My kindness is wasted on an

ungrateful person. No gratitude at all."

Once I stopped seeing Dad so often, I found my focus again. I worked hard on my lessons and threw myself into riding. At the time, I didn't really understand what "future prospects" meant. I only knew I was tired every day, but I didn't mind.

I was happy. If things stayed like this, that was good enough for me.

Then came news of Dad's grand birthday celebration. A riding competition was to be held, and we princes were expected to join. For us, it was just something to be part of, nothing too serious.

But Mom took it very seriously.

One day, she handed me a small caltrop and said something that made my world crash down on me—she wanted me to hurt my brother.

I refused. Again and again, I refused. My whole body wanted to run from her. It was the first time I was truly afraid of my mother. She was asking me to take my own brother's life.

But she kept persuading me, assuring me that what she was asking me to do wouldn't kill Connor, only that he would never be able to stand again. Then, she kept reminding me of how wonderful life would be as crown prince, and how miserable it would be if I failed.

When desire took root, so did malice.

As I trembled and finally uttered my consent, I felt the awful truth—I was more terrifying than Mom. He was my brother by blood, and I had agreed to harm him. I knew, deep down, that no one had forced me.

The moment I allowed myself to desire power, even just a little, I knew

the truth: this was my choice. Mine alone. 2

I knew the consequences clearly—ruining Connor's legs, and even dragging Cecil down.

I understood all of it.

The process of what I did is now a blur. I was numb and detached from everything.

But I remember what came next, all too clearly.

I saw my brother fall from his horse. I saw him trampled by the hooves of the other horses behind him. And in that instant, panic swallowed me whole. 1

I turned to look at Mom—hoping, praying, that she hadn't meant for this. When I saw the triumph she could no longer hide, I suddenly realized that Mom didn't just want to ruin Connor's legs. She had wanted his life.

And I... I was the one who had made it happen.

I was the one who killed him.

At that moment, I was dumbfounded.

Afterward, it was as though I was living in a nightmare. All I could see was a sea of scarlet, and all I could hear was Connor's anguished screams. In my life, I had never even killed an ant, yet I had taken the life of my own brother. What kind of cruel, heartless person was I?

I drifted through the days like a ghost. It wasn't until his funeral that I finally broke. I curled up in bed, pulled the covers over my head, and wept.

until I couldn't breathe.

Mom said we had finally gotten what we wanted. But in that moment, I hated her. And yet... How could I blame her?

I was the one who had done the deed.

Power truly did drive people mad.

Mr. Young had warned me, saying, "If you cannot hold firm to your heart when power is in front of you, it will drag you into darkness."

He was right.

And now, I'm caught in that darkness, with no way out. For the rest of my life, I will never forgive myself.

From now on, I will wander through countless lands. Whenever I encounter a temple, I will kneel and pray, hoping for a chance at redemption in my next life.



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Chapter 1584

Snow fell softly in the dead of winter, blanketing Victory Pass in white. At that moment, the world seemed to have been made pure again.

For years, I wore nothing but a tattered priest's robe. I carried a broken bowl and wandered from place to place, asking for food. I stopped only briefly at temples along the way to rest for a night or two and kneel before the statues to beg for forgiveness.

I could have stayed at the first monastery I was sent to. Life there wasn't easy, but it wasn't so hard either. I had warm meals and shelter from the cold. But I knew if I stayed in comfort, I would never wash away my sins. 

Only by suffering, by staying on the road and bearing the cold, the hunger, the pain, could I find peace in my heart.

And so, I came to Victory Pass.

My sandals had long since fallen apart. Thick calluses had grown on my feet; I could walk barefoot over rocks and barely feel a thing. Even with every piece of clothing I owned layered over me, the winter cold still cut through to my bones. But I had gotten used to it.

Bad men lived long lives, they said — and I seemed to never die.

Through the wind and snow, I walked towards my destination: Gratitude Temple. But the years of travel had taken a toll on me. Fatigue lived deep in my bones now, and the bitter cold stirred it up even worse. It was especially intolerable because I hadn't eaten in two days.

My legs gave out, and I collapsed right there on the snow-covered path.

When I opened my eyes, warmth surrounded me. There was a heavy quilt

laid over me, and a fire crackling in the hearth. Through a small open window, I could see tree branches bent low with snow.

My eyes shifted slowly, taking it all in. It had been so long since I felt warmth and comfort like this. I found myself wishing to stay just a little longer.

Then came the sound of a door creaking open.

I sat up in a panic, but dizziness hit me at once. I fell back onto the bed, weak and breathless.

"Don't move. Just rest for now."

The voice was calm and kind. A man walked in, holding a steaming bowl of medicine. He set it beside the bed and stood there quietly.

Something about his voice... was familiar.

When my head stopped spinning, I looked up, and there it was.

A faint smile on a face I knew too well.

"It's been a long time," he said.

Ryan?

I was afraid I might be wrong, so I looked again—closer this time—but my head was spinning too badly. I had to shut my eyes again.

Still, inside me, a storm had already begun.

Ever since I was sent away to live a quiet life in the monastery, I hadn't seen Ryan, nor anyone else from my past. Even when Dad passed away or when Cecil took the throne... I was never allowed to return to the palace,

my former home.

I hardly dared to think of them. Just remembering those days brought a wave of guilt and regret so strong, it felt like it would drown me. No matter how many times I whispered prayers for peace, they never brought calm.

Not really. 

And so, I kept my eyes shut, too scared to open them again. But I couldn't stop tears from slipping out anyway.

My thoughts dragged me back to that terrible day, to the sight of Connor—bloodied, broken—falling from his horse. Again and again, that moment played in my mind.

It felt like a saw had been wedged into my heart and was being pulled back and forth, cutting it into shreds. The pain was sharp, raw, unbearable.

"Caden," came the voice again—gentle, just as it had always been. "Drink the medicine first."

My whole body trembled. I didn't dare open my eyes. It took a long time before I could force out a reply. My lips moved soundlessly at first, then finally, from my dry, burning throat, came a hoarse whisper.

"My monastic name... is Ravine."

It meant the one who regretted.

But it was too late for regrets now!

The silence that followed was long and heavy.

Commented [Ma1]:

Commented [Ma2R1]:

At last, Ryan spoke again, saying, "I've left the medicine beside you. Drink it when you can."

As the sound of footsteps faded, I pulled the blanket over my head, crying silently. I hadn't cried much when I was younger. Mom had told me that Connor often cried, which made him weak and foolish.

So, no matter how hurt or upset I felt, I never allowed myself to shed a tear, terrified of becoming the kind of person she despised. But now, I couldn't hold it in. The tears came pouring out, just as they had when I heard the news of my brother's death. I hid beneath the covers, my sobs uncontrollable. 1

Grief took over. It felt like I was being pulled back into that dark, black hole—the one that had swallowed me whole for so long. 1

A voice broke through the storm of my thoughts: "The medicine's cold now. I know you don't like the bitter taste, so I mixed some honey into it. After you drink it, I'll give you some candy."

The voice was gentle, but it wasn't Ryan's. It was familiar... but not quite.

However, just that bit of familiarity sent a shock through me.

I threw off the covers in a panic.

Standing at the foot of the bed was someone I didn't expect. A wave of joy surged in me, only to be doused in an instant.

It wasn't him. It couldn't be.


How could it be him? It was impossible.

The young man opened his palm, and inside lay a piece of candy. He

smiled faintly. "Let it go. I've let it go. Some things are only worth hating for so long. As long as you're alive, you have to look forward.

"After all, you can only see the light if you look ahead. If you stay hidden in the shadows of the past, life will always be dark. You've been a priest for many years, right? How can you not know this principle by now?"

I scrambled to my feet and knelt before him for what felt like an eternity.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." 

Those were the only words I could manage through my tears.



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