

War Song 411

Chapter 411

Carissa chuckled softly.

Still, she needed to be clear about a few things. She instructed Violet to find Kiera, brought her back, and had the girl seated in a chair. "Have you seen him?" she asked.

Kiera's eyes shimmered with a glint of excitement. "Yes, he came to the palace to pay respects to the queen, and I saw him then."

"What do you like about him?" Carissa asked.

"I'm not sure. I just liked him when I saw him," Kiera replied.

Carissa wasn't familiar with Logan's appearance, but a first impression that sparked immediate affection often indicated love at first sight, which usually related closely to one's appearance. "Well, then should we have someone inquire into this?"

"I can't make that decision. It's up to Mom and you," Kiera said, her lips curving upwards despite herself. "But, I don't mind. Go ahead and inquire."

A princess' marriage wasn't something that required extensive inquiry. If she had her heart set on someone, it would simply be a matter of issuing a royal edict.

However, Carissa wanted to understand Logan's own wishes. If he was only marrying out of obligation to the royal family, then life after the marriage for the couple would likely be quite unhappy. Carissa was aware of Kylie's thoughts on the matter. The Quinton family had many outstanding members, and if any of them were to marry a princess, Logan, who seemed the least impressive among the family, was the most suitable choice. This would prevent the other promising members of the Quinton family from having their talents wasted.

However, Helen wasn't entirely pleased. She agreed that a marriage alliance with the Quinton family was beneficial, but she preferred Marcus instead of Logan.

Moreover, Logan was not particularly talented. His academic performance was mediocre, and he spent his time tinkering with this and that, seeming to be of little use.

When Carissa came to consult her, Helen was silent for a long moment. "Could we consider Marcus instead?"

"Kiera likes Logan."

"So what if she likes him? Infatuation is a fleeting feeling. Once they live together, discontent might set in. It's important to choose a consort who is truly remarkable."

"A consort may hold a nominal position, but he won't be able to be a high-ranking official. What matters is that he and Kiera are genuinely in love."

Helen remained uncomfortable with the situation. "Look at how well the Quinton family's daughters have fared with the princes. They're from the main branch of the family."

Carissa's tone was indifferent, "What

makes the Quinton family's

daughters so much better than me? If we're to compare, how can Kendrick be compared to my husband? With my husband around which concubine could surpass you? Don't you think comparing yourself to them diminishes your own status?"

It was a single remark that jolted one out of their daydreams.

After a brief moment of stunned silence, Helen suddenly stood up, her face flushed with excitement. "Yes, you're absolutely right. Who can compare to my son? Among all the late king's sons, who, besides the current king himself, can match up to Rafael? Why should I compare myself to them? I've always been the winner."

Carissa sat back comfortably, waiting for Helen's excitement to subside. "In that case, I will send someone to inquire about Logan's intentions."

"Is it really necessary to ask? Just have my elder sister bestow the marriage," Helen said.

"We'll inquire," Carissa insisted.

Helen raised her hand dismissively. "No need. Asking him is already showing him too much respect."

Carissa's expression hardened. "We'll inquire!"

This insistence really did make her feel a sense of superiority.

Helen quickly relented, "Well... Alright, then."

Carissa thought of Natalie, and immediately set out with a formal letter of request.

Natalie, who enjoyed playing the matchmaker, was delighted, especially given how charming and beautiful Kiera was. She agreed immediately, and told Carissa to wait for good news.

The next day, Natalie visited. With a beaming smile, she said to Carissa, "Logan is indeed interested in Princess Kiera. As soon as his mother asked him, he eagerly agreed."

Helen was suspicious. "When did they develop feelings for each other? They've only met once or twice, and he already likes her?"

Natalie reassured, "Well, Logan is a considerate person. He doesn't have any devious intentions or bad habits. He is just a bit playful, like many young men. As long as he's not frequenting entertainment parlors or gambling dens, he should be acceptable."

With Natalie's assurance, Helen reluctantly nodded in agreement.

With the couple's marriage settled, Kylie issued a decree for the marriage. Then, the Astrology Department selected a favorable date in August this year, deeming it suitable for the wedding.

Chapter 412

When Rafael returned from work, Carissa updated him on the matter.

After removing his cloak and handing it to a servant, Rafael sat down and sipped on a cup of coffee. After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Logan is a typical wealthy young man-fond of pleasure and indulgence. He and Kiera do seem to share...similar interests."

"In a few days, I expect the Quinton family will come to finalize the betrothal. My suggestion is to follow the usual marriage customs. I've spoken with Kiera, and she enjoys these traditional ceremonies," said Carissa.

"Have her marriage arranged according to her preferences. I'm her brother. I've faced countless dangers on the battlefield, and it's all been to ensure that she and my mother can live freely as they please." He took Carissa's hand and guided her to sit beside him, his eyes gentle.

"Originally, I wanted to say that to you, but it seems I don't really have the right to. Your father's and brothers' military achievements, and your own, should be more than enough to secure a comfortable life for you."

Carissa smiled. "The words you speak bring me happiness."

His eyes shifted with emotion. "Really? Then, let me be honest with you. When I first went to the Southern Frontier, my sole intention was to reclaim the region and then return to marry you."

He gently pulled her onto his lap. Seeing this, the servants immediately took their leave.

Carissa rested her head on his shoulder. "You've achieved your wish."

"And you?" His voice carried a hint of anxiety. "By marrying me, have you fulfilled your wish?"

Carissa smiled, pressing her chin slightly against his shoulder. "Yes, and I'm happy."

His grip tightened around her, making it almost difficult for her to breathe. "Carissa, with this, I have nothing else I wish for."

Carissa stayed in his embrace for a while before gently pushing him away. "How is the establishment of the household soldiers progressing? You mentioned it earlier, right?"

"It has already begun. Haven't you

heard from Rod? Originally, over a hundred of my own guards accompanied me in the campaign. Now, I need to transfer them back from the Hell Monarch Army still

need to discuss this matter with the

king and General Prince.

"I see. I noticed that the vacant land in the estate is being developed, but I haven't seen any household soldiers stationed yet, so I was asking."

"You don't need to worry about these

matters. If

you

want to manage the

household affairs, feel free to do so. If not, Luke is handling things well Jacob has been accompanying me to the Supreme Court recent so he hasn't had much time to attend to the estate."

"I'm only taking a brief break myself. It's uncommon for a lady of the estate to be idle. I'll be taking over responsibilities from Luke in a few days," Carissa replied.

"Alright. Most of the staff in the

estate are new, with some coming from the palace with me. Although they're young, they are considered long-time members of the

household. Luke also accompanied me from the palace and has with me for many years, so he is absolutely trustworthy. You can manage the rest as you see fit.

"As for my mother, she has always liked to sleep in. Don't go to her too early to greet her. You should sleep in a little yourself."

Carissa smiled. "I've already greeted her and paid my respects once since we got married. After that, she has been coming to have breakfast with me. You leave early, so you might not know about that." Rafael was quite surprised. "Really?"

He knew that his mother and Carissa had a good relationship now, but he hadn't expected it to have progressed to the point where Carissa didn't need to formally greet her, and that Helen even came to seek her out personally.

He couldn't help but smile. "The peaceful interactions between you two is something I hadn't anticipated."

"I didn't expect it either," Carissa said with a laugh.

Since Rafael had returned early today, he planned to have a meal with everyone. However, upon hearing of this, Helen claimed she wasn't feeling well and requested that her meal be brought to her room. Rafael thought she might truly be unwell and was about to visit her when Carissa stopped him.

"She's not unwell. It's just that you've been leaving early and returning late recently, giving her fewer greetings and talking to her less. Now that you suddenly want to have a meal together, she might think you want to criticize her about something."

Rafael was astonished. "Why would she think that? When have I ever spoken ill of her? She's my mother-what right do I have to criticize her?"

Chapter 413

Carissa pinched his cheek playfully. "If you stop scowling in front of her, she won't think you're going to lecture her."

Rafael caught her hand and, with a playful peck on her lips, replied with a smile, "I can't help it—it's just my natural aura."

"You often smile when you're with me, don't you? You should smile more at her too."

Rafael nodded. "Alright, I'll do as you say."

Carissa went out to give instructions, telling the servants not to bring food to Helen's room. Instead, Carissa would personally invite her to the dining hall.

Helen was a bit fidgety, and asked several times how Rafael was feeling today.

Carissa reassured, "He's in a good mood."

Relieved, Helen followed Carissa to the dining hall. Rafael was already seated and, upon seeing her, stood up and greeted her. "Mom, you're here."

His tall, upright figure, combined with his habitual calm demeanor, conveyed the imposing presence of a seasoned general.

Then, in a show of obedience to his wife's advice, Rafael slowly smiled at Helen.

Helen was taken aback.

In her mind, she recalled the signs before the late emperor's outbursts—he would also slowly show a smile or a cold grin before erupting into fierce anger. Rafael increasingly resembled his father in this regard.

However, Helen nodded and said, "Sit down."

She settled into her seat with a steady calmness. With Carissa around, she felt assured that Rafael wouldn't exhibit any signs of anger like his father.

A short while later, Kiera and Ryan arrived and took their seats.

The meal proceeded in silence, with no exchange of words or glances between mother and son.

However, Carissa served Helen her favorite dishes, showing how attentive she was to Helen's preferences.

Thinking of this made Helen's mood significantly brighten. She even enjoyed an extra bowl of soup.

After the meal, as coffee was served and the servants cleared the dishes, Helen suddenly felt a wave of emotion and was on the verge of tears.

She wasn't sure why, but she felt a mix of bittersweet happiness.

Wasn't this what she had hoped for all along? Her children were by her side, quietly enjoying a meal together. There were no complaints from her son, no scolding, no reprimands, and no signs of impatience or resistance.

As they drank their coffee, they chatted about the current happenings. One of the matters that came up was what happened to Mary, the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family.

Luke said, "The rumors outside have

not ceased. In fact, the outcry against Aurora is growing louder. I've heard that General Warren took her to Jadehill Estate to apologize, but the current marquis refused to see them. After hearing that, Aurora in a fit of anger."

ended up running away at Aurora

There were no longer any reservations about discussing the Warren family's matters in the estate, as everyone knew that Carissa didn't mind it.

Luke continued, "It is said that Madam Clayton is also dissatisfied with the Marquis of Jadehill's actions. She didn't take Aurora's words to heart. Madam Clayton said since the deed was done, let people talk as they please. She isn't bothered by it."

Carissa was reflecting on Mary's

noble demeanor when Helen furrowed her brows and interjected, "How can she not care? If someone dared to speak about me like that, I would

up. Madam Clayton is simply too easy to bully. If she is so easily bullied, what about her

Madaly have them beaten

descendants?"

Rafael replied, "Madam Clayton has lived to such an old age. She has probably heard and seen all kinds of things. She is a kind-hearted person, and she likely doesn't take such insults to heart."

"That's not acceptable!" Helen retorted. "Madam Clayton clearly did a good deed, but is being called an old beggar. She is a noble lady with a title, and Aurora is nothing in comparison."

Realizing she had used harsh language, Helen awkwardly added, "Such lack of propriety. I don't know how that young lady from the Prince family manages that household."

Luke chuckled and said, "You may not know, but their household is in chaos. Madam Viola does want to manage the household. Unfortunately, Madam Aurora is also a rightful wife, and is difficult to manage.

"Since she is also General Warren's

rightful wife, she is harder to

discipline than a concubine. Moreover, Madam Aurora knows

martial arts, so Madam Viola's ne

attempts to impose rules have been unsuccessful. I've heard that the two maids she brought with her were beaten by Madam Aurora.

"General Warren comes home every day to handle these domestic troubles. With his time and energy spent in that manner, how can he focus on his official duties?"

Helen remarked, "That young lady from the Prince family is rather pitiable, though."

Violet scoffed. "Pitiable? Hardly! They're all cut from the same cloth. You might not know this, but when Cari married the marshal, Viola's marriage was also on the same day. She tried to overshadow Cari at every turn, and even told her maids that Cari's dowry was so little. The look on her face when others came to add to Cari's trousseau was quite something."

"Is that true? How do you know?" Helen asked.

"Of course, it's from my sources. The Prince family's management isn't great. They can't control their servants' mouths. Viola's bitterness towards Cari is quite evident," Violet said with a touch of pride. It turned out that Winona's people were indeed very useful.

Carissa recalled her two meetings with Viola. The first time was uneventful, but by the second meeting, she had sensed hostility.

"We don't have to deal with her anyway. Let her be angry," she said.

"She's ungrateful," Helen spat in disdain.

She thought of how her son's military power had been taken by the Prince family, and added, "To say she's pitiable is to overlook that every pitiful person has their own faults. Her entire family isn't worth much, and they even took my son's military authority..."

"Mom!" Rafael's expression darkened immediately. "What are you saying?"

Helen was startled and quickly grasped Carissa's arm, looking like an aggrieved kitten. She was just trying to show maternal concern! She didn't understand why Rafael was being so harsh.

Carissa said, "Mother, such talk is inappropriate, even within the estate. It was the king's decision."

Helen nodded. "I understand."

Carissa then lightly tapped Rafael's arm. "Don't speak so loudly."

Seeing his mother's reaction, Rafael realized he had been too harsh. "I'm sorry, Mom. I raised my voice a bit."

Looking aggrieved, Helen said, "You shouldn't speak loudly to your mother. If others hear it, they might say you're disrespectful."

Rafael glanced at Carissa, paused, then said, "I'll be more mindful, Mom."

With that, Helen decided to skip finishing her coffee and retreated to her room.

Though the sky had darkened, the weather wasn't too cold, and the breeze carried a hint of warmth.

The couple walked hand in hand through the courtyard.

Rafael informed his wife, "Aunt Avis was buried at Ethereal Peak in Valken. The funeral followed a princess consort's rites. In death, she was granted the honor she deserved as a princess consort."

Due to the freezing rain, Avis' funeral had taken place not long ago. Neither Carissa nor Rafael had attended. They had sent Jacob in their stead.

Carissa felt a pang of sadness. "It's all just for show."

"Don't be disheartened," Rafael said softly, squeezing her hand. "At least you were there to keep her company before she left."

"Yeah." Carissa lowered her head, not saying much.

"Jacob said that Randall truly mourned Aunt Avis. He was the sincerest in his grief at the funeral, while Sabrina and Stephanie only managed to squeeze out a few tears to put on a show of sadness."

Carissa recalled the faces of the two

sisters. When they heard of their mother's death in Hell Monarch Estate, they seemed indifferent, as if their mother had already been dead.

in their hearts long ago.

Changing the topic, she said, "I've sent a notice to Gracehold Estate. I'll be visiting Leona tomorrow."

"Do you want me to go with you?" Rafael asked.

Carissa smiled. "We're just having a chat between cousins. What would you do there? Besides, you don't have a day off tomorrow."

"I'll act like an incompetent official and stay away from the Supreme Court to go with you."

Carissa replied, "There's no need.

I've asked Vivi to come with me, and

I've also invited Rowan to join us. He'll check Leona's health. Samuel taking a concubine must have been a severe blow to her."

"Alright." Rafael frowned, clearly having little regard for Samuel.

Carissa suddenly said softly, "Leona loved Samuel deeply, but it's a pity her affection was misplaced."

Rafael pulled her into an embrace, his voice filled with determination as he said, "I love you very much too, and I know my love isn't misplaced."

Carissa rested her head against his chest. For a moment, her body felt tense, but slowly, warmth spread through her heart.

How could his chest be so warm and solid?

Chapter 415

Rafael waited patiently for a long time. When Carissa remained silent, he felt no disappointment. Sooner or later, she would come to truly love him and express it in her own words. Their lifetime together was long, and he was willing to wait.

The next day, Carissa, accompanied by Violet and Rowan, visited Gracehold Estate with some generous gifts.

The Earl of Gracehold's wife, Abigail, greeted them with her family. Samuel was the eldest legitimate son and the heir of the earl. With his noble background, accomplishments, and good looks, he was indeed someone many women would eagerly pursue.

As a princess consort, Carissa was accorded a grand reception.

It was known that the Earl of Gracehold, Noah Langley, had many concubines. However, none were present that day. Only the wives from the second, third, and fourth branches of the family, along with their children, came out to meet Carissa and her entourage.

Abigail appeared to be around forty. She was slightly plump, but exuded the shrewdness and elegance of a seasoned matriarch.

Noah's sons and daughters came out to pay their respects. Carissa personally presented the gifts. After conversing pleasantly with them for a while, the Langley family members were ushered outside by Abigail.

Carissa's gaze then fell on Leona. Leona was still in the early stages of pregnancy, but her eyes were reddish, and she looked notably thinner.

Carissa's heart ached for her.

Abigail noticed this, and smiled as she said, "Leona has been unable to keep any food down since her pregnancy began-everything she eats makes her sick. Only recently has she started to feel a bit better." Carissa understood that a pregnant woman needed extra care, both physically and emotionally.

Though Abigail seemed shrewd, she didn't appear to be the type of harsh mother-in-law. Her gaze towards Leona was gentle and kind.

Of course, it was also possible that she was merely putting on an act.

Madison, the wife of Noah's second brother, spoke with a smile, "Since Leona is pregnant, we have forbidden everyone in the house from eating lamb as the smell makes her nauseous."

Her words carried deeper meaning, suggesting that everyone in the household would accommodate Leona's needs and not neglect her.

Madison was articulate, but the wife of Noah's fourth brother's wife, Isla, who was rather blunt, interjected, "Yes, we all avoid the smell of lamb like that. But strangely, Ruby enjoys roasted lamb, and Samuel spends every day eating it with her. Afterward, he uses the excuse of the smell to avoid spending time with Leona."

Abigail shot her a sharp look. Realizing her mistake, Isla quickly fell silent.

Carissa glanced at Leona, who looked to be on the verge of tears. She sighed inwardly, but acted as if she hadn't heard Isla's comment.

"I've brought a physician today. He's an apprentice of Sebastian. I'd like him to examine Leona and see how the pregnancy is progressing."

Upon hearing that the physician was

one of Sebastian's apprentices,

Abigail quickly stood and bowed

"Thank you for coming all the way here, sir."

Rowan returned the bow, then proceeded to sit beside Leona. After arranging the mat, Leona extended her hand.

Rowan checked her pulse with both.

hands and said, "She's anxious, and her pregnancy is unstable. You must have been using medicine to prevent a miscarriage, right?"

Abigail hesitated for a moment before replying, "Yes, we have been using the medicine since the beginning of her pregnancy." "It's not very effective. I'll prescribe a formula for her to try for a few days," Rowan said, pulling out a prescription pad and writing. A maid came forward to collect the prescription.

Rowan added, "Any physician's office will have these herbs. She should take it twice daily-morning and noon, but not at night." "Thank you, sir." Abigail stood once more to express her gratitude, and signaled for the maid to handle the payment.

Rowan accepted the payment, and gave Leona one last look before returning to his seat.

After the examination, the atmosphere grew somewhat awkward.

Everyone knew well enough why Leona was in such a bad state. However, such matters couldn't be discussed openly.

Noticing Carissa's somewhat

gloomy expression, Abigail was

about to say something to smooth things over when a cold voice

interrupted from outside.

"What's this? Samuel said I could move freely within the estate. Why am I being denied entry to the sitting room now?"

"It's not that, Madam Ruby. Madam Abigail is entertaining distinguished guests."

The voice remained haughty, "Distinguished guests? Am I an embarrassment?"

Abigail's expression changed abruptly, and she shot a sharp look at the maid beside her.

Chapter 416

However, it was too late.

Before the maid could leave, a woman had entered. She was dressed in a begonia red brocade dress with intricate floral patterns. Over it, she wore an exquisite fur cloak.

Carissa glanced at her and saw a woman with jet-black, lustrous hair, and skin as fair as snow. Her features were so refined that not a single flaw could be detected.

She wore an emerald hairpin with a four-leaf clover pattern in her hair, adorned with floral decorations, and red ruby earrings hung from her earlobes. Her waist was slender and graceful, her movements both charming and elegant, with a blend of allure and cool detachment.

Abigail furrowed her brow upon seeing the woman enter. The insolent woman had left her room, and was now offending their distinguished guest.

The woman, Ruby, entered the sitting room. She cast a dismissive glance around, and then gave a slight curtsy. "I've heard that a distinguished guest has arrived at the estate, and I'm not permitted to enter the sitting room. I've come to pay my respects, so as not to be remiss in etiquette."

Leona, who had remained silent until now, was visibly shaken by Ruby's insolence. Ruby had completely disregarded her cousin, prompting Leona to tremble and scold, "What are you doing here? Leave!" "Oh? So, it turns out the distinguished guest is someone to be ashamed of? Madam Leona, please don't be angry. I wouldn't want to be the cause of any distress that might affect your pregnancy," Ruby replied, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

"How dare you!" Abigail's face turned ashen with fury. Still, she refrained from expressing her anger openly due to Carissa's presence. "What nonsense are you spouting? Hurry and pay your respects to the princess consort!"

Ruby's gaze shifted to Carissa and Violet before finally settling on Carissa. Her eyes widened slightly with surprise, clearly taken aback by Carissa's beauty.

Ruby wondered how she compared to her.

In a cool and indifferent tone, Ruby said, "With so many princess consorts in the capital, I'm not sure which one has arrived."

After speaking, she gave a perfunctory curtsy in the face of the angry glares from the other women. "Regardless of who it is, I've paid my respects."

Without even glancing at her, Violet addressed Abigail directly, "In the Spencer family, such unruly concubines would be taken out and given a sound thrashing. I wonder if your household upholds such strict discipline as well?"

Violet's palms itched with anger, and she had to restrain herself from rushing out and slapping that insolent woman.

Carissa, though not much better off, had tempered her demeanor over the years and was much more composed. This was a matter for the Earl of Gracehold's family. Since Abigail was turning a blind eye, Carissa wouldn't stop Violet.

So, Carissa simply took a sip of her coffee, her expression calm and detached, not even glancing at Ruby.

Seeing this, Abigail realized that Carissa was showing leniency out of consideration for the Earl of Gracehold's family. Her expression darkened immediately. "Take her away."

Two maids stepped forward to drag Ruby out.

Ruby glared at them coldly and spat, "How dare you touch me with your dirty hands?"

With a huff, she turned and headed

outside. Her voice rang out sharply from the corridor, "Hah! What princess consort? Even someone

like me, from a brothel, is purer than

her"

The anger in Violet's eyes flared up, burning brightly. With a polite bow, she said, "Excuse me for a moment!"

She strode out, and grabbed Ruby by the shoulder. "You old harpy, look over here!"

"What are you"

Four sharp slaps echoed through the air, followed by a kick, and Ruby's screams filled the air. Violet yanked Ruby's hair back, and slapped her again.

"You better remember my face! I'm

Violet from the Spencer family of Ebonflow. If I hear even one word against the Hell Monarch's princess consort from you, I'll hit you every time I hear it, and each time will be worse than the last."

The faces of the women from the Earl of Gracehold's family turned ashen. The scene was truly embarrassing. Not only were they furious with Ruby's disgraceful behavior, but they were also irritated that outsiders were meddling in their internal affairs.

Leona trembled with anger, her once bright eyes now filled with tears and sorrow.

Carissa set down her cup and said, "Leona, let's take a look around the estate."

Turning to Abigail, she inquired, "Do you mind if I have a look around?"

Abigail forced a smile, understanding that they wished to speak privately and thus dared not stop them.

"Please go ahead, Lady Carissa. Leona, be a good host to the princess consort."

Chapter 417

Leona rose and led Carissa outside, just in time to see Ruby being dragged by her hair by Violet. At this moment, Ruby's arrogance and icy demeanor had vanished. Her face bore several distinct slap marks, swollen and bruised from Violet's harsh treatment.

Noticing their approach, Violet pushed Ruby away with disgust. "Get lost!"

Ruby struggled to maintain her balance, but defiantly raised her chin to look at Leona. "Lady Leona, your guest is truly barbaric. But perhaps I should thank her, for my lord will now cherish me even more." With that, she clutched her abdomen and was assisted away by her maids.

Leona's face turned pale, and tears streamed down her cheeks.

Carissa guided her back to her quarters, and offered her a handkerchief to wipe her tears. She sighed and said, "Is this how she's been treating you? Leona, you are a prince's daughter and a duchess!" Leona sobbed, "What use is being a duchess? He doesn't rely on my parents for anything. And even if my parents wanted to help his career, they wouldn't be able to."

Harvey was a leisurely prince without real power. He was inept at managing affairs, lacked substantial funds, lived off his fief, and was surrounded by a host of concubines. Also, all his concubines demanded luxurious living conditions.

How could Leona's parents support her?

"Has she always been this audacious?" Carissa asked.

"When she first arrived, she spilled tea on my shoes when serving me. I scolded her, and my husband reprimanded me," Leona said, her voice trembling with deep despair.

"Cari, what should I do? I love him so much, yet he hurts me like this. I'm carrying his child, and he brings a courtesan into our home. Have you ever heard of a noble family's heir marrying a courtesan?" Violet said, "Enough of this! The Earl of Gracehold's household isn't really a prestigious family. If not for that talented son they produced, they'd be in decline."

Leona sobbed uncontrollably. "I used to think I was so fortunate. So many noble women admired him, yet he chose me. I know I'm not as beautiful as Ruby, but I am a duchess from the royal family. How can he disregard me so? Since Ruby entered the household, he hasn't come to my quarters, and when I suffer from pregnancy symptoms, he merely sends someone to inquire about my health."

"There's also his other concubine, the lady from the Wagner family, right?" Carissa said, gently wiping away Leona's tears.

"Nora is actually quite compliant.

She only hoped to use her family's wealth to secure a good marriage. As a merchant's daughter, she entered the household with a dowry of fifty thousand silver coins, of which thirty thousand was given to Samuel to marry the courtesan. Nora accepted it willingly."

"Divorce him!" Violet said firmly.

While she didn't think divorce was a simple matter, Samuel was heartless and untrustworthy. He was truly not someone to rely on.

Leona smiled bitterly. "Divorce? If I

were to divorce him, my parents wouldn't let me return home. Do you remember how you were treated during your divorce, Cari? They didn't even want the gifts you gave me to add to my trousseau, considering it bad luck."

"Doesn't your family know how you're suffering? Haven't they talked to Samuel?"

"They know. My father is aware, but he says that having multiple wives is normal for men and told me not to be petty or jealous. While my mother also feels for me, she still tells me to endure saying that as Samuel's primary wife, I'll eventually be the matriarch of the household when he inherits his title. She says that when Samuel grows tired of the courtesan in a few years, he'll throw her aside, so I should just bear with it for now."

"Your parents are truly spineless!" Violet cursed.

"But how can I endure this kind of life? If she only stayed in her quarters, it would be one thing. But Samuel dotes on her, and she comes to harass me daily. She makes me uncomfortable by always bringing up their nightly activities, and...."

Leona couldn't continue and buried her face in her hands, crying in anguish.

Even though she didn't finish her sentence, everyone knew what she meant. Ruby's provocations included flaunting her intimacy with Samuel and deliberately causing Leona pain.

"Focus on taking care of yourself and the baby for now. After the child is born, you can deal with her slowly," Carissa advised.

At the moment, she couldn't offer much practical help, considering Leona's fragile state.

"I can't deal with her. Even a single word doesn't make a difference, because Samuel protects her. Even though Nora's dowry provided the money Samuel redeemed her with, Ruby slapped Nora just because of something she said," Leona sobbed.

Chapter 418

Both Violet and Carissa were seething with anger.

How could Samuel be so heartless? He used Nora's money to marry the woman he adored. Yet, that woman had the audacity to slap Nora for a single remark.

Carissa's voice was sharp with rage as she asked, "Has he ever hit you?"

Leona shook her head. "No, he hasn't."

Carissa continued, "Even if he hasn't hit you now, who's to say what will happen in the future? That courtesan was already so bold in front of me today. It's likely she will provoke you further. Though she's a courtesan from a prestigious brothel, she has plenty of tricks up her sleeve."

She placed a comforting hand on Leona's shoulder. "How many people did you bring with you? Do you have enough to protect yourself?"

Leona replied, "I brought four maids and one old servant."

Carissa considered her options. She would consult with Travis about sending a letter to his guild to see if his senior guild members could come as guards. Carissa was unsure if Travis' master would agree, as she had previously disapproved of female apprentices going out to seek a livelihood.

It would only be for a few months, just until the baby was born and until the Lunar Blessing Ceremony, which was on the 100th day of the baby's birth. Carissa hoped the Lunar Guild's leader would consent. She decided not to mention this to Leona yet. Once arrangements were confirmed, she would send the reinforcements directly.

As they left Gracehold Estate and settled into the carriage, Rowan spoke up.

"Lady Carissa, the situation with Lady Leona is quite dire. Her emotional distress is severe, and has likely caused her to cry daily. If this continues, no amount of miscarriage prevention medicine will be effective. It's uncertain if the baby can be saved, and there's a real risk that she might suffer lasting health issues.

"Also, she seems to have had a cough for a while. Coughing in the first three months is particularly harmful to the baby's health. Her lungs and heart channels are severely congested. She really needs to be more relaxed."

Rowan's words deepened Carissa's concern. It was easy to say "relax", but much more difficult to achieve.

Leona had never been a strong child. Whenever faced with difficulties, she would simply cry. Despite her status as a duchess, her temperament was shaped by the weakness of her parents, leaving her timid and easily frightened.

Her situation was made worse by

her deep love for Samuel. Before marrying into the Langley family, she

had been full of hope and ONE

for her future. Yet, she soon

discovered that Samuel had taken a new concubine and favored her

above all else, leaving Leona

neglected and heartbroken.

"In my opinion, it wasn't enough just to beat that old harpy. Samuel should be the one to be punished," Violet said coldly.

Carissa responded calmly, "If you strike someone he cares about, do you think he won't come demanding retribution?"

Violet cracked her knuckles. "Good. If he comes, we'll give him what he deserves."

Rowan hesitated before saying,

"Actually, if you do that, Lady

Leona's situation might worsen. Mr. Langley might become even more resentful toward her, and if he turns cold and harsh, it will only cause more distress for her. If she is distressed any further..."

Carissa knew all too well that such distress could endanger the baby.

Violet retorted, "Regardless, he's treating Lady Leona poorly now. Why not teach him a lesson to make him behave?"

Carissa pondered for a moment, then said, "If you hit him, it will be seen as an assault on a government official, and as a scholar, he will be humiliated from being beaten by a woman. This will only lead him to take out his anger on Leona. I have another idea."

"What is it?" Violet asked eagerly, keen on dealing with the scoundrel.

Carissa replied, "We need to enlist Meredith's help. Let's go to her residence, Pristine Palace."

Meredith was married to Levi, the

son of the Oversight Minister, Irvin, who was notorious for his intolerance of corruption and misdeeds. It didn't matter if the cases were related to the previous era or within the inner court. As long as he found any incriminating evidence, he would report and pursue it with relentless vigor.

Wasn't Samuel's future limitless? Let his private affairs become public, and Irvin could use this opportunity to make a case out of it.

After all, the Oversight Department has been quite idle lately, right?

Chapter 419

Meredith was far from being put off by Carissa and Violet's unexpected visit. In fact, she welcomed them with great warmth and enthusiasm.

"I should have sent a formal notice of our visit, but it was an urgent matter. I hope you will forgive our impromptu arrival," Carissa apologized.

Meredith smiled. "Why make such formalities between us? It's a pleasure to have you here. Just so happens that today, Henrietta is also my guest. She overindulged and upset her stomach. She's currently in the restroom, but you'll see her shortly."

"What are you talking about? Meredith, don't speak nonsense."

At this moment, Henrietta entered with her attendants. She was holding her stomach and clearly still felt unwell, but her retort to Meredith was forceful.

Meredith laughed. "Oh, Henrietta, you want to keep up appearances just because Carissa is here. Even if you refuse to admit it, you're still a glutton, and Kiera's just following your lead."

Carissa, Violet, and Rowan greeted her.

"Greetings, Princess Henrietta."

Henrietta responded with a respectful nod. "Please, sit down. Why stand? Carissa, why do you look so pale today? Has someone bullied you?"

Carissa took a seat and explained the situation regarding their visit to Gracehold Estate, detailing everything straightforwardly, including Violet's confrontation with the courtesan. Henrietta cast an approving glance at Violet. "Well done!"

Then, slamming her hand on the table, she exclaimed, "What kind of audacious woman dares to provoke the primary wife like that? If she disregards even a princess consort, it's clear how poor Leona must have been treated in the household! Now, even pregnant, Leona receives no affection from her husband. How is she supposed to endure such a life?"

Upon hearing this, Meredith understood the purpose of Carissa's visit.

She took a slow sip from her cup. Her eyes betrayed a hint of anger, but she maintained her composure. As her father-in-law was the Oversight Minister, it required her to be measured in her responses. After setting down her cup, she said, "Henrietta, why are you getting so worked up? Calm yourself."

"Calm down? I can't possibly calm down!"

Henrietta was not typically rash or fierce, but she deeply understood the struggles faced by women. As a princess, she lived a life of luxury, but she had also been exposed to the hardships faced by the common people.

"Although our culture allows for concubines, Meredith said slowly, "there are regulations governing it. However the world is ruled by men. to protect the primary

Laws exist

wife's rights, but they are seldom

enforced, and men often do not

adhere to them.

"Our kingdom's laws stipulate that a man can only take concubines if his primary wife is over forty and has not borne children. Yet, no official or noble family adheres to this rule."

In practice, the law was effectively

useless and couldn't restrain any men. For the average man, marrying one wife was already a challenge. As for the wealthy merchants with multiple concubines hidden away in their mansions, no one bothered to intervene. When it came to

government officials, receiving a woman or two from a superior as a plaything wasn't exactly something they would refuse.

So, bringing up the issue of concubines would hardly lead to action, as few in the court had entirely clean hands.

However, Samuel was different. Government officials were explicitly forbidden from visiting entertainment parlors—a rule the late king had stressed again and again.

Yet, since the new king took the throne, those restrictions had started to loosen.

Moreover, Samuel prided himself on his exceptional talent and enjoyed showcasing it in places like entertainment parlors, attracting women who admired him.

Inadvertently, he became infatuated with the courtesan in the entertainment parlor and was eager to marry her.

Visiting entertainment parlors and

marrying a courtesan was one

thing—but doing so while his wife was pregnant? That crossed a line. Worse still, he arranged to marry two concubines simultaneously, and used the money from one to pay for the other.

In the end, he got the woman he wanted without spending a single coin.

Such conduct was a true disgrace of a man!

Chapter 420

Meredith said, "My father-in-law oversees the Oversight Department. Just the other day, over dinner, he mentioned that they're working to clean up the behavior of officials and restore the regulations from the previous king's reign. He insists that all officials must be honest and incorruptible. Lately, he and his deputy are discussing this matter, and it seems that Samuel is now in the spotlight."

Upon hearing this, Carissa smiled and said, "Isn't that a stroke of luck? However, we might need to wait a day or two. Since that courtesan was beaten today, Samuel might be quite distressed. When I met him, he looked down on me greatly. I suspect he might come to demand an explanation. I wonder if offending a princess consort counts as a crime?"

Meredith replied, "I've heard that Samuel fancies himself some kind of genius reborn, and prides himself on his exceptional talent. Since he was appointed as one of the top scholars by the king, he thinks of himself as above others because he's considered one of the king's direct students. If that was the case, he should set a good example and restrain himself.

"But instead, his household is a mess-he openly visits entertainment parlors and brothels and has taken a courtesan as his concubine, completely neglecting his primary wife. To make matters worse, he's even offended a princess consort because of that courtesan. I trust the Oversight Department will come down hard on him soon."

With Meredith's assurance, Carissa felt relieved.

Striking Samuel would only lead to further resentment and make matters worse for Leona. However, with the Oversight Department keeping an eye on him, would he dare to act so recklessly? If he did, he might well forfeit his future prospects.

After venting her anger, Henrietta also spoke about Leona, "She is simply too timid! Despite being of noble birth, how could she allow herself to be bullied like that by the members of the Earl of Gracehold's household?"

"She has always been gentle and soft-spoken. You know how Uncle is. Growing up in such an environment, how could she develop any fortitude? If it were anyone else even an ordinary noble lady would the Earl of Gracehold's family dare to treat them so badly?" said Meredith.

Violet looked frustrated and said, "In my opinion, she loves Samuel too much. I don't understand what's so special about him. Underneath his human facade, he's nothing but a worthless animal. If it were up to me, I'd make sure he was beaten every day until he gets straightened out."

Meredith sighed. "We women must always hold part of ourselves back, no matter how well our husbands treat us at present. We shouldn't give our hearts entirely. If we do and then face betrayal, it can be catastrophic."

She glanced at Carissa, and said candidly, "When Barrett hurt you, you sought a divorce without hesitation. Clearly, you didn't have much genuine affection for him."

Carissa replied, "At the time, I truly intended to build a life with him. As for deep feelings, we hadn't spent enough time together to really get to know each other, so I couldn't say I was in love with him." Henrietta nodded. "That's fortunate. But what about Aurora? Who does she think she is to dare insult the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family? I'm tempted to send someone to slap her across the face!"

Meredith added, "When she returned

victorious from the battlefield, she was held in high regard. Now, she's fallen just as far. Anyone who harbors ill intentions will eventually face retribution. I've heard that people are even going to their home every day to throw dung and rotten vegetables at their door."

"Was Barrett not reported to the Oversight Department?" Henrietta asked.

"He was. However, the king ordered

him to have Aurora apologize. Unfortunately, the apology was unsuccessful. The matter remains unresolved, and it's clear that the

Warren family and the

Jadehill's family are now at odds."

Carissa didn't comment further. She simply listened; sharing her own opinions wasn't necessary.

She did feel a pang of sympathy for

Charlotte, who was still living together in the same household. The daily smell must be unbearable. Also, the servants in the household

likely loathed Aurora for

constantly clean up the dung in front of the door. Such daily chores could truly be disgusting.

The common people often had clear-cut feelings of love and hatred. They could elevate a person to great heights with praise, or they could drag them down into the dirt with scorn.