

War Song 421

Chapter 421

After returning to the estate, Carissa discussed the matter of hiring his senior guild members with Travis.

Travis's first question was: "How much are you offering?"

Carissa knew she wouldn't easily persuade him without a substantial financial incentive. Only by offering more money could she possibly get his master to relent.

She replied, "I'd like them to stay until the child is safely born and reaches their Lunar Blessing Ceremony, which will be a few months. If you send two people, I'll offer a total of one thousand silver coins. How does that sound?"

Travis raked a hand through his hair, considering the offer. "It sounds acceptable, but I must immediately write a letter. Does His Highness have someone specifically for delivering letters? We must ensure the letter reaches my master as quickly as possible."

Carissa smiled. "Please make sure to write the letter as quickly as possible, then."

One thousand silver coins was indeed a significant amount.

Travis' master forbade her apprentices from leaving the mountain because working as female bodyguards for high-ranking families only paid a meager two silver coins per month, and they had to endure mistreatment.

Now, protecting a duchess would not involve such mistreatment, nor would it require other tasks- just ensuring she wasn't harmed and overseeing her pregnancy. For just a few months of work, two people would earn one thousand silver coins. Surely, his master would be tempted.

The day after the letter was sent, Samuel indeed arrived at Hell Monarch Estate with two attendants. He specifically asked to see Carissa.

He came only after Rafael had left for work, which showed he wasn't entirely dismissive of others. He just thought that Carissa, as a once-divorced woman, was easy to bully.

However, the gatekeeper was taken aback by his arrogance and immediately reported Samuel's identity to Jacob.

Jacob stood at the entrance, his demeanor polite but his words icy, "Either leave immediately or face a beating."

Behind Jacob were several guards, all brandishing whips. By the time Carissa arrived, Samuel had already left in disgrace.

Upon hearing Jacob's report, Violet felt quite regretful. She had two slaps she wanted to deliver to Samuel, but hadn't been able to. It was very frustrating.

Since that day, he had not appeared again, which made Carissa worry that he might direct his anger towards Leona.

A week or so later, Travis' two senior guild members arrived on horseback.

Upon hearing that they had arrived, Travis asked, "You came by horse?"

"We rented them."

Both senior guild members were dressed similarly, in thin cotton jackets with short, coarse fabric in

stone-blue color. They were around twenty years old, but their

appearance was quite aged, with

rough skin from daily labor.

Travis led his senior guild members to meet Carissa. As soon as Carissa saw them, she recognized them immediately and promptly saluted in greeting. "Leah, Alana, it's good to see you."

Violet quickly followed suit, offering her greetings as well.

The two young women had been taken in by Travis' master. Leah was found in a basket, and Alana was found with nothing but a stone lock in her possession. Therefore, Leah's birth name was actually "Basket". But as she grew up, someone started to call her Leah, and everyone followed suit as "Basket" was an unappealing name.

Alana's name meant rock, and there had been no changes in her name.

"Hello, Carissa. Hello, Vivi," the two young women greeted with a dignified yet respectful demeanor, not feeling any inferiority just because they had entered a royal residence. Leah asked, "Has Shit Stick caused you any issues? If so, please let us know, and I will deal with him."

Travis quickly covered her mouth. "Leah, I'm the training instructor here. You can't call me that, or the soldiers will refuse to follow my orders, and I won't receive my instructor's stipend."

Money was still important, so Leah changed her approach.

"Alright, I got it, Travis."

Travis' nickname was Rod.

Carissa and Violet were puzzled. Why was Travis now being called "Shit Stick" instead of just "Rod"?

They learned that after receiving a reward, Travis had bought many cosmetics and had been reprimanded by his master for being a "shitty stick", thus earning the nickname "Shit Stick".

Chapter 422

In front of them, Travis reiterated, "From now on, in the prince's residence, you must call me by my name. I'm Travis-not Rod, not Troublemaker, and definitely not Shit Stick!"

Violet shrugged. "You've been known as Rod for a long time. But if it makes you happy to be called Travis, then so be it. In our hearts, you'll always be just a rod."

Carissa instructed someone to take Leah and Alana to freshen up, and then to buy a few sets of clothing. They would head to Gracehold Estate early the next morning.

Since Rowan had asked Violet to deliver a prescription to Margaret at Ironridge Estate, they would need to pass by Valor Estate. As they passed Valor Estate, Violet peeked through the curtain but saw nothing unusual, so she ignored it.

After delivering the prescription to the steward at Ironridge Estate, they didn't linger and quickly proceeded to Gracehold Estate.

In the carriage, Carissa went over the important points with Leah and Alana about what to be aware of once they entered the residence.

"We don't take the initiative to hit anyone, or make the first move. However, do not let that courtesan concubine approach the duchess. If Mr. Langley comes to the duchess' room to vent his anger and causes her to be heartbroken, you need to escort him out.

"Monitor the medicine she takes daily, and inspect her food with a silver needle. I know Alana understands some pharmacology. Arrange for the appropriate soups and such, but you don't need to make them yourself.

"And remember, if there is any urgent situation that you cannot handle or is difficult to manage, ensure that one of you stays with the duchess while the other comes to inform me immediately." Carissa provided detailed instructions, and advised Leah and Alana to minimize contact with the other people in the residence.

Although Carissa believed that Abigail wouldn't harm Leona, she was wary that the family might look down on martial people. Thus, it was unnecessary for Leah and Alana to worry about the others' opinions while carrying out their duty.

In summary, the main concerns were Samuel and Ruby.

Alana nodded in response. "Got it. Don't worry, that courtesan isn't worth much-she's as insubstantial as smoke. Just a gust of wind, and she'll disappear. You don't need to be too concerned about her."

"I know. Anyway, it's better to be cautious. There are also rules in big households. Let me tell you..."

As Carissa was speaking, a foul odor suddenly wafted in from outside, accompanied by angry shouts and curses.

Startled, she turned to see Violet leaning against the carriage window, lifting the curtain to look outside.

Carissa peered over and recognized the familiar entrance-it was the gates of Valor Estate. The front of the estate had been smeared with excrement. The culprit was being dragged inside as he continued cursing Aurora for insulting Mary. Despite being dragged, he seemed unafraid and continued his tirade.

Violet lowered the curtain, and turned away. "It's been days, and it's still not settled. I really want to see Barrett's face right now. Will he look upset or resigned?"

Carissa agreed that the situation

had dragged on for quite a while. However, given that the Marquis of

Jadehill's household wasn't

accepting any apologies, it was likely

to continue for some time.

"You really... Why did you lift the curtain?" Carissa remarked, noting that the smell had seeped into the carriage. She opened the curtain to let in some fresh air as they exited the alley.

"Just wanted to see the commotion," Violet replied with a smile. "You can't miss out on the excitement involving a scoundrel."

Looking regretful, Alana said, "It's a waste of that manure. It would be great for fertilizing vegetables."

Leah nodded in agreement. "You're right. People in the capital are so wasteful."

At that moment, a carriage approached from the main street and turned into the lane they were on. Carissa had opened the curtain, and the person inside the carriage happened to do the same. Their eyes met, and Viola immediately ordered, "Stop!"

The carriage came to a halt in front of Carissa's carriage. Viola stepped out.

She was dressed in a crimson dress embroidered with gold threads. Her hair was styled in an elegant updo, with a hairpin inserted at an angle.

Her expression was stern; there

were dark circles under her eyes, indicating she hadn't slept well. It was likely that she had returned early from her visit to her family to

avoid the mess caused by the

excrement incident.

"Greetings, Your Grace!" Viola greeted with a bow, but her tone was cold and aloof.

Chapter 423

Carissa recalled what Violet had said.

Viola had been intent on competing with her over the dowry, and their previous encounter had ended poorly.

So, Carissa simply nodded and said calmly, "Mrs. Warren."

Viola's face was grim, and her tone was sharp, "Is the princess consort so idle that she comes early in the morning to witness the commotion at the Warren family's residence? Or did the princess consort forget the way back to her own residence, mistaking the Warren family's residence for her own?"

Violet immediately started to get out of the carriage, but Carissa stopped her and then looked at Viola with a faint smile.

"Sometimes," Carissa said, "it's necessary to pay a visit to one's past and see how the unscrupulous people in the Warren family are faring. It's only a gesture of goodwill."

Viola's face turned ashen. "Who are you calling unscrupulous? Are you here to mock us for our misfortunes? If so, get out of the carriage and see for yourself! See it up close, smell it yourself. If you like, you can even go and clean it."

Carissa smiled. "I am no longer a part of the Warren family. Such filthy places are best left for you to clean, Mrs. Warren."

Viola's anger flared. "How dare you! You're a princess consort, yet you publicly degrade us like that?! Aren't you concerned about losing your dignity and becoming the subject of ridicule?"

Carissa took out a handkerchief, and waved it. "I'm not afraid of being a laughingstock. Are you, Mrs. Warren? If you're not, should I tell others that you were trying to compare dowries with me?" Viola's expression changed suddenly. How could Carissa know about that?

Then, she sneered coldly. "Ridiculous! What's there to compare with dowries? Gold and silver are just trivial things. I have nothing to compare with the princess consort. What you have, I might not. But what I have, you may not necessarily have."

Carissa gestured toward Valor Estate's gates. "Indeed, what you have, our residence does not."

As Viola's expression grew colder, Carissa continued, "Trivial as gold and silver are, they are the most cherished things by the people of the Warren family. Mrs. Warren, you must often use your dowry to supplement the family funds, don't you?"

Viola raised her chin. "I do so willingly. My husband loves and respects me, and I am willing to give everything for him. That is the duty of a wife."

Carissa regarded her for a moment before saying, "I know Sebastian from Arcane Sanctum. Would you like me to recommend you so he can take a look at your brain?"

"What's wrong with what I said? Your Grace, if my husband didn't want you, you should consider the reasons for that."

Carissa was so angry, it almost made her laugh. "Your husband didn't want me? Have you forgotten that it was I who requested the edict for our divorce? Viola, let me be clear it

it was I who rejected him. Your beloved husband was discarded by me. I threw him away like garbage. Is that clear enough?"

There was no point in arguing with a fool.

Carissa let the curtain fall. "Let's go!"

The coachman cracked his whip, and the horses started moving. Viola hurriedly stepped back, her head buzzing with anger.

How dare Carissa speak about Barrett like that? How dare she?!

Inside the carriage, Alana looked puzzled. "Are the rules in the capital really this strange? Shouldn't we retaliate when she speaks like that?"

Carissa folded and put away her

Yet

handkerchief in the capital, verbal disputes are quite common. Most are filled with honeyed words and hidden schemes. Viola's blatant hostility makes it reasonable for me to order a couple of slaps. However, I don't have a servant with me, so I can't handle it personally, nor can I let you two take action."

Violet's identity was special, tied to a prominent family. They couldn't afford to offend Oliver and the Prince family because of Carissa.

As for Leah and Alana, they were there to protect Leona. It was best for them to avoid offending anyone to ensure no one would trouble them—not even a little.

"We won the argument without needing to fight. Didn't you see how her face turned purple with anger?" Violet remarked.

She propped her chin on her hand.

"Actually, hitting women isn't very

satisfying. After we've been on the battlefield, we don't want to resort to physical violence lightly. When I slapped Ruby the other day, it felt meaningless. Viola doesn't know martial arts either, so beating her wouldn't be gratifying."

Alana pondered for a moment. "But I really wanted to hit her."

She added, "However, once we're at Gracehold Estate, I won't hit anyone."

Chapter 424

Carissa sighed in relief. She had been worried that if she mentioned wanting to hit Viola, Leah and Alana might start a fight if they encountered something displeasing at Gracehold Estate. She believed the two young women would understand the limits.

Carissa found Viola's behavior quite baffling. To be honest, she hadn't wronged Viola much. So why the intense hatred?

However, after a bit of thought, she realized it was probably because Rebecca had spoken ill of her in front of Viola. It seemed that Rebecca harbored a deep resentment toward her marriage into the royal family.

Yet, Viola had once been a wife in the Farrell family. With such an open-minded and far-sighted man like her late husband, Thomas, why had she learned nothing from him?

Upon arriving at Gracehold Estate, Abigail hurried to welcome them into the sitting room. She felt a bit anxious, especially since Samuel had caused a scene at Hell Monarch Estate a few days ago. She was worried someone from Rafael's household might come to seek retribution.

After waiting for a few days without anyone coming to pay them a visit, she was suddenly alarmed when informed that the Hell Monarch's princess consort had arrived. Her heart jumped to her throat.

Her concern was that while her son's career seemed bright, there were rumors that the Oversight Department was preparing to bring charges against him. If the people from Rafael's household also came to demand justice, the Oversight Department might use this as an opportunity to flood the court with accusations against Samuel.

The Oversight Department was known for acting quickly on such matters. But this time, despite several days of deliberation, they hadn't yet submitted their formal complaint. The delay had made Abigail increasingly anxious.

Abigail felt uneasy, and began with an apology, "A few days ago, my son acted thoughtlessly and caused a disturbance at the royal residence. I am here to apologize on his behalf. Please don't take his behavior to heart."

This time, Carissa's attitude was less forgiving than before.

"Your son is well-educated and comes from a noble family. He even achieved the honor of being one of the top scholars through the national examination. However, his youth and success have led him to be arrogant and dismissive of others, which will surely lead to trouble and ruin his future."

Abigail's expression stiffened. "Yes, Your Grace. Your words are very true."

"Honest advice is often unpleasant to hear," Carissa said, recognizing that Abigail might not appreciate her words. "I will not say much more, but the fact that your son dared to make a scene at Hell Monarch Estate shows that he never held the duchess in high regard. Now that she is pregnant with your family's heir, I hope you will pay her more attention and care."

"Of course," Abigail hurriedly replied.

"Today, I have brought two people who know a bit about medicine. They will be responsible for Leona's diet and herbal remedies from now on. Once Leona safely gives birth will take them away. They will not receive a monthly stipend from your household-I will cover their expenses myself. This is my small gesture of goodwill towards my

cousin. I trust you will not refuse."

Abigail understood that Carissa was genuinely concerned for Leona's wellbeing. If the people Carissa sent were knowledgeable about medicine, they could help avoid some of the dirty tricks that might be used behind closed doors.

Now that her son had achieved

success, there were many things she, as his mother, could not say. Samuel's arrogance had grown, and

there

was no telling him otherwise. Having people sent by Carissa to look after Leona was indeed a good

thing.

"In that case, you shouldn't have to cover their monthly stipend, Your Grace. Since they are serving Leona, it is only right that our family bear the expense," Abigail said.

Carissa shook her head. "There is no need for that. They're not servants, but were specifically hired by me. Naturally, I will provide their salaries."

The statement was meant to inform Abigail not to treat them as mere servants. By not receiving a stipend from the Earl of Gracehold's family, Leah and Alana wouldn't be subject to their household's arrangements.

Abigail understood the underlying message and said, "Then, we shall proceed as you have instructed, Your Grace. I am most grateful."

After some more discussion, Carissa still didn't see Leona, so she asked, "Why hasn't Leona come out yet?"

Abigail quickly ordered, "Check on Leona again. Tell her to hurry."

"No need for that. She's pregnant, so let her avoid unnecessary movement. Please lead me to see her," Carissa said.

Knowing that the two cousins likely had matters to discuss privately, Abigail instructed a maid to guide them to Leona.

Chapter 425

Carissa looked at Leona's swollen, red eyes, which she was trying to hide behind a fan.

With a sigh, Carissa said, "So, you knew I was here, but still didn't want to see me?"

Leona replied with a nasal tone, "Cari, my eyes are in no condition to be seen."

Carissa glanced at her. "You're right. They're swollen so badly."

"Cari..." Leona's voice choked up again. "Because of that incident, he insults me every day. How can he be so cruel?"

Carissa frowned. "If he insults you, why don't you insult him back?"

"I..." Leona's tears fell once more. "I don't know how."

Carissa was at a loss. She turned to Alana. "Alana, do you know how to insult someone?"

"Oh, I'm very good at it," Alana replied.

"Good. From now on, if Mr. Langley comes and insults the duchess, you insult him back. Remember one principle: if he insults you, insult him back. If he gets physical, you get physical."
"Got it," Alana said.

"Cari, who are these two?" Leona asked, wiping her tears away and looking at the newcomers curiously.

"They are senior guild members from one of the guilds in Meadow Ridge. They know some martial arts and medicine, so they can oversee your meals and help you deal with anyone you can't handle."
"Thank you, Cari." Leona's tears flowed freely again, as if there were no end to them.

"Enough, stop crying!" Carissa said, her temper flaring. "Crying all the time isn't good for the baby. You're a duchess and married into an earl's household, which is already a step-down. Why are you still being treated so poorly? What kind of duchess is so helpless? I hope you can learn something from Jessica. Although she's made her husband's family dislike her, at least she hasn't suffered as you have." After a moment, Carissa reconsidered comparing Leona to someone as heartless as Jessica.

She added, "Can't you try to be a bit more resolute? You're a duchess and the wife of the family's heir! No one in this household should be able to truly bully you. Don't be so weak."

"I just can't stand my husband's attitude. Why does he keep taking out his anger on me for that woman's sake?" Leona said, her voice trembling.

Carissa gave her a light pat on the head. "Just pretend he's dead, alright? For your own sake and for the baby's, dry your tears. If you keep crying, I won't come to see you again." Leona dried her tears and nodded. "I understand."

Carissa knew Leona understood, but was aware the latter might not be able to follow through. Otherwise, Carissa wouldn't have needed to send people to help. After comforting Leona a while more, Carissa bid farewell and returned to her residence.

At Valor Estate, the man who had thrown the excrement was caught. Once subdued, he was given a severe beating.

Viola was still seething from her encounter with Carissa. When she returned home, she discovered that the servants were kicking a commoner. Upon inquiry, she learned that he was the one who had thrown the

immediately ordered that one of his arms be broken, then had him

thrown out.

As she watched the man scream in agony, still shouting accusations against the Warren family, she was enraged. She stormed directly to Aurora's room.

Aurora was practicing martial arts in the garden, her face covered by a light veil. When she saw Viola storm in with a menacing entourage, Aurora drew her sword and pointed it at Viola, her voice icy as she demanded, "Get out!"

Viola was seething with frustration.

❧

Clenching her fists, she yelled, "If you're so capable, then why don't you just kill everyone who insults you? The daily dung thrown at our doorstep has turned our family's residence into a laughingstock-no, not just a laughingstock, but the subject of everyone's scorn! This mess is all your doing!"

Aurora sheathed her sword and retorted coldly, "And how isn't this related to you? If you hadn't caused trouble that day, would I be so angry now?"

"In the first place, you were in the wrong! Even now, when things are difficult in the residence, you have money but refuse to contribute. I've kept clear accounts of the expenses I've covered. Despite the large dowry

you received from my husband, you

haven't contributed a single coin! You have no regard for the family, but you expect to be well cared for, with your every whim attended to, and all your maids and servants kept. How is that fair? I'm supporting the household, but I'm also expected to support you. How is that reasonable?"

"It's because you're foolish!" Aurora huffed. "Try removing the people from my rooms, and see if I don't turn the estate upside down!"

"You're simply going too far!" Viola's face reddened with rage. "Do you know, even Carissa came today to watch the commotion at our residence!"

Chapter 426

Aurora's eyes narrowed, her entire body stiffening as a fierce intent flashed from her gaze. But she quickly composed herself, adopting a nonchalant demeanor.

"So what? If she wants to watch the commotion, that's her business."

Viola choked momentarily. "What?! Aurora, I'm begging you. Can you please go to Jadehill Estate and apologize again? Your actions have not only affected the Warren family, but also impacted my husband's career!"

"Your husband?" Aurora sneered coldly. "You call him that so easily."

"What's wrong with how I address him? Isn't he my husband?"

Aurora's voice grew colder, "Yes, he is your husband. So, if you want to plan his future, apologize, or contribute money, that's your responsibility."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Aurora drew her sword slightly, her expression steely. "That means you should leave. Don't provoke me."

Viola trembled with rage. She struggled to understand how, despite being a member of the family and the legitimate, primary wife, Aurora dared to be so audacious and rude to her.

Viola had told Carissa that she was willing to contribute her dowry to support the Warren family, but internally, she felt deeply frustrated.

"Aurora, my elder brother is the general of the Hell Monarch Army, and I'm a lady from the Earl of Silverstone's family. How dare you be so disrespectful to me?!"

Aurora chuckled with a hint of scorn. "What? Are you going to have your brother bring the Hell Monarch Army to deal with me? Or do you think your family can bully me, a mere wife granted by the king?"

Viola felt utterly defeated. "You're nothing but a scoundrel. I can't believe my husband ever had feelings for you. You must have seduced him on the battlefield. You're just as despicable as Carissa. Both of you are shameless."

Aurora laughed. "Well, that must be a disappointment for you. On the battlefield, he was the one who showed interest in me first. He was the one who said he liked me. And comparing me to Carissa? What's she even worth? She's just a shameless, once-divorced woman who remarried."

As she spoke of Carissa, her eyes remained fixed on Viola, with a pointed and unmistakable implication. Viola's eyes brimmed with tears of anger. "I will definitely tell my husband about this tonight. Just you wait!"

"Fine, I'll be waiting!" Aurora turned and headed back into her residence, leaving Viola in the courtyard.

As she entered the residence, Aurora added one final remark, "A once-divorced woman who remarries lacks any shame."

Viola cried as she turned and left, heading straight to Rebecca's quarters. She dried her tears. Her mother-in-law must be taking her medicine, and as the daughter-in-law, it was her duty to attend to her illness.

Though Viola couldn't get Sebastian

to treat Rebecca, she had used her family connections to bring another renowned doctor to attend to her mother-in-law. However, her

mother-in-law insisted on

Snowdrop Pills, so Viola had to

have

spend money each month to

her natal family purchase and deliver

them.

Rebecca was generally satisfied with her current daughter-in-law, who was dutiful and considerate. If it weren't for Aurora, Rebecca wouldn't have to worry about Barrett's future. With Viola's family backing him, he would surely be thriving.

However, in terms of service, Viola was nowhere near Carissa's level. Carissa would sleep in the same room when Rebecca fell ill, and if there was any discomfort at night, Carissa would immediately attend to it. Viola was unwilling to do so; she would cling to Barrett every night, fearing he might be summoned by Aurora.

Thus, Rebecca harbored both resentment and nostalgia towards Carissa. When Carissa was around, there was never a shortage of money in the house. Seasonal

clothes, silks and jewels, and three

meals a day with snacks-living

luxury had seemed completely

natural then.

Carissa never complained. When Charlotte sometimes grumbled about the situation, Carissa would say that since her husband was busy fighting enemies on the battlefield, she shouldn't add to his worries about home.

A woman from a military family had this kind of awareness-war was the most important thing, so she took care of every detail in the household.

Now, even though Viola used her dowry to supplement the household, she often spoke of reducing staff and cutting costs. While meals were still provided, snacks had disappeared, and even the daily meals were far less sumptuous than before.

Moreover, due to Aurora's harsh words toward Mary, Valor Estate was filled with the stench of excrement daily.

Viola's management of the household left much to be desired. The servants were lazy and neglectful, and she could not control them. With daily incidents of excrement being thrown, she couldn't come up with a solution.

If it were Carissa handling things...

Well, if Carissa were in charge, the Warren family would be prominently featured on the donation list instead of being the target of such disgrace!

Chapter 427

On the following morning, during the court assembly, Irvin and his deputy, accompanied by several senior inspectors of the Oversight Department, presented a series of reports.

The reports accused Samuel of consorting with a courtesan while his legitimate wife was pregnant, favoring his concubine over his wife, and mistreating his wife.

Furthermore, they condemned the Warren family for their disrespect towards the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family, leading to public outrage. The resulting anger had led to people throwing excrement at Valor Estate. The Warren family members had caught the culprit, dragged him inside, and broken his limbs. The culprit had now filed a complaint at the Royal Citadel, confessing to the act and demanding compensation.

Barrett had not been allowed into the court and had to stand outside with lower-ranking officials. Although he was supposed to be out of earshot of the discussions, the loud arguments from the inspectors penetrated outside, and he overheard them denouncing him.

His heart sank.

He bitterly regretted his decision to abandon Carissa for Aurora. Now, not only was his household in disarray, but his future also seemed bleak.

Samuel was still present in court, arguing and refusing to accept the inspectors' charges. He prided himself on his extensive knowledge and was confident he could argue his case against the inspectors. However, the inspectors of the Oversight Department were skilled debaters, renowned for their fierce and passionate arguments. Despite Samuel's attempts to quote historical examples of courtesans with exceptional talents, and even their contributions to the poetry and painting industry, his arguments were futile.

The Oversight Department focused on one thing: Samuel had broken the law and violated the late emperor's edict.

Irvin's voice was stern as he declared, "No matter how talented that courtesan might be, your actions in taking a concubine while your legitimate wife is pregnant show utter disregard for the law.

"Moreover, the late king issued repeated edicts forbidding officials from frequenting places like entertainment parlors and brothels. It's one thing to know her, but to bring her into your home? No official in our era has dared act in such blatant defiance of the law! Even those who are brazen only secretly buy houses outside the city and have them live there. But you, a scholar, are openly defying the law. You knew the law and broke it, which makes your crime even worse.

"Your affair with the courtesan has become common knowledge. The public now believes that officials are all drawn to such places, thinking they are only interested in indulgence and corruption. You have tarnished the reputation of our officials and committed a crime that cannot be forgiven."

"Your Majesty, I beseech you to severely punish Samuel Langley to set an example for all officials," the Oversight Department inspectors implored, their voices firm and resolute as they knelt.

Their plea was emphasized with a final, powerful addition, "And may all officials present who have never visited an entertainment parlor or brothel also plead with Your Majesty to punish Samuel Langley." The impact of these words was devastating.

Who among the court officials dared to remain standing? Anyone who did not kneel was implied to have visited such establishments. Therefore, regardless of their true actions all present had no choice but to kneel and join in the plea for Samuel's severe punishment.

Among them, the voice of the Minister of Justice, Rafael, was the most authoritative.

Salvador, who had previously been unaware of the situation, was already fuming with rage. Seeing the entire court kneeling and pleading for Samuel's punishment while Samuel stood there with an expression of defiant stubbornness, Salvador's fury exploded.

"Samuel Langley, do you not know your crime?" Salvador roared.

Even though Samuel still felt he had done nothing wrong, the overwhelming presence of the king forced him to slowly kneel. He hid his resentment as he stuttered, "Y-Your Majesty... I... I know my mistake."

"It is not just a mistake; it is a crime,"

Salvador snapped, his anger intensifying as he took in Samuel's reaction. It seems you still do not understand where your fault lies. From today, you are dismissed from all your duties. Go home and reflect on your actions."

Samuel's face turned ashen. He had not anticipated such a severe punishment, expecting only a few reprimands.

In his panic, he pleaded, "Your Majesty, I know my mistake—no, I understand my crime now! I beg for your mercy!"

"Take him away!" Salvador waved his hand dismissively.

Samuel, once a prized scholar of the king, had tarnished his own reputation so badly that Salvador couldn't stand the sight of him. Hot

was swiftly removed by the palace guards, his pleas and cries echoing down the hall, completely bereft of the proud demeanor of a top scholar.

"Summon Barrett Warren!" Salvador ordered angrily.

Barrett entered the hall, his face pale and eyes dark with exhaustion.

Salvador looked at him, remembering how much trust he had placed in Barrett, and how many times he had tried to support him. But the man was like useless mud—no matter how hard Salvador tried, he couldn't make Barrett stand firm.

Chapter 428

Salvador's roar echoed throughout the court, "Who do you think you are?! How dare you set up your own torture chambers and break the limbs of a civilian? If the Warren family can do that, why do we even need the Royal Citadel, the Ministry of Justice, or the Supreme Court?"

Barrett had no knowledge of this matter. But given the Oversight Department's accusations, it was clear that someone had gone to the Royal Citadel to lodge a complaint.

He had no other defense to offer, and could only plead repeatedly, "Your Majesty, forgive me. Please, Your Majesty, calm your anger."

"Calm my anger?" Salvador's voice rose in fury. "I told you to take Aurora and apologize to the Marquis of Jadehill's family, but when the marquis refused you entry, you simply walked away. Is this your attitude towards giving someone an apology? Not only did you fail to earn forgiveness, you also had the audacity to vent your frustrations on the common people?! You deserve to be pelted with dung, and I almost want to do it myself!"

Salvador's anger left him speaking recklessly. Barrett had truly disappointed him, far beyond his expectations. If Salvador hadn't personally arranged the marriage and recognized Barrett's military achievements, he wouldn't have promoted him at all. The intention was to give him a chance and salvage Salvador's own reputation, but it turned out Barrett was utterly unworthy.

Not a single official in the court came forward to speak on his behalf, not even Viola's cousin, the Ministry of Finance's senior administrator. Defending Barrett would mean offending the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family and inciting public outrage.

Barrett was left with the grim realization that he might not even keep his position in the Capital Guard. He felt a mix of complex and difficult emotions, nearly to the point of tears.

He choked out, "I understand my crime, Your Majesty. I beg for your punishment. I will certainly go again to apologize to the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family and seek their forgiveness."

Salvador's chest heaved with anger. He thought of the old general from the Warren family-if his spirit were watching from the afterlife and saw how useless his descendants were, he would probably be rolling in his grave.

Salvador declared coldly, "Barrett, you have failed to manage your household, allowed chaos in your residence, and neglected your duties. I hereby demote you to the ninth rank, and you're now an

ordinary guard. If you make any further mistakes, I will reclaim your estate. Barrett, this is your final chance."

Barrett felt his mind go blank and his face turned pale as death. He knelt on the ground with difficulty and said, "Thank you for your grace, Your Majesty!"

He remained on the ground for a

long time, afraid to rise, feeling the weight of every gaze in the court upon him. What made him most uncomfortable was the presence of the Hell Monarch. He didn't want to face Rafael, or more accurately, he didn't want Rafael to see him in such a pitiable state.

On the evening of the second day after his wedding, Barrett had been ambushed in the back courtyard of his estate by a group of men. They had placed a sack over his head and beaten him mercilessly. He knew it was Rafael's doing, and he knew it was because of that brief, tense exchange they had on their mutual wedding day as they passed each other.

However, without evidence, Barrett dared not file a report. Revealing it would not only be humiliating, as it would suggest that the Warren

family's residence had as much net

protection as a sieve. It would also expose him as a military general who had been covertly attacked in his own home, without even

knowing who was behind it.

If he had proof, however, that would be a different story. He would waste no time accusing Rafael of abusing his status as a prince and war hero to sneak into another official's estate and assault a court official.

"Get out!" Salvador's voice thundered above him.

Barrett quickly stood up and bowed deeply as he slowly retreated. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Rafael standing there, his gaze filled with mockery. Barrett felt a surge of shame and anger, wishing he could just die on the spot.

Back at Valor Estate, he headed straight for Aurora's room in Forsaken Hall. The courtyard hadn't always been called that. Aurora had renamed it after their falling out, just to spite him.

When Barrett stepped into the courtyard, a place he typically avoided at all costs, Aurora's first reaction was shock. But as she noticed the dark fury simmering in his eyes, she instinctively took a step back. "Why are you here?" she asked.

Chapter 429

Barrett advanced and grabbed Aurora's wrist. "Let's go. We're going to Jadehill Estate."

Aurora pulled her hand away forcefully. "I'm not going!"

Barrett's expression darkened as he stood in the courtyard. "If you don't come willingly, I'll drag you there! You can either walk, or I'll tie you up and make you carry thorn branches on your back."

Carrying thorn branches on one's back was a traditional act of penance, where an individual who had committed a serious offense would bear thorny branches as a symbolic gesture of remorse and submission. The practice was a way to visibly demonstrate their sincere repentance and willingness to atone for their wrongs.

"You wouldn't dare!" Aurora's anger flared, her voice trembling with indignation. "All I did was say a few words-what crime have I committed that's so unforgivable I need to beg for forgiveness with thorn branches on my back?"

Barrett gritted his teeth in frustration. "You know what you've done! Your crimes are so severe, carrying those thorn branches would be a mercy! You deserve to be executed!"

He glanced at the maids nearby and roared, "Get out!"

Terrified, the maids scrambled to leave.

Aurora stared at him with reddened eyes. "You don't treat me with even a fraction of the kindness you once did! You clearly loathe me. If that's the case, why did you marry me?" Barrett was on the brink of breaking down. He shouted at Aurora in frustration, "I was a fool! I was blind! I mistook you for someone honorable and courageous, but you're not!"

Aurora covered her ears. "Shut up! Clearly, you misjudged. You thought Carissa would accept me, which is why you married me. But when Carissa refused to accept that you were marrying another wife, you revealed your true colors. Your affection for me was nothing but a passing fancy! You're heartless and unfaithful! Barrett, I was wrong about you."

Barrett's face turned ashen, as if her words had struck the very core of his being.

Standing upright, he said coldly, "I won't dwell on the past with you, but you must come with me to Jadehill Estate today. And as for the person you broke the limbs of yesterday, you need to compensate him. If not, you'll be thrown into prison."

"Stop talking nonsense! I didn't hurt anyone yesterday." As Aurora spoke, she suddenly recalled what had happened on the previous day and asked, "Did Viola claim I did it?"

Barrett's anger flared. "Don't play

dumb! The person who pelted the estate with dung yesterday-you were the one who caught him and broke his limbs. He's already reported the incident to the Royal Citadel. You'll be visited by their officials soon enough.

"This morning, the inspectors presented a case against me, accusing me of poor household management and allowing my servants to harm civilians. Besides you, who else in the household is so violent?" Aurora's face turned pale with anger. "It wasn't me! I didn't even step out of the courtyard yesterday! If you don't believe me, go ask the steward or anyone who was with me."

Her agitation suddenly ceased as she fixed him with a cold stare. "Why don't you ask Viola? Maybe it was her who had people do it."

Barrett raised a hand dismissively. "Impossible! Viola is gentle and virtuous. She wouldn't do something so brutal."

Aurora's heart sank with cold despair. "So, in your eyes, only I am capable of such cruelty, while Viola is a saint. Barrett, oh, Barrett, you're absolutely right-you're truly blind."

Barrett refused to believe that Viola could have given such orders. He was adamant that it must have been Aurora.

"This isn't the first time you've done something like this. We both know what you're capable of. You dare to act cruelly, but can't face the consequences. You have no one to blame but yourself for being despised."

Aurora, seething with rage, shouted, "Bring Viola to Forsaken Hall and have her recount everything that happened yesterday!"

A trembling maid entered, her lips quivering as she said, "G-General Warren, if you're referring to the person throwing dung at the estate yesterday, it was indeed... indeed Madam Viola who ordered his arm to be broken."

Another maid stepped forward and added, "She's right, General Warren. It was Madam Viola. But she only instructed that his arm be broken, not his leg. It was his own foul mouth that led to..." Barrett took a deep breath, his eyes filled with disbelief.

Viola was behind this?

Aurora watched his reaction, feeling

no satisfaction but instead an increased sense of grievance. Her expression was filled with bitter

sarcasm as she said, "That's r

so-called dignified and virtuous wife you speak of."

Chapter 430

Barrett was struck once again by the crushing weight of his situation.

Suddenly, he felt as if he had lost all sense of direction. His energy and spirit seemed to drain away, leaving him feeling as if he were adrift with nowhere to turn.

He had previously viewed Viola as dignified and virtuous, a cultured and considerate woman who was also highly respectful towards the servants. After all, she came from the Earl of Silverstone's family and had married into the Farrell family-a family of military prestige, with Thomas Farrell being a respected figure among the generals.

He had expected Viola to be as honorable and forthright as her late husband, someone who would be both courageous and kind-hearted.

Yet now, just a single order from her had led to the breaking of a man's arm.

While Barrett also resented the people who had thrown excrement at the estate, giving them a beating and letting them go after would have been good enough.

Why go so far as to break their limbs?

It wasn't a matter of compassion-it was about avoiding further public outrage and trying to quell the situation quickly. Now that the man's limbs were broken, Barrett feared that this incident would only escalate.

He stared at Aurora, his tone unwaveringly stern. "I'll check with Vi. When I come back, you'll still need to apologize."

Aurora managed a bitter smile. "Vi? It's been a long time since you've called me Rory. Now, it's just my name. Barrett, I truly made a mistake."

Barrett turned away, remaining silent for a moment before saying, "Who hasn't?"

Aurora stifled a sob, quickly swallowing the sound. She refused to bend or break. She had to maintain her dignity. Yet, the walls she had built around her heart, once fortified by his past affection, were crumbling.

The news of Carissa and Rafael's marriage had already started the collapse.

How could she ever regard Viola as a threat?

Aurora had never seen Viola as a rival because she knew, deep down, that Viola would never compare to Carissa in Barrett's eyes.

What was lost would always be the best thing.

Aurora's true rival would always be Carissa, never Viola. Viola didn't even warrant comparison.

Barrett strode out with determined steps.

Viola was already aware that the man whose legs had been broken had reported the incident to the authorities, hence why the Royal Citadel had sent officials to the residence.

When the steward reported that the officials had arrived, Viola panicked. She avoided meeting the Royal Citadel representatives and hid inside the house, instructing the steward to handle the situation.

Barrett arrived just in time to

overhear the steward briefing the chief constable, "We never intended to break his limbs. We only meant to give him a good beating to teach him a lesson. Unfortunately, the guards were too harsh."

Barrett approached and nodded respectfully, then asked, "Is there any possibility of resolving this matter amicably?"

The chief constable returned the gesture. "General Warren!"

After addressing him, the chief

constable continued sternly, "Whether this can be resolved depends on your negotiations. Our superiors have instructed us that if a resolution can be reached, that's best. If not, both the instigator and the assailant will be sent to prison."

Barrett furrowed his brow. "But the man was throwing dung at my gates! He provoked and insulted us first. Given the circumstances, shouldn't compensation for medical expenses and an apology from the assailants suffice?"

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The chief constable replied, "Rest assured, General Warren. We will take strict action against him for throwing dung at your gate. Once recovers, we will detain him. However, the beating he received, resulting in a broken arm and leg, is also something we must address according to the law."

Barrett lowered his voice, "I'd appreciate it if you could help me handle the situation. I will..."

The chief constable took a step back, a cold smirk forming at the corners of his mouth. "General Warren, are you attempting to bribe me? That won't do. We handle cases with integrity and strictness, and we don't accept bribes."

Feeling awkward, Barrett could only watch as the chief constable's stern demeanor confirmed his fears. He knew that the Royal Citadel's governor, Anthony, would not let this matter slide easily.

Anthony's sister was the late wife of the Sinclair family's deceased second son. She was also Ryan's mother. Anthony would likely be eager to stand up for Carissa.

Barrett had no choice but to send the steward and the guards who had participated in the beating to the Royal Citadel. Before they left, he gave the steward a meaningful glance.

The steward's face turned pale, and after hesitating for a moment, he followed the Royal Citadel officials.