

War Song 471

Chapter 471

Sebastian pulled out a sheet of paper, listing various drugs and poisons, along with their effects and side effects. He showed it to them briefly before explaining each one in turn.

The first was called Hellfire. It caused hallucinations, magnifying a person's deepest obsessions and thereby granting them greater strength. However, it required an antidote. The woman, after killing her family, had attempted to chase down the neighbors. But when the officials arrived, she had calmed down. So, Hellfire was not the cause.

The second was called Shadecap. This was a type of fungus that could induce hallucinations and madness, potentially leading to self-harm or violence. Before such effects occurred, the person would display symptoms like crying or laughing uncontrollably and moving erratically. Shadecap wouldn't give someone enough strength to kill twelve people.

The third was Soulgrip Threadworm. Also known as a parasitic worm, the parasite would enter the brain and allow another person to control their actions, although the controlled individual would retain memories of the event.

Sebastian continued, "The most crucial point is that a Soulgrip Threadworm causes hallucinations and can elicit tremendous and frenzied strength. During the period of control, the person would appear as though they had transformed, with their body and limbs under the controller's command. If the controller is a skilled martial artist, then the person would exhibit similar strength and martial prowess."

After hearing Sebastian's explanation, Patrick and the two deputy ministers exchanged glances, their brows furrowing in contemplation.

"But how did a Soulgrip Threadworm enter her head?" Patrick asked.

Sebastian replied, "Through food or medicine. The worms might have been inside her brain for a long time, as they grow slowly. It usually takes six months to a year for them to mature and become effective." Patrick said, "Just because such a thing exists, doesn't mean she was infected with them."

"I'm here just to clarify a few things. This case still has its mysteries, doesn't it? For example, why was she able to kill twelve people-her own family members, no less-so easily? The most plausible explanation seems to be the Soulgrip Threadworm."

Rafael asked the most crucial question, "If it is indeed a Soulgrasp Threadworm, do you have the confidence to remove it from the woman's body?"

"No need for me. My apprentice, Ivy, can handle it. She is deeply knowledgeable about parasitic toxins and is very familiar with them," Sebastian replied.

Rafael nodded. "Thank you, Sebastian."

Then, Rafael turned to Matthew and said, "Please have someone escort Sebastian back."

Matthew personally saw him out. When he returned, everyone fell into silence.

Matthew asked, "Your Highness, should we return the case for reexamination?"

Patrick responded first, "With the doubts resolved, it should indeed be returned for reexamination."

Rafael, however, shook his head,

"No. This case is more complex than it seems. Mr. Lloyd, I suggest that both the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Justice submit a joint petition to the king, requesting him to appoint a special investigator for investigation."

Patrick was taken aback. Generally, when there were doubts about a case, it was returned for reexamination. If a special investigator was appointed, it would imply distrust in the local governor. Could it be that the Hell Monarch had uncovered information unknown to the Ministry of Justice?

Realizing this, Patrick immediately

said to the two deputy ministers, "Keep this matter confidential for now. Don't utter a word to anyone, especially regarding the Soulgrasp Threadworm. We will decide after submitting a joint petition to the king."

Those present understood the

gravity of the situation. The evidence was questionable, and the victims were respected locals. The whole family was wiped out and the case had caused a big stir, which, suggested someone might be manipulating the situation.

They had to handle this case carefully, or they could lose their jobs.

After thinking it over, Patrick broke into a cold sweat and bowed to Rafael. "I apologize for any offense, Your Highness. I hope you can forgive me."

Rafael replied, "Your urgency is due to public pressure to convict the accused woman quickly, Mr. Lloyd. But rushing this could lead to mistakes."

Patrick wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Your careful approach is admirable, Your Highness. Fortunately, you have delayed things. If we had followed the initial ruling, it might have caused bigger problems." Rafael warned, "Being in a high position means you need to be extra cautious, especially with your daughter in the palace. Any mistake could be costly."

"Yes, of course!" Patrick murmured, his previous anxiety and agitation now replaced by a calm demeanor.

Chapter 472

After the case was reported to Salvador, he appointed Patrick as a special investigator to investigate the matter in Brightmoor District. Ivy accompanied him.

The fact that the investigation was being conducted by a special investigator personally appointed by the king, and one who was the head of the Ministry of Justice no less, would manage to stir some doubt among the enraged populace.

Kyle, too, made a rare public statement regarding the case, outlining its ambiguities. Previously, the scholars who had condemned the situation had done so fueled by the public's anger. Their passionate outcry was driven by a wish for justice for the deceased, and to protect traditional family roles and authority.

But now that Kyle had spoken up about the case's doubts, the scholars also changed their tune. They no longer asserted anything with certainty, but expressed hope that the investigation by the special investigator would bring about the truth so that the dead may rest in peace.

Yuvan had not anticipated such a result.

They believed that either the review would be rejected or the case would be sent back for reexamination. Regardless of the outcome, Rafael's reputation would be irreparably tarnished, and he might even lose his position as the head of the Supreme Court.

Yet, they had sent a special investigator to investigate instead.

"I underestimated Rafael," Yuvan said coldly.

"Don't worry, Your Highness. No matter who investigates, they won't uncover that the woman has a threadworm in her brain."

Yuvan said, "In that case, Rafael will be cleared of any involvement. Whether or not the guilty woman is sentenced to death, it's the special investigator who will determine her fate. Do you know who this envoy is? It's Mr. Lloyd from the Ministry of Justice. Once he makes a ruling, there's no need to report it to the Supreme Court. He has the authority to execute her without further review. Even if the poisoning is revealed later, Rafael will remain unaffected."

Moreover, Yuvan didn't want to oppose the Lloyd family, especially with Sylvia within the palace. The Lloyd family had a history in public service, and if the investigation were to dig deep, it could easily lead back to him.

One must take things step by step. Having waited so many years, Yuvan couldn't afford any mistakes with this matter.

He suppressed his dissatisfaction, and said slowly, "If the threadworm remains undiscovered, at least it won't implicate the governor of Brightmoor District."

The governor of Brightmoor District was a connection he had carefully cultivated for years. It was not something he could afford to jeopardize.

"Rest assured, Your Highness. No one will be able to trace the threadworm. I am the one controlling them," Wayne said with confidence.

The special investigator arrived in Brightmoor District at the end of April.

The case had attracted widespread attention, prompting Patrick to launch a swift investigation as soon as he arrived. He even allowed the public to observe the investigation, aiming to provide transparency and reassurance. After all, the deceased's family had been known for their virtue and charity, earning the deep respect of the community.

Naturally, not just anyone could attend. Only select respected elders and scholars from the local community, along with a few ordinary citizens, were allowed to observe.

The decision was made on Rafael's advice. Since a thorough reinvestigation was necessary, it had to be transparent, allowing the public to witness the truth for themselves.

So, when Ivy lit a specific type of herb in front of the accused, Lola, everyone watched as a tiny, nearly invisible threadworm wriggled out of her nose. The threadworm was thinner than a strand of hair, white, and nearly transparent. It was

almost invisible unless seen up close.

Since Lola had been eating with her family, it was clear that the threadworm must have been introduced into her medicine. Patrick ordered the arrest of James, the physician who had been treating Lola. There was no need for an interrogation. Seeing the spectacle, James was so frightened that he immediately knelt and confessed.

He revealed that six months ago, someone had approached him. The man had given him a gold ingot and instructed him to add a powder to Lola's medicine. The man claimed it was not poison, and James had witnessed him taking the medicine himself.

The man said he knew Lola had been ill for a long time, and that her family had been virtuous and kind. He couldn't bear to see her suffering, so he provided what he claimed to be good medicine. Although James suspected it was a lie, the allure of the gold and seeing the man take the medicine himself led him to agree.

Chapter 473

To demonstrate the potency of the Soulgrasp Threadworm, Ivy ordered a chicken to be brought in. She made it swallow the threadworm, and then used medicinal smoke to stimulate the threadworm's power. The crowd watched in astonishment as the chicken went wild, pecking at anyone it encountered and flying frantically around the courtroom in a frenzied display of aggression.

Even the most renowned local fighting rooster, which was brought in to challenge the erratic chicken, lost an eye in an instant.

The chicken only calmed down after Ivy used more medicine, and it slowly threw up the Soulgrasp Threadworm.

"This creature is called the Soulgrasp Threadworm, and it's controlled by someone. When Lola ingested it, it was merely an egg. These eggs are resistant to high temperatures. Once inside the body, it will travel through the bloodstream to the brain. This process generally takes about six months, which aligns with James' account. Now that the threadworm has matured, anyone who is exposed to the activating substance or comes under someone else's control will display erratic, crazed behavior," Ivy explained.

As the crowd stared in shock, Patrick stepped forward and said, "So, someone intended to harm this family and had plotted meticulously. Lola was merely a tool in their scheme and is also a victim." The crowd was in an uproar.

Ivy cleaned up the scene, and turned to the terrified James. "You were lucky. The person who poisoned Lola didn't anticipate that anyone could extract the threadworm, or they didn't think anyone would investigate in this direction. That's why you weren't killed. But your situation has stirred suspicion. You've always been Lola's physician, and that gold ingot wasn't easy money. It might have cost you your life." James broke into a cold sweat, and collapsed onto the ground.

As the sun set and night fell, Ivy's carrier pigeon returned to Hell Monarch Estate with a brief message [First step successful, second step continues to unravel.]

In other words, Patrick wouldn't return soon. Ivy had a mission, and hinted to Patrick that the huge public reaction and the stir among the people suggested that someone might be pulling the strings behind the

scenes.

Patrick was also eager to achieve

results. He didn't want to be perceived as holding his position only because of Sylvia. If it turned out that someone was orchestrating the chaos from behind the scenes, causing a nationwide uproar and public outrage, uncovering the full extent of it could make him a hero.

Carissa was sitting nearby and working on her embroidery. She saw the pigeon courier, and remarked, "By clearing yourself from this case and uncovering the truth, you've achieved a double win." Rafael watched as her needle

moved swiftly, forming the outline of

a duck. After a moment of

distraction, he replied, "It's more

than that's a triple win. The whole court knows I insisted on a

reexamination and sending a special investigator. If someone is trying to bring me down, I'll turn their schemes to my advantage and enhance my popularity further. Let them fume."

Carissa smiled gently, and continued her embroidery.

Rafael, curious, asked, "Who is this duck for?"

Carissa answered, "It's for Leona's child. As the child's aunt, I need to show some thoughtfulness."

Rafael looked at her gesture, and

said with some difficulty, "It's thoughtful, indeed, but I think buying something might be better—perhaps a gold locket or a necklace? If want to make a gift, we have. embroiderers in the estate. Your skills are suited for weapons, not needles. This seems like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut."

Carissa gave him a look, and said, "I know you're implying my embroidery isn't that great, but Lily says I've made a lot of progress, and I actually enjoy doing this."

Rafael thought to himself that while Carissa may enjoy it, it was a pity she lacked talent.

Rafael inquired about Leona, "How is she now? Is she feeling better? Samuel's dismissal should have made him tone down his behavior, right?"

Carissa shook her head. "With all his talk of true love, how could he possibly change? Not only has he not toned down, he doesn't even visit Leona's quarters anymore."

"True love?" Rafael frowned. "Isn't that term completely tarnished? What about his other concubine? The merchant's daughter, the one whose dowry was used to redeem the courtesan."

"Since Nora entered the estate, she's barely even seen him." Carissa stopped her embroidery, her face showing irritation. "Nora is only seventeen this year. Given her family background and the difference in status with the Earl of Gracehold's family, it's nearly impossible for her to escape that cage. Isn't she just another victim of her family's schemes? Did she really want to marry Samuel as a concubine?" "Outside, that's indeed how they speak of her," Lily said as she personally brought in some soup.

Carissa replied, "I know. They say Nora is seeking to elevate her family status by becoming a concubine of an earl's household, and that she married him willingly. But whether she was truly willing or not, who cares? Who pays attention to what a woman thinks or desires? Who cares if she might just want to find a stable, ordinary husband and live a simple life?"

Rafael was touched by her words. "You have had almost no interaction with Nora, yet you speak on her behalf. You truly empathize with women, unlike some who speak of righteousness but actually devalue women the most."

Carissa was taken aback, suddenly reminded of Aurora.

Aurora had previously boasted in front of Carissa that she was a model for women everywhere, claiming she wanted to fight for women's rights. Yet deep down, Aurora held women in contempt.

Lulu entered to report, "Lady Carissa, Lady Alana has arrived."

"Quickly, show her to the sitting room," Carissa said, rising quickly.

If Alana had come this evening, something must be afoot.

Alana and Leah had occasionally visited to discuss matters, but they generally chose daytime rather than evening or night.

Although Rafael had not had much interaction with Alana during his time at Meadow Ridge, they had become acquainted after she arrived in the capital, and they were aware of each other's affiliations.

Thus, Rafael felt there was no need for any formalities between them. Since they were both from Meadow Ridge, he said, "I'll accompany you. If she's coming this late, it must be important." Alana was seated in the sitting room, and the servants had brought her coffee. She ignored its scalding temperature and drank it, clearly extremely thirsty.

When Carissa and Rafael arrived, she didn't rise but called out, "Lady Carissa, Prince Rafael."

"Greetings, Alana!" the couple greeted with a bow.

"Please sit. I'll be brief," Alana said calmly. She always approached matters with such composure-never in a rush, yet the urgency of her message might be significant.

"Alana, is something wrong with Leona?" Carissa asked as she and Rafael took their seats.

Alana nodded seriously. "Yes. As

we've discussed before, Leah and I

would generally avoid direct action, but tonight couldn't hold back. I gave that cur of a man a beating, and knocked out two of his teeth. I thought I should let you know, Lady Carissa. If that scumbag comes looking for you because of our actions, feel free to give him another slap. I barely held back tonight. Half of my anger was vented, and I'm still fuming."

Carissa asked, "If you lost your temper, he must have done something outrageous. What happened?"

"Madam Ruby was under house

arrest, but she was released recently and came to provoke Lady Leona. Initially, Leah and I didn't let her in. But today, she deliberately came, fell on the stone steps, and scraped her scalp. She went back and told that scumbag that the duchess pushed her. Even though it was a blatant lie, that scumbag believed it and came to confront the duchess angrily."

Alana then asked, "Can I have another cup of coffee? This one's finished."

Everyone was waiting for her to continue, but her sudden request for coffee caught them off guard.

Chapter 475

Lulu hurried downstairs to fetch more coffee, and poured a fresh cup for Alana.

After Alana finished her coffee, she continued, "Lady Leona had been waiting for him to come, so we didn't stop him. We thought it would be better if the couple resolved their conflicts openly. At least, before the child is born, the duchess should be in a better mood instead of crying alone every night."

Carissa became anxious. "Did he go in and insult Leona?"

"Insult her? If it was just that, I wouldn't have hit him. He pushed the duchess and made her belly hit the corner of the table. She was in so much pain that she broke into a cold sweat, which was when I stepped in and hit him."

"He pushed Leona? How is she now?" Carissa asked urgently.

"The family's physician has seen her. She's experiencing a possible miscarriage and will need to stay in bed for a month," Alana said, taking another sip of coffee. "Since the duchess kept crying out for her mother, I went to Hartstone Estate first, hoping to ask them to come and check on the duchess."

Alana paused for a long time, making everyone anxious.

Carissa couldn't help but ask again, "Did they go?"

"No!" Alana took another sip of coffee. "I'm so thirsty from running around and not drinking enough. Lady Heather wanted to go, but Prince Harvey said if they went, they would have to

confront that scumbag. If they did, they needed to know the Earl of Gracehold's family's stance on the matter.

"They ended up discussing back and forth and decided that since the physician said bed rest would suffice, they would visit on another day and avoid the current commotion. Visiting in a few days wouldn't be tied to today's incident."

Suddenly, an angry voice came from outside the door, "Damn that nonsense!"

Helen and Gillian entered, both with expressions of fury.

"His own daughter is being mistreated, and instead of standing up for her, he's afraid of offending his son-in-law? What kind of reasoning is that? Is his son-in-law made of gold?" Helen snarled. Alana stood up to greet Helen.

Helen looked at Alana, and asked, "So, they're just going to let it go? What exactly are they afraid of?"

Alana replied, "Lady Helen, Prince Harvey's stance is that if we cause a scene now, the duchess' future will be even more difficult. It might even hinder her ability to carry the child properly."

"The present situation is already bad enough! What good will delaying do?" Helen was infuriated, fully embodying the role of a mother.

If Logan dared to mistreat her daughter, she would have demanded Carissa take immediate action, leaving no room for mercy.

"They plan to go in a few days," Alana said.

"In a few days? What's the point of waiting?" Helen retorted. "A few days to plan a reunion? Carissa, you go."

Gillian quickly interjected, "That's not

appropriate, my lady. Lady Carissa

isn't a member of Lady Leona's family. The duchess does have her own family. If her family doesn't step in, and only the cousin does, it would seem like our royal household is

bullying the smaller family."

"If they've already been so rude, what do we have to fear in retaliating?" Helen replied.

Rafael observed his mother, who looked as if she were ready to tear Samuel apart, and remarked, "For matters of bullying... I think you would be perfect for the role, Mom."

Helen was momentarily stunned. "Me? On what grounds would I go? I'm only the mother-in-law of Leona's cousin. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to go."

Rafael reminded her, "Are you sure that's all? Leona is my cousin, and you would be visiting on behalf of the queen dowager, which would be entirely appropriate. If you were to stumble upon this situation and react with anger, who could question your authority?"

He added, "Most importantly, you have a high status!"

Helen thought for a moment, and realized Rafael was right. Harvey and the late king were brothers, and Harvey had previously addressed her as a sister-in-law.

Given the situation, she was effectively part of Leona's family. If she as a family member didn't step in now, when would she?

"I'll go!"

Without caring about the encroaching darkness, Helen immediately ordered the preparations for a carriage and horse. She would bring Alana and Violet, who were eager to witness the commotion. Carissa stopped Violet, whispered a few words in her ear, and instructed her to discuss the matter with Helen in the carriage.

Chapter 476

Janice had always accompanied Helen, so she had intended to go along as well. However, Carissa asked her to stay behind.

"I'm short of people in my room. Please stay here and assist me for now."

Janice bowed her head. "Yes, Your Grace!"

She stopped in her tracks, and did not follow. A hint of panic flashed in her eyes-had Carissa noticed something?

Carissa smiled warmly. "I've heard from Mother that you're skilled at hairstyling. From now on, you'll work as a hairstylist in my quarters."

Seeing Carissa's gentle smile, Janice asked, "Your Grace, Lulu has always been the one to do your hair. If I take over her duties, won't it be inappropriate?" Carissa reassured her, "Lulu has other tasks to attend to. It's not about taking someone's place. There's no need for you to feel uneasy."

Janice finally felt somewhat reassured. "Understood. If Lady Helen agrees, I'll serve you in Orchid Hall, Your Grace."

She cast a secretive glance at Rafael. He remained indifferent, clearly showing no sign of suspicion.

Gracehold Estate was brightly lit. The Earl of Gracehold and his wife, along with other members of the household, came out to welcome Helen.

Helen said kindly, "There's no need to make such a fuss. I've come just to visit my niece."

The expressions of those present were hard to describe.

They had been worried all day that Harvey and Heather might come to question them. But by evening, no one from Hartstone Estate had arrived, which offered them a slight sense of relief. Just as they were about to settle in for the night, Helen arrived unexpectedly.

Knowing Helen's reputation, Abigail understood that while Helen could be managed, she could also be quite formidable, depending on the situation.

Helen had barely settled down when she said, "Everyone, please don't disperse yet. I'll go see Leona first, and then return to speak with all of you."

Though Helen spoke with a smile, her words cast a chill over the Earl of Gracehold's residence.

After Helen left, the Earl of Gracehold, Noah, fumed, "That ungrateful brat! He's disgraceful! He's brought shame upon the Earl of Gracehold's name!"

Abigail sighed. "Your mother

indulges him and permits his behavior, which is why he's so brazen. Today's disaster only resulted in a few scoldings from her. Ruby was supposed to be expelled from the residence, but he refused to allow it. He even threatened to kill himself if she was sent away. Mother initially imposed house arrest on her, but relented when he pleaded, leading to this chaos. He's truly a troublemaker."

Noah's face darkened. Ever since Ruby entered the household, their reputation had suffered. The indulgence of his mother, Dorothy made Samuel unruly and arrogant. After marrying Leona, Samuel considered himself superior and disregarded everyone.

Now, Samuel had been dismissed from office and was under

investigation. He blamed others for his downfall and scorned the

officialdom, spending his days

drinking and composing poetry, lost in his indulgences.

Helen and Violet arrived in the back courtyard, where Alana guided them in. The dim light cast a faint glow on the pale yellow curtains, adding to the atmosphere of sadness. Leona's eyes were swollen from crying. Seeing Helen and Violet, she thought it was her mother and called out, "Mom!"

Her tears flowed freely with the cry.

As the curtain was lifted, Helen and Violet stood at the bedside. Seeing Leona's tear-streaked, swollen face, Helen's heart ached.

"Don't cry, dear. You're pregnant. You mustn't cry like this."

Realizing the visitors were not her mother, disappointment flashed in Leona's eyes. But hearing Helen's comforting words, her tears continued to fall.

"Aunt Helen, did my cousin send you? Tell her not to worry about me. I'm fine."

Her voice was so muffled with tears that her words were barely understandable.

"Tell me how he has treated you. I will speak on your behalf," Helen said.

She gently patted Leona's shoulder. Leona had frequently visited the palace to pay respects to the queen dowager. Every time Helen had seen Leona, she was refined and graceful. Now, what had become of her?

Pregnant, frail, and pitifully thin, her once-round face had sharpened, her chin pointed. Her eyes, swollen and red, made her hollowed cheeks even more pronounced.

The once lively and radiant girl had transformed into this pitiful state.

It had only been a short time since her marriage!

Chapter 477

Hearing Helen's tender tone, Leona could no longer hold back her tears.

Although Alana had already explained the situation, Leona's maid still cried as she recounted it once more.

"Ever since Mr. Samuel was stripped of his title, Lady Leona has been confined to the estate, but our poor mistress hasn't had a moment of peace. Mr. Samuel blames her for everything. Twice, when they crossed paths while she was paying her respects to Madam Langley, Mr. Samuel pointed right at Lady Leona and accused her of spreading gossip. He said it was her fault the Oversight Department reported him to the king.

"Although Madam Abigail has protected our mistress, Madam Langley has shielded Mr. Samuel. She says that although our mistress is a duchess, she has married into the Earl of Gracehold's family and should treat her husband as her world. She mustn't speak a word of complaint or mention any fault of her husband to outsiders. Otherwise, she'd lose her standing as the proper wife.

"Just like today, it was clearly Madam Ruby who provoked Lady Leona first. Our mistress only saw her once, and didn't even speak. Madam Ruby threw herself on the steps, and Mr. Samuel came in a rage to seek justice, even pushing our mistress onto the table."

The maid wiped her tears and pointed to the corner of the square table. "Right here."

Helen and Violet followed her finger. Though the corners of the mahogany wood table were rounded rather than sharp, the impact was still severe. Fortunately, it had only caused a disturbance in the pregnancy rather than a direct miscarriage, showing the child's good fortune.

"Violet!" Helen's anger flared. "Bring that wretched woman to the sitting hall! I need to question the people of the Earl of Gracehold's residence thoroughly. Is there still any need for such a vile concubine to remain in the house?"

Since Alana and Leah still needed to remain in Gracehold Estate, it was most suitable for Violet to handle such matters.

"What about Samuel?" Violet asked.

Helen gave her a look. "If I'm dealing with Ruby, do you think he won't come?"

Violet nodded in understanding. It seemed like Helen was sharp in this situation.

Under the maid's guidance, Violet headed straight for Ruby's residence.

Samuel had lost two teeth earlier that day from Alana's blow, and his anger was boiling over. Egged on by Ruby's provocations, he was scheming on how to get both Alana and Leah out of the house. During Ruby's confinement, he had missed her dearly. Now that she was free, there was no doubt he was eager to spend some intimate time together.

Just as Samuel had removed his outer garment and was embracing Ruby, the door was suddenly kicked open.

Furious, he roared, "How dare you!"

Just as he finished speaking, Violet stormed in. With a resounding slap, she struck Samuel's face. Before Samuel could react, Violet had already seized Ruby by her hair and dragged her outside. "You enjoy falling down the steps, right? Here, let me oblige you."

Screams erupted through the air.

Violet dragged Ruby by her hair down the stone steps and then pulled her back up, repeating the process several times. By the time Samuel rushed out in a panic, he saw his beloved being tortured and screaming in agony, her hair disheveled and her once-beautiful face smeared with blood.

"Let her go!" Samuel cried out in distress, his heart breaking. He shouted furiously at Violet, "Who are you to come into my residence and beat people up?"

Violet grabbed Ruby by the throat, her gaze dark and menacing as she stared down at Samuel.

"My name is Violet Spencer. You

best remember that. I despise scoundrels and vile women above all else. One of the top scholars, and all that virtue and righteousness you claim to know? It's wasted on you. You have no honor and no decency, and you call yourself a man of learning? You're nothing but a

pathetic mutt."

Ruby's eyes rolled back as Violet tightened her grip. Samuel, seething with rage, was left speechless, his throat tightening with indignation.

Without another word, Violet

released Ruby, grabbing her by the

collar instead. In one swift motion she used her Lightfoot Skill to leap toward the garden hall. Samuel snapping out of his shock, furiously dashed after them.

Helen sat in the sitting room, her expression cold and severe. Her piercing gaze looked nowhere in particular, but the icy silence that surrounded her sent a chill through everyone present, leaving them uneasy.

Chapter 478

In the carriage, Violet had relayed Carissa's instructions to Helen.

Upon arriving at Gracehold Estate, Helen was to use both grace and force. After witnessing Leona's pitiful condition, she was to unleash her full authority and intimidate everyone present, including the matriarch of the Earl of Gracehold's family.

Violet dragged Ruby into the room and, with a firm kick, sent the latter sprawling on the ground.

"Is that all you have? And you dare play tricks in front of the duchess? No one in this household stood up for the duchess. They all sided with this wretch. Lady Helen, please make your decision!" Abigail, who loathed the woman as well, knew that Ruby was her son's beloved. And since Samuel was Dorothy's favorite, Abigail tolerated Ruby in the household. Seeing Ruby now kicked and humiliated by Violet, Abigail couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction.

Without lifting her head, Helen said coldly, "I'm not sure what the rules are in this household, but in the palace, if a concubine dared to offend or frame the queen, the choice was either a length of white silk or poisoned wine.

"Does this household not have these options? No white silk or poison? Surely there's still a punishment rod here, right?"

Noah knew that Helen was here to stand up for Leona. Generally, Helen would not involve herself in others' family affairs. Meanwhile, Carissa's absence suggested she didn't want to interfere with the internal matters of the Earl of Gracehold's family.

However, Helen was different. She was an honored concubine, and the late king was Harvey's brother. So, Helen represented Leona's maternal family. While it might not be entirely appropriate, it was still justifiable.

Noah had long been displeased with Ruby. Hearing Helen's words, he immediately ordered, "Drag this wretch out and beat her!"

Ruby, once proud and aloof, now lay on the ground, looking as pitiful as an animal. She trembled, trying to rise to maintain some semblance of dignity, but Violet delivered a swift kick to her shin, causing her to collapse to her knees.

"Do you hear? You're about to be dragged out."

Ruby didn't shed tears. Instead, her face hardened with defiance. "You wealthy families who disregard human life-go ahead, kill me if you must. I won't yield!"

Typically, those from noble families, when branded with such disregard for human life, would need to be cautious.

But she was facing Helen and Violet. Helen was unfazed by such concerns, and slammed her hand on the table. "Then, beat her until she yields!"

"Who dares?" Samuel shouted, his voice full of fury.

Everyone looked toward the

entrance to see an elderly lady with silver hair being helped in. She was dressed in a green silk dress with floral patterns, and a deep blue- cloud patterned cloak. Her hair was loosely styled, clearly having been undone for bed, but upon hearing that Helen had arrived, she had hastily gotten dressed.

Samuel helped Dorothy to her seat before rushing over to support Ruby. Seeing his beloved in such a miserable state, he roared in anger, "Who allowed you to treat her like this? She's my woman!" "I gave permission," Helen said coldly.

Her eyes narrowed as she watched Samuel cling to that seductive woman. Moments ago, wasn't Ruby all high and mighty, aloof and untouchable? Now, suddenly, she was the pitiful one? "What happened to the promise of dragging her out and giving her a beating?"

"Lady Helen!" Dorothy straightened up, her voice icy. "We will handle the affairs of our own household. There's no need for you to interfere."

Helen's anger flared. "If your son

were a decent person, I wouldn't

have had to come. What kind of household is this? Is it worth my late-night visit? A century-old noble family produces such a

Sand

unjust scoundrel who indulges his concubines and neglects his wife.

Instead of addressing how to correct the family's morals, you're concerned with covering up and indulging him. Your ancestors would be rolling in the grave at how you're behaving!"

"Lady Helen!" Dorothy slammed her cane on the ground with a resounding thud. "No matter how lacking our people are, it's not your place to discipline them. Even the current queen wouldn't meddle in our family affairs. Even if my grandson is ignorant, he has been punished. He has been dismissed from his post and had two teeth knocked out by the duchess' maid. Has our family ever made things difficult for the duchess?"

Helen sneered, showing no regard for the older woman. "The audacity! What right do you have to make things difficult for the duchess? Do you even remember your place and rank anymore?"

Chapter 479

Noah saw the change in his mother's expression, and immediately advised, "Mom, please, let's discuss this calmly..."

"Be quiet, you useless thing! They've already bullied their way into our residence, and you're still playing the part of the dutiful son?" Dorothy shouted in fury, her face contorted with rage. "Get out of the way!" She walked over and took a seat, taking a deep breath as she met Helen's gaze.

"Place and rank? Once the duchess married into our family, she became one of us-our daughter-in-law! Women follow their husbands both at home and in public. Yet, she stirred up trouble and even incited the Hell Monarch's princess consort to report her own husband, all for some domestic

matter. What family doesn't have concubines? Instead of learning from the good examples, she's picked up all the bad habits-envy and pettiness. She's learned them all too well."

Helen's eyes widened in shock.

Wait, was Dorothy talking about Carissa? Was Dorothy referring to Helen's daughter-in-law, the one who had always protected her before even officially joining the family?

With a loud crash, Helen's cup shattered on the floor, porcelain shards scattering as she shouted, "Old hag! Don't force me to slap your face myself!"

That move left everyone in the room stunned into silence. Even Dorothy was taken aback, her eyes wide with disbelief as she stared at Helen.

How could Helen be so indifferent to propriety?

Helen stood up and walked directly toward Dorothy, her finger pointing threateningly, her nails pressing against the old lady's nose.

"You raised such a shameless grandson, and still dare to speak so boldly in front of me? You claim that Leona incited my daughter-in-law to report this beast of a man? Did you see it with your own eyes? Hear it with your own ears? If you don't produce evidence today, I'll destroy your family!"

"What... You..." Dorothy's lips trembled with anger. "Lady Helen, this is my family's estate! How dare you speak so arrogantly?"

Helen retorted furiously, "So what if I

am arrogant? How dare a mere noble lady sit so calmly in front of me? When it comes to rank and respect, even a duchess must bow before my daughter-in-law, who is a princess consort! How dare you plot behind the scenes! The matter that the Oversight Department has brought up against that scum grandson of yours is a court issue. What does it have to do with my

daughter-in-law?

"If your grandson had any integrity, no one could accuse him. He's the king's student, but instead of serving his ruler, he's holed up in his residence, favoring concubines and neglecting his wife. Men like him deserve to have dung thrown at them, just like those of the Warren family!"

"Vulgar, utterly insufferable!" Samuel's face turned ashen with anger. Ignoring the delicate woman in his arms, he hurried over to shield his grandmother and shouted at Helen, "Lady Helen, I respect you, but....."

Smack!

A resounding slap landed on Samuel's face. Helen struck with such force that she nearly lost her balance, but Violet was quick to catch her.

Helen steadied herself, and delivered another slap with the back of her hand. "Who gave you the right to interrupt while I'm speaking? Don't you understand manners?"

Samuel received two more slaps, and his once-pristine image as a noble youth was utterly shattered. Embarrassed in front of his beloved, he shouted furiously at Helen, "You're bullying us with your power! Do you think I won't write a proclamation denouncing you tomorrow?"

Seeing the situation spiral out of control, Noah urgently intervened, "Samuel, be quiet!"

The people from the second branch of the family came forward to help, attempting to drag Samuel and Ruby away.

But Dorothy was enraged and shouted, "No one is to take him away! What fault has he committed? It's them who are being outrageous!"

Helen stood before her, and spat coldly, "Shameless old hag! You don't even deserve to be called a noble lady. You can't tell right from wrong. All you do is indulge this piece of filth, ignoring even the fact that your grandson's legitimate wife is pregnant with your

sw?

great-grandchild.

"You must be of illegitimate birth yourself, having learned those filthy tricks from your concubine mother. You harbor a deep hatred for legitimate wives, yet you go to such lengths to favor concubines. Why did you fight to become the primary wife if you preferred concubines so much? When the leaders set a poor example, those beneath them inevitably follow suit. You're setting a terrible example, old hag."

Helen knew it was this very old woman who had indulged Samuel, allowing him to get away with everything. It was Dorothy's approval that allowed Ruby to enter the family.

Chapter 480

Dorothy's vision darkened, and she nearly collapsed from anger. She swayed for a moment before she finally managed to steady herself.

Pointing a trembling finger at Helen, she stammered, "I... I will surely...surely go to the palace and report to the queen dowager. You...are being utterly outrageous!"

"Go ahead and report, you vile woman!" Helen lifted her head with pride. "The queen dowager is my sister, but she is a person of reason. If she learns how your family is bullying Leona, she may be so enraged that you'll lose your title! At that point, you can forget about being a noble lady and return to being a commoner."

"When did the title become yours to take away? Who do you think you are?"

Dorothy was thoroughly infuriated. She dropped her cane and pushed Helen, who fell to the ground as a result.

Helen then yelled, "How dare you lay hands on me? How dare you defy your betters and strike me?"

The entire Earl of Gracehold household was stunned. Just moments ago, Helen had been cursing fiercely and passionately, but now she looked like a wronged young woman, with tears welling up in her eyes.

Meanwhile, Carissa and Rafael had already boarded a carriage to Gracehold Estate sometime earlier. There were some matters Carissa couldn't intervene in directly, but if her mother-in-law was being mistreated, she could certainly step in.

She had instructed Violet to speak to Helen during the carriage ride, advising that it was acceptable to reprimand and even physically confront the Earl of Gracehold's family. If it provoked them into reacting violently, Helen could fall to the ground. Then, Carissa and Rafael would have a legitimate reason to take action.

Additionally, Leah also went to Hartstone Estate when Violet began dragging Ruby to the sitting room. Leah informed Harvey and Heather that Helen had gone to stir trouble at Gracehold Estate. Harvey and Heather were startled by this news. Given Helen's temperament, wouldn't she turn both families into enemies if she caused a scene?

Besides, Heather was eager to see her daughter. However, Harvey had previously stopped her from doing so. Fearing the families would become hostile, Harvey quickly called for a carriage to go to Gracehold Estate.

The two carriages arrived almost simultaneously at Gracehold Estate's gates.

Rafael helped Carissa out of the carriage, while Harvey jumped down first and then turned to assist Heather.

Their eyes met, and Rafael greeted coldly, "Uncle Harvey, Aunt Heather."

"Rafael." Harvey was taken aback to see them here, feeling a bit awkward. "What brings you here?"

"Why are you here, Uncle Harvey?" Rafael inquired.

Harvey had originally intended to

prevent Helen from causing a scene, but found himself hesitant to reveal his purpose upon seeing Rafael. Instead, he simply said, "We heard

that Leona was in trouble, and came

to see for ourselves."

Rafael's eyes darkened suddenly, a hint of anger flashing in them. "My cousin is being bullied? Let's go inside!"

"No..."

Harvey was momentarily taken aback, wanting to clarify that it was merely a domestic dispute rather than bullying. But Rafael, already holding Carissa's hand, strode purposefully inside. "Prince Rafael and Lady Carissa have arrived!"

"Prince Harvey and Lady Heather have arrived!"

With the loud announcement, Rafael and Carissa stepped confidently over the threshold.

Everyone present hurriedly stood up. "Greetings, Your Highness, Your Grace."

Upon seeing her son and

daughter-in-law arrive, Helen immediately said pitifully, "Cari, Son, these people from the Earl of Gracehold's family are being

outrageously overbearing. Tel.ne?

even

dared to push me! They clearly don't respect the royal family at all!"

Rafael's imposing presence was palpable. His cold gaze swept across the room, causing everyone to lower their heads. Even Samuel, who had been defiantly holding his head high, gradually bowed it under Rafael's intense stare.

Ruby was the only one who raised her chin, her face a picture of pitiful innocence. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she gazed at Rafael like a pitiful kitten.

Rafael's gaze lingered on her face for a moment, and Ruby's expression turned defiant and unyielding.

Rafael turned away and, along with Carissa, was led to the main seat.

Harvey and Heather, who had entered with them, found themselves in an awkward position. Despite their high rank as a prince and princess consort, they could only sit to the side. "Who dared to bully my mother?" Rafael's voice, as he settled into his seat, was as cold as frost.