

War Song 501

Chapter 501

Viola's eyes brimmed with tears, and her voice trembled. "No, let's go back to the first floor and pick out a few pieces instead."

As a lady from the Earl of Silverstone's family, she couldn't raise her voice to her mother-in-law here. She could only plead with as much humility as she could muster, hoping they would agree to move to the first floor.

Even the items on the first floor were not cheap. The Golden Tower only carried high-quality items.

Serena clung to the jewelry box tightly. "No, I want this one!"

Viola shook with anxiety, her gaze darting around as more heads poked out from the private rooms, all of them wearing expressions of surprise. This only deepened Viola's sense of humiliation.

How could she possibly come up with almost 40,000 silver coins? Did she have to empty out her dowry and even use the funds from her late husband's pension?

How could she do that?

Viola stood there, trembling and speechless. She had never experienced such a humiliating situation in her life. She turned to leave, but Rebecca quickly grasped her sleeve. Viola's mind buzzed as she turned to face Rebecca's icy gaze.

Rebecca's tone was gentle, but her eyes held an oppressive weight. "Why are you in such a hurry? You need to wait for the shop assistant to accompany you."

"Then..." The shop assistant was unsure of what to do. He had never encountered such a situation on the third floor before. These women didn't want to pay for the tiara, nor did they want to return it to him. "Should I follow you back, madam?"

Guests on the third floor usually took their purchases and settled the payment later. They either sent someone to The Golden Tower, or had the money collected from their home at a later date. After all, most of them were regulars and well-known nobles in the capital.

However, the current situation seemed unusual. The shop assistant felt that if he let them take the tiara without immediate payment, he would never be able to collect the money.

Despite her shaking, Viola managed to respond with a quivering voice, "No!"

As the standoff continued, some people emerged from the private rooms to observe. Viola dared not look up, unsure if any of them were people she knew.

Kiera also peeked out but was pulled back by Carissa, who whispered, "Don't worry about what's happening with other people."

Kiera nodded and continued examining the jewelry Nathaniel had brought for her, though she couldn't help but be distracted by the commotion outside.

On the other hand, Violet stood at

the entrance of the private room, which was separated by a beaded curtain rather than a door. The curtain was usually drawn aside to let in natural light. Only if a guest specifically requested would the shop assistant pull it down to block the view.

After all, who would deliberately block the view? When shopping for jewelry on the third floor, one might run into people they wish to associate with. Over time, they could end up being close.

Nathaniel had clearly heard the

commotion. He waved over the shop assistant who had been handling the jewelry, and said, "Please ask William to handle this

matter. I will attend to Lady Carissa and Princess Kiera."

"Yes, sir!" The shop assistant put down the tray and left.

Moments later, a middle-aged man in a blue outfit ascended from the second floor. With a smile on his face, he approached Rebecca and her party, and humbly said, "Madam, we can store the ruby tiara at our shop for you. You can collect it when you wish, and we don't charge a storage fee."

William had offered Viola a way out. If the item was stored in the shop, they could maintain some dignity.

Viola visibly relaxed, and smiled gratefully. Her eyes were still moist with tears, making her smile appear somewhat pitiful.

Before she could speak, Serena pouted and said, "No need for that! I'll take it back with me today. Have someone come to our residence to collect the payment."

Chapter 502

The shopkeeper William looked at Serena with a smile and said, "Miss, that's certainly possible. However, we have many more ruby tiaras in the shop. You've only seen this one. Would you like to choose from a few more options?"

Serena lifted her head to see a shop assistant carrying a tray made of zebrawood enter the room. The tray obviously held pieces of much lower value, clearly brought up from the first or second floor. She immediately clutched the jewelry box she held tighter and said, "No, I only want this one."

Rebecca was clearly getting frustrated. "What's with all this nonsense? We've already chosen this one. What is the matter with your shop? Just come to our residence to collect the payment. Stop wasting time."

William was experienced and well-acquainted with such situations, though it was rare on the third floor. It was clear to him that the mother and daughter were trying to force the daughter-in-law to pay for the dowry, but the situation seemed unusual.

The matriarch of the family was supposed to be in charge of the household finances, and she should have been the one to handle the money. Yet, this younger lady who looked like she was about to burst into tears was clearly the one paying. It seemed she was using her own personal funds for the purchase.

The two women were clearly pressuring her into making the purchase. In a place like this, the young lady didn't want to be humiliated and was trying hard to hold back her tears. Her look of distress was genuinely pitiful.

As the situation reached a standstill, a lady dressed in simple, understated clothes stepped out of a private room. With a calm demeanor and a gentle voice, she addressed William, "Wasn't this ruby tiara reserved for me? Why is it being sold to someone else?"

Everyone looked up, and Viola's face instantly turned ashen.

They knew each other. The woman's name was Kayla Lloyd. Her uncle was Patrick Lloyd, the Minister of Justice. She had married Lawrence Ziegler, the second son of the Marquis of Elderglen. Lawrence had died at the same battle as Thomas.

However, Kayla didn't return to her natal family after Lawrence's death. Instead, she stayed in the Marquis of Elderglen's family as a widow and adopted a son, ensuring that Lawrence's legacy would continue. At the moment, Kayla had genuinely meant to help Viola out of a tough spot.

However, back when Viola had received her divorce letter and returned to her home, people had begun comparing the two of them.

At that time, Kayla was too

consumed by her own grief over

losing her husband to pay much

attention to the public's reaction

Now, She was simply trying to lend a hand, thinking that they shared similar hardships.

But instead, her gesture seemed to have provoked Viola.

Viola immediately looked up and said, "Since the shop assistant didn't mention that it was reserved for you, my sister-in-law will take it. Sir please send someone with me to collect the payment at my home."

Kayla and William were both taken aback.

Kayla met Viola's cold, almost venomous stare and hesitated before softly saying, "Alright then. If you like it, I'll find something else."

With that, she quickly returned to the private room where she had been choosing items. The curtain fell behind her, concealing her from view.

Violet was stunned.

Was Viola out of her mind? That lady had clearly come with good intentions to help her, yet she seemed to have been offended. Did Viola have a personal grudge against her?

The lady seemed genuinely kind, and even her gaze towards Viola was somewhat pitying.

Seeing Viola stiffly lead Rebecca and Serena down the stairs, Violet went back to the private room. She leaned over the display case and asked Nathaniel, "Do you know who that lady was?" Although Nathaniel hadn't seen the lady in question, he could likely recognize the voice, as most guests on the third floor were familiar faces.

Nathaniel smiled and said, "Are you

talking about Lady Kayla from the

Marquis of Elderglen's family? She is

a very kind and gentle person. Her husband, General Ziegler, was also highly respected and remembered by the people."

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The term "respected and remembered" revealed a great deal of information.

Just like Viola, Kayla had also lost her husband on the battlefield. They shared a common sorrow, and it was out of kindness that she had wanted to help Viola. Unfortunately, Viola didn't appreciate the gesture, leaving Kayla quite embarrassed.

Upon hearing the lady's identity, Carissa immediately understood the situation. However, she didn't comment further on the matter. Instead, she changed the subject and asked Kiera which pieces she had chosen. She also needed to buy a gift for her simple-minded mother-in-law. Not bringing Helen along today would likely upset her.

The design for the Mystic Pearl set was finalized, and Kiera picked out several other pieces she loved. Hugging her sister-in-law, she exclaimed how much she adored Carissa.

Nathaniel chuckled from the side. Compared to the tense exchange between Viola and Serena outside, this pair truly showed what genuine affection looked like.

Though he was a businessman, he had great respect for the military generals who served the kingdom. The entire Duke of Northwatch's family, from the youngest general to the current princess consort of the Hell Monarch, were known for their bravery and had made significant contributions to Starhaven.

Because of this, Nathaniel gave them a generous discount, selling everything nearly at cost. He even threw in a few extra hairpins and accessories as gifts and personally escorted them to the door.

While in the carriage, Carissa shared stories about Kayla from the Marquis of Elderglen's family and the comparisons made between her and Viola back in the day.

"However, I only heard about this later from others. I don't know the extent of the turmoil, but from Kayla's tone today, she seemed unaware of the full story."

Carissa paused and sighed.

"In reality, whether it's Kayla or Viola, both choices to remain widowed or to remarry are not wrong. It's just that each path has its own set of challenges. No one can alleviate that suffering, and one shouldn't harbor resentment toward others who have faced similar hardships but chosen different paths."

Violet said, "You're right. Every choice comes with its own set of judgments. Ultimately, it's a personal decision. Kayla chose to endure the loneliness of widowhood, and Viola, who returned home and remarried, should let go of the past and move on with her life. But because Kayla intervened to help her, Viola ended up buying that headpiece for over 36,000 silver coins.

"Can her dowry even cover that amount? I heard that when she returned to her family, the Farrell family gave her Thomas' compensation as well as some shops. She wouldn't use that compensation to buy something for Serena, would she?"

Violet added somberly, "If Thomas were watching from the heavens, he would surely be rolling in his grave."

Kiera felt distressed and leaned on Carissa's shoulder. "Carissa, what kind of person was Thomas?"

Carissa replied, "The Farrell family

has always been a military

household, but they've never had a truly outstanding general, so they haven't risen very high in rank. Thomas had the potential to become a renowned general on his own. He was skilled and intelligent, and he initially served under my maternal grandfather. Later, when my father went to the Southern Frontier, my grandfather saw this opportunity for Thomas to make a name for himself and transferred him. Unfortunately, he was killed in action on the Southern Frontier."

Carissa truly hoped that Septimus was Thomas.

Now, Oliver had been given command of the Hell Monarch Army. But despite his bravery, he lacked the all-encompassing intelligence and strategy of Thomas, falling short even compared to Louis and Timothy. Oliver's family had merit, and he himself held a title, which was why he commanded both the Hell Monarch Army and the Sinclair Army.

The king always sought to promote young military generals. If Septimus were truly Thomas, Salvador would undoubtedly assign him significant responsibilities.

Violet rested her head against the carriage window, reflecting on what Carissa had said about Septimus. If he were indeed Thomas, his loyalty and endurance would be truly rare in this world.

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He was a hero!

What was Barrett compared to him?

How could the Warren family's conduct compare with the Farrell family's?

Viola had compared Thomas with Barrett? Please!

She was truly nauseating!

She was nothing but a disgrace!

She didn't deserve Thomas!

Chapter 504

When Helen returned from the palace, she walked straight through the sitting room. She held her head high, and completely ignored the women speaking inside. One of the women called out, "Mother, you're back?"

Helen didn't acknowledge them and continued to walk with her head held high.

Another woman rushed out and took her arm. "Mom, look at what Carissa and I bought for you! Come and see!"

"Hmph!" Helen glanced at Kiera coldly. "Why would I care?"

Kiera's face fell. "Huh? You don't? Carissa spent a long time choosing these."

"Hmph! Spent a long time choosing?"

Helen glared coldly at Carissa, who was standing at the door. In response to Carissa's smile, Helen raised her chin. "Fine, let me take a look. But I'm very hard to please." Carissa smiled and said, "Mother, please come and see."

Violet quickly called for someone to prepare some snacks. As she admired the jewelry, she filled Helen in on the excitement of the day.

Helen placed a delicate red coral hairpin with dangling pearls in her hair. As the pearls swayed slightly, the soft clinking sound was pleasantly soothing. She felt delighted, and had to admit that Carissa knew her preferences well.

She thought the commotion was amusing enough when she heard it from Violet. If Helen were actually there, she would be furious. She might have been unable to stop herself from snatching that ruby tiara. The audacity of it all was just too much!

Just being involved with that family felt tainted. It was like they each carried their own problems around with them, making everything they touched feel dirty.

Viola was definitely out of her mind to spend almost 40,000 silver coins on a headpiece. Given their family's shabby appearance, how could they have ever seen a genuine fine product?

The treasures at The Golden Tower were not cheap—they were the finest of their kind. It was for that reason Jessica had modeled The Gilded Tower after them.

Helen felt a flush of heat on her face. She was fortunate not to have gone today. Nathaniel had personally attended to them. Although she didn't directly engage in the business, she felt quite guilty.

She realized Carissa must have anticipated this and hadn't invited her. That was how thoughtful her daughter-in-law was.

Thinking of this, Helen felt happy again.

After dinner, the accountant brought the ledger for Carissa to review, and she called Ryan over to go through it with her.

Ryan wasn't yet adept at accounting, but Carissa hoped he would be able to understand the ledger. He had previously had some instruction from a tutor, which gave him a basic foundation.

In a few days, Ryan would be starting at Silverbrook Academy. The enrollment notice had already arrived. Originally, Rafael had planned to accompany him on the first day, but now only Carissa could go with

him.

"Aunt Carissa, our family's

accountant is amazing! The

counting board clicks so loudly, and

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after he finishes, he tells us how

much money we have earned. The counting board is truly

incredible-just a few clicks and the money keeps coming in!"

Ryan propped his chin up, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"How much money we make isn't due to the counting board," Carissa said with a smile, patting his head. "It's because there are people working hard for our shop and estate. So, you should always be kind to those who genuinely help you."

Ryan asked, "But how do I know if someone is genuinely helping me?"

Carissa's voice was gentle.

"Understanding people is one of the hardest things in the world. A person with no knowledge or experience finds it especially difficult to see through others. However, when we read the teachings of the sages and learn from the experiences of those before us, we gain the ability to discern right from wrong and truth from falsehood. Once we

understand these principles, seeing through people's hearts becomes much easier. A person who is disloyal or untrustworthy, no matter how well they disguise themselves, will ultimately reveal their true nature. We will then be able to see through them."

Ryan tilted his head. "You want me to study hard and understand these things, right, Aunt Carissa?"

"You're very clever, Carissa said,

smiling as she tapped his forehead. "In the future, the responsibilities of the Duke of Northwatch's household will fall on your shoulders. Inheriting the title is no small matter-you must be capable."

Ryan nodded seriously and said, "Yes, Aunt Carissa, don't worry. I'll work hard. Besides practicing martial arts, I'll also aim to be a top scholar. I want to be a duke who excels in both literature and martial skills." Carissa laughed softly. "Well then, you must work hard, future little duke. Otherwise, people will say you're incapable and that you rely solely on the fortunes of your ancestors."

Ryan nodded earnestly. "I understand, Aunt Carissa!"

Chapter 505

In Valor Estate, only one lamp was lit in the corridor tonight, and two glass-covered lamps illuminated the main courtyard. These glass lamps were actually the ones Carissa had left behind when she moved away.

The side hall was shrouded in darkness, with only the buzzing of mosquitoes to break the silence.

The Golden Tower's shop assistant hadn't left. He sat anxiously in the side hall of the main courtyard. No one had served him coffee, and no lamps had been lit. He had waited from dawn until nightfall. He was there to collect payment, but once inside Valor Estate, he had been left waiting in this place. From the direction of the main hall, he could hear the sounds of shouting and heart-wrenching crying. The commotion lasted for at least an hour before finally quieting down. Then, someone had come in to tell him to wait. Since then, no one had returned.

Given his experience, he was accustomed to accompanying guests to collect banknotes when they didn't have enough on hand. In the past, he would sometimes need to wait, but the longest he had ever waited was about 15 to 30 minutes. This was usually due to the size of the estate and the host's hospitality, who would provide delicious refreshment and waited until he finished before giving him the banknotes.

More often than not, he didn't have to wait long. He would only sit for a short while before receiving the payment. But here, it was different he had waited until dark without even being served a cup of coffee or having a lamp lit.

He felt as if he had wandered into a thieves' den.

He had stepped outside to ask the servants, but they merely told him to wait. He could only return to his spot and continue waiting, especially since the tiara, which cost 36,800 silver coins, had already been taken away.

After finishing her dinner and bathing, Serena went to see her mother. She had used fragrant lotion during her bath, and her entire body was enveloped in a delightful scent.

This fragrant lotion was a gift from Jessica, and was said to cost ten silver coins a bottle. It not only smelled pleasant, but also kept her skin smooth and translucent.

"Is she still not back?" Rebecca asked, glancing outside after taking her medicine.

Jade came over and replied, "Madam Viola has not yet returned."

Serena pursed her lips. "Didn't she return to her family's home to get the banknotes? Does it really take this long? I hope she doesn't come back empty-handed." "She said she wanted to buy it," Rebecca replied flatly.

Her heart ached too. The tiara cost almost 40,000 silver coins-such an amount could do wonders in official circles.

"Well, Barrett hasn't returned either. He's probably on duty tonight," Serena said with a sharp, disdainful smile. "When he gets back, she'll probably make a scene, crying and shouting as if we were the ones pressuring her. I was ready to refuse it but she insisted on buying it for me. I'm sure she'll complain to him when he gets back."

"Let her complain," Rebecca sighed slowly, unable to shake the gloom in her heart.

She recalled the dowry Carissa had arranged for Kiera today, including twenty Mystic Pearls for a tiara. Her heart ached with each thought.

The Sinclair family was truly too much.

When Carissa married into the

Warren family, no one showered her

with such an extravagant array of gifts. Even though her dowry was substantial, it mostly consisted of property and shops.

Melanie was incredibly shrewd. She seemed worried that Carissa would suffer, so she converted the money into assets that couldn't easily be spent.

Sure, there was money in Carissa's dowry, and that year was one of the best for the Warren family. However, it was nothing compared to the grandeur of her marriage to the Hell Monarch. That was true wealth beyond compare.

Every time Rebecca thought of it, her heart ached anew.

After they returned from The Golden Tower today, Viola had acted like a madwoman. She shouted and screamed like a shrew, rivaling even Aurora.

Though she had eventually said she was just going home to get the banknotes, her frenzy was truly disheartening.

"She's only fooling herself and taking her frustration out on others. It was her own fault," Rebecca said, clearly irritated. She glanced at Serena and added, "You should avoid provoking her these days. She looked ready to lash out at anyone she can."

Chapter 506

Serena sat on the edge of her bed, and snorted.

"I wouldn't go out of my way to bother her. Before she married in, I thought she was quite capable, especially when comparing dowries with Carissa. Now she can't even come up with a few tens of

thousands. It's truly pathetic! At least she's better than Aurora. Do you remember how much money Barrett gave away when he married Aurora? The dowry she brought back was just a pittance. I've never seen such a poor show, and it was a marriage granted by the king to boot."

After criticizing her two sisters-in-law, Serena turned her attention to Amelia.

"Amelia hasn't cared about anything since she fell ill, not even my dowry. I don't even know what she'll prepare for me. I shouldn't get my hopes up too high. She's poorer than anyone in our family." Not one of the three daughters-in-law was worth much, and listening to this made Rebecca increasingly irritated. "Enough, be quiet."

Serena shut her mouth. The light illuminated her face, revealing a harsh, gaunt look that belied her earlier babyish softness.

At this moment, Amelia was trembling in her room. She had been deeply worried when she heard that Viola hadn't returned yet. The shop assistant was still waiting, and her anxiety was mounting. She was afraid that Viola might not be able to come up with the required amount of money and would end up asking everyone to contribute. Amelia was running low on funds herself, and had pawned most of the jewelry Carissa had given her previously.

When she heard the maid mention that Viola had gone mad today, Amelia had asked someone to ask around. She learned that Viola had bought a ruby tiara for 36,800 silver coins from the Golden Tower. Upon hearing this, Amelia was stunned beyond measure.

And when she heard it was Viola who had insisted on buying it, Amelia's mouth fell open in shock.

Was Viola out of her mind? Didn't she know what their family's current situation was? How could they just buy jewelry worth almost 40,000 silver coins on a whim? And she still needed to borrow more money from her family-what a disgrace!

The second branch of the Warren family was also discussing the matter. As all of them lived together in the same estate, such a commotion couldn't go unnoticed by anyone in the residence. Charlotte shook her head and muttered, "Sooner or later, this household will be doomed."

When it was almost nine in the evening, Viola dragged her heavy, weary feet through the gates of Valor Estate. Her eyes were red and swollen, her makeup smudged, her hair a mess, and a handprint was clearly visible on her cheek.

In truth, she hadn't brought

Thomas's military pension with her

when she married into the Warren family. She had left it with her mother at Silverstone Estate for safekeeping. To gather the required amount of silver, she had to return and retrieve the pension. The court had granted her two boxes of

money, totaling ten thousand silver

coins.

Typically, lower-ranking military officers didn't receive such a substantial pension. But after Thomas's many achievements at the Southern Frontier, his death was met with great regret by the king. As a result, a hefty compensation of ten thousand silver coins was awarded.

Alice had not taken a single coin from the pension. The Farrell family had given it all to Viola. Since Viola had cried and sworn she would never marry again when leaving the Farrell family, Alice had feared she might live a lonely life. The ten thousand silver coins, along with the two shops, were meant to ensure Viola could live comfortably and securely.

Upon learning that Viola was using

the ten thousand silver coins to buy a tiara to add to Serena's dowry, Evelyn had slapped her in anger. Viola had knelt, begging her mother and sister-in-law to exchange the silver coins for banknotes so she could return to Valor Estate and

make up the amount required by the Golden Tower's shop assistant.

Eventually, her mother relented. Zoey, who managed the household affairs, agreed to make the exchange. However, Zoey's gaze was filled with contempt as she looked at Viola. Today, Viola had truly lost all her dignity.

After counting the banknotes, she handed them to the shop assistant. The shop assistant counted them again under the light of an oil lamp outside. After he was done, he thanked her and left.

Once the shop assistant had gone, Viola collapsed onto the floor. Her maids, Julia and Yvonne, quickly rushed over, exclaiming in shock as they helped her up.

"Madam Viola!"

Viola clung to Julia, sobbing uncontrollably.

She truly hated Rebecca and Serena. She loathed them completely. If they hadn't insisted on going to the third floor today, she would never have encountered Kayla. If she hadn't met Kayla, she would never have spent the money on that ruby tiara.

Using Thomas's military pension to add to Serena's dowry made Viola tremble with rage.

Chapter 507

In the dim light, a figure hurriedly entered and supported Viola.

"What's wrong?"

Through her tear-filled eyes, Viola saw her husband, Barrett's face.

She threw herself into his embrace, crying even harder and more pitifully.

Barrett had never seen Viola so openly distressed, sitting on the ground and wailing. He thought something serious must have happened, and urgently asked, "What's going on? What happened?"

With tears in her eyes, Julia recounted the events of the day. However, when she was about to mention Thomas's military pension, Viola suddenly shouted, "Be quiet!"

Julia was startled, and immediately fell silent.

Julia hadn't mentioned the pension specifically, but she had mentioned Thomas's name. Even if he were not the sharpest, Barrett could piece together the situation. Viola had used Thomas's death benefits to buy a tiara for Serena, which was worth 36,800 silver coins.

"Enough. You're dismissed," Barrett said.

Then, he released Viola, his face dark with anger. "Tomorrow, you will go to the Golden Tower and return the ruby tiara."

His towering figure cast a shadow over Viola. As she wiped her tears and looked up at him, she saw his face filled with humiliation and rage.

She shot a bitter look at Julia, who felt the silent reprimand. The maid retreated to the side, too frightened to say another word.

Barrett grabbed Viola's hand and dragged her along. "Come on, we're going to Mom's room."

Viola stumbled a few steps as he pulled her, nearly losing her balance. She pleaded, "Honey, please slow down."

Barrett seethed with fury.

Hadn't he already endured enough humiliation? How much longer would he be mocked?

His reputation in the capital was in tatters, and if it became known that Viola had used Thomas's pension to buy a tiara for his sister's dowry, any remaining dignity of the Warren family would be completely destroyed.

Meanwhile, Serena was still in Rebecca's room, talking about how she would manage things after marrying into the Marquis of Ironridge's family. She would try to please Jessica and align with her against Leopold's secondary wife.

"Mom, I'll stand my ground and make sure that the Marquis of Ironridge favors me." Serena nestled into her mother's arms, her gaze resolute.

At first, she didn't want to become

Leopold's concubine. But after

things were settled, she reflected on Leopold's tall and handsome figure his stable position in the court, and the Marquis of Ironridge's family's status as a century-old family. Even being a concubine in such a prestigious family didn't seem

shameful.

Rebecca said, "But in the beginning,

you must heed Lady Jessica's

advice and oppose the marquis's secondary wife. You need to

become useful so that she will trust and favor you. Until then, you must

not flaunt the marquis' favor"

towards you. You must always be respectful and cautious with her-"

Suddenly, the door flung open with a loud bang, startling both mother and daughter.

Seeing Barrett's face contorted with anger and Viola's expression filled with resentment, Serena instinctively asked, "Viola, has the shop assistant left?"

If the shop assistant had left, it meant the money had been taken, and the ruby tiara was truly hers.

"Mom!" Barrett glared at Rebecca, his tone brooking no argument. "Return the ruby tiara to the Golden Tower tomorrow."

"Return it?" Serena shrieked. "No, I won't return it!"

"You have no say in the matter." Barrett's gaze was sharp and mocking. "You're a concubine. That tiara is covered in dazzling red

rubies, and it's too extravagant

you. Do you really think you deserve

it? Even if you did, it was bought with Thomas's death benefits. Do you want to make the whole Warren family a laughingstock?"

"What?!"

Rebecca hurriedly threw off the cover. With Jade's help, Rebecca hobbled over to Viola. Her face was now cold and furious. "You actually used the money from a deceased person to buy something for my daughter's dowry?! What were you thinking?" Viola was utterly dumbfounded and froze in place. She trembled all over, her lips moving but unable to utter a single word.

Chapter 508

Rebecca's vision went black. She lurched forward, and fainted.

Barrett quickly caught her, setting aside his anger. He urgently called out, "Someone, fetch a physician! Now!"

With tears streaming down her face, Serena rushed to Viola. "What are you doing? Are you trying to anger Mom to death? You were the one who insisted on buying the tiara, and now you regret it?!"

Viola took a step back, feeling helpless as she watched the scene unfold. A sense of powerlessness rose within her, mixed with frustration and pain. She had spent 36,800 silver coins to buy the jewelry, only to receive their reproach.

Was she now to be blamed for everything?

In the middle of the night, the commotion of calling the physician created a chaotic scene. Viola had to wipe away her tears and use a handkerchief to clean Rebecca's face and hands.

The physician diagnosed Rebecca with a fainting spell caused by acute anger, but reassured them that it was not serious and that a few doses of medicine would suffice.

When Rebecca regained consciousness, Barrett's anger had completely subsided. He knelt by the bed and apologized to his mother. "I shouldn't have spoken so harshly and made you faint from anger. I'm at fault."

Rebecca looked at Viola weakly. "About the ruby tiara...make sure no one knows it was bought with Thomas's pension. Keep it a secret."

Viola looked at Barrett, and he pulled her down to her knees beside him. She felt a chill all over, despite it being the warm month of May. The cold from the floor seemed to seep into her knees.

She could only apologize, her voice trembling as she said, "I'm sorry."

As a remarried woman, she couldn't bear the guilt of causing her mother-in-law to faint.

Even though she was full of grievances and resentment, she had no choice but to accept the situation. The husband who had been so furious and ready to stand up for her was now filled with regret, showing no sign of pursuing the ruby tiara any further.

Her heart was heavy with cold disappointment.

Rebecca took a deep breath and said, "Enough. You all leave now. Just Serena will stay here to look after me."

Barrett said, "Mom, let Viola stay here to take care of you. She has always been the one looking after you."

"No, send her out." Rebecca still looked furious, her breathing rapid. "Have her leave and make sure the others keep quiet. We can't have them spreading everything around." She had to appear furious. Otherwise, the blame for this incident would fall on the Warren family.

Viola felt a deep, bitter sorrow. She

stood up and walked out like a lifeless doll. Barrett chased after her and tried to pull her back, but she shook him off and continued to move forward numbly.

Even if Barrett had only come after her and held her hand the way Rafael intertwined his fingers with Carissa's, then the 36,800 silver coins she spent would have felt worthwhile.

She had experienced the intimacy of intertwined fingers before, feeling the special importance and mutual joy. What she wanted wasn't just mutual respect-she craved the unique closeness of married life.

Barrett watched her leave after brushing his hand off. Thinking about how she had used Thomas's pension, Barrett felt a deep sense of discomfort and irritation. He retreated to the study alone. Viola waited in the room for a long time, hoping he would return to offer some comfort. Instead, Julia informed her that Barrett had already retired to the study.

She covered her face with her hands, tears slipping through her fingers.

She remembered the night she went with her sister-in-law to collect the banknotes from the account room. Zoey had spoken to her with an ic demeanor, a single sentence that left Viola feeling simultaneously chilled to the bone and burning with heat, as if she were being tormented by alternating waves of ice and fire.

As Zoey handed over the payment with a disdainful look, she said, "You know that you have no right to use his pension. I hope you never forget what you've done to disappoint him." Those words dragged up every painful memory Viola had desperately tried to bury, laying them bare before her in a gory display.

There were things she deeply regretted, but it was too late for that now.

It was a moment of poor judgment, a lapse she wished she could forget. Why did Zoey have to keep reminding her?

A sudden sound of a muffled laugh from outside the window startled her. She jumped up and asked, "Who's there?"

Chapter 509

Aurora's mocking voice drifted in.

"You've turned yourself into a joke!"

Viola clutched her chest. "How dare you! You're just a concubine! How dare you come here to ridicule me?"

"Hah! As a concubine, I've actually received quite a generous sum from this household," Aurora said with a laugh. "Since I entered the family, I've had the best of everything-no one dares to treat me poorly. And not a single penny of my own money has ever gone out."

With that, she left gracefully, leaving Viola gasping in frustration.

In the entire household, Aurora was the only one who could stand apart and enjoy the spectacle. If Serena dared to ask for anything, Aurora would slap Serena without hesitation. Only someone like Viola...

So despicable!

After Aurora finished mocking Viola, she returned to her room. She checked the defensive mechanisms, and then ordered her maid not to enter before changing and going to bed.

She had heard about the new Westhaven crown prince and confirmed the true identity of the man she had captured in Fawnrun City. Back then, Westhaven's spies had killed the Duke of Northwatch's entire family. Now, she had to be more cautious in case there were still Westhaven spies hiding in the capital.

Anyway, Barrett wouldn't come to her room, which was irrelevant. Staying alive was the most important thing.

While the Warren family's residence was in chaos, the situation at the Earl of Gracehold's residence was no better.

Dorothy was enraged to learn that her precious grandson had been stripped of his title as heir and could no longer inherit the Earl of Gracehold's name. She had been causing a commotion for days, demanding an audience with the queen dowager to refute the charges brought by the Oversight Department.

Her actions had caused widespread discontent among the other family members. The position of heir wasn't something only Samuel could inherit-weren't there other descendants? Dorothy's favoritism was so extreme that it chilled everyone's heart.

Unable to bear the disturbance any longer, Noah knelt down and pleaded with her, "Mom, he's given up everything for that lowly woman. Why are you still favoring him? You don't have only one grandson. If you continue this way, our family will be torn apart and truly be ruined."

Dorothy was furious, and struck him with her cane.

"How outrageous! You're such a useless father! He's your son! You should be hoping for him to succeed, not fail! The king had acknowledged him as a top scholar and personally appointed him as an official! How can you allow others to slander him so freely? You didn't protect him in court, and now he's been stripped of his title. His official position and heir status are gone! What do you expect him to do in the future?"

Dorothy hit Noah several times with her cane. Though she wasn't very strong, the blows humiliated him as he was the head of the household.

He grasped the cane with one hand and said mournfully, "Mom, His Majesty already spoke to me. If this chaos continues, our title will be at an end."

Dorothy staggered. "What did you say? The king said this personally?"

Noah let go of the cane, his voice filled with helplessness.

"His Majesty said it himself. He said if the Earl of Gracehold's household doesn't treat the duchess well, we'll lose our title. Regardless, His Majesty has already considered revoking the title. We can't make any more trouble. We can't let Samuel make any more mistakes. He always listens to you. Please get him to stop insulting the civil and military officials and criticizing the royal authority."

Dorothy collapsed into her chair, her face ashen. "No, our family's title is hereditary and was granted by King Augustus himself. How can the current king revoke it? What does a man taking a concubine have to do with his title?"

"Haven't we treated the duchess well

enough? You all are eager to stand up for her, but I'm the only one protecting Samuel. Look at him now-our esteemed scholar has had his teeth knocked out by a maid!

Anyone can strike him, and now, with his official rank and title stripped away, even the few words of criticism he receives are being regulated and controlled. It's as if you're trying to drive him to his doom!"

"Mom, think about your other grandchildren," Noah said mournfully.

"But none of them are as outstanding as Samuel is! None of them can compare to him!"

Dorothy's eyes hardened. Samuel was her cherished grandson, and those little people wanted to ruin him!

She slowly commanded, "Hold off on the ceremony to appoint a new heir for now. After I see the queen dowager in a few days, I will find a way."

Chapter 510

At Harmony Palace, Eleanor questioned the middle-aged man before her. His head was bowed, and she asked sharply, "How is this possible? How did Carissa find out about Cece's identity?! Did that wretch herself tell Carissa's people?"

The man was tall and handsome, though a bit weathered. Hearing Eleanor's accusation, he quickly shook his head.

"It's impossible. Celeste would never take the initiative to tell Lady Carissa. She has always been so obedient to you and never dared to disobey your orders."

"She wouldn't dare." Eleanor's eyes flashed with hostility. "Her mother is still imprisoned in my palace dungeon. If she wants her mother released, she had better be obedient."

"Of course. She'll definitely listen to you."

Eleanor glared coldly at him, growing more enraged at his demeanor. "Go and ask her. Also, instruct the others to keep a lower profile and not let anyone learn of their identities. I suspect that Carissa only learned about Celeste and is making a fuss to provoke me, hoping to make me hesitate and disrupt my plans. I won't be fooled by her tricks."

"Understood. I will speak to them about it."

Seeing that he had nothing else to say and was solely concerned about his daughters, Eleanor's gaze grew even colder. "Get out!"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Henry turned and left. Over the years of internal strife and scheming, his once imposing figure had become slightly stooped.

Eleanor watched his retreating figure, thinking of the man who bore some resemblance to him. Her heart stirred briefly, only to be engulfed by a surge of deep-seated hatred.

Years ago, she had sought Hector's hand in marriage as a princess, but he had dismissed her without a second thought. Instead, he had chosen the lesser and more insignificant woman, Melanie Sullivan. On their wedding day, Eleanor had cursed them, wishing they would be childless and doomed to an unhappy end.

Yet, Melanie had given birth to six sons and one daughter. The more Eleanor despised them, the more they seemed to flourish, their love for each other ever strong. The Duke of Northwatch had no concubines or secondary wives.

After all these years of resentment, Eleanor knew she would never forget the man who had suddenly intruded into her heart and disrupted her entire youth. When the news of his death came, she laughed wildly, and then cried just as uncontrollably.

He died well, but why wasn't it Melanie who died instead?

At least Melanie's sons had all died with him. Melanie must have been heartbroken. Indeed, she cried so much that she nearly went blind.

In time, the entire family was wiped out, which was truly a satisfying turn of events.

Wretches always get their just desserts.

But that man, even at the moment of

his death, probably never once thought of Eleanor. And in the dead of night, she still dreamed of the moment she first saw him, her eyes full of wonder, her cheeks flushed with shyness.

The things she could not have were the most unforgettable.

She threw the cup to the ground, and it shattered with a loud crash.

Staring at the broken pieces of porcelain, her eyes were filled with hatred. If only her father had agreed to let her marry Hector! If he did, she wouldn't now harbor such extreme resentment toward him, the late king, as well as toward the current king.

'Oh, Father, did you know? You've ruined your daughter's life!'

At Hibiscus Lane, the side gate of a house creaked open, and a maid ushered in Henry as she said, "Don't worry, Your Grace. Mr. Langley returned to Gracehold Estate today and won't be back until tonight at the earliest."

Henry nodded. "Take me to see her."

The manor in Hibiscus Lane was a property of the Earl of Gracehold, arranged by Dorothy for Samuel and Ruby to stay in.

Today, Dorothy had sent for Samuel.

With his status as heir apparent

stripped away, Samuel was

beginning to panic. The situation grew even more dire when he heard that there was a petition to have his name removed from the National Examination Register. Overcome with fear and anxiety, he felt compelled to return to the estate and seek his grandmother's intervention.

Henry met his daughter in the sitting room. Ruby, now going by Celeste, stood up and curtsied. "Greetings, Your Grace."

Henry looked at his daughter's bowed head and sighed softly. "I'm your father. There's no one else here, so just call me 'Dad'."

Celeste lifted her head. "Alright, Dad."

Henry sat down, his clothes rustling as he settled into the chair. "How was your identity discovered? Your mother is quite upset and has asked me to find out if you've been in any private contact with Lady Carissa."