

War Song 511

Chapter 511

Celeste's eyes were cold and contained a hint of disdain, even when addressing her father.

She replied, "How could a mere concubine in the Earl of Gracehold's family possibly have any private dealings with the Hell Monarch's princess consort? If Mother doesn't trust me, I don't mind drinking a glass of poisoned wine to alleviate her concerns." Henry frowned. "What nonsense are you talking about? If she wanted you to drink poison, why would she spend so much money on your upbringing? Don't forget your mission-your mom is still in her hands."

Celeste's eyes glinted with mockery and bitterness. "If you truly loved my mom, why didn't you stand up to Mother? Instead, you let me suffer and be mistreated just to keep her by your side."

Henry's face darkened. "You've thrown the Earl of Gracehold's family into chaos. Grand Princess Eleanor is pleased with the turmoil. She's merely displeased that your identity was exposed. Your sister has already set out and will encounter the Hell Monarch on the road. With her exceptional beauty and her skills in martial arts, which the Hell Monarch favors, she will likely gain his favor. If she can enter the Hell Monarch's estate, our plan will be halfway successful."

"Let's hope my sister can successfully kill Lady Carissa." A ruthless glint flickered in Celeste's eyes.

Hector was the source of her tragedy and that of all her sisters. Hector was dead, but Carissa still lived.

Henry fell silent, his eyes reflecting a mix of complex emotions.

Finally, he sighed. "Your sister's martial skills are not as good as Lady Carissa's. She can only try to poison and sabotage from within after entering the estate. But if she's discovered, she'll lose her life."

"As long as she is favored, she won't die." Celeste smiled derisively. "The Hell Monarch and Lady Carissa have no real affection for each other. Didn't Mother say so? Their marriage is merely a political alliance. The Sinclair family needs the Hell Monarch to maintain the public image of the Duke of Northwatch's reputation, while the Hell Monarch needs Lady Carissa's military power to support him. Although Lady Carissa is only an honorary deputy commander of the Mystic Army now, if she truly returns to command the Mystic Army, she will still have many followers."

Henry frowned, and instinctively wanted to avoid the topic. "That has nothing to do with us. In fact, I opposed your sister approaching the Hell Monarch. It's too dangerous."

"Does it matter if you oppose it?" Celeste nearly spat the words "useless coward" at him. Her eyes brimmed with unmasked disdain and contempt.

Henry's hair was already graying, and he looked at his daughter. He couldn't blame them for their resentment. He had fathered them, only for Eleanor to use them as tools. And he himself was just another tool.

"I have opposed it," he said. His voice was barely a whisper, fraught with weakness and guilt. "But I was powerless."

Celeste's expression remained impassive. "Enough with the useless talk. What instructions does Mother have next? What do I need to do?"

"The Earl of Gracehold's family has

been ruined. Samuel is expendable. You need to find a way into the Earl of Silverstone's household. The

current Earl of Silverstone net

Oliver, only has a concubine, but he's leading troops outside. You won't be able to reach him, so you'll have to deal with his younger brother."

Henry produced a sheet of paper detailing information about Kenneth Prince, the Earl of Silverstone's younger brother.

Celeste took the paper with a pinch of her fingers. The fact that so little could be written about Kenneth showed he was also a useless person.

She was thoroughly disgusted with

these ineffectual individuals. She would rather approach someone like the Hell Monarch, someone truly capable and influential. Such a person was worth her effort.

She had hoped Samuel, as a top scholar, would amount to something. Unfortunately, he turned out to be just a pampered and inept figure, unable to discern right from wrong. It was truly disappointing.

"Can you sever ties with Samuel cleanly?"

Celeste's tone was indifferent,

"Although he redeemed me, I never

received the proper status of a

concubine, and I've already

reclaimed my freedom with the necessary paperwork. All that's needed is for you and Mother

restore my status as a free person. As for severing ties with him, that's a

simple matter. Now that

has lost

his title, he's in a state of panic. If my departure will allow him to return to the earl's household to manage his affairs again, he would be happy inwardly, even if he outwardly opposes it."

"Alright, then." Henry had nothing more to say. He only lingered for a moment in thought before asking, "Do you want to visit your mom?"

"No need!" Celeste replied coolly. "She can enjoy her life with you."

Henry wanted to retort that she was not enjoying herself but was confined in a dungeon, but the words died on his lips.

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When Samuel was summoned back to Gracehold Estate, he continued to maintain a haughty attitude. He insisted that he had done nothing wrong, and claimed that the reprimand and the stripping of his title as heir were signs of the king's folly. The young man was arrogant and self-righteous. He looked down on everyone around him, including his own parents and family. He was convinced that he alone was in the right.

Seeing Samuel's obstinate attitude, Noah was enraged and slapped him across the face.

"Go and apologize to the duchess immediately! If you dare to voice any more dissatisfaction with the king, get out and never set foot in our family's residence again. And that includes the manor on Hibiscus Lane!"

Samuel had returned home with a lingering sense of unease. After losing his status as heir, he had hoped that his family would support him through his protests. If they had, he would have reluctantly yielded and brought Ruby back with him. However, no one sided with him when he returned home. Even his grandmother, who had always favored him, remained silent. Now, after being slapped and forced to apologize to Leona, his rebellious spirit only intensified.

He covered his face and roared angrily, "Fine, take everything back! You want me to apologize to her? Never! She's the one who was jealous and couldn't stand Ruby. She's the reason Ruby got hurt, and she even complained to her cousin! She's why the Hell Monarch brought trouble to our family! Are you really okay with this? Or are you just bowing to power? If you're going to buckle under pressure, that's your issue, but don't expect me to lack spine like you do. That will never happen!"

"Ungrateful wretch! Are you trying to ruin the entire family?" Noah trembled with rage.

Samuel's other relatives present also criticized him.

"Samuel, this is your fault! You can't blame others for coming to demand an explanation."

"This isn't about fearing authority-it's about acknowledging mistakes and correcting them."

"Exactly! You study moral teachings, so why can't you discern right from wrong? Favoring a concubine over a wife was wrong from the start. If you're willing to correct your ways, we're willing to accept you..."

Samuel interrupted them coldly, "Be

quiet. I don't need your approval!

You're a bunch of petty, inept individuals, and here you are pointing fingers at me. You may look down on Ruby's status, but you heard for yourselves that she is Grand Princess Eleanor's daughter. If Grand Princess Eleanor were to acknowledge her, wouldn't you all be currying favor with her then? In the end, you're all just opportunists."

Dorothy was deeply hurt to hear such harsh words from the grandson she had favored so much. Thinking of the prestige of the Earl of Gracehold title, she took a firmer stance.

"Setting everything else aside, go and apologize to the duchess. Ask for her forgiveness. Even if you disregard everything else, remember she carries your child. You pushed her yourself. No one unjustly accused you of that."

Hearing his usually doting

grandmother speak this way,

Samuel felt a deep sense of despair.

He sneered and said, "In the end, you want me to submit. Fine, I'll apologize to her! If she wants, I'll even kneel before her. Is that what you want?"

"What?" Dorothy nearly had a heart attack from anger. "Can't you speak properly? Do you want me to die an early death from anger? A man's knee is worth gold! Even if she is your wife or even a duchess, you don't have to kneel to her. Just sincerely admit your mistake. The duchess cares for you, so she will naturally forgive you. Show some genuine remorse..."

Before Dorothy could finish speaking, Samuel had already turned and stormed off toward the back courtyard.

Abigail screamed, "Quick, send someone to follow him. Who knows what kind of trouble he'll stir up next?"

Having just taken a dose of medicine, Leona was almost asleep. However, she was roused by the commotion outside. She could hear Samuel and Alana arguing and frowned. What was he doing here?

"Hazel, what's going on outside?" she called out.

Leona's maid, Hazel, was standing by the curtain. She hurried over and said, "Your Grace, you're awake? Mr. Langley came in a rage, and Ms. Alana and Ms. Leah are trying to stop him."

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Leona said, "Help me sit up and let him in. Let's see what he has to say."

"Your Grace, are you sure you want him here?" Hazel recalled how Samuel had pushed Leona into the table, and was both angry and worried. Leona reassured her, "Don't worry. Have Alana and Leah watch from the side. He won't be able to touch me."

Leona had given up on this man, but if he had something to say, it should be said clearly and directly.

Hazel helped her sit up and placed a cushion behind her back. "You shouldn't be out of bed. The physician said you're not to move around."

"I know," Leona replied flatly, her pale face betraying no emotion.

Since Heather had forbidden her from seeking a divorce, she had spent her days lying listlessly in bed. Not only was she uncertain about the future, but she didn't even know what would happen the next day. But today, Samuel's angry arrival gave her a glimmer of strength. She wanted to do or say something.

The footsteps grew louder and more urgent as he strode in, but Alana and Leah quickly flanked him. When he reached Leona's bedside, the two of them blocked his way, preventing him from getting any closer.

Leona looked up and met his fierce, resentful gaze.

Before she could speak, he snapped, "You want me to apologize to you, is that it? Fine, I'm apologizing! It was my fault that day. I pushed you, and I'm sorry. I apologize."

Leona adjusted the covers but remained silent, not responding to his incomplete apology.

Samuel took a step forward, but was immediately blocked by Alana. He shot a cold glare at her and continued, "I'm apologizing to you now, but you should also apologize to Ruby for causing her to fall down the stairs that day. Get up and come with me to apologize to her." Leona's eyes reddened, but she suddenly smiled. "Apologize to her?"

Samuel glared coldly. "I'm apologizing to you, but you still won't apologize to her? Do you think you're too important? Are you trying to follow your cousin's example and bully people with your status?"

He attempted to reach past Alana to grab Leona, but Alana slapped his hand away and said sternly, "Speak with your words. Why are you trying to touch her?"

After Samuel was struck, he kicked

the table in anger, his eyes flashing with fury. "See, this is how you

people are! You bully others with et

your power. Even your servants are snobbish. They treat me like 'm nothing."

Alana was enraged and wanted to slap him again, but she anxiously glanced at Leona. Leona's eyes were red, but she wasn't speaking.

Alana was frustrated. Why wasn't Leona saying anything? She had a mouth, so she should use it! What was the point of staring at Samuel with tears in her eyes?

Seeing that Leona was silent, Leah tried to remove Samuel by force.

However, Leona suddenly spoke, "First, I don't accept your apology."

She lifted her head, tears brimming in her eyes. Her body trembled slightly, but she made an effort to control her anger and speak calmly. Despite her best efforts, her voice still wavered.

"Your apology is insincere. Even if it were sincere, it wouldn't undo what you've done to me. So, I neither accept your apology nor forgive you." "You won't accept it? Hah!"

Samuel found it utterly laughable.

Staring at Leona's pale, slender face, he was about to chastise her for her narrow-mindedness but found

himself at a loss for words. The net

sages said that to recognize one's mistakes and correct them was of great virtue, but their teachings never said that an apology had to be accepted.

So, he could only sneer. "Hah, on what grounds do you refuse to accept it?" Leona grew increasingly louder and colder, and her voice no longer trembled.

"I refuse to accept it on the grounds of your favoritism and the neglect of your primary wife, your arrogance and lack of consideration for others, your failure to live up to your rightful spouse, and your failure as a father. Additionally, you claim to be a

gentleman, yet your actio

often

reflect a more petty character."

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Samuel was furious and embarrassed.

He snapped, "You think so little of me, yet you're still eager to cling to me? Our feelings were never truly mutual. Our marriage was your obsession from the start, and I was simply pressured by the influence of the royal family..."

"Be quiet." Leona's eyes were red, and her lips trembled again as he spoke of their marriage. She felt deeply ashamed and distressed.

"I did have feelings for you, but you also claimed to have feelings for me. That's how this wretched union came about. If my family had any power, would you have dared mistreat me?"

Her tears fell uncontrollably despite her best efforts to hold them back. Though she tried to remain composed, her natural weakness meant that her emotions got the better of her, and the tears flowed freely.

She was so thin and fragile, and she was trying to stifle her sobs but failed. Her appearance stirred a fleeting sense of guilt in Samuel.

Yet, this guilt was short-lived. He had vowed to be loyal to Ruby and not to show any interest or pity toward other women.

He responded coldly, "I mistreated you? Why don't you talk about how you mistreated her? You live comfortably in Gracehold Estate, while Ruby has to stay in that shabby place on Hibiscus Lane with me. No, they even say they want to take that manor back, and I've been stripped of my title as heir. My miserable situation with Ruby is all because of your refusal to accept her! And now, your cousin is making things worse, leading to the Oversight Department's accusations against me." "What?!"

Leona was so enraged that she felt her chest tighten. Her earlier composure was completely lost, and she couldn't even speak clearly.

In a fit of anger, she threw a pillow at him.

"You bastard!"

The pillow missed him entirely.

Samuel retorted coldly, "I've already apologized. Whether you accept it or not is your problem."

He turned to leave, but Leah grabbed him by the collar. As he turned, his collar was yanked, nearly causing him to stumble.

Leah said sternly, "May I speak?"

Samuel looked at her with disdain. "And why should you..."

Before he could finish, Leah's left hook struck him hard. He felt a sharp ringing in his ears, and his vision went dark. When he came to, he was lying on the ground.

His mouth filled with a coppery taste as he spat out blood. Fury surged through him, and he was about to roar with rage when he saw Leah bowing to him with a stern expression. "I'm sorry. I apologize."

After her apology, Leah helped Samuel up, forcing him to stand. Her expression remained serious. "Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you? I want to kill you!" Samuel's eyes were bloodshot with rage.

"If you still want to kill me after I apologized, why should she forgive you? Get out! No child would want to be born to a father like you!" Leah roared.

She shoved him out, throwing him onto the corridor, and then slammed the door shut behind him.

Samuel lay at the base of the stone steps. The servants Abigail had summoned hurried to help him up.

Samuel pushed them away, his face contorted with anger. "Don't touch me! Get lost!"

After being struck twice by the two women by Leona's side, Samuel felt utterly disgraced. Without looking back, he stormed out of the residence.

Didn't they tell him to apologize? He had done it.

His family was just momentarily angry. His grandmother would surely miss him and eventually call him back.

Leona wiped her tears vigorously,

her voice choking as she asked, "Am really that useless? I can't even argue properly, let alone come up with the right words to scold him."

Alana comforted her, "No, you were very effective this time. You scolded him and argued with him. Though it could have been stronger, it's progress. You used to be unable to say anything at all, which was truly frustrating."

Leah also encouraged her, "Yes, you did well this time. Practice a bit more in the coming days, and L'ff bring him back for you to scold again. You'll definitely improve further."

Hazel wiped her own tears and said, "Your Grace, you did really well this time."

Leona replied bitterly, "Even you are saying I did well, Hazel. That just shows how weak I used to be."

Chapter 515

Samuel returned to the manor on Hibiscus Lane and immediately went to rinse his mouth, spitting out the blood. He couldn't let Ruby worry.

In Hibiscus Lane, there were only two shop servants-one in the kitchen, and the other likely attending to Ruby.

Samuel used the cold water in the dining room to rinse his mouth, feeling a sharp pain throbbing in his head. The left side of his mouth felt as though it were splitting open, and he had to endure the pain for a while before he could force back his tears. Leona was so ruthless. She had her husband beaten time and again.

Samuel had been blinded by her gentle and mild demeanor, not realizing how jealous she truly was.

Her cousin, the Hell Monarch's princess consort, was just like her-they were one and the same.

He had been beaten, and both his grandmother and father would surely know. So, he had an excuse to leave in anger. If he were asked to return again, he wouldn't go back so easily.

"Bill, bring me that handkerchief..." he called out, before remembering that Bill had not come with him from Gracehold Estate.

Bill's bond papers were with his mother, and she had forbidden him from coming.

Years of living in luxury and privilege had made him feel that his current situation was unbearably shabby and pitiful.

He recalled his early days as a top scholar and then marrying a duchess and becoming her consort. Although he was just starting his career, everyone said his future was limitless. Yet, the grandeur of those days had only made his current situation seem more desolate. After rinsing his mouth and wiping his face clean, he headed towards Moonlit Hall.

Upon entering, he saw a bag on the table. Ruby had her back to him, dressed neatly with hairpins in her hair. She wore the apricot-yellow embroidered pleated dress from when he had brought her home.

"Ruby!" Samuel called out, embracing her from behind and kissing her cheek. "Whose bag is this?"

Celeste slowly pushed him away. Her face, no longer gentle and charming, seemed to have frozen over with a layer of frost. "I'm not Ruby. My name is Celeste."

Samuel's arm suddenly felt empty. He stared blankly. "But to me, Celeste and Ruby are the same."

Celeste stood up, her eyes as cold as ice. "Whatever."

Samuel's heart sank. "Ruby, what's wrong?"

Celeste picked up the bag and said flatly, "I waited for you to return to say goodbye. From now on, we'll go our separate ways."

Samuel was completely shocked, and his expression froze. "What are you saying?"

Celeste looked at him. Her once tender eyes were now like shards of ice. "I'm saying that our relationship ends here."

"W-Why?" he stammered, his lips trembling. He grabbed Celeste's arm desperately. "Did someone from Gracehold Estate come? Did someone from the duchess' side come? Did they bully you? Did they force you to leave me?"

He clumsily tried to hold her close. "Don't worry about what they say or do. I won't leave you. I absolutely won't abandon you!"

Celeste rolled her eyes, clearly fed up. "I'm the one who doesn't want you. Look at yourself now. You've lost your official position and your title as heir. You'll never inherit the title again. All you have is the fame of a top scholar, which is worthless now. The entire capital knows about your

your reputation for favours about

concubine over your wife. You're so desperate to find a mentor, but even they wouldn't want you because of your tarnished character."

Samuel was devastated. He couldn't believe the woman before him had become so cold and unfamiliar. His heart felt like it was being torn apart.

"But who did I do all that for? It was all for you."

"So what? Am' + supposed to feel grateful?" Celeste shot him a disdainful look. "I could say today's departure was due to pressure from your family, the duchess, or even the Hell Monarch's princess consort, but I can't be bothered.

"You were born into privilege, with an inheritance to look forward to. Yet, you spend every day railing against the very power you enjoy. It's hypocritical. If you were just an ordinary person, would you dare speak so recklessly? You're just someone who enjoys the benefits and then complains about them. I despise people like you. Don't come looking for me again!"

With that, Celeste strode out.

Samuel ran after her. "You said you loved me!"

Celeste didn't even glance back. "I lied, you worthless fool!"

The harsh words from the one he loved shattered Samuel completely. He felt the world spinning and darkness closing in. Then, he collapsed to the ground.

Chapter 516

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After being roused from his stupor by the servants, Samuel sat in the courtyard, feeling as though his heart had been hollowed out. No matter who called out to him, he remained unresponsive. Outside Hibiscus Lane, Henry's men kept a close watch. When they reported back to Henry, he frowned.

"Didn't Celeste say she would sever ties with him properly? Forget it. He's of no use anyway. The reputation of the Earl of Gracehold's family is already notorious. It wouldn't matter what he did." Samuel spent two days at Hibiscus Lane, refusing to eat or drink. Celeste's departure wasn't the most devastating blow to him.

The real blow was the words she had spoken before leaving.

He had high ambitions and had achieved the rank of third place in the national examinations, garnering the admiration of many noble young women in the capital. He saw himself as a genius, someone born to stand apart from the ordinary, destined to rise above the common crowd.

In his mind, he wasn't just exceptional-he was meant to be a beacon of inspiration, revered by the masses.

Even when he lost his official position for Ruby, he wasn't afraid. In fact, it only proved how different he was from the world around him. He had broken free from society's shackles and fallen in love with a courtesan. Though he faced slander and criticism, future historians would record his story, and future generations would respect his fearless love for Ruby.

But when he lost his position as heir, a sense of panic began to creep in.

He knew that even if he couldn't become an official or enter the ranks of civil service, he would still inherit a noble title. As a titled lord, he could live his life in wealth and prestige, criticizing other nobles from a place of secure privilege.

Claire relayed what happened at Hibiscus Lane to Violet, who then informed Carissa. Alana had visited a couple of days earlier, and informed Carissa that Leona had quarreled with Samuel.

Carissa advised Alana to gently guide Leona, to remind her that as a duchess, her authority meant that everyone in Gracehold Estate had to heed her wishes-including Samuel.

When feelings between a couple were gone, power became the deciding factor. As long as her family opposed it, Leona wouldn't consider divorce as an option.

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Early in the morning in the middle of the month, the stewards from the estates and shops lined up outside, waiting to report to Carissa.

After questioning each of them, it was already midday. Carissa had them stay for lunch before sending them back to their duties.

Since taking charge of the household affairs, she had her hands full. Thankfully, the entire estate had previously been managed well under Jacob and Luke, so there was little to clean up. The next day marked the formal engagement ceremony between Kiera and Logan.

Logan arrived with his mother and the elders of his family. Though Kylie had referred to him as her brother previously, as she considered him as such, Logan was actually her cousin from the third branch of the Quinton family. His mother, Audrey, came from a humble background but was Known for her kind and honest nature. Logan's father suffered a head injury in his youth, and he had the intelligence of a child. So, he didn't accompany them today.

Helen had hoped her daughter would marry into the Quinton family, but she hadn't been impressed with Logan at first. Now, seeing him well-groomed and graceful, with proper behavior and fluent responses, he seemed far from the idle playboy rumored about. Moreover, Carissa had already advised Helen that Kiera's husband didn't need to be a high-ranking official. It was more important that he had good character, was considerate, and treated Kiera well.

Given that the two were mutually interested, their future together seemed promising.

So today, Helen sized up Logan with the keen eye of a mother-in-law checking out her future son-in-law. The more she looked, the more she felt that Logan wasn't bad at all.

As for Audrey, she was easy to get

along with. She spoke gently and had a gaze that lacked any sharpness. Helen also recalled that Audrey didn't mind Logan's father's limited intellect. The couple was deeply affectionate, and children raised in such an environment were unlikely to turn out poorly.

So, after the engagement ceremony, Helen's heart settled. The match seemed favorable. Whether the remaining members of Logan's family were easy to deal with or not was of little concern, as the young couple would be living in the princess' residence anyway. Meanwhile, Violet had followed Winona's instructions and established a base in the capital. Winona assigned Claire, Lillian, Iris, and Mabel to her. These individuals were among Winona's most skilled scouts, adept at Lightfoot Skill and disguise.

In addition to them, there were

several more whose identities Violet was unaware of. They followed Claire's orders and operated in

passersby, other times infiltrating noble households as maids, or setting up stalls around the city.

various capacities-sometimes

Chapter 517

That day, Claire reported that several suspicious individuals had entered the capital and checked into Prestige Lodge.

The reason they were considered suspicious was because they carried a distinct aura of violence, one that set them apart from the usual martial arts practitioners. This bloodthirsty presence was something the scouts were highly sensitive to. As soon as the scouts detected it, they began to track the individuals closely. After they checked into Prestige Lodge and didn't come out, the scouts reported their findings.

Upon hearing the report, Violet went to find Carissa.

Carissa frowned when she heard the news. The capital was the most prosperous and bustling place in the kingdom, with a significant number of merchants and martial artists coming and going.

"People who have killed excessively often carry a distinct scent," Violet said. "That's what Claire said, and that's why those people are highly suspicious. Could they be plotting to assassinate the king?"

Carissa thought for a moment before shaking her head. "An assassination attempt on the king would need to occur when he is outside the palace. Attempting to assassinate him inside the palace would be the height of folly, especially since they are only a few in number. An inside accomplice would be necessary for such a plot."

"Should we ask Michael to investigate the palace guards?" Violet suggested.

"No," Carissa said as she clasped her hands together and looked out at the overcast sky.

The summer rains had begun. Though the capital was situated further north, it rained more after summer.

She recalled the recent issues surrounding the new crown prince of Westhaven.

"Has Claire mentioned if these individuals seem like they're from Starhaven? Or could they be from Westhaven?"

"If they managed to enter the capital smoothly, they're likely from Starhaven," Violet replied.

"Not necessarily. If they've been in Starhaven for a long time, it wouldn't be difficult for them to obtain the necessary papers to enter the capital."

"Do you suspect they might be from Westhaven?" Violet asked.

Carissa replied, "I have some suspicion, but I'm also considering the possibility that they might be agents sent by Prince Yuvan. However, I'm puzzled by his motives for sending people into the

capital. If they're from Westhaven, I would assume they're here to seek revenge for their deceased crown prince. But if Prince Yuvan is behind this, I can't even begin to guess his reasons."

Violet said, "It could be that we're worrying too much and being overly sensitive. Perhaps they're just a few wanderers coming to the capital to seek their fortune."

Carissa didn't share this false sense of security. "Keep an eye on them. Report immediately if there's any news."

"Don't worry, I'm on it," Violet replied,

taking a sip of coffee and glancing out with wide eyes. "Looks like it's going to rain. Ryan is scheduled go to Silverbrook Academy tomorrow. I hope the rain holds off

until then."

"Yeah," Carissa responded absentmindedly, her mind preoccupied with the suspicious individuals and their possible motives.

Could they be Westhaven spies?

She couldn't bring herself to say those words to Violet. In fact, just hearing the mention of Westhaven spies felt like a dagger driving deep into her heart.

Liam had told her that apart from those who were killed on the spot, he had dealt with all the remaining Westhaven spies in Starhaven. His words should be credible. After thinking for a while, Carissa said to Violet, "Vivi, find out about Barrett's recent duty schedule."

"No need to ask. Duty changes every ten days. These days, he's on daytime duty, and he'll switch to night duty in twenty days."

"Night duty." Carissa said softly. "On the day he changes shifts, keep an eye on Prestige Lodge."

"Do you still think they're targeting Aurora?" Violet asked, unconvinced. "If they're after her would they need so many people? Aurora's martial skills aren't that great."

Carissa replied, "We've fought

alongside her and sparred with her,

so we know her skills. But before that, she was renowned far and wide as Starhaven's top female general. It's possible that someone might overestimate her abilities."

"Fine," Violet said with a touch of annoyance. "We hate her so much we wish she were dead, but we can't let her die."

"We can't let her die," Carissa repeated.

As she said it, a sudden realization hit her.

"No, it can't be Westhaven's new crown prince. His goal wouldn't have just been to kill Aurora. The reason we're keeping Aurora alive is so that he can hold her accountable later. If he had someone kill her, he wouldn't be able to use her as leverage for the Fawnrun City incident to

negotiate with us. He wouldn't make such a mistake."

Chapter 518

Violet looked at Carissa, and asked, "If they're not targeting Aurora, could they be targeting you and the marshal's household?"

"I don't know," Carissa admitted.

She hadn't been able to analyze it yet. After all, she only knew that a few individuals with a heavy aura of bloodlust had entered the capital, and there was no other information.

"I need to have Rod strengthen the defenses of the estate. Tomorrow, I'll take Ryan to the academy and have Rod station people outside for a few days until those individuals leave."

No matter what, caution was paramount. With Rafael and Jacob not in the estate, it was better to take extra precautions rather than rely on luck.

That day, Travis began setting up defenses. With five hundred soldiers stationed in Hell Monarch Estate under the king's nose, Salvador might feel some trepidation. However, their actual utility was significant.

Setting up the defense was quite straightforward. They worked in three-hour shifts, and there were more than enough people for the job.

Since there was no curfew in the capital at night, Travis personally took charge at night, given that nighttime was often when crimes occurred. The likelihood of several people storming the estate in broad daylight was quite low.

Early the next morning, Carissa and Violet took Ryan out after the carriage was ready. It was Ryan's first day at the academy. Though he claimed not to be nervous, a hint of anxiety was evident on his face.

Ryan was dressed in a blue outfit, with his hair styled and secured with a blue silk ribbon, presenting a clean and somewhat scholarly appearance.

Frederick had chosen Ryan's study partner, who was the grandson of Frederick's cousin. Born on New Year's Eve, he was named Evan and was the same age as Ryan.

Evan carried a book bag containing ink, brushes, and paper.

Ryan's gait was slightly awkward, but he wasn't worried about being mocked. He had endured scorn and abuse in his days as a beggar, which had made him emotionally resilient.

Violet glanced at the overcast sky and said, "It looks like it's going to rain. We need to hurry, or we'll be stuck in a traffic jam at the academy."

Carissa was still standing by the carriage and scanning the surroundings. She saw nothing unusual, and then lifted her skirt to get in. "Do we have an umbrella?"

"Yes, I've got it all," Violet said, checking the items. "I've got a packed lunch and a storybook too. We can read it while waiting for him to finish class at the academy." Carissa told the coachman, "Alright, let's go!"

The carriage was spacious and quite comfortable. However, just as they were nearing the academy, it began to rain. Fortunately, it was only a light shower and wouldn't cause much delay. Since they had left early, they arrived at the academy without encountering any traffic jams. At the large entrance, only a few carriages were lined up.

Carissa opened her umbrella and

stepped out of the carriage first. She

then carefully lifted Ryan down,

while Evan jumped down on his

own

At his age, he was full of

energy and excitement.

As the rain grew heavier, Violet tossed another umbrella down from the carriage. "Don't get wet. We didn't bring any extra clothes to change into." "Got it, Aunt Violet!" Ryan called out loudly.

"Good boy, Ryan!" Violet said with a smile, waving at him. "Go on. We'll wait around here for you."

Evan held the umbrella and took Ryan's hand, and they dashed into the academy. Carissa called out, "Don't run too fast. Be careful, and don't slip."

As soon as she finished speaking, there was a loud "thud", as if someone had fallen.

Carissa turned toward the sound and saw a woman in plain white clothes lying on the ground, having fallen from a nearby carriage. A maid was rushing to help her, but since she was holding an umbrella in one hand and trying to support the woman with the other, she slipped and ended up falling on top of her. The woman let out a muffled cry of pain.

The coachman ran over, but as a man, it wasn't appropriate for him to help them up. He could only offer his coat for the maid to hold onto in an attempt to help the woman up. But with the woman's legs trapped underneath, the maid struggled to get up and only ended up pressing the woman down further.

Carissa ran over, grabbed the maid to steady her, and then bent down to help the woman up.

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The woman's face was pale, her hair and clothes drenched by the rain. Clearly embarrassed by her disheveled appearance, she used her sleeve to cover her face and murmured to Carissa, "Thank you. Thank you so much."

"No need to thank me," Carissa said. "Are you hurt badly?"

"Not too badly... Oh!" The woman shifted her foot and winced as a sharp pain shot through her left ankle, letting out a cry of discomfort.

"It seems like you might have twisted your ankle," Carissa observed. She helped support the woman, and the maid rushed over to assist as well. However, the maid's hands were covered in blood, likely from scraping them on the rough ground during the fall. Carissa frowned, and said, "My carriage is just up ahead. I have some medicine and ointment in it. Why don't you come with me, and I can take care of you there."

The woman hesitated. "W-Wouldn't that be too much trouble? And I still don't know your name."

Carissa replied, "My name is Carissa. We've met before."

The woman in question was Kayla, who had tried to help Viola at The Golden Tower. After returning from Meadow Ridge, Carissa had visited Elderglen Estate with her mother and had seen Kayla there.

Hearing Carissa's name, Kayla lowered her sleeve and looked at her more closely. "Oh, it's you, Your Grace. I'm sorry for my rudeness."

"Lady Kayla, let's get you into my carriage for some care. There are more carriages arriving behind us," Carissa said.

"Thank you. I'm so sorry for the trouble," Kayla replied.

She was aware of her position. As a widow, she feared scandal and unwanted gossip. Her current state might attract unwanted speculation. Violet also hurried over. She helped Carissa support Kayla. In the end, Violet simply lifted her into the carriage, and Kayla blushed deeply.

"I'm truly sorry for the inconvenience."

Carissa also helped Kayla's maid into the carriage. Since Lulu and the others were not with them today, the carriage, though accommodating four people, didn't feel cramped.

Violet recognized Kayla as well, but she refrained from mentioning the events at The Golden Tower.

Kayla immediately remembered

Violet, as the latter had been

standing at the private room

entrance with her arms crossed and watching the drama unfold. Also, her strikingly beautiful face was

unforgettable after a single glance.

Feeling embarrassed by the recollection of that day, Kayla offered an awkward explanation, "I was really interested in that ruby tiara that day..."

Violet smiled. "I was interested in it too. It's unfortunate that Madam Warren bought it."

Kayla smiled awkwardly, regretting her attempt to explain. She should have avoided mentioning that day to prevent further embarrassment.

Violet and Carissa exchanged glances, both sensing that Kayla must not have been out socializing for a while, as she seemed preoccupied with the incident from The Golden Tower. Violet attended to the maid, cleaning the bloodstains and applying medicine. Meanwhile, Carissa disregarded Kayla's discomfort and gently removed her shoes and socks.

Noticing the swelling around her ankle, Carissa asked, "Lady Kayla, could you gently move your ankle to see if it hurts?"

Kayla followed her instructions, moving her ankle lightly and letting out a pained hiss. "It hurts."

"I hope it's not a fracture," Carissa said as she applied an ointment Sebastian had given her. "This ointment is from Arcane Sanctum and is quite effective for pain relief. However, because it's very good at relieving pain, it might mask the severity of the injury. You should still have a physician examine it once you get back."

"Thank you so much, Your Grace. I'm truly grateful and very sorry for the trouble," Kayla said softly, her voice barely above a whisper. She seemed very reserved, repeatedly expressing her gratitude and apologies. "There's no need to be so formal, Lady Kayla. We're old acquaintances, so let's not be so distant," Carissa said.

At the mention of their old

acquaintance, Kayla's eyes

reddened. She quickly turned her face away, clutching her

handkerchief. "With more peop net

arriving, could I wait until it's less crowded before going back to my carriage?"

"Of course," Carissa replied. "We're waiting until the academy class ends."

She glanced at Kayla, then lifted the curtain and instructed the coachman, "Move the carriage a little further away."

The carriage stopped at the northern corner of Silverbrook Academy, while the Marquis of Elderglen's family's carriage followed behind to avoid traffic congestion.

The rain grew heavier, and the crowd increased. With Kayla's injured foot, it was inconvenient for her to return to her carriage at this time. She had to wait until the carriages bringing children to the academy had dispersed before she could leave. "Are you here to send your son to school, Lady Kayla?" Carissa asked, knowing that Kayla had adopted a son but unaware of his age.

"Yes, it's his first day at school, so I came to see him off." A genuine smile appeared on Kayla's face as she spoke of her son, making her expression seem more natural.

"How old is he? What's his name?"

Kayla replied, "He's seven years old, and his name is Alexander."

Violet laughed and said, "From that name, one can tell he comes from a family of generals."

Kayla's expression momentarily faltered, a hint of bitterness showing in her eyes before she quickly masked it. She softly explained, "My late husband chose names for our future children. If we had a son, he wanted a name that symbolized protection and leadership."

"I see!" Violet said, sensing the delicate nature of the conversation. Noting Kayla's reddened eyes and her apparent emotional state, Violet changed the subject. "Your maid's hand is injured. Let me help tidy your hair."

"Oh no, that's not necessary," Kayla protested, but Violet was already starting to arrange her hair.

Violet added, "Don't be fooled by my rough appearance. I'm quite skilled at hairstyling."

Unable to stop Violet, Kayla could only continue to apologize and express her embarrassment.

To ease Kayla's emotions, Carissa started a casual conversation, "I'm also here to send my nephew to school today. Like your son, it's his first day at the academy."

Silverbrook Academy had limited slots each year, so the new students were usually grouped together.

"It's Ryan, right?" Kayla asked, already knowing about Ryan. Her smile broadened slightly. "That's wonderful."

Carissa understood from Kayla's words that it was more than just a polite response-it hinted at the Sinclair family's growing hopes.

She observed Kayla's youthful yet despondent face and said gently, "Everything will be alright. What's past is past. Those who remain must live well."

Kayla nodded slightly, her expression reflecting a deep sadness.

The rain intensified, and the commotion at the academy's entrance grew louder, accompanied by shouts. The intersection was clearly blocked. Even Kayla's carriage couldn't move for the moment.

As Violet helped Kayla with her hair, she noticed an earring had fallen off. "You've lost an earring. It must have come off when you fell."

Kayla gasped, her face paled. She quickly touched both earlobes and confirmed that the earring on her left side was indeed missing. She hurried to lift the curtain as she said, "I need to go find it." The maid said, "Madam Kayla, don't go out. Let me search for it."

Violet peered outside and said, "It's crowded and chaotic right now. The spot where you fell has already been trampled by carriages, and your earring is quite large with a pearl, so someone might have picked it up."

Many carriages were not personally driven by the families; some were servants or hired coachmen. If they had seen the pearl earring while dropping off the children, they might have taken it. Kayla suddenly covered her face with her hands and began to cry. "No, I have to find it. It's a token of my husband's love. I can't lose it."

She wiped her tears away and said urgently, "I have to go find it. If I don't, someone might pick it up."

She tried to lift the curtain to jump out of the carriage, but the maid grabbed her arm. "Madam Kayla, don't rush."

Carissa and Violet helped her out of the carriage, holding umbrellas and joining her in the search.

At the spot where Kayla had fallen, Carissa and Violet scanned the ground carefully, inch by inch.

However the crowd and the rain et

made the task almost impossible. The carriages were maneuvering to turn around, and shouts demanded that they move aside.

With the heavy rain and the dense crowd, finding a pearl earring was nearly hopeless.

Carissa looked up, about to suggest waiting until the rain stopped, when she saw Kayla kneeling on the ground, dragging one foot forward while feeling around with her hands. The torrential rain soaked her slender frame, and her neatly arranged hair was now a tangled mess, making her appear like a madwoman.

Carissa's heart ached, and she nearly cried. She hurried over and helped Kayla to her feet. "Get back in the carriage. We'll continue searching."

"No!" Kayla shook her head through her tears, her hands trembling uncontrollably. She tried to hold back her emotions, but was unable to. "I must find it. It's very important to me-it truly is!"