

## War Song 531

### Chapter 531

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The Royal Citadel personnel arrived quickly. Gregory briefed them and conferred with Michael. It was decided that the bodies of the assassins would be taken back to the Royal Citadel.

Since the matter was now in the hands of the authorities, statements were crucial. The information revealed to Michael earlier would need to be reiterated to the Royal Citadel personnel. To avoid having to answer more questions, Aurora pretended to have fainted from her injuries and was carried back to her room.

Everyone was busy dealing with the aftermath.

After handling all the inquiries, Barrett finally collapsed from exhaustion. Viola instructed that he be taken to the bed in Grace Mansion to rest.

Charlotte usually preferred not to get involved in the affairs of the main house. However, when she heard Carissa had been the one to save them tonight, she went straight to Rebecca and demanded sharply, "How did you treat her in the past? Today, she saved the entire Warren family. Do you feel any shame? Will you still speak ill of her in the future?"

For the first time, Rebecca was at a loss for words in front of her sister-in-law. She was still in shock after the danger she faced tonight, which had nearly taken what was left of her life.

Yet, Rebecca was naturally strong and stubborn. After several changes in her expression, she finally managed to say, "How would she know that Valor Estate was under attack? Did she send the assassins herself? The authorities haven't investigated clearly yet, so why are you jumping to conclusions?"

Charlotte was dumbfounded. "So, you're saying she hired the assassins to kill you, and then came to your rescue so you'd owe her your lives? Is that what you mean? After all, if our family acknowledges her help, she can use that to secure wealth and power for herself, right?"

After saying that, Charlotte left, wiping away her tears as she went. She felt deeply wronged, both for Carissa and for herself. She even considered the idea of moving out of Valor Estate.

Amelia was starting to stand on her own feet, but there were Barrett's two wives to consider. One was cruel, while the other was foolish. Neither of them was of any real use, and they had managed to tarnish the family's reputation.

But moving out and separating from the main family now seemed impossible. The Warren family had sold off all its properties and shops. Charlotte's branch of the family couldn't afford even a house on their own. They couldn't possibly just rent a house to live in. What about the marriages of their children?

But what was the point of separating themselves from the main family, but still living in the same estate? The main family had spent a lot of money over the years, and it was impossible to make them pay back half of it.

Jonathan seemed like a non-existent figure and was incapable of handling any matter. Benjamin was even less useful, and Bryan was a complete failure who was useless in both academics and combat.

Charlotte found herself distressed, wondering how they would continue living. It was truly a source of endless worry.

Carissa left Valor Estate and quickly returned to her residence.

Tonight, Claire had come to report that several people dressed in black were heading towards Valor Estate. Carissa immediately ordered the

household soldiers to be on high net

alert. She also instructed Violet to keep a close watch on Helen and Ryan. Carissa suspected it might be a diversion, so the people in Hell Monarch Estate had to be vigilant. Carissa herself took her Rose Spear and headed to Valor Estate. Given that the situation involved inevitable killings and battles, she decided to handle it personally. That way, she could better explain things to the king later and avoid implicating Violet and Travis. After all, her status as the princess consort would spare her many troubles.

Upon returning to Hell Monarch Estate, she found that everything was calm.

Violet and Travis hurried over to her and asked, "How did it go? Were there any assassins who survived?"

"There were some, but Aurora killed them all," Carissa said, putting down her Rose Spear.

She was indeed angry, but Aurora's actions only confirmed her guilt and fear.

"Was everything fine here?" Carissa asked.

"Everything is fine. Nothing happened," Violet replied, frowning. "Aurora killed all the assassins? Didn't you need to step in?"

"I severed their tendons and drained their cores. Gregory also ordered people to bind them, but before Michael could arrive, Aurora had already slit their throats," Carissa explained. "She murdered them to silence them," Travis said, leaning on a metal staff, deep in thought. "They weren't from Westhaven, right?"

"They were from Starhaven," Carissa confirmed.

There were some differences in appearance between the people of Westhaven and Starhaven. Westhaven people had slightly darker skin, with high noses and deep-set eyes.

Carissa was almost certain that

Yuvan was behind it. By killing Aurora, he would leave Westhaven's people with no outlet for their anger. That would create an opportunity for a war between the two kingdoms.

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Carissa recalled she had met Edmund, Westhaven's third prince, outside Simonton City. He was now the crown prince of Westhaven. He harbored a deep-seated hatred towards the people of Starhaven. If he ascended to the throne, the situation in Fawnrun City would become very troublesome.

Carissa felt sorry for her grandfather, who was still stationed at Victory Pass even though he was well over sixty. By his age, most military officers would have retired and be enjoying life in the capital.

Carissa understood the king's intention to promote younger generals. But in recent years, there were hardly any who were truly capable of handling important roles.

Salvador had also stripped Rafael, who had been a feared general in both Westhaven and Sandoria, of his military authority. If he had still been in command, he could certainly have deterred potential threats.

For now, Oliver was in charge during this period of peace when there was no immediate danger. However, if conflict were to erupt again, he would be inadequate for the task.

"Rest early," Carissa advised. "The case will likely be handed over to the Royal Citadel. They might come by tomorrow for questioning, and perhaps the king will summon me to the palace."

Having visited Valor Estate, Carissa felt a bit unsettled and was reluctant to discuss it further. Particularly, hearing Barrett claim that she still harbored feelings for him was both laughable and exasperating. She was glad Rafael had left the capital. Otherwise, he would have been furious hearing such things.

The next day dawned clear and bright. The sun had just risen, painting the sky with beautiful, colorful hues.

Carissa was dressed and ready, and was about to ask why Ryan hadn't arrived yet when Lulu entered with breakfast.

"Ms. Spencer has taken Lord Ryan to the academy."

"So early?"

"Ms. Spencer began her martial arts practice early in the morning. Lord Ryan mentioned he didn't fully understand some of his lessons yesterday and wanted to head in early to consult his tutor."

"Oh? Were the lessons so difficult on the first day?" Carissa asked as she sat down, realizing she had forgotten to ask what the tutor had covered the previous day.

"I'm not sure," Lulu said with a smile. "But seeing Lord Ryan work so hard makes me happy."

"He's sensible and understands his future responsibilities," Carissa said with a mix of relief and concern.

In this world, whether in noble families or common households, stability and success always required one's own effort. If one relied solely on the blessings of their ancestors and parents without putting in any effort, they would end up being idle and potentially even become a wastrel.

The Duke of Northwatch's family didn't produce wastrels.

Their family currently held a duke title, which Ryan was set to inherit. As the only heir, he couldn't afford to be idle.

After breakfast, the various

stewards of the estate were waiting

outside. Carissa received their

reports in the side hall. She had instructed them to only bring forward the urgent matters, so it took about an hour to conclude the reports.

"Let's go and pay a visit to Mother," Carissa suggested. "The weather is so pleasant today, so let's take a stroll in the garden with her."

Helen was not fond of activities. She preferred to lie down when possible, sit when lying down was not an option, and only stand when she could neither lie down nor sit.

Just as Carissa was about to step out, she saw Violet supporting Kayla as they walked towards her. Kayla's maid was carrying a gift.

Carissa turned to Lulu and said, "Go inform Mother that I have guests. I will come by and see her later."

Lulu nodded and greeted Violet and Kayla before going to report to Helen.

Carissa stepped forward and took Kayla's hand.

She responded gratefully, "I'm sorry for the disturbance yesterday. I came today to express my thanks." "There's no need to be so formal," Carissa replied. "You're injured and should be resting at home." She and Violet helped Kayla into the side hall.

Kayla's maid presented a gift.

"Madam Kayla is aware of what happened yesterday and feels that it

has caused trouble for you, ne?

Grace. She is grateful for your

assistance and has prepared a small token of appreciation. Please accept it

Carissa asked Pearl to receive the gift and smiled. "It was just a small gesture. You didn't have to go to the trouble of involving the matriarch of the Marquis of Elderglen's family."

Kayla smiled shyly and said, "Mother

said that someone as kind-hearted as you is truly rare. She intended thank you in person, but with all the recent rain, her cough has

than el. the

worsened. She was afraid that she

might pass on her illness to you, so she sent me instead."

Kayla had dark circles under her eyes, and no amount of powder could conceal her fatigue. It was obvious that she had not slept well the previous night.

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After a brief chat, Carissa asked, "Can the earring be repaired?"

"My mother-in-law has already sent it to The Golden Tower for examination. It should be repairable," Kayla replied.

"Such a valuable item should be kept safely; wearing it out carries risks," Carissa said, noticing how much Kayla cared about the earring and understanding its significance to her.

"I usually don't wear it," Kayla said with a smile, though her eyes were misted with tears. "But it was Alexander's first day at the academy yesterday. I thought if I wore it, it would feel like my late husband was with me, sending our child to the academy together."

Her voice trembled slightly, "That was one of the things we vowed to do together when we got married. I know it's silly. But if I don't lie to myself sometimes, it's hard to get through the day."

Carissa's eyes were filled with compassion, half for Kayla and half for herself.

"You're strong, Your Grace. Unlike me, I know you wouldn't do something silly like lying to yourself."

Kayla's voice was tinged with sadness, but she seemed eager to talk to someone.

Perhaps it was because she hadn't confided in anyone for a long time. Or maybe because Kayla's husband had served under the Duke of Northwatch and perished with him and his six sons on the Southern Frontier battlefield.

"I have no grand ambitions in life, and my talents are unremarkable. My character is reserved and I lack decisiveness. My husband, on the other hand, was a hero in his youth. He was exceptionally handsome and came from an illustrious family. He could have married any woman he wanted. Yet, he chose me, an ordinary person.

"I married him when I was seventeen. I'm twenty-five now, and we've been married for eight years. We were often apart, which is why we couldn't have our own children. Fortunately, we have

Alexander now. Although he's not biologically ours, I believe my late husband would have liked him.

"I have no other hopes for this life. I only wish for Alexander to grow up to be as upright and noble as his father. And I hope that someday, I can take him to the place where his father fell, so he can pay his respects and offer a prayer."

As she spoke, Kayla looked at Carissa with tear-filled yet resolute eyes.

"If that day ever comes, I hope you can have someone guide us to where he rests, Your Grace."

Carissa gently replied, "Of course. When Alexander is older, I will send someone to lead you there. However, once you reach the Southern Frontier, you can ask the locals. They have erected a monument in the honor of those who have fallen, and there are continuous offerings."

Kayla smiled through her tears. "That's good to hear. I can rest easy now, truly."

Seeing her tears, Carissa felt unsure of how to comfort her.

"Don't cry. He wouldn't want to see you in pain."

"Yes, he would be heartbroken. He told me once that seeing me cry hurt him too," Kayla said, wiping her tears away with a sad smile. "The memories are so vivid in my mind Every night, when I toss and turn, I find myself replaying every word he said over and over in my mind. But that's enough. The memories he left me are enough to carry me through the rest of my life."

Carissa and Violet exchanged a glance, both feeling a pang of sorrow in their hearts.

Kayla composed herself. "I'm sorry for my loss of composure. I didn't mean to cause discomfort for you, Your Grace, Ms. Spencer."

"It helps to talk about it, doesn't it?" Violet said, her voice unusually gentle.

"Yes, it helps a lot," Kayla replied, her eyes and nose reddened from crying.

It seemed like all her emotions had finally found a release, bringing her a sense of calm.

After Kayla left, Violet hugged

Carissa, her nose tingling as she choked up. "Cari, I wasn't there for you during your hardest times, and it e

breaks my heart. How did you

manage? I can't even bear to think about it."

Amused at this unexpected display

of emotion, Carissa laughed through teary eyes. "But I got through it

home

Don't cry, or I won't be able to

either."

Violet quickly let go, fanning her eyes and tilting her head back to push down the tears. "No. No crying. Neither of us should cry."

"Who's crying?" Helen entered the room and saw both Violet and Carissa with red-rimmed eyes. "Wait, didn't we have guests? Why are you both in tears?" She muttered, "And why didn't the guest come to pay respects to me? How rude."

Violet and Carissa burst into laughter. Helen's pouty expression was just too much to handle, leaving neither of them able to keep a straight face.

Chapter 534

In Simonton City, Oliver was growing increasingly impatient. After four rounds of negotiations, Victor refused to budge. He insisted that he would only release Septimus in exchange for Simonton City.

The other prisoners had already been exchanged long ago. In fact, Starhaven had been on the losing side of the deal. The number of Sandorian captives they had was twice more than the Sinclair Army soldiers in Victor's hands. The numbers didn't add up, revealing how many prisoners Sandoria had killed. Now, they were demanding an entire city in exchange for Septimus' life.

It was absurd.

If it hadn't been for Rafael arriving a couple of days ago and urging him to delay the negotiations, Oliver would have flatly rejected Victor's demands.

Timothy and Louis had repeatedly stressed that Septimus had been an important figure in recovering the Southern Frontier, but Oliver didn't agree. He had reviewed the list of people in the Sinclair Army, and Septimus wasn't even on it. Even if his name not being on the list had been an oversight, how could one man alone provide critical intelligence?

So, Oliver believed that the intelligence Septimus delivered was something scouts could accomplish and wasn't of paramount importance.

The negotiations had already dragged on for too long. He was unwilling to delay any further. After all, the prisoners had been exchanged. If Septimus were a loyal and righteous man, he wouldn't want to see the kingdom sacrifice an entire city for his release.

The problem was that the king had sent Rafael to participate in the negotiations. After the prince's arrival, he issued an order to delay the negotiations, then disappeared. Oliver was fully aware of what this implied-sacrificing Septimus would bring disgrace, so Rafael had hidden away.

With the Hell Monarch out of sight, the responsibility for the negotiations fell solely on Oliver. Whether he chose to sacrifice Septimus or an entire city, the blame from the public would be directed at him, not Rafael.

Therefore, Oliver decided to send people to search for Rafael while reporting to the court that the prince had vanished upon arriving in Simonton City. That way, Rafael would be held accountable for his own disappearance.

With the report dispatched, any decision Oliver made from this point on would implicate Rafael as well-it was his own fault for hiding away.

Once that was done, Oliver called for Louis and Timothy to discuss the situation.

Oliver sat in the command tent, which was now far superior to the makeshift setup of the past. The spacious and brightly lit hall had comfortable couches and even a tunnel leading to a heated underground chamber for the winter.

He sipped a cup of coffee made from beans that had been brought from the capital, finding the fragrant aroma soothing and alleviating some of his irritation.

He spoke slowly, "Currently, the Hell Monarch's whereabouts are unknown. However, the negotiations can't be delayed any further. We must report back to the court. In your opinion, when should we terminate the negotiations?" Timothy and Louis exchanged glances. They both understood that Rafael hadn't gone missing or hidden away. Instead, he was leading a team to Sandoria's border city to rescue Septimus.

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Rafael had instructed them not to inform Oliver about his whereabouts, as the latter was too impulsive. If I learned Rafael's mission, he might become arrogant or careless during the negotiations, which would easily be noticed by Victor, who was no simple opponent.

After spending such a long time on the Southern Frontier battlefield, he was both brave and cautious, with a keen sense of suspicion. Oliver would find it difficult to outmaneuver him. "Why are you dawdling?" Oliver frowned. "In such a tense situation, why are you all spacing out?"

Louis was silent. Why was this

considered a tense situation? How many such situations had they faced during battles? But he didn't dare voice his thoughts. Although he

wasn't fond of Oliver, he had to respect his position as the

appointed marshal.

"Marshal Prince, I think we should drag this out for another ten days or so, and hold a few more rounds of negotiations. At least it will show that we've done everything possible," Louis suggested. Oliver shook his head. "Ten days or more is too long. Marshal Crow is already impatient. You saw the last negotiation-he's pressing hard for an answer now."

Timothy interjected, "Marshal Prince, regardless of his impatience, we should hold off for now. The king's order was for you to negotiate, but the final decision rests with the mar- the prince. We need to find him first. "Once we locate him, he can decide whether to reject Marshal Crow's demands outright or to offer a city in exchange for Septimus. Of course, I'm saying this with your best interest in mind to avoid public criticism." Louis added, "He's right, Marshal Prince. No matter what decision is made, the people will criticize it once they find out. If things get out of control, the king will have no choice but to use you to calm the unrest."

Though Oliver was not particularly capable, he wasn't a fool. He knew these two had served under the Duke of Northwatch and the Hell Monarch for years. He found it hard to believe they would sacrifice Rafael for his sake. His eyes narrowed. "Are you hiding something from me? Do you know the Hell Monarch's whereabouts?"

Timothy clasped his hands together.

"Marshal Prince, I don't know where Prince Rafael is, and I have no intention of harming him. However since the prince is not here at camp and is the king's younger brother, the king will undoubtedly protect him. But you are not in the same position. I am well aware that we follow you, not the prince, and thus am considering your interests."

Oliver pondered for a moment, his gaze growing colder.

Eventually, he announced, "Five days. In five days, I will tell Marshal Crow that the Hell Monarch advocates for abandoning the negotiations. You will act as witnesses." Timothy and Louis were taken aback.

Five days? And he planned to tell Victor that Rafael advocated for abandoning the negotiations? Wouldn't that reveal the prince's presence in Simonton City?

Five days-would Rafael be able to rescue Septimus in that time?

Chapter 535

On the fourth day since the assassins appeared in Valor Estate, Carissa was summoned to the palace. Before this, no one from the Royal Citadel had come to question her, nor had the garrison unit appeared.

Carissa wasn't surprised. After all, the Royal Citadel and the garrison unit would have used the information they got from the Warren family to conduct their investigation. They needed to gather a coherent account before reporting to the king. Only then would the king

summon her to the palace for questioning.

As Carissa made her way to the palace, Barrett finally forced himself out of bed and headed straight for Aurora's room.

He had been bedridden for several days, recovering from his injuries. He had also been stewing with anger for days. Although his wounds were superficial, he had received over a dozen sword wounds and had no choice but to remain in bed to recover. If he didn't, he risked permanent damage. If that happened, he would lose all his value and might even be unable to serve as a member of the Capital Guard.

Aurora had also been confined to bed for a few days. As her injuries were less severe, she could have gotten up earlier, but she didn't want to move. Everyone in the residence regarded her with hostility-even the servants looked at her with fear and disgust. She still received three meals a day and the necessary medication she needed. No one dared stop them. She and Barrett were married by the king's edict, and the Warren family didn't dare ask him to divorce her.

After what happened, Aurora realized that Barrett had completely lost any affection for her. All remnants of their past feelings were gone.

So, when he stormed in angrily, she was already mentally prepared.

Barrett yanked her off the bed, his face dark with gloom and fury. He roared, "Why did you use me to shield yourself from their attacks? Did you want me to die in the face of danger? Is this your idea of considering our future?"

Aurora looked at him coldly. "I did it because the assassins didn't intend to kill you. Did you think I really wanted you to die for me? The assassins were targeting me that night, but they showed mercy towards you. Have you wondered why?"

Barrett threw her roughly back onto the bed, his anger boiling over. "Don't try to deceive me with your excuses. I'm sick of your lies. Even if the assassins didn't want to kill me, I couldn't have avoided their blows. When you pulled me in front of you, you grabbed my arms so tightly that I couldn't even defend myself. Aurora, you're so cruel!"

"I'm cruel? You're an idiot!" Aurora propped herself up on the bed, her face twisted with anger as she glared at her husband. "Have you ever wondered why the assassins were only after me and didn't try to kill you?"

"How did Carissa swoop in to save you at the perfect moment? Just as those swords were about to strike you, her spear came flying in. How could a person's weapon arrive before the person themselves? It only proves one thing: she had been there all along."

"What are you trying to say now?" Barrett asked as stood in front of the bed, looking at the woman who had utterly disappointed him.

"I'm saying you're brainless! Carissa clearly sent those assassins! She wanted to kill me! That's why the assassins spared you!" Aurora shouted. "That's bullshit!"

Enraged, Barrett raised his hand as if to slap her, but his hand froze in mid-air for a moment before he pulled it back.

He said coldly, "If it were Carissa, why didn't she just kill those assassins outright? Why leave them alive for my uncle to take back to the Royal Citadel? It was you who killed those assassins because you feared they might be from Westhaven. You were afraid that the authorities would find out about what happened in Fawnrune City!"

"Aurora, don't try to act so righteous. You're clearly guilty. You know the crimes you committed in Fawnrune City were heinous. Your indiscriminate killing makes you no better than a beast."

Aurora laughed harshly. After her laughter subsided, she wiped away the tears from the corners of her eyes.

"Foolish-you're truly foolish, Barrett. Carissa's scheme worked. Yes, I am guilty. I was worried that those assassins were from Westhaven. But the moment I saw their masks lifted, I knew it was all a trap set by Carissa."

"She has always hated your whole

family. But instead of getting

revenge, she wanted all of you to be grateful to her. Look at you now-you've fallen for it. You even think she has feelings for you. Oh, Barrett, how could you be so stupid?"

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Barrett watched Aurora with a cold, unfeeling gaze as she smiled and mocked him with her words.

"If you hadn't fed me all that nonsense about wanting success for our future, I might've believed you. But Aurora, now I'd sooner trust a dog than you. You lied to me from the start. When I questioned you about Fawnrun City, you never told me the truth. Even when the truth came out, you were evasive and tried to cover it up. And now you want to incite me to doubt Carissa?"

He leaned in closer, his voice icy and disdainful, "Do you think I can still trust you? Do you remember how unsightly you acted that night? You were only concerned with saving yourself. You rushed straight to Grace Mansion and locked Viola and her two maids out. "No matter how hard they banged on the door, you refused to open it. Actually, I was wrong. It wasn't just an unsightly display-it was a show of how selfish and cruel you are. If you told everyone else what you said to Viola, do you think they would believe you? I don't believe a word of it.

"Julia, Yvonne, and the estate's guards didn't have to die. If you had fought alongside me instead of fleeing to Grace Mansion, I would have willingly faced death with you even if we both had been killed by the assassins."

He straightened up slowly. "But you didn't. You chose to escape to Grace Mansion, and you chose to drag down the people in the residence. Your life is precious to you, but the lives of others mean nothing. Don't forget, Julia and Yvonne were women too. Where's the so-called love you have for women? You boast about it so loudly, but your actions are cruel. That's who you are-selfish and as poisonous as a serpent."

Aurora's face momentarily froze, as if she couldn't believe Barrett was no longer easily deceived.

She snorted and retorted indifferently, "Say what you want. Anyone with a brain would think deeply about why Carissa knew about the danger in Valor Estate and why she came to rescue us. Don't try

to tell me she's just a martial artist with a warm heart who's willing to put aside past grudges and risk her life to save your family."

"Risk her life?" Barrett looked at her with contempt. "Perhaps it was dangerous for you, but do you think it was for her? How many moves did she use to deal with those assassins? Did you see it? You said you're the first female general of the era. You even said she couldn't shake your position. Don't you feel embarrassed? Even if you aren't, I feel embarrassed for you!"

Aurora finally lost her temper and yelled in exasperation, "Barrett! If you regard me so lightly, go to Carissa. Didn't you ask her if she still has feelings for you? Go on, defeat Prince Rafael and win Carissa back. I'll gladly give up my position as your rightful wife!"

Barrett looked at her coldly. "Did I hit a nerve? Did touch a sore spot? You've always only cared about your so-called position as the first female general. What's laughable is that Carissa has never given it a second thought. What matters to you means nothing to her."

Aurora stood up and swung a fist at his face, screaming in a fit of hysteria, "Get out! Get out of here!"

The force of the punch caused the wound on her injured arm to open up again. Blood stained her sleeves.

Barrett merely rubbed his cheek, ignoring the blood dripping from his wife's arm. "Evil deeds will always be met with retribution. I got mine, and you'll get yours. Beware, the civilians of Westhaven you slaughtered might come back to haunt you in your dreams."

"Ridiculous!" Aurora laughed

maniacally, her movements erratic.

"Let them come! I was able to kill them so easily. What do I have to fear now that they're dead? I did

nothing wrong. The people off

Westhaven are enemies of Starhaven. Whether they're soldiers or civilians, they all deserve to die."

"You're absolutely hopeless. You're so capable of killing, but instead of fighting enemies, you vent your anger on civilians to show off your power? How blind was I to have chosen you back then?" said Barrett.

"If you're so capable, divorce me! Go ahead, divorce me!" Aurora roared.

Barrett replied coldly, "You relied on the king's edict for our marriage. If I divorce you it would be disobeying the king's order. If I don't, we'll just keep enduring this, dragging each other down until one of us dies. No one will come out unscathed. Didn't you look down on women in the inner quarters? Why don't you just stay here for the rest of your life?"

Aurora threw pillows and blankets at him. "Get out! Go to Carissa since you love her so much!"

Unwilling to spare her another glance, Barrett turned to leave. As he exited Grace Mansion, he saw Viola outside. Her face pale with distress, she looked at him with eyes that were swollen from crying. Her lips trembled as she asked, "So, the one you love most is actually Lady Carissa? What does that make me?"

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Barrett looked at Viola, his heart heavy as he recalled her two deceased maids.

"I'm sorry about Julia and Yvonne. It's my fault, I couldn't protect them."

Viola clenched her fists and demanded, "Tell me, what is my place in your heart? Don't change the subject."

Leaning against a nearby tree, Barrett took a deep breath to steady himself and tried to calm the anger that had flared up.

He spoke softly, "I'm not changing the subject. I just... deeply regret and mourn their deaths. As for your place in my heart, it is naturally that of a primary wife."

"Just that?" Viola pressed, tears welling up in her swollen eyes. "Do you feel no affection for me? Don't you have any feelings for me at all?"

Barrett was momentarily stunned by the question.

He looked at Viola and opened his mouth, intending to explain that their marriage had been arranged by Natalie with the king's blessing, and that it was simply a union of families. As long as they treated each other with respect, that was enough.

But seeing the tears welling up in Viola's eyes, he couldn't bring himself to say it. He had never expected her to ask about his feelings.

Seeing him unable to speak, Viola understood everything and smiled bitterly. "So, there's no affection, only the duties of a married couple."

Barrett's gaze was troubled. "As your husband, it is my duty to respect and protect you..."

"The assassins killed Julia and Yvonne. When they came for me, you fought desperately to protect me was it only out of duty?" Viola took a step back, the heartbreak clear in her eyes. "Just duty?"

"I... you are my wife, so it's only natural for me to protect you," Barrett said, feeling guilty as he thought of how he had once treated Carissa.

Utterly disappointed, Viola wiped away her tears and said, "Since I entered your family, I've managed the household, served your mother, put up with your sister, and even endured your vile and venomous other wife, and now you tell me you don't love me at all? Why did I sacrifice so much for you?"

Barrett didn't know how to respond to her question. He just stared at her blankly for a long while before asking, "What do you want me to do?"

"What do I want you to do? Are you really asking me that?" Viola laughed through her tears, her composure completely gone. "Your salary, combined with your father's and older brother's, can't even cover the expenses of your family.

"How long can your reward of a hundred gold coins last? I've already been using my dowry to supplement the household, and now you ask me what you should do? All I ask is for a bit of sincerity. Are you really so clueless, or do you just not care? Or is your heart entirely with Lady Carissa?"

Barrett opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word. He couldn't bear to hurt Viola, yet he couldn't bring himself to say he had feelings for her.

Finally, he said, "From now on, don't use your own money to support the residence I work hard to earn more. Make sure Julia and Yvonne's families are well taken care of. there isn't enough money in the household, I'll borrow from elsewhere."

With that, he stumbled away, enduring the pain from his injuries.

Viola broke down in tears. She had spoken openly, and he should at least have given some response, even if only to spare her feelings. Yet it seemed his heart was entirely with Carissa.

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At that moment, Carissa was in the royal study.

"Greetings, Your Majesty!"

Carissa knelt on one knee, offering a respectful salute with her fist over her heart. Given her official position, she was required to pay her respects as a subject whilst in a formal setting like the royal study.

"Rise!" Salvador smiled at her. "Have a seat."

"Your Majesty, I can't do that," Carissa replied, shaking her head.

"Please, sit. Besides Derek, there is no one else here." Salvador waved his hand at a servant. "Have some coffee brought in."

Carissa inclined her head respectfully. "Thank you, Your Majesty."

After the coffee was served, Carissa took a sip and set it aside, waiting for Salvador to speak.

He made some casual conversation and inquired about Helen's well-being before getting to the point.

"I heard that a few days ago, Valor Estate was attacked, and you went to their aid. Were you injured?" he asked.

Carissa understood she had been summoned because of that matter, so she answered respectfully, "I wasn't injured, Your Majesty. Thank you for your concern." Salvador nodded. "That's good."

He took a few sips of his coffee, then set down the cup and continued to look at Carissa with sharp eyes.

"By the way, how did you learn about the attack on Valor Estate that night? It couldn't have been a coincidence that you were passing by with your Rose Spear, could it?" His gaze was sharp and intense as he studied Carissa's expression.

#### Chapter 538

Carissa knew that going out at night with a weapon and being aware of a potential attack on the Warren family would undoubtedly raise Salvador's suspicions. Although she was the deputy commander of the Mystic Army, her position was largely ceremonial, and it was not

appropriate to carry weapons at night or to know the whereabouts of assassins.

Salvador would suspect her, and by extension, Rafael, of having a network of spies.

Carissa looked up and spoke directly, "Your Majesty, as you're aware, my family was massacred by spies. Since Ryan was found, I have been worried day and night about his safety. So, I asked my guild senior to assign a few people to keep an eye on suspicious individuals who enter the capital.

"A few days ago, we discovered that some suspicious individuals with strong martial arts skills had checked into Prestige Lodge. They didn't leave their rooms. It was as if they were plotting something. I was concerned they might be targeting Ryan, so I had people keep them under close surveillance.

"Sure enough, that night, they dressed in dark clothing and jumped out of a window on the second floor of Prestige Lodge. But instead of heading to Hell Monarch Estate, we discovered that they seemed to be heading towards Sparrow Street.

"Since the prime minister and royal chancellor's residences are in that area, I feared they might attempt an assassination on high-ranking officials. I immediately followed them, only to find they were not going to Sparrow Street, but heading straight for Valor Estate." Salvador listened to her explanation with a smile, but his eyes remained sharp.

"Given your past grievances with the Warren family, why were you still willing to come to their aid?" he asked.

"Ultimately, it was a matter of human life. Also, I hold no deep-seated grudge against the Warren family. Moreover, as deputy commander of the Mystic Army, it is impossible for me to stand by and watch without intervening."

Salvador nodded slightly. "Your explanation is reasonable. However, did you know the assassins were targeting Aurora?"

"At the time, I didn't know. After I severed the assassins' tendons, Mr. Gregory tied them up. Since Mr. Brown had arrived with the Capital Guards by then, I left shortly after," Carissa replied.

Salvador sighed slowly. "I see. It's a pity the assassins were killed, so we can't find out who was behind them. From your encounter with them, did you discern any leads?"

Carissa thought for a moment, then shook her head. "I couldn't tell which guild they were from. The people I know are from reputable guilds and rarely use such ruthless sword techniques." Salvador furrowed his brow. "How many blows did you exchange with them?"

Carissa hesitated, then replied, "I lost count, but it was probably around twenty or thirty moves."

She didn't want to mention how quickly she had subdued the assassins, but it was likely that the Royal Citadel had already investigated. The matter could not be hidden, so she could only tell the truth.

Salvador's eyes held a hint of

admiration as he said, "In just twenty

or thirty moves, you managed to sever their tendons? Even fighting together Barrett and Aurora couldn't restrain the assassins and ended up losing several people in their estate. Carissa, your skills are far superior to theirs. If you were a man, you could certainly follow in your father's footsteps and become a renowned general."

Carissa shook her head. "I only wish to accompany Ryan as he grows up. He is my only blood relative now."

As Carissa spoke, she kept her eyes lowered, so she didn't notice the mixture of relief and regret in Salvador's gaze.

If she were a man, she would

undoubtedly have become a renowned general like her father. Even as a woman, she could still manage the Hell Monarch Army and Sinclair Army. Yet, she was the beloved of Salvador's brother. Rafael had gone to great lengths to marry her, thus stifling her potential to soar and be in control of military matters.

The position of deputy commander of the Mystic Army was a mark of her status, but fortunately, she was sensible and did not misuse this role.

Salvador gazed at her delicate face. "I know that Rafael has established his household soldiers, and their instructor is an apprentice from a Meadow Ridge guild, right? Also, the young woman from the Spencer family, who is an apprentice of the Inferno Guild, is staying with you, correct?"

Carissa replied, "Yes, Your Majesty. The instructor's name is Travis. He once fought alongside me at the Southern Frontier, and you awarded him a hundred gold coins. His guild consists entirely of women who live in difficult conditions, so his master sent him to the capital to seek employment and support the guild. As for Violet Spencer, she's an old friend from my youth and is temporarily staying in the capital to keep me company."

Salvador nodded. "It's fine. I was just asking casually. You may leave now."

Carissa saluted. "Yes, Your Majesty. I'll take my leave."

After leaving the royal study, she let out a small sigh of relief. It was fortunate that she had personally gone to Valor Estate.

If Violet and Travis had gone instead, Salvador might have become even more suspicious since they all lived in Hell Monarch Estate. After all, martial artists carrying weapons and moving about at night was against the law.

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Since the war, the border city of Sandoria had been heavily guarded, especially now that negotiations with Starhaven were underway. Sandoria's aim was to exchange the prisoners in their custody for the city of Simonton. Consequently, the dungeon where the prisoners were held was guarded by a substantial force. After being in Sandoria for several days, Rafael and his team had finally pinpointed the location where Septimus was imprisoned a heavily fortified outpost on the edge of the city. They had also thoroughly mapped out the prison's layout within the high walls. However, they didn't know about Oliver's five-day deadline, and what's more, tomorrow would mark the end of this period.

Rafael knew that Victor would be meeting with Oliver for negotiations again the next day. Even though the prince wasn't aware of the exact deadline, he suspected that Oliver wouldn't follow his orders to delay the negotiations further.

Rafael decided that while Victor was occupied with negotiations at Fangridge Mountain tomorrow, it would be the perfect time to execute their rescue plan.

Victor was known for his large entourage of skilled guards, and he would likely take most of them with him to the negotiations. Having spent so much time on the Southern Frontier battlefield and having suffered defeat against the Hell Monarch Army, Victor harbored a natural fear and hatred for them.

If Oliver refused the negotiations outright, Victor would likely leave quickly and be back by late tomorrow night.

So, it was crucial to see if Oliver would stall during the negotiation process. If he adopted a vague stance, he might be able to keep Victor at Fangridge Mountain until the day after tomorrow. That would give Rafael and his team more time for the rescue.

Jacob had the rescue operation planned out. The plan was to have one person waiting outside to provide support while the other three would breach the prison to rescue Septimus. Dylan was

assigned to stay outside and handle the situation. The operation was scheduled for dusk, when the guards would be changing shifts.

The three people going in were skilled fighters, but breaking into the heavily guarded fortress and rescuing the prisoners from the dungeon would still be quite challenging. However, Rafael and Everett had previously snuck in at night. Although they hadn't reached the dungeon, they were familiar with the general layout and the guards' shift rotations. That gave them a reasonable chance of success.

Meanwhile, in a wooden hut located near Bell River on the outskirts of the border city, ten men were gathered around a low table. They were rough-looking, had beards, and were dressed in fishermen's attire. Their faces were weathered and darkened by the sun, similar to the local fishermen.

They huddled around a blueprint laid out on the low table. The blueprint had been hard-earned they had captured a craftsman who had participated in the construction of the military post years ago and coerced him into drawing it.

However, the craftsman had only

been involved in the construction, so he didn't have the original plans. The drawing was made from memory and now, the craftsman was locked in a back room. He would be released after the rescue was completed.

"Tomorrow night should be our last chance," one of the men said, pointing to the blueprint with a serious and composed expression "But the rescue will be tough, and we may at die in there. We only know the building's layout and nothing about its defenses. The dungeon will undoubtedly be heavily guarded. With only ten of us, we're facing impossible odds.

"So, I'll ask you all: those who agree to go on the Rescue mission, raise your hands... Those who don't agree should take the opportunity to leave when Marshal Crow departs the border city tomorrow. Return to

Simonton City to reunite with your

families."

The man on the left frowned. "Tom, what are you saying? We are members of the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team, and we won't abandon anyone. During the war, we might have survived by any means to get intel.

"But the battle is over now, and the Southern Frontier has been reclaimed. We can't leave Law behind to be tormented. If we go back, we go together. If we die, we die together."

"That's right," the others chimed in. "All eleven of us if we die, we die together. If we live, we live together."

Tom's eyes brimmed with tears. Over the years, he had hidden and disguised himself, blending into various parts of the border city. He had braved the sun, rain, snow, and frost. He was no longer the distinguished Thomas Farrell of the past. He was just plain old Tom now.

Alongside him were Hom, Felix, Josh, Ben, Bruce, Ivan, Scott, Wilfred, and Tobias. There were two pairs of brothers in their group-Josh and Ben, as well as Scott and Wilfred.

Since the establishment of the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team, they had no distinctions between general and soldier. They were equals, united by a single purpose to relay the intelligence they gathered.

Tom slammed the table. "Alright, we'll move out at five in the evening tomorrow!"

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On the evening of June eighteenth, the ten men raised their coarse cups that were filled with cold water. For years, they hadn't had coffee or a drop of alcohol.

In the border city, coffee was a luxury they couldn't afford. And though cheap, they didn't dare touch the local wine. They feared that even a single sip might lead them to reveal their identities in their drunken state, which would lead to their doom.

The only time they had bought alcohol was when they learned about the deaths of Hector and his six sons. Even then, they hadn't drank it, but instead poured the liquor onto the ground in tribute to their fallen leader. That night, they had spent hours sobbing under their blankets.

But they were only allowed a single night of mourning. The next day, they had to dry their tears and continue their perilous journey, as the Southern Frontier had yet to be reclaimed then.

After the Southern Frontier was recaptured and Victor brought his troops to the border city, it became impossible for the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team to send messages. Crossing the border had also become exceedingly difficult. Previously, they had mingled with convoys carrying food and goods to Simonton City to deliver intelligence. Now, they couldn't even manage to blend in and escape.

After Starhaven reclaimed the Southern Frontier, they spent their days trying to find a way to escape. They had run all over, which led to Law being captured.

Law was likely subjected to severe torture after his capture, but he never betrayed them. Otherwise, the Sandorian soldiers would have already found them. Law's resolve was unyielding, preferring to die rather than surrender. The men of the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team weren't afraid.

Kicking off their sandals, all ten of them bent down to put on the new shoes they had made themselves. They shed their ragged clothing and donned their new clothes, which they had sewn from black cloth they had bought.

They had once been soldiers who fought on battlefields with swords and knives, so how could they have any skill in sewing? Yet, over the years, they had been unable to afford ready-made clothes and had to make their own from scraps of fabric. Having asked the local old women for advice, they had all gradually learned the craft.

Once, they had no weapons. They had come out of the prisoner camp with nothing, their clothes torn to shreds from beatings. After several years of hardship, they now possessed their own reliable swords. When not on intelligence missions, Tom and Law led the group deep into the mountains to practice their skills.

They were like resilient weeds surviving in the desert. Their loyalty and sense of duty were the only things that had carried them this far.

The moon that night hung high in the sky. It was bright and clear, its light dimming the stars beneath it.

The group knelt and saluted in the direction of their kingdom,

Starhaven. If this mission failed, they would be buried here in the border city. If that happened, they hoped their spirits would return to their homeland to see their loved ones once more.

With a sense of tragic determination, they set out. They knew every road in this border city so well that they could walk it with their eyes closed.

Rafael and his team had already been lying in wait near the garrison, ready to move as soon as the guards changed shifts.

It was almost time.

Dylan stayed at the eastern corner, where there was a platform on a high wall that could be used to station archers. However, due to the heavy troop presence, no archers were currently stationed there. If the rescue was successful, this Spot would be the most convenient one for Dylan to provide support from.

The three who were assigned to infiltrate the garrison held their breath, observing the heavily armed guards patrolling. The shift change would be happening in less than fifteen minutes. As the time arrived, the guards began moving. The patrolling guards started to disperse, and new patrols took over. They checked the situation together, and at this point, all patrols were halted. Everett was the first to scale the wall, landing softly without a sound. Rafael and Jacob followed closely, dropping down beside Everett.

Just then, they heard the faint sound

of iron hooks catching onto the wall. They exchanged astonished glances and looked towards the wall about ten feet away. They saw head after head quietly emerging, climbing the wall, and then silently dropping

down.

All of them were dressed in black clothes. Though their Lightfoot Skill were not impressive, their movements were quick and efficient as they swiftly maneuvered along the wall.