

War Song 631

Chapter 631

With Carissa and Violet present, and Abigail also pleading for Sebastian to stay in the delivery room to save Leona, the people in the outer room didn't dare to voice their opinions. Though Heather hesitated at first, after seeing her daughter's breathing becoming shallow,

she panicked and silently acquiesced.

Sebastian focused solely on the task at hand. At this point, saving the child was no longer an option. The priority was to save Leona, so he had to be bolder with his acupuncture. After feeding her a Snowdrop Pill and a Heartshield Pill, he ordered an increase in the dosage of the labor-inducing medication.

Gavin, the royal physician, felt his heart race at the thought of such boldness. But since he had heard of the pills' efficacy, he kept his opinions to himself. Besides, he was behind the partition screen and had no way of knowing which acupoints Sebastian had inserted needles into. If Gavin had seen, he would have been even more astonished.

Sebastian pulled out two traditional concoctions, Bloodmusk and Heartsage, to be used. When the smell of the Bloodmusk concoction filled the room, the onlookers paled at the scent. Bloodmusk had to be administered at a precise dosage, or it would affect not only a woman's current pregnancy, but also her future ones.

When Gavin heard what medicines Sebastian was using, he could only think that the famed physician was grasping at straws in a hopeless situation.

Finally, after much effort, Leona's cervix finally opened.

The previous doses of Snowdrop Pills and Heartshield Pills began to take effect. The initially exhausted Leona slowly began to regain her strength. The golden needle inserted into her acupoints caused her uterus to contract violently, and she felt a strong pulling sensation downward. The midwife urged Leona to push. The duchess clenched her teeth and exerted every ounce of strength she had left. After much struggle, the baby finally made its way out.

Sebastian had already turned and stepped outside, leaving Ivy and the midwife to handle the aftermath.

Leona had given birth to a boy. But sadly, the baby was lifeless, his body bruised.

As Abigail gazed at the baby's features, which bore a striking resemblance to Samuel. she couldn't hold back a soft sob.

Heather's tears flowed uncontrollably as she looked at the baby. "Oh, my poor grandson!"

Sebastian coldly said, "You might want to pity your poor daughter first."

Signs of heavy bleeding were already apparent, a consequence of the previous excessive use of blood-circulating medicine. Now, they needed to use medication to clot the blood and apply acupuncture to stop the blood flow. In other words, while the baby had been delivered, Leona's life still hung in the balance.

Carissa sat anxiously at the head of

the bed as she held her cousin's hand. Leona had already passed out, and Ivy was diligently administering the needed treatment. She was working through Leona's acupoints under Sebastian's instructions, following his every word.

Violet felt numb all over. Before coming here, she had expressed her fear of witnessing childbirth, but the urgent situation made her push her dread aside. All she could focus on was hoping that the duchess would be fine. However, Violet witnessed Leona repeatedly teeter on the brink of death. Even now, she was still not out of danger yet.

Violet felt her heart ache. Why did it have to be this way? If Leona was in this condition for someone worthy perhaps it would make the situation better. But why did she have to endure this agony for such an unworthy scumbag? Even now, it was uncertain if she would live through this.

It wasn't worth it-not at all..

Violet had already been contemplating a life without marriage, and now, she felt even more certain. This world didn't allow women to remain unmarried, yet it was even less forgiving of those who married but failed to bear children.

Violet's body belonged to her, her

future was hers to shape, and her life was her own. She would never

entrust everything to an

maul

man. No one deserved such a sacrifice from her, not even the one she loved. If the man truly cared for her, he wouldn't want her to suffer like this. If he disagreed with her decisions, it only proved he didn't love her enough.

Why should Violet settle for less?

But she understood that not everyone would make the same choices she had. She could afford to think this way because she had enough backing-the Inferno Guild would always be her home.

So many women didn't have that luxury.

She recalled Carissa mentioning the idea of starting an academy for women. At that time, Violet had argued that a martial arts class would be more beneficial, allowing women to learn self-defense and avoid being bullied in the future. But at its core, the real change had to come from altering mindsets. Carissa was right.

Violet resolved then and there to support Carissa in establishing the academy, both in terms of manpower and money.

But for now, their priority was for Leona to escape danger and survive this ordeal.

Chapter 632

As Abigail carried the lifeless baby outside, Dorothy burst into loud sobs. Ignoring the older woman, Abigail walked straight to Samuel. He had been bound for so long his blood circulation had been cut off, leaving his face a deep shade of purple. Abigail lifted the baby high for him to see. "This is your son. You killed him."

Tears still glistened on her cheeks. Her tone was initially calm, but her next words were filled with rage.

"What will it take for you to finally stop? What will it take for you to behave? Look! You've killed your own son. You've brought turmoil to our family. What do you think you're doing? Just because you think Leona fancies you, you think you can trample on everyone? You ungrateful wretch! She's fighting for her life! Do you even understand what you've done wrong?"

Samuel kept avoiding looking at his mother, and especially didn't want to look at the lifeless baby. Having heard everything that had happened inside, he couldn't articulate his feelings at the moment, but refused to look at the baby. He hadn't killed his son. It wasn't his fault.

"Take him away!" Samuel mumbled, blood bubbling from his lips. "I don't want to see him. I won't."

But he did see the baby, just for a fleeting moment. The lifeless baby lay there, swaddled in cloth. The baby, so handsome and precious, should have been crying and wailing, but there was only silence. This was his son... and he was dead!

Samuel whimpered, which eventually escalated into a heart-wrenching cry. "Take him away! I don't want to see him! Mom, I know I was wrong! Untie me! I want to see her! I know now that I was wrong!" Abigail's tears continue to flow. "It's too late, Samuel. Some things can't be undone. Your child won't come back to life. Nothing can return to how it was."

Once Abigail's anger subsided, only sorrow was left in her voice as she said, "From a young age, you've been my pride and joy. You began your education at six years old and earned countless praise from your teachers.

"You became one of the top scholars at a young age, and the king handpicked you as a talented candidate. You married a duchess, became heir to the Earl of Gracehold's family, and had a title awaiting you in the future.

"Your life and career should have

been smooth sailing, but you let mere fleeting pleasure ruin everything. What's worse is that Ruby wasn't just a normal

courtesan. She was a concubine's daughter from Grand Princess Eleanor's household, sent as a calculated attack on our family. You're an intelligent man, so how could you have fallen into that trap and gambled away your future?

"Leona adored you, and you discarded her like she was nothing. Now, you've even killed your son. The bond you had with Leona is gone. You've lost both your status as heir and your official position-you've lost everything. You've ruined your life." Samuel cried in anguish, but no one knew what he mourned for. Was it for his lost love with Ruby, the titles and his future slipping through his fingers, his lifeless child, or perhaps the memory of his wife who once treated him warmly?

His cries were hysterical, echoing with countless grievances and unfulfilled desires.

No one stopped him, nor did anyone comfort him. Only Dorothy stood in the doorway, her own tears trailing down her face as she watched her grandson. Meanwhile, Leona had survived the ordeal. Sebastian announced that the severe bleeding had ceased, but she would need time to fully recover.

When Leona finally woke up, she grasped Carissa's hand as tightly as she could and whispered, "Cari, take me away."

"You need to rest and recuperate, silly child. Where could you possibly go?" Heather said as she wiped her tears.

But Carissa had already stepped outside to consult Sebastian, asking, "Can we carry her out now?"

"It's best to wait until tomorrow. You should make preparations. You can either carry or lift her, but she needs medication today. After three doses, she can leave. Find a quiet place for her to recover. She won't survive here in Gracehold Estate," Sebastian replied.

Heather rushed out to stop them. "She can't leave, Carissa! Don't encourage her foolishness. This is her husband's home! Where can she go?"

Carissa ignored her completely and

turned to Leah and Alana. "You two get ready and pack her things. Sort out her dowry as well. Let Mrs.

Langley know, and she'll send

someone to deliver it. A womenet

can't unilaterally divorce her

husband, so let's call it an amicable divorce to keep it dignified for both parties."

Chapter 633

None of the women in Gracehold Estate said anything. The air was filled with a heavy silence and sorrow in the aftermath of such a tragedy. No family could bear a situation like this without feeling the weight of grief. Abigail's words to Samuel resonated with Dorothy. Since her grandson's promising future was now ruined, she opposed the idea of a divorce. However, she struggled to find her voice when faced with Carissa's cold demeanor. Earlier, Dorothy had complained about Carissa interfering with their family's affairs. Ultimately, it had been Carissa's decision to summon Sebastian that had saved Leona's life at a critical moment.

Dorothy turned to Heather and softly said, "A divorce isn't good for anyone, Your Grace. Please persuade Leona not to let the Hell Monarch's princess consort dictate their fate and ruin their marriage."

Heather glanced at her niece and was about to speak, but Carissa's icy voice cut her off, "If you utter even a single word urging Leona to stay, I'll make this matter public. Once Princess Meredith hears about it, she'll certainly have her father-in-law petition the court, and the Earl of Gracehold's family will face repercussions that can't be undone."

With the Earl of Gracehold's family already under scrutiny, the young men of the household had been cautious. But now, because of Samuel's reckless actions, the future of everyone in the household was in jeopardy. So, the women of the household rose to speak for Leona.

"Leona barely had any good days after she married into our family. She was pregnant for nine months, and she spent three of them confined to bed, only to endure this unbearable suffering afterward. She's returned from the brink of death; Samuel shouldn't be allowed to harm her again."

"That's right. We should heed Lady Carissa's advice. Let them part ways. If Samuel wishes to pursue his courtesan or some other concubine's daughter, no one will stop him. We only hope he won't bring further ruin upon our family."

"We should let Leona leave Gracehold Estate. How can she survive in a place that brought her so much sorrow?"

Words of justice were only spoken when it threatened one's own interests.

Heather swallowed the words she initially wanted to say and wiped away her tears, instead saying, "But what will happen to Leona? In the end, she's still choosing to part ways with Samuel."

Heather resented Samuel, yet she secretly wished for him and Leona to continue their lives together.

After only a few sharp words

directed at Samuel, she turned to Carissa and sadly said, "It wasn't that I didn't want to accept the wedding gifts you offered to Leona back then, but look at what happened. Despite me not accepting the gifts you sent, we're now in this

predicament.

"Had I accepted them, who knows what fate would have befallen us? I'm not blaming you, but after your mom passed away, there were hardly any sensible people left in your household. Your mom trained Frederick for many years, yet he still didn't understand the rules well."

Heather kept bringing up the issue of Carissa giving Leona gifts for her dowry. She claimed not to blame her niece, but every word dripped with accusation.

Carissa wasn't about to let Heather's remarks slide this time.

In a calm and almost icy tone, she said, "You're @ght, Lady Heather. It's the people in my household who

lack understanding. How could a et

household on the brink of ruin have any luck? Here's what we'll do tally up all the gifts my mom has ever

sent you and return everything.

"I'll have Lily and Frederick account for what you've given my mom over the years, and we'll return those. Once we've settled this, there'll be no hard feelings between our families, and you won't have to worry about the gifts bringing your family bad luck.

"As for Leona's dowry, I ultimately never gave her anything. The gifts remain unopened and are sitting in my estate's annex. It was good that you refused them when you did, or the blame would fall on me if anything happened to your family."

Heather's expression froze. "What...

Child, is that truly what you think I

meant? I'm not blaming you. I'm only saying that the people in your

household don't know how to handle

matters. Your mom and I were

sisters bound by blood! Why do we need to draw such a cleartine between us?"

"Let's not argue about it any longer. You can sort everything out when you return home. I'll send someone to deliver and collect what's owed tomorrow," Carissa concluded, then turned her back on her aunt. She couldn't be bothered to listen to anything else the older woman had to say.

Chapter 634

In the side hall, Harvey seethed when he heard Carissa intended to take Leona away from Gracehold Estate, and that his daughter had chosen to divorce Samuel. He, Leona's father, was still present. So, when did it become Carissa's place to decide Leona's fate? Just as Harvey was about to furiously summon Carissa for questioning, Rafael arrived.

Jacob had gone to the Supreme Court to look for him. Once he finished explaining the overall situation, the prince had abandoned his duties and made his way to Gracehold Estate. Men weren't allowed in the inner courtyard, so Rafael headed straight to the side hall. As he reached the room, he

heard Harvey angrily shout, "Who does she think she is? How dare she decide everything for Leona? Allowing a divorce destroys a marriage! Isn't she afraid of bringing misfortune upon herself? With me here, I'd like to see her try!" A flash of purple appeared in his line of sight as soon as Harvey finished speaking, and Rafael strode into the side hall. The prince surveyed the room with a cold glance, taking note of the men who stood up to pay their respects to him.

He ignored them, fixing his gaze on Harvey. "Uncle Harvey, you were talking about my wife, right? What has she done that's so damaging? Didn't she save Leona's life? Or was it her decision to have Leona divorce that beast of a husband who abandoned her for a mere concubine? How has she destroyed Leona's marriage?"

"You've never been one to talk much, so you should keep your mouth shut. You've also never cared about managing affairs, so don't interfere in anything. Besides, you've never been afraid to suffer losses, so just keep doing that and don't refute anything I say." Harvey's face turned an alarming shade of red at his nephew's words. With the men of Gracehold Estate witnessing the entire scene, Harvey was unable to maintain even a shred of dignity.

Noah respected and feared the Hell Monarch. Ignoring everything else, he quickly invited Rafael to take a seat. They could sort things out later.

At the moment, it wasn't important whether Leona decided to divorce Samuel. What worried them was how the king and queen would react.

Moreover, given Samuel's current temperament, continuing his marriage with Leona would spark even more trouble. The Earl of Gracehold's family had narrowly escaped disaster this time, since Leona's life had been preserved. But what if it hadn't?

If Leona had died, Samuel would have dragged everyone from the Earl of Gracehold's family down with him.

Noah's granduncle and uncle were still above him when it came to making decisions for the family. So, it didn't matter what Harvey said. If Leona was content, the Earl of Gracehold's family was willing to cooperate with whatever decision she made.

After all, Samuel had become a liability for their family. He was once someone destined for greatness, but was now useless. They had no choice but to abandon him, even if they didn't want to.

As Rafael took his seat, a hush fell over the room.

He had no intention of saying anything further. He was here to support Leona, and would leave the arrangements to Carissa. He had faith that his wife would make the best choice for the duchess.

Sometimes, it was a lack of support

from loved ones that kept someone stuck at a crossroads. But when the disappointment in those closest to a person became unbearable, a little backing from someone else could help them stand tall again.

During Carissa's most challenging moments, the elders of the Sinclair family had stepped in to support her. She understood all too well how crucial it was to have someone by a person's side when they found

themselves at rock bottom.

Regardless of Harvey's objections, Carissa was determined to take Leona with her. It might seem like she was overstepping her boundaries by meddling in another family's affairs, but there was little choice left for her. Rafael believed that Carissa and Leona had given Harvey and Heather a chance, only to be met with disappointment and a brush with death.

Jacob had reported the situation with remarkable detail, which suggested that he had already placed people within Gracehold Estate.

Carissa had even arranged for Alana and Leah to be on guard to prevent any unforeseen complications. But in this world, there was always a chance for oversight, no matter how meticulous a person's planning was. If someone was determined to cause trouble, it was nearly impossible to guard against every possibility.

When Carissa learned of Rafael's arrival, she instructed Violet, Alana, and Leah to keep a close watch on Leona while she stepped outside to speak to him.

The outer courtyard was bustling with men. When Rafael noticed his wife approaching, he stepped out to find a quiet spot so the two of them could talk.

"I won't be returning home tonight. I'll stay here and wait until we take Leona away tomorrow. Keep an eye on Ryan and make sure he does his homework, okay?" said Carissa.

Rafael pulled out her hairpin and tucked it in place gently. "Don't worry. Jacob will oversee everything. Do you need me to stay?"

"No, it's fine. Violet and I will stay. Alana and Leah are also here." Carissa paused. "It's mainly Leona's condition that's bad. I also think Lady Heather and Madam Dorothy might cause trouble, so I can't help but worry."

Chapter 635

"How is Leona doing now? Is the baby really gone?" Rafael asked.

"Yes. She almost bled out, but luckily, Sebastian was here. She survived, but it'll take her at least a year and a half to recover. She's fast asleep now, but I'm afraid she'll be heartbroken once she wakes up," Carissa replied, her voice heavy with sorrow. Rafael sighed. "She carried the baby for nine months. I'm sure she will be."

Carissa's complexion paled. "She nearly lost her life too. Raf, we can't let Samuel get away with this. He needs to spend a few years in prison at the very least."

"Leave it to me," said the prince.

Watching his wife stand there, delicate yet strong against the autumn wind, a pang of sadness welled up in his heart. When Leona was giving birth, Carissa must have been terrified of losing her cousin.

Rafael's gaze turned icy.

Samuel Langley!

"Let's wait until Leona is away from here before we take action," Carissa suggested. "We don't want to complicate things. If we arrest Samuel now, a horde of people will surely rush to Leona. I don't want her to be disturbed."

"Alright. I'll head back to the Supreme Court for now. Once you take Leona away tomorrow, I'll send someone to arrest Samuel. He harmed his legitimate wife and caused their child to die in her

womb. Him pushing Leona down the stairs is considered attempted murder of a royal relative. That's more than enough to arrest him," said Rafael.

"But he's still one of the top scholars, and he has a status..." Carissa lamented.

"I'll speak to Mr. Murray and have him bring it up with the king."

Rafael had nearly forgotten about that. Although Samuel didn't have an official position anymore, he was still considered one of the king's favored candidates. They first needed to ensure Samuel's name was struck from the National Examination Register to avoid offending Salvador.

Carissa reached out and grasped her husband's sleeve, her expression betraying her reluctance. She might have appeared strong in front of others, but today had genuinely frightened her. Because of that, she showed her vulnerability in front of Rafael at this moment. The prince longed to hold his wife, but they were at Gracehold Estate. Many people filled the side hall, and there were servants bustling about outside.

He settled for squeezing her hand and gently saying, "Don't be afraid. I'm here for you. Whenever you need me, I'll be right by your side."

Carissa's eyes glistened with tears as she choked out, "You should talk to Mr. Murray. I'll stay with Leona. I'm worried she'll be scared if doesn't see me when she wakes up."

"Alright, go ahead. I'll wait until you're inside before I leave. I still need to have some words with these people."

Rafael straightened up and stood tall in the corridor, exuding a sense of security that eased some of Carissa's tension.

When Carissa returned to her cousin's room, she found Heather sitting by Leona's bedside. The older woman was holding her daughter's hand and calling out to her.

Anger flared up within Carissa. She exchanged a glance with Ivy, who immediately understood the unspoken message and stepped forward.

"Lady Heather, Lady Leona is exhausted right now. Sleep is the best medicine. My mentor has instructed that Lady Leona must sleep as much as possible, so please don't disturb her."

Heather had initially intended to

wake Leona to discuss the divorce.

But upon seeing that Carissa had returned, she realized the discussion wouldn't go anywhere. There was nothing she could do except retreat awkwardly.

Carissa took Heather's place by Leona's bedside. She glanced at her cousin, noting that she was still asleep.

Carissa calmly said, "Ivy and I will stay here. Everyone else, please leave."

"I'm her mother. I should be here with her," Heather hurriedly insisted.

Carissa shook her head. "No. You weren't there for her when she needed you, and she doesn't need you now. If you really care about her, help her pack her dowry items." Heather sighed heavily. "Carissa, a divorce wouldn't be good for her."

Carissa didn't respond. There was no need to talk to Heather any longer.

Violet deliberately chimed in, "I'll organize her stuff. We'll take everything that can be moved. Who cares who it belongs to? Even if it belongs to the Earl of Gracehold's family, it's fair game."

Upon hearing that, Heather quickly followed Violet out. If the divorce was inevitable, Heather refused to give anyone the chance to use it against her. Once everyone had left, Kate and Hazel stood on the other side of the curtain, leaving only Carissa and Ivy in the bedroom.

As for Samuel, Alana had released him. He knelt on the ground and sobbed uncontrollably, his voice raw from crying.

Alana grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and tossed him out. "You can cry outside."

Even though she had released him, Alana kept a watchful eye on him to ensure he didn't leave Gracehold Estate.

Chapter 636

Carissa stayed awake the entire time to watch over Leona, while Violet pulled up a chair to sit outside the room. No one dared enter.

Abigail sent meals for them, but Carissa couldn't eat a thing. Violet managed a few bites, but the image of Leona's body contorted in pain haunted her and made it hard to swallow.

In the middle of the night, Leona woke up. She opened her eyes in a daze and called out for Carissa, who had been holding her hand the whole time. When she heard Leona's voice, she squeezed her hand tightly. "I'm here. It's okay."

Ivy took the chance to feed the duchess some medicine. Leona took it obediently, but her eyelids grew heavy after a while and she drifted back to sleep. Yet, tears slipped from the corners of her eyes. Carissa gently wiped them away. "It's okay. You've made it through the worst of it. It'll be fine now."

Leona's exhaustion was obvious from her complexion. It would take three doses of medicine for her to regain even a bit of strength. She woke up briefly to take the second dose, but quickly fell back asleep. Ivy rested for a while, then approached Carissa and whispered, "Lady Carissa, why don't you take a break? I can keep watch."

"No need. I'm not sleepy," Carissa replied, shaking her head. "You worked hard during the day, so you should get some rest. You'll still need to administer the medicine one more time before dawn."

"Yes. Prince Harvey has left, but Lady Heather is staying in the estate. She's just in the next room. She probably wants to stop you from taking Lady Leona away," Ivy replied.

"She won't be able to stop me. I'm determined to take her with me," Carissa firmly said.

After Rafael left, he went to see Jeremiah and explained everything.

The following morning, after the court session, Jeremiah spoke to Salvador in his study. Whatever he said caused the king to erupt in anger. Samuel's status as a top scholar was revoked, and his name was struck from the National Examination Register. Salvador also ordered the Supreme Court to handle the case.

Once the case was underway, Leona wouldn't have any problems divorcing Samuel.

The following day, Harvey arrived just as Carissa was prepared to leave with Leona on her back. He, Heather, and some people from the Earl of Gracehold's family tried to stop her, but they didn't dare use force. They could only resort to trying to persuade her with words.

It was only when Rafael arrived with the royal edict that the atmosphere shifted. Everyone from the Earl of Gracehold's family knelt in fear, anxious that the king might strip them of the title in a fit of rage.

When they heard that only Samuel was being arrested, many breathed a sigh of relief. Samuel was now the disgrace of their family, and they didn't care that he would be taken away, as long as Noah's title was retained.

Only Dorothy fainted upon hearing

the news. She had spent the previous night devising a plan to help Samuel escape, only to be

thwarted by Alana and Leah, when et

were keeping a watchful eye on him.

Dorothy's plan had failed, and now, she couldn't do anything else as the Supreme Court officials were here to arrest her grandson today.

Samuel trembled in fear as shackles were placed on him, suddenly realizing how powerless he truly was. The once proud and arrogant man who used to rely on his talent was no more. Now, humbled and stripped of all dignity, he was left begging his family for help.

Leona watched the scene unfold from Carissa's back.

When Samuel turned to her to plead, Leona shut her eyes and whispered, "Let's go, Cari."

No one dared to obstruct them any longer. Carissa carried her cousin while Violet, Alana, and Leah cleared the way ahead. Leona's dowry had been meticulously accounted for the previous night, and she asked for it to be returned to her parents.

"I don't need it. I'm a county duchess and I have my own fief. I can take care of myself."

Heather chased them to the doorway and cried out, "Leona, I only want what's best for you! You and your cousin are not the same! You have no skills! How will you survive?"

Carissa ignored Heather. She marched straight to the carriage and took Leona to another residence.

Meanwhile, Rafael ordered Samuel to be taken away.

Harvey stepped forward and pleaded, "Rafael, please show some consideration for me. Don't make things difficult for him."

Harvey's voice wasn't loud, but it was audible enough to catch the attention of those from the Earl of Gracehold's family. Rafael cast them a fleeting glance, noticing that many were looking at Harvey with gratitude. The man certainly had a way of hiding his true intentions.

Without saying a word, Rafael simply walked away.

With the incident at Gracehold Estate causing such a stir, it was only a matter of time before the news spread throughout the entire capital.

Chapter 637

Leona's body remained weak. She knew she had lost her baby. Even before the delivery, she had felt the loss when Sebastian arrived. She held back her tears in front of Carissa and refused to cry. But after they settled in the estate, Leona buried her head and wept. Violet wanted to go in and comfort her, but Carissa stopped her and shook her head. "Any consolation now will feel hollow. She needs to endure this on her own."

quietly once her cousin stepped out of the room.

Some pains were so deep that comfort would do nothing but stir up more tears, memories, and heartache.

Claire came to report that Molly and Fiona had gone to Silverstone Estate. After hearing this, Violet informed Carissa, who was startled as she suddenly recalled Zoey's visit yesterday.

The day had felt so long that it almost seemed like the visit had happened ages ago.

"Keep an eye on them within permissible limits. Don't draw too much attention," Carissa instructed.

"Don't worry, Claire and the others know how to handle things discreetly. Winona trained them, after all," Violet reassured.

Carissa nodded, then went to see Alana and Leah.

"Now, Leona's divorce is inevitable. I originally asked you to care for her until she gave birth and said it wouldn't take too long. Now that she has given birth and left Gracehold Estate, do you want to return to Meadow Ridge or stay with her a little longer?" Carissa asked. Her eyes filled with sorrow and self-reproach, Alana replied, "I've already sent a letter to our master and told her we won't be returning to Meadow Ridge for a while. We failed to protect the duchess. I shouldn't have gone in to get the cloak yesterday.

"I never expected Samuel to be so cunning. He never mentioned wanting the duchess' help to restore his official position. He only ever came to try and get into her good graces, and we thought he was trying to turn over a new leaf. That was my mistake and my fault. So, I'll stay with Lady Leona during this difficult time."

"Don't blame yourself, Alana. You can prepare for many situations, but you can't prevent everything. You and Leah have done your best. If it weren't for you, Leona would have faced far worse."

"There's no need to comfort us, Carissa. You also don't have to pay us. We feel unworthy of it. We'll only leave once the duchess has healed, regained her strength, and can smile again." "I can't-"

"Those in the martial world keep their promises," Alana said, then turned to head into the kitchen.

She couldn't leave the task of preparing Leona's medicine to anyone else. Ivy was already working hard enough, so Alana didn't want to add to her burdens when both she and Leah knew some pharmacology.

Violet, who was more interested in Molly's visit to Silverstone Estate, decided to check in with Carissa again.

"Should we ask Claire to gather some information? It could be risky, though."

Carissa shook her head. "No, we shouldn't take any unnecessary risks. We see the bigger picture. It's all about winning over the Earl of Silverstone's family. Besides, I'm sure dey will seek me out again. With the head of her family currently away, she'll have to look for

assistance, and I'm her best option."

Violet nodded. "That's true. Zoey is holding up the entire Earl of Silverstone's household right now. Caspian is as good as useless. He's honest and straightforward, but lacks vision."

"I recall Carmen mentioned that Celeste's next target is Caspian. Why hasn't there been any news on that front?" Carissa asked.

"From what Carmen said, Celeste

found Caspian to be unsatisfactory.

She didn't want to carry out the task,

so Grand Princess Eleanor taught her a lesson. Maybe she's injured from that? If she is, she'll need time to recover. Or perhaps she's planning to reappear under

Love

different guise? After all, she used to be a courtesan, so many people recognize her. Caspian might have even met her before as Ruby."

Carissa nodded thoughtfully. "That's possible. It must be tough for Zoey. Just when one issue is settled, another arises. I hope Caspian can hold his own."

"He treats his wife pretty well and

doesn't look down on her just because she's a merchant's daughter Violet remarked, pausing momentarily before continuing, "But then again, you can't always count on men. They can't resist beautiful women, especially someone like Celeste, who knows how to

manipulate them.

"It's hard for most men to hold out against that. If she tried to charm your husband, she might even know how to win him over and steal his heart. If that happened, you'd be the one in trouble."

Chapter 638

Carissa contemplated the possibility, then said, "That could really happen. Raf is quite sentimental, and people like him tend to get swept up in emotional turmoil more easily."

Violet's eyes widened in disbelief. "You actually agree with me? You should at least try to argue. Aren't you bothered by it at all?"

"Weren't we simply analyzing the situation? It's not actually happening, so why should I be bothered?" asked Carissa, stunned. "I'm talking about it hypothetically," Violet clarified.

"Why would you take a hypothetical situation seriously?" Carissa countered.

Violet stared at her friend and couldn't help but poke Carissa's forehead with her finger. "I seriously wonder if you have any feelings for your husband at all. I've never been in love, but what's mine is mine. If someone covets what's mine, just the thought of it would make me unhappy."

"You're so petty!" Carissa shot back. "Getting angry if it really happens is one thing, but getting worked up over something that hasn't happened yet will only harm your emotions and health, not to mention your relationship with your husband. It's not worth it."

Recalling Violet's earlier comments about not wanting to marry, Carissa added, "Besides, you're the one who doesn't want to get married or talk about feelings. What experience or qualifications do you have to advise me?"

Violet rolled her eyes. "I understand feelings just fine, so why can't I comment on your situation?"

I don't want to get married because I feel that no man deserves me. I'm great and one of a kind. There won't be another woman like me in this world, just like there won't be another woman like you. But we're different.

"You would have had to enter the palace if you hadn't gotten married. Besides, Prince Rafael treats you well. But me? I don't have a secret admirer who has loved me since I was young and has been waiting for me. So, what's the point of getting married? Why not just enjoy my life? I don't even have to worry about children. Look at Leona-she nearly lost her life giving birth."

After a pause, Violet asked nervously, "Tell me, are you afraid of giving birth?"

Carissa nodded. "Of course. I asked Ivy, and she said many women have died during childbirth."

Violet sighed. "Exactly! Giving birth is such a painful ordeal, and if it's a girl, the child will also suffer. No way I'm going through that! I won't ever think about marriage!"

Suddenly recalling something, Violet added, "By the way, you once mentioned wanting to start an academy for women, right? I think it's a great idea."

"Didn't you want to set up a martial arts class instead?" Carissa replied absent-mindedly. "Why the sudden support for the women's academy?"

"It's not contradicting what I wanted.

We can have both a martial arts

class and an academy for women. I want them to learn more than just the typical teachings on womanly virtues. They should study a variety of subjects, including what men learn, so they can broaden their horizons. Isn't that also what you were thinking?" Violet explained.

Carissa leaned against the door frame, her gaze distant. "When Barrett first brought Aurora back, he said she wouldn't be confined to the inner courtyard. Aurora also dismissed the notion. She looked

down on women in the inner courtyard, thinking they only cared about the rivalry between wives and concubines.

"But the truth is, many women have to spend their lives in the inner courtyard. They may never see a battlefield or have the chance to take exams for official titles. It seems that marrying and having children is the only path for them.

"Even if that's the case, I hope there will be women, like Rosalind, who is well-read and knowledgeable about history and literature. They should have a broader perspective, a generous heart, and know how to love themselves. Even if they're trapped in the inner courtyard for life, they shouldn't be treated lightly by others."

Violet leaned against her friend and said, "I might not understand everything you're saying, and I haven't experienced it myself, but I'll support you in whatever you do, unconditionally and without limits."

Carissa chuckled softly and

wrapped her arms around Violet's.

"You know, when we went to see Rosalind on Thomas' behalf, her words made me even more determined. She admired Thomas but also knew how to think rationally. She understood

priorities and kept her head when considering the practical issues. She didn't let emotions push her into making decisions that seemed like the easiest way to be happy in that moment. That was the perspective and strength that education has given her."

"I don't know what that strength is, but I really admire women like that," Violet replied lazily.

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Carissa smiled. "Exactly. Then, there's Zoey from the Earl of Silverstone's family. She can tell right from wrong. She dealt with the situation between Viola and Thomas without showing any favoritism, which is truly rare. In noble families, one person's honor is everyone's

honor, and one person's downfall drags everyone down. For her to act that way was commendable.

"You're right. I hold the same admiration for the people you do," Violet said, nudging Carissa playfully with her chin. "I wonder what my cousin is discussing with Zoey right now at Silverstone Estate. I bet she's trying to help her husband win over Oliver."

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Silverstone Estate was certainly lively today. Evelyn, Zoey, Luna, and some elders from the Prince family were all present.

Molly and Fiona arrived with their maids and servants, bringing with them an impressive array of gifts. The items piled up like a small mountain on the table, clearly showcasing Molly's generous nature.

Molly wasn't particularly skilled at socializing, but she was eager to highlight her status as a princess consort and make Fiona seem inferior. So, every time Fiona spoke, Molly would interrupt, then give gifts to Zoey's children.

Zoey's son and two daughters received a fair share of gifts, but the children of the concubines were given less. Despite being interrupted several times, Fiona remained composed. She maintained her poise and smiled as she conversed with Evelyn and Luna.

Sensing that Fiona was the true challenge here, Zoey mentally braced herself against her, choosing not to respond immediately to what she said. Instead, Zoey would deflect with small talk before replying with a word or two. And since Molly was present, Zoey would naturally address her shallow questions first to ensure she remained courteous.

Fiona suggested they take a stroll around Silverstone Estate, stating that it was the perfect time of the year for orange blossoms to bloom. She could already smell the fragrance wafting in the air.

Zoey immediately offered to accompany her, but Fiona smiled and said, "I completely forgot that I sprained my ankle a few days ago, so I can't walk around the garden. Why don't you and Lady Molly walk around while I stay here and chat with Madam Evelyn and Madam Luna?"

Molly didn't like to be ordered about, but the chance to wander alone with Zoey was too good to pass up. She immediately stood with a smile and said, "Alright. Please lead the way, Madam Zoey."

Zoey felt a surge of anxiety. None of the others seemed to grasp the depth of Fiona's cunning. If they slipped up and revealed or said anything they shouldn't, it would spell trouble. The clever ruse Fiona had pulled left Zoey feeling completely blindsided.

On the surface, Zoey maintained her composure as she invited Molly to step outside. She smiled brightly and said, "Orange blossoms are quite difficult to nurture in the capital, but we- Ah!"
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Suddenly, Zoey miscalculated her step and stumbled right over the threshold.

Molly gasped and quickly signaled for help. Jane rushed forward to steady Zoey, who gingerly tiptoed back to the main hall with her maid's assistance. Zoey's breath came in sharp gasps as she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry! Please don't hold it against me, Lady Molly."

"How could you be so careless?" Evelyn frowned, disapproval clear on her face at her daughter-in-law's clumsiness. Zoey was usually so composed, so how could she trip by just stepping outside? That was a major embarrassment.

"I was simply overjoyed at Lady

Molly and Lady Fiona's presence here today and got carried away. I truly apologize," said Zoey, her voice laced with regret as she slowly took a seat. "Luna, why don't you accompany Lady Molly to the garden?"

Luna had just begun to rise when Molly interjected, "There's no need to go out anymore. You were injured because you indulged me. Let's just sit here and chat." Zoey apologized again, "I'm sorry to have ruined your mood, Your Grace."

"Is your foot alright? Should we fetch a physician?" Molly asked in concern.

"It hurts a little, but I don't think it's broken. There's no need to call for a physician, but thank you for your concern, Your Grace," Zoey replied.

Chapter 640

The Earl of Silverstone's family had also invited a theater troupe to Silverstone Estate today, as one couldn't have low standards when hosting a princess consort. Everything necessary had been arranged for her comfort. However, after consulting everyone present, it turned out that no one was particularly interested in watching a performance, so the idea was dropped.

Fiona and Molly lingered at the estate until evening.

Smiling, Fiona said, "Prince Yuvan has been in Valken for quite some time and rarely returns to the capital. We don't have many friends here, so it's truly a stroke of fate that we can engage in such pleasant conversation today. "Why don't you visit our residence in a few days? It so happens that one of our companions who came to the capital with us is a renowned fortune teller, Mr. Wayne. He's the best at predicting fortunes, health, and even future events." Evelyn's eyes lit up. "Mr. Wayne? He has quite a distinguished reputation! I would be very grateful for an introduction, Your Grace."

"Then, it's settled, Madam Evelyn. You must come and visit us," Fiona replied, smiling brightly.

Zoey's smile froze. With the back-and-forth exchange, the two families would appear really close in the eyes of outsiders.

That couldn't happen!

Zoey's mind raced. Earlier, she could use the excuse of the clumsy fall to avoid the situation. But now that Fiona had extended an invitation and Evelyn had already agreed, refusing would definitely offend them. Was it better to risk offending them or becoming the talk of the town?

As Zoey weighed her choices, she recalled Carissa had said that there was nothing else to the visit. Zoey hoped that was true, and if it was, she didn't have to fear offending anyone. In fact, being impolite might even turn out to be advantageous.

With a smile, Zoey said, "Mother, Lady Fiona was just joking with you. How could we possibly impose on them? Lady Ruth is ill, and both Prince Yuvan and Lady Molly are busy caring for her. We should wait until Lady Ruth is better before visiting. We mustn't interfere with Prince Yuvan's duty to Lady Ruth."

Evelyn understood her daughter-in-law well, knowing that Zoey was always meticulous about manners. So, she surely had a compelling reason for refusing Fiona's enthusiastic invitation.

Evelyn smiled and said, "Yes, you're absolutely right! I'm getting a bit forgetful in my old age. Lady Ruth is unwell. I'm sure Prince Yuvan and Lady Molly must be quite worried. They returned to the capital to care for her, so it wouldn't be right for us to intrude." Luna seized the chance and chimed

in, "Mother and Zoey make a good point. Why don't we wait until Lady Ruth is fully recovered before we go? If we have the chance, we could also see Lady Ruth."

Though Fiona was adept at navigating social situations, the conversation had clearly been closed off, and it wouldn't do good to try and continue it. After all, Yuvan and his family had returned to the capital under the pretense of caring for Ruth.

With a smile, Fiona said, "Alright. Once Lady Ruth is well again, I'll send word. You must all honor us with your presence then."

"Of course," Evelyn replied, still smiling.

Everyone echoed her sentiment.

While Molly and Fiona hadn't achieved their original goal, the sun was setting, and it was time to leave.

Jane supported Zoey as they escorted the departing guests, and the latter only let out a sigh of relief once the carriage was out of sight.

"Everyone, let's head inside. I have something important to say," Zoey announced.

With the elders from all branches present, it was a good opportunity to clarify some matters. The family was large, so news could leak out they weren't careful. It would be disastrous if one side of the family spoke of something without the other knowing. They needed to make sure that didn't happen.

Back in the main hall, Zoey spoke seriously, "From now on, any invitation coming from Prince Yuvan's family must be declined with a plausible excuse. If they host gatherings for notable figures from the capital, we can attend as a group. But remember-never go alone."

Everyone exchanged glances.

"What's going on? If we can't go, doesn't that mean we can't meet Mr. Wayne?" Evelyn asked, sensing that something was amiss.

Maintaining her serious demeanor,

Zoey said, "We can't meet him,

Mother. Everyone, we're not well acquainted with Prince Yuvan and we don't understand him. We're the second family his people have visited since returning to the capital. We all know the implications of that. It's not the big risks we should worry about, but the small ones. I hope all of you will take this seriously. Just remember what I said today, and don't talk nonsense when you're outside."

The room fell into a contemplative silence as they grasped the situation.

Zoey was right. There were many other noble families in the capital, so why were they the first to have received a visit? And why were they given such lavish gifts? Something didn't add up.

While the Earl of Silverstone's family

managed to navigate through the

situation, chaos had erupted in

Gracehold,

Estate. Samuel's arrest

had prompted Dorothy to throw a fit. She demanded that the family intervene to secure his release, or she would go on a hunger strike.