

## War Song 641

### Chapter 641

However, Samuel had been taken to the Supreme Court. It would be no easy feat to get him out.

If word of Dorothy's hunger strike were to spread, it would make the Earl of Gracehold's family seem like they were neglecting her. So, even though they knew the chances were slim, they still pulled strings and asked people to plead with the king on their behalf. Noah had some connections of his own. They told him that if Leona forgave Samuel and was willing to let him off, there was a possibility of him being released.

However, who would dare approach Leona at this point? They weren't shameless enough to do so, nor did they dare to, especially since Carissa was standing guard over her.

In the end, Noah went to Harvey, who had spoken out in Samuel's defense when he was arrested. It was clear that he didn't want Leona and Samuel to get divorced, so Noah could only seek out Harvey in this situation. Harvey agreed to help, but whether he would actually go to the Supreme Court was a different matter altogether. It wasn't like the Earl of Gracehold's family knew either.

Meanwhile, Heather was eager to see Leona. Given that a royal edict had already been issued, the divorce was imminent and there was no room for negotiation. So, Heather planned on bringing her daughter back home.

Just as she was about to set off, she noticed Carissa arriving with Frederick and Lily, bringing a carriage full of items. They had come to return the gifts Heather had given Melanie over the years. It was an entire carriage filled with both ordinary and precious items. These gifts bore witness to their long-standing relationship as sisters.

According to what Frederick and Lily remembered, the gifts Melanie had given Heather included gold, silver, common items, and many valuable medicinal herbs. Most of the herbs had been provided by Sebastian to the Duke of Northwatch's family back then. They were likely meant for treating injuries, especially since Carissa's father and brothers had been on the battlefield, so it was wise to have extra supplies.

Apart from the medicinal herbs, there were also supplements and emergency remedies, including several bottles of Snowdrop Pills and Energy Pills, which were meant to strengthen the heart and restore energy.

Lily mentioned that Heather had personally asked Melanie for the pills and had taken multiple bottles. The pills could be stored for a long time, but Heather hadn't offered any to be used when Leona was in a dire situation.

That left Carissa deeply puzzled.

After all, Leona was Heather's

daughter. It seemed implausible for

a mother to completely disregard her daughter's well-being. When Heather was informed of Leona's plight, she surely would have gathered the best medicine available from the estate, right?

Even if she had forgotten due to her panicked state, surely someone by her side would have reminded her. Yet, Heather had arrived

empty-handed. The most likely.

explanation was that she had

used

up all the medicine or had given it away. But the latter option didn't make sense either. Over the years, Harvey and his family hadn't been in close contact with anyone.

Carissa made quite a spectacle of her arrival. She had specifically requested Travis to be the driver. It was overkill, but his loud voice was perfect for the occasion. "The Hell Monarch's princess consort and Lady Heather are severing ties as aunt and niece, and are now returning the gifts exchanged between the two families!" Travis had been announcing the same sentence all the way until they reached Hartstone Estate, where they encountered Heather, who was just about to step out. Heather's face turned ashen with rage.

Carissa dismounted and stood directly before her aunt. "Lady Heather, I've come to follow through with what we discussed yesterday. Have you prepared the items?"

"Carissa, are you crazy? Do you really intend to cut ties between us?" Heather asked, her voice dripping with suppressed rage.

Carissa's expression remained flat.

"Once something is said, it can't be taken back. Travis, please assist in unloading the items. If anything is amiss, I'm sure Lady Heather will point out, and we'll make up for it. After all, they gave each other many gifts over the years due to their sisterly bond, so it might not all

match up."

There was a crowd gathering at the estate's entrance, so Heather grabbed Carissa's arm and dragged her inside.

"Since you mentioned the sisterly bond I had with your mom, how can it be something you can just cut off? What right do you have to decide for your mom? And if you sever our ties, how will you explain it to your ancestors when you see them beyond the grave?" Heather hissed.

"How I'll do that is my own business. There's no need for you to worry, Lady Heather," Carissa replied calmly before calling over her shoulder, "Bring it in."

Chapter 642

The contents of the carriage were unloaded and arranged outside the main hall of Hartstone Estate. Heather didn't even glance at the items, her expression dark and thunderous.

"If you don't want to look at it now, you can take your time and look at it later. If anything is missing, feel free to send someone to let me know. As for the items my mom gifted you, they should be returned as well. I remember there were quite a few medicines from Arcane Sanctum among them," said Carissa. Heather turned on her heel and walked away as she coldly remarked, "Those have long since been used up. How do you expect me to return them to you? Aren't you afraid that your mom's feelings would be hurt with this stunt?"

"My mom always cared for Leona. If she knew how you treated your daughter, I'm sure she would sever ties with you too," Carissa replied.

Tears brimmed in Heather's eyes. "Carissa, how did you become like this? You refuse to acknowledge me as your aunt and push your cousin to get a divorce. What have I ever done to you?"

Was it because I didn't help you when you divorced Barrett?" "Let's not dwell on the past. I hope you can be decisive about this, Lady Heather."

Heather looked at her niece, heartbreak evident on her face. "Can't we just have a civil conversation? There's no need to escalate things like this. What would others think? Do you know how sad your grandparents would be if they were here?" Carissa remained unmoved. She said nothing as she waited for her aunt to send someone for the items. Heather studied Carissa for a long moment before finally realizing she was getting nowhere with her pleas.

Gritting her teeth, she finally ordered, "Get the cloud-patterned satin shoes with pearls my sister gifted me. As for the rest, it's mostly medicine. I've used it all up over the years since I haven't been well, so I can't return those to you." After a while, a servant returned. She held out a pair of pale pink satin shoes embroidered with green threads. They looked brand new and meticulously maintained-free from any dust and with pristine soles. "Only this pair of shoes are left. You can take it or leave it," Heather said coldly.

"I remember there were quite a few valuable pieces of jewelry as well," Carissa replied.

"They've all gone missing!" Heather exclaimed in frustration. "Are you really determined to settle things so clearly with your own aunt? Carissa, you were in the wrong first! Do you even understand the rules? You meddled in Leona's household matters! My husband and are still alive! It's not your place to interfere! You did such a major thing, but you don't care!"

"What does it matter whose place it is? Lives are what truly matter. Also, don't twist the truth! When you had your falling out with Prince Harvey didn't you turn to my mom for help? Why didn't you think to go to your parents instead of troubling my mom?" Carissa retorted.

Heather was left speechless. All that was from years ago, and her marriage was now in a much better place.

Caring for relatives and discussing matters among themselves was common in large families. It was through this kind of mutual support that they maintained their ties and built powerful alliances. However, Carissa had overstepped by meddling in Leona's affairs against Harvey and Heather's wishes. That rubbed Heather the wrong way.

"Since you only have this pair of shoes left, I'll take it then," Carissa said, not wishing to linger any longer.

Even if Heather had the medicines, she wouldn't return them. But they were likely gone, or she would have brought them for Leona without question.

"Carissa, is Leona okay?" Heather hastily asked.

"No, she's not, but Ivy will take care of her. If she wishes to see you after she recovers, she'll probably send someone to inform you," Carissa said, turning to leave.

"Let me see her now! You can't keep us apart! She's my daughter!" Heather called out desperately in a raised voice as she chased after her niece.

A crowd had already gathered

outside earlier, The residences

nearby were all occupied by noble

families. The masters and

mistresses of these residences wouldn't come out to watch, but their servants and attendants were curious enough to do so, and would report back.

That was why Heather raised her voice, and even let tears slip down her cheeks once she finished shouting.

Chapter 643

-

However, Carissa wouldn't let Heather have her way.

If Heather wasn't afraid of shedding all pretenses and was unconcerned about the reputations of her family and the Earl of Gracehold's family, then let her come!

Carissa sharply said, "First, when Samuel took a concubine and abandoned Leona, you all stood by and told her to endure it. Leona is a dignified duchess and the man's rightful wife. Why should she have to tolerate a courtesan? Where did you place her royal dignity then?"

"Second, when Samuel first beat Leona and left her bedridden, neither you nor Prince Harvey uttered a word against him. You merely sent some supplements to Leona and told her to endure until Samuel changed his mind.

"Third, Leona had a difficult time giving birth because Samuel pushed her down the stairs. When she had one foot in the grave, she called out for me, her cousin, not you, her mother. When the king discovered that, he was furious at Samuel for mistreating and abusing Leona. But instead of standing up for your daughter, you defend her husband and cling to this marriage.

"Do you wish for Leona to die? Is that why you want her to continue to suffer under Samuel's torment until she ends up like Aunt Avis, who died miserably in Verdant Monastery after enduring such torture?"

Heather's expression changed drastically as she stared at Carissa in shock. It was as if she couldn't believe her niece had spoken so callously in public. And Heather was sure Carissa had deliberately thrown that last sentence in.

No one knew about what happened to Avis, as Yuvan and his people had kept it tightly under wraps. Even when Avis willingly went to Verdant Monastery, it was under the guise of recovering her health. Yuvan had presented everything in a positive light and made everything look perfect. It didn't matter that some rumors had gotten out, since even Avis' two daughters were protecting Yuvan.

With Avis' own daughters saying as such, who would dare question it? After all, the outside world was rife with mixed truth and lies.

Yet, Yuvan had married Molly not long after Avis' death, which would inevitably raise eyebrows. Now that the matter was being brought up, it left everyone free to speculate.

Yuvan wanted to maintain a clean and respectable image, right?

No way that was happening!

Since Yuvan had returned to the capital, it was time to confront him directly and in a systematic order.

Carissa continued, "Also, I'm not stopping you from seeing your daughter. If you approach Leona as her mother, I'm sure she would be delighted."

Having finished speaking, Carissa took the shoes and climbed into the carriage under the watchful eyes of the crowd. She left Heather standing at the estate's entrance, subject to the crowd's curious gaze.

Fuming, Heather turned and stormed back into Hartstone Estate.

Meanwhile, Dorothy had really begun a hunger strike.

Noah had already gone to Hartstone Estate twice. Harvey informed him that he had already used his connections to ensure Samuel wouldn't suffer or be punished at the Supreme Court, and asked Noah to relay this to Dorothy. Noah thanked him profusely, feeling guilty that his family had not treated Leona well.

After a momentary hesitation, Noah asked, "With all this wrath brewing, do you think it will drag other people from our family into trouble?"

Harvey remained silent for a long time, his brows furrowed in thought. It made Noah increasingly uneasy.

No one in the Earl of Gracehold's

family dared to approach the king anymore. Even during court sessions, they were eager to be the first to leave, wanting to avoid being singled out for reprimands. It was one thing to be reprimanded, but they were most afraid that

Salvador's would strip their family of their title in a fit of anger.

"Your Highness?" Noah called out again, seeing Harvey lost in thought.

Harvey looked up and sighed. "Because I failed to protect Leona, the king doesn't care for me now. The separation between our families is inevitable. As for Samuel, I still think of him as my son-in-law and want to ensure he doesn't suffer at the Supreme Court, but I can't guarantee that this won't affect your title.

"Maybe you can try to approach Yuvan. He's currently caring for Lady Ruth in the palace and goes to see the queen dowager on a daily basis, so he could probably intercede with her on your behalf. Samuel won't be able to escape the consequences, but at least you'll be able to protect your family's standing."

"Prince Yuvan?" Noah paused, taken aback.

But then, he quickly realized it was a good idea. Yuvan had been in Valken and was back in the capital to care for Lady Ruth. The queen dowager would surely show him some consideration since Yuvan had left his mother in the capital when he went to his fief. "Thank you for your suggestion, Your Highness. I'll go right away," Noah said gratefully before leaving hurriedly.

#### Chapter 644

At Hell Monarch Estate, Jacob reported the situation to Rafael in the study, then settled down to sip his coffee once he was done.

"So, Noah headed straight to Uncle Yuvan's residence after leaving Hartstone Estate?" Rafael raised an eyebrow. "Hah. It seems our suspicions were correct. They're all working together with Aunt Eleanor." "Prince Harvey has been hiding it too well. We never paid him much attention before," Jacob said.

"I was stuck at the Southern Frontier battlefield over the past few years, so I missed a lot that happened in the capital," Rafael said, analyzing the situation. "They haven't gained enough power yet. Otherwise, they would have made their move when my brother first took the throne. Back then, there was chaos at Victory Pass and a war at the Southern Frontier. When my father passed away and a new king took the throne, that would have been their best chance."

Jacob considered it for a moment, then shook his head. "That may have been their best chance, but it wasn't the right time for them to seize the throne. With internal and external strife, inheriting such a mess would have been quite a challenge for them." "It would have been a challenge, but they would also have had a higher chance of success," Rafael countered.

Jacob explained, "Your Highness, that just goes to show Prince Yuvan's grand ambitions. He wants the throne, along with fame and public support. That's why he's investing so deeply. If he were to rebel while the kingdom was fighting enemy kingdoms, he would be branded as a usurper even if he



succeeded. One who desires everything will inevitably end up with nothing. I imagine he's regretting his choices now."

Rafael agreed with Jacob's words, saying, "For now, let's keep an eye on the situation and support Carissa's plan to topple Aunt Eleanor. By the way, have we received any news from Westhaven?" That was the second piece of news Jacob was there to report.

"Marshal Liam was attacked and severely injured. He's currently in a coma. He faced assassination attempts several times before and managed to evade them, but he wasn't so lucky this time." "Could we get someone to infiltrate his circle?" the prince questioned.

"We have one person who managed to do so, but he's not in a position of importance. He's only a minor guard at Marshal Liam's estate, so he wasn't present during the attack. Even if he had been, it wouldn't have mattered. There were many ruthless assassins. Marshal Liam is highly skilled and his guards are all elite fighters, but they still couldn't avoid the ambush," Jacob replied.

"What about Westhaven's king? What's the situation with him now? Didn't they initially say that he wouldn't survive the summer? Autumn is already upon us now," Rafael asked.

"There are many rumors floating around, and even Westhaven's citizens don't know the true state of their king," said Jacob.

"I see." Rafael sighed softly.

He hoped Westhaven's king would hang on a bit longer. Otherwise, once Westhaven's crown prince ascended the throne, the situation in Starhaven would turn dire. There would be troubles both inside and outside the kingdom. After thinking for a while, Rafael said, "Help me send a message to Winona. See if her people can deliver some Snowdrop Pills to Marshal Liam."

"Before I came here, I already entrusted a letter and the pills to Claire. She'll arrange for the delivery," Jacob responded as he picked up the cup he had just set down.

Rafael raised an eyebrow. "Are you trying to get ahead of me again?"

Jacob remained calm and composed. "I just wanted to let you know that I'm earning the salary you're paying me with a clear conscience, Your Highness."

"Seriously? You practically follow me through heaven and hell, so why worry about that? Well, if you need anything else, you can ask Carissa," Rafael said with a laugh. Jacob's usually cool demeanor softened into a slight smile. "I don't want much, just a painting by Mr. Spencer."

"An orchid painting? There are plenty of those around."

"If that was it, I wouldn't bother you with it," Jacob said seriously. "I would like to request for him to do a painting based on a description."

Rafael's eyes lit up with understanding. "Your sister."

Jacob's gaze turned wistful. "Yes. I have never given up searching for her."

"Your sister went missing when she

was seven. Eighteen years have passed, and she would be

twenty-five now. Even if Kyle could paint her, it would be a painting of her at age seven. How will you

search based on that?" the prince

asked.

"No, I've heard that Mr. Spencer has a unique skill. Based on a person's childhood likeness, he can deduce what they might look like as an adult and incorporate it into the painting."

Rafael replied, "Okay, so he has such

a talent. But your own painting skills are decent, and you couldn't manage to paint your sister because your memory is hazy. In which case how can you expect to describe her well enough for someone else to paint?"

"Some details are indeed hazy. When I try to draw my sister, I recall the sorrow that engulfed my family after her disappearance, and perhaps that makes me reluctant to delve too deeply into those memories. If Mr. Spencer was here, perhaps he would be able to capture her on canvas based on my description. At least her face lingers in my mind, so maybe it'll slowly come into focus," said Jacob.

## Chapter 645

Rafael knew that this was Jacob's greatest regret. The man had even vowed to himself that he wouldn't marry until he found his sister.

"Alright. I'll discuss this with Carissa," Rafael said. "But I can't guarantee that Kyle will agree. It sounds a little ridiculous."

Jacob remained calm. "I only ask that you ask Mr. Spencer about it. If it doesn't work out, I won't be disappointed."

"Okay." Rafael nodded, then discussed a few other matters with Jacob before heading back to his room.

Carissa had just returned from seeing Leona when Rafael informed her of Jacob's request.

"Jacob has a sister who went missing years ago? But if he sent Claire to contact Winona, why didn't he just write directly to Kyle?" she asked, surprised.

"Jacob draws the line quite well. Asking Claire to contact Winona is related to his job, while reaching out to Kyle is a personal matter. He still wants to have an intermediary help convey his words," Rafael replied. Carissa understood. "Alright. I'll write and ask, but I'm not sure if Kyle is at Meadow Ridge now. He's always off somewhere."

Rafael smiled. "He should be there now. Sage Everett has just returned after having been away for a while, so they're probably busy reorganizing things. I doubt anyone will be leaving Meadow Ridge for the next few months."

For some reason, the mention of her martial uncle always stirred a wave of anxiety within Carissa. Her respect for him had been etched into her bones.

"Luckily, I'm married and away from Meadow Ridge," she quipped, laughing lightly.

"And you married his only beloved apprentice, so you'll be treated especially well and forgiven more readily," Rafael said with a sense of pride, before leaning down to press a kiss to her forehead.

"Sage Everett is a little protective," Carissa said.

Rafael tried to wipe some ink smudges from his hands, but they wouldn't come off. He called for someone to fetch some water.

"That's not right. It's not a little. He's very protective," the prince commented.

Carissa felt a bit reluctant to accept her husband's words, but then she reconsidered and added, "But Sage Adrian is even more protective."

Rafael's eyes sparkled. "That's true. When we went to save the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team members, Sage Everett told me not to offend you at all. If you went back to Meadow Ridge and complained to your guild members, he wouldn't be able to withstand the wrath of the entire guild."

"That doesn't sound right. Who isn't afraid of Sage Everett?" Carissa disagreed.

Everyone in the Pathfinders Guild, including Adrian, was afraid of Everett.

"Yes, they're afraid, but a cornered beast will bite people, right? You're everyone's favorite. If you feel wronged and complain to them, they will rise up against my mentor if he protects me," Rafael replied, suddenly adopting a pitiful

Ovel

demeanor. "Even though we're from the same guild, your branch has plenty of people, while mine is just me. It's hard not to be bullied."

Carissa's eyes filled with sympathy at his words. She stood on her tiptoes and playfully flicked his forehead. "So, you need to treat me better."

The moment she reached up, Rafael felt a rush of joy.

Had this blockhead finally come to her senses?

But then, a sudden hit against his forehead and a twinge of pain followed Carissa's words.

Nope. This blockhead was still as dense as ever.

Rafael pulled his wife into his arms and sat down in a chair, wrapping his arms around her waist as he asked, "How's Leona doing?"

Carissa shifted closer, though she

felt a bit awkward being so intimate

while it was still daytime. "She's doing okay. Her complexion isn't as pale as before, but her mood is

terrible. She keeps crying when she's sure no one's around."

"She carried the baby for so long, so losing him is surely heartbreaking. She just needs time. It'll all pass," Rafael reassured.

"I've brought the water, Your Highness!" Lulu called out as she entered without looking up, carrying a basin.

Carissa immediately stood up with a stiff expression. "Uh... Put it down there."

Lulu complied. After thinking for a moment, she tugged on Carissa's arm.

"My lady, come here for a moment. I have something to discuss with you."

Normally, Lulu would address her as "Lady Carissa" or "Your Grace". But now, she was reverting to a more familiar address.

As Carissa followed her outside, Lulu led the way until the two of them came to stand beneath a shady tree.

"My lady, the prince wants to treat you better. Why do you keep resisting him?" Lulu asked, her hands on her hips.

"I'm not," Carissa replied in an exasperated tone. "Is that all you want to say?"

"When I walked in, I saw His Highness holding you. But the moment you saw me, you jumped up like you were doing something wrong. Why did you do that?" "It's not dark yet."

"So what?" Lulu pouted, clearly frustrated. "Do you think getting close to His Highness is something to feel guilty about? Do you have to wait until it's dark to get intimate? You weren't this resistant before. You can't start pushing His Highness away because of what happened between Lady Leona and Mr. Langley."

Chapter 646

Carissa was surprised.

Had she been doing that?

She hadn't been resistant to getting close to Rafael. After all, they were intimate every night. They shared the bed, and curled up together. Throughout the night, her head had hardly left the comfort of his arms or chest.

Seeing Carissa's confused look, Lulu felt an inexplicable frustration rise within her. She asked directly, "My lady, do you want a respectful relationship with His Highness, like a pair of polite spouses, or do you want to be a real loving couple?"

"Lulu, aren't you overreacting?" Carissa reached up to touch Lulu's forehead. "Have you been possessed by something? Are you running a fever?"

Lulu puffed up her cheeks, and glared. "My lady, answer the question!"

Carissa tilted her head slightly, a few strands of hair falling out of place and dancing in the sunset glow. "Don't you need both respect and love in a marriage? Just because a couple is loving doesn't

mean they can't be respectful. Is it one or the other? Can't I have both?" "What?" Lulu was taken aback.

Both? Well, that wasn't out of the question.

Lulu paused, then continued, "But sometimes, it feels like you don't really care about His Highness' feelings. He's very concerned about yours. It has to go both ways."

"Why do you think I don't care? I do!"

"It just seems a bit off," Lulu said as she tilted her head to the side. "Like the late Lord Nathan and Lady Yvette-they really were a loving couple."

Carissa recalled that every time she returned from Meadow Ridge, she witnessed the affection between her second brother and his wife. They would walk hand-in-hand and sit close together. And when they thought no one was watching, her second brother would sneak a kiss. During meals, they would feed each other and occasionally share lingering glances across the table.

Carissa fell silent for a moment, then pushed away those memories. "Okay. I got it."

Lulu realized that she might have misspoken, and she asked awkwardly, "My lady, are you hungry? Should I bring some food?"

Carissa didn't answer. Instead, she turned sharply and headed back.

Rafael saw her determined approach, and asked, "What's wrong? What did Lulu say to you?"

Carissa walked straight up to him, and stood on her tiptoes. Rafael understood the cue and instinctively leaned in.

'Go on then, give it your best shot!'

Then, her soft lips touched his cheeks, and he was stunned for a long while. As her face turned a little red, he suddenly hugged her tightly. See? Even a blockhead could blossom, right?

In his arms, she murmured, "There's

something I need to tell you. My mom gave Heather a lot of medicine back in the day, including several bottles of Snowdrop and Energy Pills, and also emergency remedies. However, not a single one is left now. Those medicines aren't the sort to be taken casually when one isn't sick, and they're too precious to throw away. I suspect Heather gave them away, which means she and Harvey aren't as aloof as they appear to be and do have dealings with other families."

Though it was a bit disheartening to discuss such serious matters now, they both knew it was important. So, they sat down to analyze and discuss the situation.

"I'm not really familiar with Sebastian's medicines. The Snowdrop and Energy Pills are available for sale, right? If a noble family wanted to buy them, Sebastian wouldn't refuse. How does giving away the pills help build relationships?"

Carissa shook her head. "No. Years

ago, the Snowdrop and Energy Pills were rare, especially the Snowdrop pills. One of the ingredients is extremely difficult to find, and it has to be harvested in frigid conditions and can't be allowed to dry out. It must be prepared within twelve hours of gathering it, and it's hard to refine. Also, gathering herbs in such harsh weather is grueling. That's why there weren't many Snowdrop Pills available each year.

"The production only increased after Sebastian refined his formula and found a substitute ingredient. Even so, they're still limited. He has a set quota every year. Some go to me and the Pathfinders Guild, he keeps a few bottles for himself, and he sells the rest. If the pills run out and Sebastian is out of the capital, anyone in urgent need won't be able to get them."

"I see. You mentioned there were some emergency remedies as well. What are those used for?"

"Those are typically used to keep someone alive for a few days, or just a few hours. They're mostly given to those who are already beyond saving, to help them make arrangements for their final affairs."

Rafael pondered for a moment, then said, "That's something we can look into."



When Samuel's trial began, the first ruling was to sever all ties between him and Leona, the Duchess of Everpeace. This complete break showed no regard for protecting the dignity of the Earl of Gracehold's family.

Then, Samuel was found guilty of brutally beating his rightful wife, which resulted in the death of their unborn child. Given that Leona was part of the royal family and had the king's royal edict backing her, the Supreme Court's deputy minister sentenced Samuel to ten years of exile in Quarath. He would be subjected to the supervision of the local authorities there and forced to do hard labor, including farming.

The ruling was immediate and would take effect the very next day, leaving the Earl of Gracehold's family with no chance to plead mercy from anyone.

However, Noah didn't pursue any appeals either. He had spoken to Yuvan, who informed him that he had already interceded on Noah's behalf with the queen dowager. Samuel would be the only one punished, and Noah's title would remain intact. However, Yuvan warned Noah not to stir up any more trouble. If he did, things could spiral out of control.

Noah didn't dare mention Samuel's sentence to Dorothy. All she knew was that Samuel was in prison and safe from hardship. However, the knowledge did little to ease her heart. After all, Samuel was her beloved grandchild whom she had spoiled and nurtured. When Samuel was being escorted to Quarath, Noah and Abigail went to bid him farewell.

During that time, a servant inadvertently let slip the details of Samuel's sentence, causing Dorothy to faint on the spot. She had already been on a hunger strike for two days, which had taken a toll on her health. Coupled with her age, her sudden anger and heartbreak caused the lower half of her body to be paralyzed. Her mouth was askew, and she couldn't stop drool from leaking out. She could also hardly articulate her words.

Noah and Abigail were oblivious to the news as they waited outside the city for Samuel's escort to appear. When they saw Samuel shackled, the image of his once vibrant self flickered in their minds. However, he was now a hollow shell. His eyes were vacant, and he was almost unrecognizable.

Noah rushed forward and hurriedly gave some money to the escort so he could talk with Samuel for a while.

Tears streamed down Samuel's face as he begged, "Dad, Mom, save me! I don't want to go to Quarath and do hard labor! I won't be able to bear it! I'll die! Please, save me!"

All his arrogance and pride had vanished. He was now a pitiful sight as he sobbed uncontrollably.

Abigail nearly fainted from grief, and she was unable to utter a single word.

Noah held back his tears and said,

"This is all your own doing. You had such a bright future, but you ruined it yourself. I'll make the necessary arrangements for your journey to Quarath and ensure you get there safely. But once you're there, whether you live or die is up to you. The king hasn't named the crown prince yet, but when he does, there may be a general amnesty. That'll be your chance to return, okay? No matter how difficult things get, you must endure. Do you understand?"

Samuel felt a wave of despair wash over him. How long would he have to wait until the king named the crown prince and granted a general amnesty? His exile was for ten years. With the king still so young, Samuel was afraid the crown prince still wouldn't be named even after ten years had passed.

How could he possibly endure that long?

"Dad, if there's any chance, please save me! I beg you!" Samuel cried, desperation seeping into his voice. "I can't last ten years! I won't survive until the general amnesty."

Noah's heart twisted in anguish. He

had intended to question Samuel about whether the latter understood the gravity of his mistakes, but he couldn't bear to press further after seeing Samuel in such a state. Instead, he urged Samuel to hold onto life and promised he would find a way to rescue the latter if given the chance.

One of the escorting officers stepped forward, offering Noah a modicum of respect. "It's time for us to set off."

Tears streamed down Noah's face as he pressed a banknote into the officer's hand. He bowed deeply, and pleaded, "Please take care of him on the journey. If he arrives safely, I'll reward you generously." The escort officer nodded. "Don't worry. It's autumn now, so the weather won't be as harsh. He'll make it through."

"Thank you," Noah said, relieved to hear that his son wouldn't die on the road.

Noah was an earl, yet he had to bow and scrape before a mere escort officer. It was a new low for him.

When had he ever felt this small in life?

He wiped his tears, and couldn't help but turn to Samuel. "Do you finally realize your mistakes? If you do, I'll be willing to convey your apologies to the duchess."

Chapter 648

Samuel's eyes were hollow as he was pushed to take a few steps forward. Suddenly, he turned back to face Noah.

"Dad, if you see Ruby, ask her if she ever cared for me at all, even if just a little?"

At Samuel's words, Noah felt his vision darken. It was as if something was lodged in his throat and nearly choking him. He swayed for a moment before collapsing to the ground.

Abigail burst into loud, heart-wrenching sobs, which drew a crowd of onlookers from the streets.

The turmoil between the Earl of Gracehold's family and Harvey's family was already well-known, and the people of the capital were now buzzing with gossip.

With Noah sitting on the ground and Abigail in tears, the spectator could only watch with detached curiosity. The sorrows of the nobility were mere entertainment to the common folk. They felt no empathy, only a desire for more gossip.

Upon returning home, Noah and Abigail learned that Dorothy had fainted and suffered a stroke. Despite quickly ordering everyone to keep their mouths shut, word still spread that her illness was caused by Samuel's actions. The shame of disrespecting his family left a heavy stain on Samuel's name. Even if he managed to return one day, he would be seen as worthless.

After her stroke, Dorothy could hardly speak. She spent her days murmuring Samuel's name. In her dreams, she saw him being tormented and dying during his exile. The anxiety and emotional strain took their toll on her health, and she passed away within days. Dorothy's death cast a shadow of disgrace over the Earl of Gracehold's family. They now had to bear the blame for mistreating Leona,

and for Samuel's disrespectful attitude. In addition, several other family members who held significant positions in the court were reported to the Oversight Department for their involvement in the mistreatment of Leona.

In a fit of anger, Salvador demoted them all. While Noah retained his title, his family's reputation was ruined beyond repair.

After the court session, Rafael bumped into Noah. They walked together and exchanged a few words. Noah remained fazed for a long time before dragging his heavy feet away slowly.

-

After Yuvan had visited several noble families, he was finally ready to visit Eleanor at Harmony Palace. Coincidentally, Harvey arrived on the same day.

Yuvan was ranked third in the age among the siblings, while Harvey was the fifth. Eleanor was only two months younger than Yuvan, and Harvey was two years younger than them.

In the past, these three had rarely interacted. When Yuvan visited the capital, it was usually merely to exchange pleasantries in the palace. They seldom visited each other directly. Harvey had little connection with Eleanor, unless it was attending her banquets.

Eleanor dismissed the servants from the room, then smiled and said, "It's quite a coincidence that the three of us are gathered here today. I didn't expect you to drop by as well, Harvey."

"You're right," Harvey replied, his

previous humility nowhere to be found. He settled into a chair with

his chin slightly raised, and eft

dignified demeanor befitting a

prince. "It's a rare chance that we get to sit down together and have a good chat."

Yuvan sipped the exquisite coffee that Eleanor had provided, and smiled. "This is really high-quality coffee. It's far superior to what I drank back in Valken." Eleanor replied, "I've only got two jars left. I only brought some out today because both of my brothers are here to visit me, and I felt it worth sharing."

Yuvan shifted his gaze toward her. "You seem a bit thinner, Eleanor. Is something troubling you? Are your subordinates causing any trouble?"

"Celeste is the only one, but she shaped up after a proper reprimand," Eleanor replied, her eyes icy. "Some people just can't seem to understand their place. They really think they're part of my family."

"There's no need to get angry. If they misbehave, just teach them a lesson, and they'll be obedient," Yuvan said as he set down his cup, a hint of joy on his face. "The Earl of Gracehold's family is completely ruined."

"Yes, and Leona was caught in the crossfire," Eleanor said as she glanced at Harvey. "Harvey, you can't blame me for this. Leona wouldn't listen to you. She's soft-hearted, and was deeply infatuated with Samuel. Her marriage to Samuel would have only strengthened the Earl of Gracehold's family, so I had no choice but to ruin them."

Harvey forced a smile.

Eleanor continued, "Besides, your original plan was flawed from the start. You expected Leona to win over the Earl of Gracehold's family

and Samuel. How could that ever e

an old

work? The Earl of Gracehold's family is an old noble family and is fiercely loyal to the crown. Also, Samuel was an arrogant man and thought himself above everyone. He would never have listened to us. It was better to eliminate him outright."

Chapter 649

Harvey lowered his gaze and showed no trace of anger, yet the veins in his hands resting on the armrest bulged slightly. "You're right."

"Don't worry about Leona anymore. Your daughter's loyalty clearly lies elsewhere. She would rather follow Carissa than return to your estate with you. Honestly, she's no great loss," Eleanor went on. Harvey remained silent, but frustration gradually clouded his eyes.

When Yuvan saw this, he quickly changed the topic. "Well, the matter of the Earl of Gracehold's family is settled. The king won't employ officials who are disrespectful to their families, so their good days are over. I came here today regarding Aurora. I sent assassins after her, but Carissa got in the way. She cost me some of my best men."

"It won't be easy to kill Aurora now, Yuvan. The king has dispatched the Capital Guard to watch over Valor Estate. They're in civilian clothing, but I've looked into it, and they're definitely from the Capital Guard," Harvey replied. "Also, Aurora is cunning. She never steps outside Valor Estate."

"What about bribing someone in Valor Estate to poison her?" Yuvan asked.

"I've tried, but it was useless. She only has one servant by her side, and doesn't need anyone else. Plus, she tests all her food with silver needles. There's no way for us to infiltrate Blessed Haven."

Yuvan chuckled, his eyes glinting with amusement. "See, Harvey? It seems your efforts are less effective than Eleanor's. The assassination didn't work, and poisoning was also a bust. Looks like you're at a loss at handling Aurora, huh?"

Though Yuvan spoke with a smile and a light tone, Harvey understood the underlying dissatisfaction the older man felt.

"I'll come up with something else," Harvey assured.

"You better make it quick. The old king in Westhaven can't last much longer. Our people are already close to the Westhaven crown prince, and he's fixated on avenging the former crown prince. Also, there's discontent among the common folk regarding Liam's retreat from the borders. Edmund has been spreading those rumors himself to

pave the way for his own ascension

and to settle things with Starhaven."

Harvey was slightly confused. "Isn't Liam Edmund's uncle? If he stirs things up like this, wouldn't Liam become a target of public criticism?"

"Edmund was already unhappy with

Liam for signing the border agreement with Aurora," Eleanor explained. "At that time, Liam had Aurora and her soldiers surrounded. However, his priority was to rescue the previous crown prince and get him treated instead of eliminating the enemies. Liam let his emotions cloud his judgment, and proved he wasn't fit for a crucial role," Eleanor said.

Then, she shot Harvey a sideways glance. "Do you really not understand what Yuvan is after? He wants Aurora dead. That way, when Edmund ascends the throne and demands accountability, we won't be able to use Aurora as a scapegoat. It would give them more leverage in their negotiations if she was used.

"Plus, if Aurora is gone, all the blame falls squarely on Dominic and his family. It won't matter if he was injured at the time, or that he had just lost a son. Without Aurora, he'll bear the entire burden of responsibility for the massacre of innocent civilians. By law, that means his entire family will be sentenced to death."

Harvey replied, "But even if Aurora is pushed into the spotlight, Dominic still has an unshakable responsibility as the marshal of Victory Pass."

"It wouldn't be the same," Yuvan

said, disappointment creeping into his eyes as he regarded Harvey once more. "Aurora was the one who injured and humiliated Arthur. If that becomes public knowledge, both the kingdom's common folk will leathe her to the bone. They'll be desperate to see her dead. With someone so hated around, the Sullivan family will have someone to deflect the blame onto, and the fallout wouldn't be as significant."

Harvey pondered for a moment, then said, "But it's a fact that killing Aurora won't be easy now, especially with the king protecting her. He probably anticipates the changes in Westhaven. Apart from the Capital Guard, Rafael has also stationed some guards to safeguard her. Still, I do have an idea. I wonder if you two would like to hear it?"

"Go ahead," Yuvan said as he picked up his cup and sipped slowly.

A cold glint flickered in Harvey's eyes.

"Aurora likely knows her fate by now," Harvey said, "and that she's merely surviving day by day. Why not send someone to relay a message to her? We could tell her that if the situation escalates, she should insist that Dominic was the one who ordered her to do what she did. That way, she might still have a chance to save herself. What do you think?"

Chapter 650

After Harvey finished speaking, Yuvan fell into deep thought for a moment.

"But it's ultimately better for her to die. That way, all the blame will fall on the Sullivan family. Aurora is cunning and fears death. With her being so despised, I fear the common folk would find her words hard to believe. Also, the Sullivan family has guarded Victory Pass for so many years without ever harming a single civilian. If someone were to spin that narrative to clear their name, it could very well absolve them of any wrongdoing," Yuvan said.

Harvey replied, "But our goal isn't to wipe out the Sullivan family. We only need them out of Victory Pass so we can place our people to guard it. Oliver hasn't aligned with us yet, so we must take control of Victory Pass. As long as we control the elite troops in both areas, or if the conflict drags on, we can implement our original plan of inciting the civilians uprising across the region. This will highlight the king's failures and make him the target of public outrage, which is the perfect chance for us to make our move."

After he finished speaking, he secretly glanced at Eleanor's expression as he lifted his cup. As expected, he saw a flicker of anger cross her face.

Eleanor's voice was sharp as she said, "No! All the Sullivan family members must die."

Yuvan frowned. "Eleanor, don't act on impulse. Harvey's right. Our goal is to remove the Sullivan family from Victory Pass. As for you wanting them dead, you can decide how they die and how brutal you want to be with them once they're back in the capital." Harvey anticipated a rebuttal from Eleanor when he voiced his opinion, but he knew that she would listen to Yuvan.

Besides, Yuvan was right. There was nothing more satisfying than witnessing the suffering of those one despised before their very eyes.



Seeing that Eleanor had no objections, Yuvan continued, "There's something that needs to be addressed urgently. We must incite the noble families and common folk scholars. We'll sing Rafael's praises for his accomplishment in reclaiming the Southern Frontier. The goal is to make sure the people only know about Rafael, and have no idea about the king's involvement."

Eleanor and Harvey nodded in agreement.

Eleanor sneered and said, "Yuvan, something interesting has come up. It seems that our dear nephew has taken a liking to Carissa."

"Are you referring to when he issued the royal edict stating that Carissa must enter the palace if she didn't get married in three months?" Yuvan shook his head. "I doubt it. Clearly, he was trying to manipulate Rafael into giving up his military authority. He knew Rafael had feelings for Carissa for a long time, so he used her as leverage to get what he wanted."

Eleanor shook her head, and said coldly, "No, there's been a rumor from the people in Sylvia's palace. When he was intoxicated one time, he held Sylvia's hand and called her Carissa."

"Really?" Yuvan was surprised. "He really has feelings for her?"

"It seems to be true."

Yuvan traced the rim of his cup with his fingers, a smile slowly spreading across his face. "How amusing-brothers vying for the same woman. It's only natural they would fall into conflict." Harvey remarked, "But the king doesn't seem to have any intention of claiming her for himself."

"Whether he wants to or not

depends on how things play out. Perhaps he's waiting for the right chance to turn the tables..." Eleanor trailed off, and chuckled coldly. She left her statement hanging, but Yuvan and Harvey understood the implications.

"That won't be easy," Harvey cautioned. "Carissa is quite skilled in martial arts. Dealing with her will be a challenge, and your usual tactics won't have much effect on her." Eleanor scoffed. "So what if she's strong? She's still just a woman."

Yuvan contemplated in silence for a moment, then said, "Let's first deal with what I mentioned earlier. As for whether the king has feelings for Carissa, I'll need to investigate further. I can easily find out, given that I'm often in and out of the palace."

"And there's the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team members. Lawrence is of no use anymore, but Felix and Thomas are important. We should meddle in their marriage arrangements, Eleanor." Eleanor slowly smiled. "I actually have someone suitable for Thomas. I was just planning to find a matchmaker."

"Who is it? Can we trust her?"

Eleanor's smile turned enigmatic. "She's completely loyal to me, and I've saved her life before."

"Which family does she belong to? How old is she? What skills does she have?"

Eleanor stretched lazily and said, "Her background isn't important. She could be Fiona's sister or even Henry's sister, who was raised outside the palace. It's up to us to fabricate her story. She's around 25

years old, and is exeve

skilled. When she was

Stonebridge County, she was pursued and nearly killed. I saved her, so she's absolutely loyal to me."

Yuvan said, "If she's truly loyal, we can use her without worry. Since she's 25 years old, we should see if the Farrell family would accept her as Thomas' bride."

Harvey interjected coolly, "Did you really save her, or did you manipulate the situation so that she would need saving? Could it be that she's like those other women in your courtyard and bears a face similar to Melanie Sullivan?"

"You know me so well, Harvey," Eleanor replied with a laugh. "She does bear a slight resemblance, but what's most striking is the red mole on her lips."