

## War Song 691

### Chapter 691

Daniel's home was not far from the Sinclair family's main residence, Sinclair Estate. It was a house with two entrances, two exits, and a patio.

Usually, Daniel's wife, Thalia, would accompany her mother-in-law, Hilda, after dinner. The two women would do embroidery together, with Thalia usually making clothes for her unborn child or two sons. But tonight, not only did Thalia not show up at all, the sound of the

children playing couldn't be heard either.

Finding it odd, Hilda sent her maid, Doris, to check on them. When she arrived at Thalia's quarters and inquired, Thalia's maid, Fern, looked surprised.

"Isn't Madam Thalia doing embroidery with Madam Hilda? She left an hour ago with the two boys," said Fern.

"No, Madam Hilda hasn't seen Madam Thalia. That's why she sent me to ask," replied Doris, also surprised.

"How can that be? Madam Thalia had dinner and took her pregnancy medicine, then left."

"Did she say she was heading to Madam Hilda's place?"

"Yes, she did. Pansy went with her. Before leaving, Madam Thalia told me to tidy up the porch so I didn't follow them."

"We haven't seen her. She couldn't have gone visiting elsewhere, right? Hurry and go to Sinclair Estate and ask them. I'll check with Madam Emily. She mentioned earlier today that the boys were going over to her place to play."

Emily was Solomon's wife, and their home was next to Daniel's. Currently, Solomon was busy helping Theodore handle matters regarding their family's younger members, earning the respect of the rest of the family. When Carissa left the Warren family, it was Solomon who had arranged for the younger members of the family to help her move her dowry from Valor Estate.

Doris and Fern hurried out to inquire. After checking both places, they returned with the same information-no one had seen Thalia or her two boys.

Upon hearing this, Solomon felt a sense of unease. Thalia had spent most of her time in Serenvale and rarely returned to the capital. And given that she was pregnant, she seldom ventured out. She only visited Sinclair Estate or Solomon's home. It was unlikely she would wander around.

It was unusual for her to go out during the day, let alone at night.

Solomon immediately called his wife

to stay with his uncle and aunt to comfort them. Meanwhile, he gathered the younger members of the family to search for Thalia and her two children. After searching for more than two hours, everyone reconvened and reported that they

had found nothing.

A sense of foreboding crept into Solomon's mind. He thought about how Thalia and her two children had only recently returned to the capital and rarely ventured out, making it unlikely for them to have offended anyone. Reporting their disappearance to the Royal Citadel at this late hour would be pointless, as there were only a few officers on duty. After a moment of contemplation, Solomon decided to visit Northwatch Estate to seek out Frederick. When Frederick learned the details of the situation, he became anxious.

"Keep searching for now. I'll head to the Capital Guard's headquarters. I know some people there. I'll ask them to be on the lookout while patrolling. After that, I'll drop by Hell Monarch Estate to see Lady Carissa."

"Alright, we'll keep searching. Thank you, Frederick," Solomon replied.

"Quickly, let's split up," Frederick instructed, not wasting any time.

He quickly put on a coat and took a carriage to the Capital Guard's headquarters and the garrison unit.

Frederick had been the steward for the Duke of Northwatch's family for a long time, so he had some connections with the Capital Guard and the garrison unit. After making arrangements at those two places, he headed to Hell Monarch Estate. Carissa was still awake when she heard Frederick had arrived, so she hurriedly sent someone to invite him in.

Upon hearing that Daniel's wife and

children were missing, Carissa recalled that uncle of hers. He had always stayed in Serenvale, but had returned when her family was wiped out. When Carissa saw Daniel back then, she had been taken aback by how much he resembled her dad.

However, she had been

overwhelmed with grief then. Her family's funeral was a task shared between them and the Klein family. By the time the mourning period ended, Daniel had already returned to Serenvale, and Carissa hadn't even had the chance to thank him.

Rafael immediately issued an order, "Travis, mobilize all the household guards to search."

Jacob strode in and shook his head. "There's no need to send so many people out. Just a few will do. Frederick, you should mobilize everyone from Northwatch Estate to search."

Chapter 692

Rafael noticed that Jacob was holding a note. It seemed he knew the whereabouts of Thalia and her children.

A stunned Frederick protested, "Why don't we send more people out? It's late, and we need to find them immediately. If anything happens, it'll be too late!" He glanced at Carissa, but she remained silent.

Rafael spoke up, "Frederick, follow Jacob's instructions. Take people to look for them. And as for the Sinclair family, don't say too much to them. Just let them know we will also be sending people out. If they're not found by tomorrow, have them report it to the Royal Citadel."

Since Rafael had given his order, Frederick replied, "Understood. I'll follow your wishes, Your Highness."

Just as Frederick left, Violet rushed in. She had just finished bathing and was alarmed when she heard the staff mention that Frederick had come from Northwatch Estate, prompting her to hurry over in case something was wrong. "What happened?" Violet asked as she hastily pinned up her damp hair.

Holding the note tightly, Jacob first instructed Travis to keep watch outside, then explained, "We received a tip from our hidden network in Harmony Palace. They reported that Grand Princess Eleanor's captain of the guards, Kurt, took a few people out tonight. Shortly after, they returned through a side door. They were carrying two children and a pregnant woman, who were all taken to the dungeon."

Violet was unaware of the situation, but hearing that Jacob had connections in Harmony Palace filled her with respect.

"You managed to place someone in Harmony Palace? That's impressive, Jacob! Your contact must be highly valued by Grand Princess Eleanor, right?" she asked.

"Yes, they're in quite essential positions. We can't do anything without them," Jacob replied seriously.

After all, cleaning the toilets was a crucial task that needed to be handled by someone. Fortunately, the job allowed them to patrol the various courtyards at night and go unnoticed by others. Not only did no one pay any attention to them, people would often go so far as to hold their noses and walk away from them due to the unpleasant smell that lingered.

"They? It's not just one?" Violet asked before suddenly becoming startled by a realization. "Wait, what did you say earlier? They've kidnapped two children and a pregnant woman?"

Carissa's face was etched with

worry. "It's my aunt and cousins.

Frederick said my Uncle Daniel just left the capital today. If his wife and children were taken by people from Harmony Palace, I'm afraid he might have fallen into Grand Princess Eleanor's hands as well."

Violet gasped in surprise. "Could Grand Princess Eleanor have found out that we're making a move during the Emberfest Festival?"

Carissa shook her head, a flicker of hidden fire dancing in her eyes. "That's not it. My uncle looks a lot like my father, and he's only in his twenties. Being young and similar in appearance, I worry that..." Everyone understood what she was concerned about.

"Grand Princess Eleanor is

completely insane! She's already collected a bunch of people who look like your mom, and now is targeting someone who resembles your dad. What is she trying to do? To be loved by her is to be cursed for a few lifetimes! Even your extended family members aren't safe from her!" Violet exclaimed, her anger flaring.

Carissa gripped the armrest, her eyes frantic. The problem is we're supposed to act tomorrow night. If we save them tonight, our plan for tomorrow might fall apart. It would be like alerting her that we have something planned. But if we don't rescue them tonight, I'm afraid they'll meet a terrible fate."

"Waiting until tomorrow night is too risky. We have to save them. A pregnant woman and two children-how can they survive in the hands of those wolves?" Violet said.

Jacob interjected, "Let's not panic. If they intended to kill them, they could have done so right away. There was no need to take them back to the dungeon..."

Jacob trailed off as he realized that even if they weren't killed, being taken back would surely mean torture.

Rafael pondered for a moment, then said, "The only way is for me to sneak into the dungeon and keep an eye on them. If they make a move, I'll intervene. If they don't, I'll hide and wait for your operation tomorrow night." Quietly infiltrating Harmony Palace and finding a way into the dungeon to hide was something only Rafael and Carissa could accomplish, and Rafael's chances of success were greater than hers.

Chapter 693

"Do we have a map of Harmony Palace? Where's the dungeon located?" Violet asked.

"Of course we do. We're supposed to make our move tomorrow night. How could we not have one?" Rafael replied.

Violet felt a surge of frustration. Despite her and Claire's efforts to gather intelligence, they hadn't uncovered anything significant.

"How did you manage to sneak people into Harmony Palace so quietly? It's one of the most difficult places to infiltrate, especially for such important tasks. And it's not just one person-you've arranged for multiple!" Violet exclaimed.

Wanting to steer away from the unpleasant topic of cleaning toilets, Jacob got straight to the point, explaining, "The initial plan is for His Highness to sneak in. However, there's no way to leave messages for our people to see at this late hour. They can't help us, so it's all on His Highness now.

"Fortunately, we know the layout and patrol patterns of Harmony Palace. The best time to enter is around nine at night, but it's almost eleven now. We've missed the optimal window."

"I need to set out immediately. I'm going to change into my stealth attire," Rafael said, then turned to Carissa. "Don't worry. I'll keep them safe."

Carissa nodded. She had absolute trust in him.

"Just be careful and take care of yourself."

"Got it." He gave her a warm smile, exuding confidence. "The guards at Harmony Palace are nothing special. They only handle tasks like abducting people under the cover of darkness. My only challenge is to quietly slip into the dungeon and find a place to hide. I've seen the dungeon map, and there are spots to conceal myself."

"Alright, just be cautious."

Carissa knew Eleanor's guards weren't as inept as Rafael suggested. Compared to Hell Monarch Estate, they were certainly not on the same level. Even so, getting in unnoticed would be challenging, as there were five hundred soldiers stationed at Harmony Palace. While many were incompetent, there were capable individuals among them, like the captain of the guards, Kurt.

"We should deal with Janice. We've been preparing for our plan at Harmony Palace that'll supposedly be carried out on the fifteenth of October, and she's already sent back several messages.

She's passed on even the small details we intentionally leaked to Grand Princess Eleanor. With Raf away tonight, we need to keep her under control to prevent her from alerting anyone," Carissa added.

Violet rubbed her hands together. "Leave it to me."

Carissa and Rafael returned to Orchid Hall. After sending Janice and Lulu out, Carissa helped Rafael take off his daytime clothes and change into his stealth attire.

Outside, Janice pressed her ear against the door, trying to catch any sounds from within. But Lulu yanked her away with a scowl.

"What are you doing? How dare you eavesdrop on His Highness and Her Grace?"

"I wasn't eavesdropping. I just heard His Highness was going to change clothes. Usually, Ms. Qiana and Ms. Sydney attend to him. Why weren't they called? I was just curious," Janice replied sheepishly.

"That doesn't mean you should eavesdrop," Lulu said as she pulled Janice to the side. "Just stand here and wait. After all this time working here, how can you still not understand the rules?"

Janice shook off Lulu's hand, her expression cold. "I don't need you to teach me. I served Lady Helen, so my understanding of the rules is certainly better than yours."

"If you really understood the rules,

you wouldn't be eavesdropping,"

Lulu shot back with a frosty expression. "Lady Helen is easygoing and her rules aren't too strict. But here with Lady Carissa, you need to follow the rules to

letter. Otherwise, youes to the

can go back to serving Lady Helen."

Janice stood to the side, ignoring Lulu.

She couldn't help but wonder why Rafael was changing clothes so late. Where could he possibly be going? With Lulu watching closely, she couldn't risk eavesdropping.

However, Janice had gained

Carissa's trust over the past few days. Carissa often spoke with Violet in Janice's presence, sometimes not bothering to hide anything from her, including their plans for the fifteenth of October. She had pieced together a lot just from her own deductions.

Janice had been receiving an increasing amount of rewards from Eleanor. If she could learn about Rafael's fate-night outing and what it was for, reporting back to Eleanor the following day would surely earn her even more rewards.

She was lost in thought when the door opened, and Carissa called out, "Lulu, Janice, come in and serve me."

Janice's face lit up as she happily responded, "Yes, Your Grace!"

Already dressed in his stealth attire, Rafael slipped out from behind the partition screen as the two maids followed Carissa into the bedroom.

Once inside, Janice looked around but didn't see Rafael. Confused, she asked, "Huh? Where's His Highness?"

Chapter 694

Carissa didn't answer her, instead saying, "Tomorrow, Raf and I are heading out of the city. Can you help me paint my nails so I won't have to rush in the morning?"

"My lady, where are you going tomorrow? Are you taking me with you?" Lulu asked eagerly, her face lighting up.

"No." Carissa shot her a playful glare. "I just feel like going out."

Janice continued to glance around in confusion.

Rafael and Carissa had clearly entered the room together, so why was Carissa alone now? Janice was sure Rafael hadn't left through the door, as it had been locked the whole time. Had he snuck out through a window? Why such secrecy? As they took out the dye and prepared to paint Carissa's nails, Violet's voice rang out, "Carissa, I can't find the Mystic Pearl earrings you gave me. Are they here with you?"

She stepped into the room with a frustrated look on her face. "Help me check if they're in here."

Carissa laughed. "But you never take off your jewelry in my room. How could they be here? Did you maybe forget them somewhere else? Have you looked thoroughly?"

Violet opened Carissa's jewelry box and rummaged through several containers nearby. "I've checked everywhere. I was planning to wear them tomorrow. Let me see if they're with you."

Carissa had many pieces of jewelry, and the items here were just a small selection of what she often wore. As Violet searched through the jewelry boxes, frustration crept onto her face when she failed to find the Mystic Pearl earrings. "Could it be that someone took them? We don't have any thieves in our household, do we?" she asked.

"Impossible. Nothing like that has ever happened here," Carissa replied. "You're so careless and usually leave things lying around. Couldn't the earrings have fallen to the floor or rolled under the dresser? I'll ask Lily to help you look. Lulu, Janice, why don't you help as well?"

Violet sighed in defeat. "Alright, come and help me look. Those two Mystic Pearls are quite valuable. If someone sold them, they would fetch over a thousand silver coins. But it's not just about the money. They're special because you gave them to me, and I don't want to part with them."

"But I need to paint Lady Carissa's nails," Janice protested, wanting to stay behind to see if there were any clues.

Perhaps Rafael hadn't jumped out

the window and was still in the room. Rafael and Carissa's actions

tonight were quite suspicious. If anything happened, Janice would need to inform Eleanor first thing in the morning.

"No need for that anymore. I'll also look for the earrings," Carissa said as she stood up.

Left with no choice, Janice took one last look around the bedroom and confirmed that Rafael was indeed gone before following Carissa out.

Violet's room was already in

om was

disarray, with chairs and tables

pushed aside. Lily had come with

several maids from the household to

help search. Seeing the mess, they

couldn't help but be astonished at

how rough Violet was.

The room wasn't very large, so it didn't take long to search it. They searched the outer courtyard as well but found nothing.

Carissa's expression darkened as

she cast a cold gaze around the room and said sharply, "Those Mystic Pearl earrings didn't just

vanish without a trace. If anyone net

took them, step forward now and I won't hold it against you. But if I have to search for them and find out who did it, don't expect me to go easy on you."

Everyone exchanged glances, each adamantly denying they had taken them.

When Luke arrived, he sternly asked the same question, and everyone reiterated their innocence.

"A thief would never admit to being one. Ms. Spencer, when did you realize the earrings were missing?" Luke asked.

"Tonight. I was still wearing them yesterday."

"That means they were likely stolen today. Whoever did it probably didn't have time to sell them yet," Luke said. "Your Grace, I suggest we search everyone's quarters."

Carissa nodded. "Since no one is admitting to it, go ahead and search."

When Janice heard that, she turned pale with fear. She instinctively turned to flee, but Lily stopped her.

"Janice, Lulu, Pearl, Joy, Qiana, Sydney-you'll all come with me to do the search. Luke, please take some guards and start searching the lower-ranking maids' and servants' quarters," said Lily.

## Chapter 695

Such a large-scale search naturally caught Helen's attention. She had gone to bed early and was fast asleep when the commotion outside woke her. Gillian, who was sleeping in the same room, was asked to check what was happening. When Helen heard that a servant had stolen Violet's Mystic Pearl earrings, her anger flared.

"Our household provides a much better life than other estates. The person who stole the earrings doesn't appreciate that. If I catch them, I'll have their arms broken!" Helen exclaimed.

"Lady Carissa has arrived," someone announced from outside.

"Why is she here instead of handling things outside? I'm already in bed," said Helen, reluctant to leave her warm bed amidst the cold night air.

"Mother." Carissa strode in confidently, alone.

She knew that the Mystic Pearl earrings would be found in Janice's quarters. Since Janice originally served under Helen, she should decide how to deal with her once the earrings were found.

Helen's displeasure evaporated the moment she saw Carissa, and a warm, inviting smile pulled at her lips. "What brings you here? It's a chilly night, and you didn't even put on extra layers. Come, have a seat."

Carissa nodded respectfully. She was aware her mother-in-law preferred to stay in bed, so she settled on the edge of it.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you so late, Mother. It's my fault for not managing the household more strictly."

"Oh, it's not a big deal. It's just that it's quite the fuss at this hour. Why not search tomorrow instead?" Helen asked as she yawned.

"If we wait until tomorrow, the thief could easily dispose of the earrings. They're worth quite a bit of money," Gillian explained.

Helen hummed in acknowledgment, glancing calmly at Gillian as if asking the latter to continue showing off how presumptuous she was.

"Make some coffee," Carissa instructed. "It's late, and we can't hold out without a cup. I see your eyelids are about to close, Mother."

Helen waved her hand dismissively. "No coffee for me. If I drink it at this hour, I won't be able to sleep tonight."

"Just a little to help us stay awake. If we catch the thief, you can reprimand them. Your status alone would be enough to intimate them and make sure they never do it again," Carissa said.

Helen heard the implications in her

daughter-in-law's words. While

Helen's status was indeed

prestigious, she had never really involved herself in household

matters. A few words of renet

wouldn't be enough to intimate

anyone.

Besides, Carissa was always efficient in handling matters. So, it didn't make sense that a minor thief issue would be brought to Helen in the middle of the night, let alone for her to be expected to intimidate anyone. Clearly, Carissa already knew who the thief was.

Helen immediately narrowed her eyes and glared at everyone in the room. "Who among you took it? Return it now while Carissa is still here, and I might still be able to plead for your sake."

The ones serving Helen were Mindy

and Sonia, along with Gillian. If her daughter-in-law had made such a fuss by coming to her room in the middle of the night, it had to be someone close to her, not just any random servant from outside.

Mindy and Sonia quickly knelt down. "Your Grace, we haven't taken anything."

Helen had initially suspected one of them might be guilty. With a search underway, they wouldn't be able to hide it for long if they had taken the earrings. Their only option would be to confess. If they admitted it now, there might still be a chance for mercy. Waiting until the search revealed the truth would make it too late to beg for leniency.

But both denied it.

Helen turned her gaze to Gillian, her suspicion deepening. It couldn't be this old woman, right? Though, she had once mentioned that the money Helen paid her wasn't much. Gillian caught the look of doubt in Helen's eyes and frowned slightly. "Am I that kind of person?"

Helen turned away. She did trust Gillian. After all, the elderly woman had been by her side since Helen was a child. They were more like family than just a master and servant. That was strange. If it wasn't any of the servants close to her now, then who was it?

Carissa smiled at Mindy and Sonia, who were still kneeling on the ground. "You can both get up now. Go make some coffee. Mother and I could use something to clear our heads." Helen realized the situation was more serious than she had anticipated. This was likely not just about stealing.

Her heart skipped a beat as she said, "Go on, prepare the coffee."

#### Chapter 696

Helen randomly picked up a hairpin. There was a gemstone set into its head, and she recognized the handicraft of the product all too well. It was from The Gilded Tower, which sold imitations of The Golden Tower's merchandise. She picked up a bracelet and examined its craftsmanship, which was of similar quality. There were dozens of such items. Combined with the banknotes and ingots, the items on the table roughly totaled a thousand silver coins. At first, Helen thought Janice might have stolen them. However, who in Hell Monarch Estate would buy and use jewelry from The Gilded Tower? After all, Helen had already sold off any such items she owned to distance herself from them. "Lily, take everyone else out for now. I'll interrogate her with my mother-in-law," Carissa ordered.

"Understood." Lily waved her hand and led everyone else out, including Mindy and Sonia. Both looked equally shocked. They had shared a room with Janice and had no idea she possessed such wealth.

Violet entered and closed the door behind her. She stepped up to Janice and grabbed the latter's chin. "Caught you red-handed. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"I didn't steal the earrings!" Janice protested.

Her face was still pale, and she trembled slightly as the reality of the situation began to sink in. She realized that the commotion tonight was a setup for her.

Carissa's tone was calm. "If you didn't steal them, where did all this money and jewelry come from? Were they gifts from my mother-in-law?"

Janice's lips quivered. "T-Those are mine. I bought them myself. The banknotes are from my savings."

"Your savings? How much is your monthly allowance? Should I call the accountant to come and calculate how this amount is possible?"

"I-I saved up when I was working in the palace..." Janice's forehead glistened with sweat as she stammered, struggling to explain coherently.

Carissa said calmly, "I don't care

how you acquired the silver coins, gold ingots, or jewelry. However, the Mystic Pearl earrings were found in your possession. While you followed my mother-in-law out of the palace, you're ultimately still one of the palace maids. I'll return you to the palace tomorrow and hand you over to the Royal Management Department as punishment."

Janice took a deep breath, her face as pale as death. She realized the punishment for stealing the earrings was just a pretext-Carissa had seen through her. Being sent to the Royal Management Department meant being within Eleanor's reach

Now that Janice had been exposed and of no further use, Eleanor wouldn't allow leverage that could be used against her to live. Janice knew she would definitely die.

Her lips trembled violently, but the words of plea wouldn't come out. All she managed was a weak protest, "N-No..."

"Take her away and tie her up in the

woodshed. She'll be sent back to the Royal Management Department tomorrow. My mother-in-law and will personally report this situation to the palace. We won't handle matters privately with a palace maid,"

Carissa ordered.

Violet stood up, opened the door, and signaled for people to come in and drag Janice away. Janice felt utterly weak, tears streaming down her face as she was pulled outside. Spotting Mindy and Sonia, she cried tremblingly, "Sonia, help me! Save me...!"

Helen remained silent for a long time as Carissa refilled her cup.

"Mother, have another cup," said Carissa.

Helen glanced at Carissa, then at Violet, and finally Gillian. "What was going on with her? Who did she collude with to harm us?"

Chapter 697

Helen's question revealed that she had guessed Janice had accepted a bribe and betrayed the Hell Monarch's family. She just didn't know who had bought Janice off. "Grand Princess Eleanor," Carissa said softly.

Helen's anger flared. "What does she want? When did it start?"

"It's likely Janice was already under Grand Princess Eleanor's thumb while you were still in the palace. Wasn't Grand Princess Eleanor doing business with you back then? Janice must have sung her praises to you repeatedly," Carissa explained. Helen narrowed her eyes. She recalled the past and became increasingly furious.

"She didn't just say nice things. She practically bragged about her! She claimed Grand Princess Eleanor's reputation for virtue was widespread, and that she was highly respected among the noble families in the capital. She also claimed Grand Princess Eleanor was so skilled at handling things that everyone praised her, making her sound more capable than even my sister. It almost made me respect her too!"

Violet wanted to point out that it wasn't respect-it was fear. Eleanor and Jessica had manipulated and bullied Helen. If it hadn't been for Carissa stepping in, Helen wouldn't have dared confront anyone, even if she knew she was being deceived.

"Why did she place her people around me?" Helen still didn't grasp the situation. "I was in the harem, just chatting with my sister most of the time. After the king ascended the throne, I barely interacted with the queen or the other concubines." "Because you have an exceptionally talented son," Violet replied.

"Is this about Rafael? Does she want to harm him?" Helen's voice softened a bit, her anger visibly lessening. "If it's about him, why not place someone in Hell Monarch Estate instead?" Carissa stated, "Regardless of her motives, just make it known and let the palace people handle it."

Helen didn't quite understand at first. "Why hand her over to the people in the palace? I brought Janice out myself. If I dealt with her, no one would dare say anything. Sending her back would make it seem like our household is weak. It's like telling them we're unable to deal with a mere maid!"

Carissa explained, "It won't appear weak. Instead, it shows that we follow proper protocol. When someone from the palace commits an offense, they are handed to the Royal Management Department for punishment. As for how the department reports to the king or the queen, that is beyond our concern."

Helen sipped her coffee, her brow still furrowed in confusion. "Why would a thieving maid catch the king's attention?"

Carissa took a leisurely sip but was interrupted as Violet snatched the cup away.

After downing the coffee in one gulp, Violet explained, "Because she's a convicted servant sent back to the Royal Management Department from Hell Monarch Estate. The king will certainly want to inquire about that." Carissa smiled. "Do you understand now, Mother?"

What was there to understand? Helen was still perplexed.

She glanced at Gillian, who wore a knowing expression, and figured she could ask the older woman later. Nodding gravely, Helen set her cup down.

"I see. It makes sense now."

"You should rest, Mother. I'll take my leave," Carissa said, pulling Violet to her feet.

"Alright, go ahead. I'm feeling sleepy," Helen replied.

In truth, she wasn't really tired at all. She still had questions for Gillian.

When Carissa and Violet were out of earshot, Helen turned to Gillian.

"You understand what's going on, don't you? Why would the king care about a thieving maid sent from our estate? Is there something I'm missing here?"

Gillian smiled knowingly. "Your

Grace, Prince Rafael has achieved

remarkable feats, and Janice followed you out of the palace. Now that she's committed an offense and is being sent back to the Royal Management Department, the king will certainly want to inquire about it to show recognition of the prince's standing. It's a way of reassuring Prince Rafael."

"Is that how it is?" Helen felt something was off, yet the explanation brought her a strange comfort-Rafael was being valued so highly.

Gillian began to tidy the bed. "Alright, let the palace people handle it. You should rest."

Gillian said nothing further. Carissa had already smoothed things over and clearly didn't want Helen to know too much.

Carissa simply wanted to use this

incident as a wake-up call for Helen so that she would be more mindful of the people around her, especially when it came to promoting new individuals. Otherwise, they might end up with another Janice in their midst.

Gillian had pieced it all

together Janice hadn't stolen the Mystic Pearl earrings, but it was a convenient excuse to get rid of her. Perhaps Carissa intended to give the

Kip

a discreet heads-up.

After lying down, Helen sat up again..

"From now on, I want you to keep a close eye on everyone in our household, whether they're serving inside or outside. If you notice anything unusual, report it to Carissa immediately." "Of course!" Gillian beamed brightly.

Chapter 698

Meanwhile, Rafael had already infiltrated Harmony Palace but had yet to reach the dungeon.

Harmony Palace's dungeon had four entrances. The craftsmen who originally built it were long dead, silenced after the fact. However, Jacob had managed to find the son of the foreman. The foreman's son possessed a set of blueprints from that time, which was how they obtained the dungeon's layout. The dungeon was roughly half the size of Harmony Palace, dug deep into the ground. Bricks were used during construction, dividing the space into four separate cell blocks-north, south, east, and west.

Each entrance corresponded to one of the cell blocks, with the eastern cell block accessible through the western courtyard. The purpose of what lay within remained a mystery, but it was clear that the southern and eastern blocks weren't meant for imprisonment. Based on the blueprints, they were simply two large underground chambers.

In contrast, the northern and western cell blocks were designed for holding prisoners. Each block had one large cell, and the rest were divided into smaller individual cells. According to the layout, the four blocks weren't connected and were completely isolated. Rafael didn't know whether Daniel's family was held in the western or the northern cell block, so he decided to try the western cell block first. The two areas were close together, and their entrances weren't far apart.

The extravagance of Harmony Palace was apparent from the number of lamps everywhere. They likely used a lot of oil every night.

However, Rafael had the advantage of being quick on his feet. The residence had many buildings and trees, so it was easy for him to stay hidden.

The entrance to the western cell block wasn't in the western courtyard, but rather in the eastern one. This intricate design was meant to confuse, but it was rather poorly executed.

The poor execution stemmed from the fact that Eleanor had never been discovered, and no one feared her. Harmony Palace was vast enough that even if someone reached the back courtyard, they wouldn't find the entrance.

With so many courtyards, side halls, and beautifully landscaped gardens, who would suspect that there was a dungeon within the residence? Who would expect the faux mountain in the eastern courtyard to be the entrance to the western cell block?

After a patrol passed, Rafael slipped easily into the dungeon. It was dug deep, and he followed the wall down for quite some time before hearing the sound of a child crying.

Rafael knew he was on the right track. His infiltration was going surprisingly smoothly.

There were lamps lit inside the cell block, though the light was dim. After descending, Rafael noticed that no one was guarding the area. He quickly moved over to open the door of an empty cell and hid inside.

Each cell was sealed tight, with only

a tiny opening in the iron door. Once Rafael hid inside, he would remain undetected as long as no one opened the cell door. Before closing the door, he wrapped a wire around the latch to make it appear locked. Unless someone looked closely, they wouldn't notice anything amiss.

There were crying sounds coming from the third cell to his left. He didn't get too close, but because he heard the sounds after entering the dungeon, he knew people were locked up in that direction.

He guessed that those inside were

the concubines imprisoned by Eleanor, or perhaps their daughters. These women likely loathed Eleanor, but may have grown numb and compliant. If they realized someone had broken in and thought they could seize an opportunity to escape, they could very well scream for help.

Thus, Rafael chose to remain farther from the occupied cell.

Pressing his ear against the wall, he could hear a soothing voice from the left.

"Jack, don't be afraid. Curtis, you

OU:

don't need to be scared. Daddy and Mommy are here. My dear, trust that our parents will notice you're missing. They'll go to the authorities or ask Carissa for help. Carissa knows Prince Rafael, remember? They will definitely come to rescue us. Don't be afraid."

That should be Daniel speaking. He reassured his family, but his voice trembled slightly at the end.

Daniel still didn't know who that temperamental woman was or why she had brought him and his family here. Judging by the way she conducted herself, she was likely formidable.

His mind was in a jumble. He couldn't focus enough to think about whom he might have offended. The things the woman had said were strange. It didn't sound like someone who had a grudge against him.

Just as Rafael settled into his hiding spot, footsteps echoed nearby. Someone was approaching from the left.

He quickly opened the small iron flap and pressed against the wall, peering out to see who was passing by.

The footsteps stopped just outside Daniel's cell. A voice laced with impatience said, "Stop your whining! You're disturbing everyone else's rest. Since you're in here, you'd better accept your fate. The only way you're leaving is in a coffin!" It was Henry's voice.

Chapter 699

me. Do what you will, whether to kill or torture me."

"Sir, may I inquire where this place is?" Daniel asked urgently. "Why have you taken our family captive? Have I offended you or your family? If I have, I offer my apologies here. But my wife and children are innocent. Please let them go. If you have a grudge, take it out on "When the time to kill

you comes, I fear you'll just hide behind your wife and children. You're a worthless coward. Just shut up," Henry replied coldly.

The drug in Daniel's system was nearly gone. He leaned against the small window, peering outside. "I won't hide. Just let my wife and children go. I don't care how I die."

"I loathe your kind-the ones who pretend to be brave. It's as if you look down on a prince consort like me," Henry retorted. Then, he turned away icily and stepped into one of the cells.

Eleanor had forbidden Henry from visiting during the Emberfest Festival, so he decided to hide in the dungeon to accompany Melanie Lester. He had bribed the guards, but letting the concubines out was out of the question.

Even if he wanted to come in, he didn't need any special permission from Eleanor. Sometimes, faking a plea for her kindness was a mere ploy to make her feel like everything was still under her control.

Daniel stood frozen, stunned by Henry's words.

A prince consort? The man outside was a prince consort? Which princess was he married to?

Putting together the crazy woman's actions and hearing the man outside call himself a prince consort, Daniel immediately recalled an old story.

This incident had occurred long before he was born. Eleanor had fancied his older relative, Hector. She had petitioned the then-king, Augustus, for a marriage. However, Augustus was unwilling to grant the request. Since Hector had no affection for Eleanor and didn't want to be a prince consort, he avoided her openly and subtly.

From that moment on, Eleanor harbored a deep hatred for the Sinclair family.

Recalling this old tale, Daniel remembered what his dad had once said-among the Sinclair family's many sons, only Daniel and Hector bore the closest resemblance to their great-grandfather.

Daniel suddenly felt a chill run up his spine, and a wave of suffocation washed over him. The feeling took a while to subside.

Daniel found it absurd. So many years had passed-Hector had sacrificed himself, and his sister-in-law was gone.

Even so, was Eleanor still fixated on Hector?!

Even if she had her obsessions, why would she go as far as to abduct Daniel? Was she planning to...

The shame and anger churned within him, making it hard to think further.

It was absurd utterly absurd!

But then, Daniel remembered the miniature chastity belt sculpture Eleanor sent when Hector fell. At first, they hadn't known about it. When Carissa returned the

sculpture, however, it caused

stir. Only then did the Sinclairs learn of it. Daniel had discovered the

matter only after returning to the capital.

As absurd as it seemed, it was still possible.

a

Eleanor was far from the virtuous figure the world painted her to be. Her facade had blinded the public Even when family members reported her, no one suspected that they would end up imprisoned by

her.

swnov

It wasn't just imprisonment. The man who proclaimed to be a prince consort said that since Daniel and his family were here, the only way out was in a coffin. No one knew they were missing, so no one would come to rescue them. With how insane Eleanor was, it seemed Daniel and his family would truly perish in this place.

As he reached his conclusion, despair washed over him. He opened his arms and drew his wife and children close, his voice trembling as he comforted them.

"Don't be afraid. In the end, it's just

death. We're men of the Sinclair family, and none of us fear death. Jack, Curtis, do you remember what I told you about your Uncle Hector and his sons? They are our family's and the kingdom's true heroes. They sacrificed themselves on the battlefield and fought countless battles to reclaim our kingdom's

territory. We must be like

them-fearless in the face of

sacrifice, unafraid of death."

The children stopped crying. They remembered Hector and knew he was a hero of the Sinclair family and Starhaven.

Chapter 700

However, Jack and Curtis continued to tremble all over.

One moment, they were safe at home. The next, a group of rough men had dragged them here and imprisoned them.

The oldest of the two children had yet to reach eight. How could they not be afraid?

Thalia was equally terrified, but as a mother, she steeled herself. Pushing aside her fear and worry, she joined her husband in comforting their two sons.

But when the couple exchanged glances, their eyes were filled with despair and helplessness.

Rafael listened to Daniel and Thalia's words in the cell next door. He couldn't help but feel a swell of admiration. His father-in-law's spirit truly radiated through every son of the Sinclair family, especially considering that Daniel had little interaction with Hector. Daniel was just a businessman, but he still possessed such unwavering resolve.

Theodore had taught them well.

What did it mean to be a true noble family? They embodied it.

Even without many officials in the court, the Sinclair family members' unity and integrity were enough to make many so-called noble families feel ashamed.

This angered Henry—he could never achieve what Daniel had in his life.

Henry and Melanie Lester were in the far left cell, and Rafael could still hear their voices.

Melanie's voice was soft, filled with disappointment and sorrow as she said, "They're your daughters! How could you be so heartless?"

"Betraying the grand princess leads to a dead end. If I hadn't exposed her, it would have cost us our lives and endangered both of our families. Melanie, I had no choice," Henry replied.

"No choice?" Melanie sobbed. "You've used the exact phrase for many years! Whenever you had to choose, you told me you had none. Why didn't you tell your family that? They have the power to resist. Even if they didn't, they could still get by if they remained content with the status quo. But every time, you come to me and say you had no choice. You say that to all your other concubines and daughters Every time you say that, someone ends up dead.

"I'm so tired of you! Carmen is the only one who's fighting back. She has spirit, but she's stuck with a spineless father like you. When she came to see me, I saw a light in her eyes that I'd never seen in yours. You're her father, but you won't help her. If that wasn't bad enough, you even exposed her and harmed her

Melanie's voice gradually faded. It sounded as if she was being forcibly embraced, stifling the words she wanted to say.

Rafael knew Melanie was in feeble health from the sound of her voice and her breathing. If she stayed here much longer, she would likely die within ten days or so.

Henry was truly a despicable man. He betrayed those poor concubines, and was even willing to sell out his daughters

Rafael recalled encountering Henry behind a rockery during a palace banquet, where Henry cried in despair. The man he had seen then was a far cry from the one he heard and saw now.

Back then, perhaps Henry had loved someone. Ultimately, he only loved himself.

After a long silence, Henry sighed. “You’re only thinking of your own life. The grand princess hasn’t sent anyone with medicine in a while. I’m sneaking you some, but I don’t know how long I can keep it up. If Carmen really works with the Hell Monarch’s people on the fifteenth of October, both you and her will be

done for.”

“It would be better to die!” A sharp voice cut through the gloom, sounding like a different person entirely. The voice was laced with bitter sarcasm and despair, accompanied by soft sobs. “It would be better to die. I could join my son... My son...!”

As the cries erupted, the entire cell block was filled with weeping

Henry barked, “Why are you all crying? You’ll only attract attention! If the guards come down here, it won’t be death—it’ll be a beating! Do you think dying is so easy? If it were, would you still be suffering down here?”

His words frightened them into silence. The sobs and whimpers vanished as quickly as they started, leaving only a tense calmness.

Daniel held his wife and children tightly. Was this a dungeon? No, this was clearly hell! This was the hell of Harmony Palace—a place he had never imagined could exist in his wildest dreams.

Rafael felt pained listening from the other side. How terrified must Daniel and his family be?

He couldn't rescue them yet, however. Eleanor would be alerted if they were discovered missing tomorrow, and the plan for the following night would likely fail.

It seemed tonight was a night of torment and endurance for many.