

## War Song 701

### Chapter 701

Under Theodore's guidance, the Sinclair family maintained their composure. He dispatched people to the Capital Guard and the Garrison Unit barracks, then awaited the Royal Citadel's opening time to file a report. The Sinclair family followed all proper protocols.

Theodore trusted that Rafael and Carissa knew the situation and wouldn't look the other way. They had their way of handling things. Since the Sinclair family primarily consisted of businesspeople and ordinary citizens, they would tackle this as ordinary folk would.

The Royal Citadel officials quickly initiated an investigation. Thalia and her two children had vanished late at night without passing through the main or side entrances of the residences, which meant they had been abducted. As part of the routine procedure, the Royal Citadel officials needed to inquire if the family had offended anyone upon their return to the capital.

As the officials searched for the missing family members and took statements, the matter caught Salvador's attention. With no morning court session today, Michael reported that Daniel's wife and children had mysteriously gone missing the previous evening.

Anything concerning the Sinclair family always drew special concern from Salvador.

Just then, an official from the Royal Management Department reported that the Hell Monarch's household had returned a palace maid.

The maid had once served Helen but was sent back for stealing a pair of Mystic Pearl earrings. They were found along with a cache of valuable jewelry in her room. Since the items didn't belong to the people in Hell Monarch Estate, it was suspected that the maid had stolen from the various ladies of the court while in the palace, leading to her return to the Royal Management Department for further action.

When Salvador initially heard the report about the maid's theft, he frowned and commented, "Such matters are for the Royal Management Department to handle. They'll deal with it and inform the

But as the words left his mouth, he sensed something was off. He ordered, "Conduct a thorough investigation to ascertain the origins of the maid's jewelry and valuables."

queen.”

How could someone serving an honored concubine living outside the palace possibly steal the jewelry of other concubines in the palace?

The maid wouldn’t even have access. Even if she did, it was unlikely she could do so alone. Only palace maids who served in the palace or those guarding the storerooms had the chance to steal.

However, the maids serving Helen had no dealings with Salvador’s concubines.

So, it was the Hell Monarch’s household that had discovered the issues with the jewelry

and valuables. Then, they found it inconvenient to investigate, so they returned the maid to the palace for further action. Salvador simultaneously ordered the Capital Guard and Garrison Unit to scour the city, determined to retrieve Daniel’s wife and children. He could never tolerate such an incident under his reign.

To have abducted three people without alerting anyone, especially at night, was likely the work of skilled hands. Whether from rival businesses or powerful figures residing in certain estates, daring to touch the Sinclair family was like digging a grave for oneself.

Salvador was inherently suspicious. Both incidents seemed aimed at the Sinclair family, but in reality.

they were targeted at the Hell Monarch’s household. Although he feared Rafael’s military achievements, no one would dare to lay a finger on the prince as long as Salvador reigned.

While the king was wary of Rafael, they were ultimately brothers. As long as Rafael harbored no ambitions for rebellion, there was no reason for Salvador to act against him. After all, Rafael was a hero for reclaiming the Southern Frontier. More importantly, he was Salvador’s brother.

Under intense questioning, Janice was on the brink of death. She divulged everything she knew.

Derek came forward to report, “Your Majesty, Janice has confessed. She claims that Lady Heather bribed her. Initially, Lady Heather instructed her to frequently speak favorably of her to Lady Helen, hoping to gain Lady Helen’s favor.

“But when Lady Helen left the palace for Hell Monarch Estate, Janice never anticipated Lady Carissa would take her under her wing. Lady Heather instructed her to speak to Lady Carissa on her behalf. She asked Janice to claim that Lady Heather faced many difficulties, and it wasn’t that she didn’t want to help when Lady Carissa was going through difficult times.”

“Heather?” Salvador furrowed his brow.

In his mind, his aunt-in-law had always been timid and hesitant. She was Leona’s mother, but she had silently endured while her daughter had suffered at the hands of the Earl of Gracehold’s family.

“It can’t be Heather, Salvador replied coldly. “Continue the interrogation until we unearth the true puppet master behind this.”

“Your Majesty, I fear further questioning may not yield results. Janice won’t hold out much longer,” Derek responded.

“Then, investigate the jewelry and valuables,” Salvador commanded.

“We’ve already looked into it. Aside from a pair of Mystic Pearl earrings, the other jewelry consists solely of pieces made by The Gilded Tower. As for the gold and silver ingots, they’re not from official mints but were privately minted. While there are silver coins, the sheer volume of privately minted gold and silver Ingots with no traceable origins makes investigation impossible,” Derek reported.

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Salvador’s expression was a mixture of anger and confusion.

However, Derek knew him well and understood that Salvador was furious with the Royal Management

Department for their incompetence.

No one believed Heather could be behind this. Even if it were her, there was no way she would have bribed Janice with all that jewelry and money just to speak favorably of herself. There was more to this than met the eye.

If Rafael thought there was nothing suspicious, he wouldn't have sent the maid back to the pa

palace. He must have discovered something but chose not to investigate further, opting to send her back to the Royal Management Department instead. This attitude made it clear he wanted to avoid getting too entangled in the mess.

Yet, the Royal Management Department hadn't obtained any useful information after the maid was sent

to them.

How could Salvador not be furious?

With a grim expression, Salvador said, "Get the royal physician to keep her alive. Even if she's hanging on by a thread, continue interrogating her."

If this matter wasn't cleared up, Salvador felt like an unseen hand was manipulating events from the shadows—almost like someone had laid out a trap.

He didn't like that feeling one bit.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Derek responded and withdrew.

After another hour of interrogation, Derek returned for another report.

"Your Majesty, she named one person. She claimed it was Grand Princess Eleanor who instructed her to do this. As for why she pointed the finger at Lady Heather, she feared retaliation against her family from Grand Princess Eleanor and was too afraid to speak out."

"Is she dead?" Salvador asked.

"The royal physician said she wouldn't last much longer. By the time I left, she was barely breathing. She's probably gone now."

“I see. Keep this matter quiet for now. Tell everyone from the Royal Management Department to keep their mouths shut. I will summon Rafael back to the palace tomorrow. It’s been a while since I’ve had a proper conversation with him. As for Daniel, have someone look into his whereabouts and see if there’s any news.”

After Derek carried out the orders, he returned to the inner chambers where Salvador was

Once he refilled the king’s cup, he was about to step back quietly when Salvador asked, “Do you believe Janice’s accusation against Aunt Eleanor, Derek?”

“I’m only an old servant, Your Majesty. I wouldn’t dare to make wild assumptions, but… Janice was indeed tortured, and in the end, she didn’t appear to be lying. Do you believe her, Your Majesty? Derek replied cautiously

“I do.” Salvador tapped his fingers on the desk, lost in thought. “Do you remember the uproar about the miniature chastity belt sculpture? My aunt is a spiteful woman. The Duke of Northwatch refused to marry her all those years ago, and she still holds a grudge over that. I suspect it was only

after Aunt Helen left the palace to live in Hell Monarch Estate that she bribed Janice. Did Janice mention what messages she delivered to Aunt Eleanor?”

Derek replied, “Yes, Your Majesty. Each time she sent a message, she received a reward. For instance, she sent news about visitors to Hell Monarch Estate, whom Lady Carissa met, and what important matters were discussed with the ladies of noble families. Also, the most significant reward she received was for providing information regarding the Earl of Gracehold’s family. Grand Princess Eleanor had Janice keep an eye on Lady Carissa to see if she would cause trouble at Gracehold Estate. Janice even relayed what the two female bodyguards from Meadow Ridge said when they visited Hell Monarch Estate.

“The Earl of Gracehold’s family!” Salvador’s gaze grew cold. “I heard Samuel took a liking to a courtesan, who happens to be one of Henry’s concubine’s daughters.”

“That remains unverified,” Derek replied.

“Is that so? But Aunt Eleanor hasn’t stepped forward to clarify either,” Salvador said with a meaningful smile. “Aunt Eleanor has always cared deeply about her reputation. It’s quite unusual for her not to clear her name when it’s been sullied like this.”

Derek assessed the situation and carefully responded, “Yes, it is rather unusual... Perhaps Grand Princess Eleanor believes the rumors are baseless and not worth addressing?”

“The rumors are indeed ridiculous. In fact, they’re absurd, especially since I’ve never seen any other cousins except Jessica from Aunt Eleanor’s household. But if the rumors are true, what do you think would compel my aunt to act this way? Samuel is certainly not a capable man, but everything concerning the Earl of Gracehold’s family has come to light because of that courtesan. What exactly does my aunt intend to achieve? Does she have a grudge against the Earl of Gracehold’s family?”

Salvador chuckled, though his eyes grew much colder.

“Of course, I’m speaking hypothetically, assuming the rumors are true.”

Derek dared not say more and murmured, “I’m too dull to understand, Your Majesty.”

Salvador shot him a glance, and said coolly, “I’ve recently heard the common folk clamoring to build a shrine for the Hell Monarch. Even wise scholars across the kingdom are writing articles praising his achievement in reclaiming the Southern Frontier. Have you heard anything about this?”

great

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Derek lowered his head, his expression shifting slightly,

However, he respectfully replied, “I’ve heard of it, but I didn’t think much of it. The Hell Monarch received your sacred order to head to the Southern Frontier battlefield. He lived up to your expectations and successfully reclaimed the Southern Frontier.

“He does deserve credit, and you have acknowledged his merits before the kingdom’s people. I believe the Hell Monarch has accomplished this as a loyal subject. But rulers will always come first when it comes to great achievements recorded throughout history.”

Salvador chuckled. “You’re always playing little tricks when talking to me, Derek. I’m not that petty, and I’m not afraid of someone with too much merit. I’m just puzzled about one thing. If the people want to build a shrine to honor the Hell Monarch, why didn’t they propose it when he first returned to the capital after reclaiming the Southern Frontier? That was when their emotions were at their peak.”

He picked up his cup with a thoughtful gaze. “Also, I recall that many scholars from various places were already writing articles praising him then. Why is there another wave of such articles now? Are they the same people who wrote them back then?”

Derek breathed a sigh of relief and forced a smile. “I wasn’t playing any tricks with you, Your Majesty. I merely couldn’t see things clearly, so I didn’t dare voice my opinions. It’s exactly as you said. If they want to build a shrine for the Hell Monarch, they should have proposed it right after the Southern Frontier was reclaimed. Now that the excitement has faded, the common people are more concerned about their livelihood. Why would they suddenly make such a fuss?

Salvador picked up a red quill and reviewed the reports before him. Seeing that he had nothing more to say, Derek dared not speak further.

In truth, when Salvador heard about the commotion about people wanting to build a shrine for the Hell Monarch, he felt some discomfort and sent someone to investigate. He wanted to know who started the uproar and whether it had anything to do with Rafael.

Ultimately, the results of the investigation showed that Rafael and his household had taken it lightly.

When someone showed Rafael the articles praising him, he simply laughed and said, “The recovery of the Southern Frontier started with the late king’s determination, followed by the current king’s meticulous planning. Because of their actions, we managed to reclaim our kingdom’s territory. How can it be considered my achievement? Besides, if we’re talking about military achievements on the Southern Frontier battlefield, who deserves more credit than the Duke of Northwatch?

Jeremiah had relayed Rafael’s remark to Salvador. When the king heard it, a smile remained on his face the entire day.

In addition, Salvador received information that the ordinary people also praised him a lot and weren’t just focused on Rafael.

Now, Rafael’s household had sent Janice back to the Royal Management Department to be interrogated. With Heather and Eleanor’s names being mentioned during the questioning, Salvador couldn’t help but be

more cautious.

“By the way, today is the Emberfest Festival,” Salvador said as he looked up and set down his quill. Tve

heard that Aunt Eleanor invites high priests every year, to pray for departed souls and accumulate blessings for their peace in the afterlife. Several noble ladies will also be in attendance, right?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Derek replied respectfully. “It has been that way in the previous years. However, I haven’t heard anything yet for this year.”

Salvador chuckled. “Aunt Eleanor has such a compassionate heart. She deserves praise. Instruct the kitchen staff to prepare vegetarian meals and fresh fruits to serve as offerings in my mother’s name to honor the lonely souls.”

Derek nodded, then asked, “Should we keep this matter...

Salvador understood Derek’s hesitation. He waved his hand dismissively.

“No need for subtlety. Since it’s a noble act of merit, making a grand occasion out of it is fine. It’ll also encourage others to follow Aunt Eleanor’s compassionate nature. Go now, and make sure everything is prepared.\*

“Yes, Your Majesty. I’ll take care of it right away,” Derek responded.

Derek handled the matter quickly and efficiently, spreading the word throughout the palace. Before long, the concubines began to follow suit and sent scriptures and food offerings as well.

In addition, many noble families heard about it too. They started sending letters to Eleanor, asking if they could join her tonight to pray for the departed souls.

However, this irritated Eleanor. She had intended to foster good relations with the noble ladies. If many people were involved, it would be too chaotic. Most people who sent her letters didn’t even know the proper steps to pray for the departed souls.



If the noble ladies saw such people at the event, they might start to suspect Eleanor's motives for doing this weren't pure.

What made Eleanor uneasy was that Victoria never interfered with matters happening in Harmony Palace. Why was she sending vegetarian meals and fresh fruits as offerings out of the blue?

Eleanor was busy preparing for tonight's events and needed to welcome the high priests Henry had invited. She didn't even know Janice had been sent back to the palace for questioning, or that the circumstances regarding Daniel's family had been escalated to the authorities.

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Eleanor knew the ladies who had sent her letters wanted to come so they could curry favor with the queen dowager. While she felt a surge of irritation over this, she couldn't refuse them.

After all, she had connections with these noble ladies, it wouldn't be wise to offend them, especially since Yuvan had just returned to the capital.

Moreover, she needed them to contend with Carissa's plan on the fifteenth of October. She only deliberated for a short time before inviting them all over

The royal chancellor's wife, Mildred, was the first to arrive. She was accompanied by her granddaughter, Rosalind. Eleanor explained the situation and mentioned that Victoria had sent food offerings, which prompted the concubines in the palace to do the same. At the same time, many noble ladies also expressed their desire to join in the event.

"That's fine. They can come as long as they have good intentions," Mildred replied with a warm smile.

Having been a devout religious believer for many years, Mildred had a compassionate heart. While she occasionally attended banquets like the prime minister's wife, Natalie, Mildred's true passion lay in the annual Emberfest Festival.

She only came to pray for the departed souls and learn more about the religion's sacred teachings from the high priests. In the past years, she had never brought Rosalind along. However, her granddaughter had insisted on accompanying her this year.

Mildred knew Rosalind wasn't particularly devout, but she appreciated her granddaughter's understanding nature and respect for others' beliefs. It warmed Mildred's heart that Rosalind was willing to spend the night by her side.

Candles had been set up on the altar outside the main hall, and a raised platform for people to pray on was ready.

"Has Reverend Zane arrived?" Mildred asked.

"He's already here," Eleanor replied. "We're preparing the food offerings now. The priests had a long journey and must be tired, so we arranged for them to rest for a while before the ceremony begins tonight."

"In that case, let's continue copying scriptures. I've already done many copies, but the more, the better," Mildred suggested.

Eleanor considered sending someone to inquire about the situation outside, but then received word that Natalie had also arrived. Since Mildred had already instructed her staff to prepare the writing supplies, Eleanor decided against it.

Not long after Natalie arrived, the matriarchs of the Lloyd and Lewis families also arrived. Each brought their younger relatives along.

The matriarch of the Lloyd family, Irene, was over seventy but still had a rosy complexion and moved with grace. She turned to Eleanor and said, "This is my granddaughter-in-law, Nadine Langley. She suffered a miscarriage a few months ago, so she came with me this year to pray for some peace of mind."

Eleanor recognized Nadine as the wife of the top scholar in the national examination after Salvador

ascended the throne, Justin Lloyd.

With a sympathetic gaze, Eleanor said, "If there's a bond between mother and child, he will surely return to you in time. Don't grieve. Taking care of your health is what truly matters."

Nadine lowered her gaze and softly said, "Thank you for your kind words, Your Highness."

“Come, let’s copy scriptures together. Later, we’ll have some vegetarian food. We’ll be starting the praying session in the evening.”

“Alright.”

The main hall was set up as it had been in previous years, with low cherry wood tables and a row of cushions in front of them. They would sit cross-legged on the cushions to copy the scriptures and later recite them while seated the same way.

One by one t

noble ladies arrived, including Gemma, Molly, and Fiona.

Those attending for the first time thought it would be a more casual affair, and they greeted each other with pleasantries as they arrived.

Molly was especially enthusiastic. She was eager to meet more of the capital’s elite women and tried to ingratiate herself with everyone.

Natalie furrowed her brows. “We’ve gathered for an important task today, so let’s skip the small talk. We’re here to copy scriptures. If anyone is hungry, feel free to have some vegetarian food first. If you’re not writing, please don’t disturb others.”

Her words left Molly embarrassed and a bit irritated. “It’s just a simple greeting. There’s no need to make a big deal out of it, Mrs. Murray.”

“What are you talking about? Why are we here today? Have you brought scriptures that you’ve copied? If you did a lot of copies, I wouldn’t say anything about it.

Molly’s expression darkened. She hadn’t prepared any copied scriptures.

Eleanor watched from the side, furious as she realized Molly hadn’t bothered to copy any scriptures. She

had notified Molly beforehand and urged her to prepare. Instead of focusing on this fundamental task, the woman seemed more interested in exchanging pleasantries.

What was the point of that?

What a useless woman!

## Chapter 705

Eleanor stepped in to defuse the tension. She cast Fiona a sharp glance to remind her to keep an eye on Molly.

Fiona was irritated. Due to her status as a concubine, she hesitated to intervene when Molly made her rounds of greetings. They had talked about this beforehand—tonight was meant to be a solemn event. It wasn't about making connections. They should focus on being quiet, copying scriptures, and praying for the departed souls. Those were the best ways to socialize.

But from the moment Molly arrived, she started trying to make small talk and acting overly familiar, as if they were at a banquet. Hadn't she noticed how the expressions of the older ladies had shifted?

Fiona stepped forward and said softly, "Lady Molly, let's copy scriptures together."

sickly in

She had brought a few holy texts, and had even copied some scriptures while attending to the palace.

Molly reluctantly took a seat at a low table and began copying the scriptures. The holy texts were in a different language, so the words were complex and challenging to write. Soon enough, her wrist began to ache. She considered putting down her quill, but Eleanor's cold glare stopped her.

With Molly present, Eleanor felt compelled to keep a watchful eye. More ladies continued to arrive. While elaborate greetings weren't necessary, everyone still greeted each other respectfully.

Outside, the offering table had been set up. It was adorned with the best food and candles. Eleanor wouldn't be solely responsible for the expenses. Everyone attending was expected to contribute; the total cost would be shared later.

The priests finished their vegetarian meal and emerged, with Zane leading the group. Seven other renowned priests accompanied him.

As the ladies rose to greet the priests, Mildred smiled gently. “It’s a blessing to see you and the other high priests again this year, Reverend Zane.”

Zane was dressed in his priest robes. He nodded slightly and said, “Peace be with you, madam. It’s good to see you in good health.”

Although he was over eighty, he appeared to be in his sixties. His hair was white, and his expression radiated kindness and compassion.

The older noblewomen stepped forward one by one to greet the priests and exchange a few pleasantries.

Molly attempted to step forward, but Fiona held her back with surprising strength. Molly fumed, annoyed at Fiona’s grip. She could easily break free, but the sudden movement would attract too much attention and become a

source of embarrassment.

Zane noticed that this year, there were more people than ever, and many wore expressions that revealed their ulterior motives. He was no stranger to the faces of both the wicked and the virtuous—he had seen it all over the years.

People’s thoughts often showed on their faces. While Zane couldn’t change the world’s nature, he would go where he was needed to fulfill a purpose. He came each year not for Eleanor or the other noble ladies, but for the restless souls who had suffered untimely deaths.

Yet he also understood that what was truly needed here wasn’t him, but someone who could guide the living away from their hellish lives. If such a person appeared, he would not need to return next year,

With a solemn nod, he and the other high priests took their seats on the platform and began their prayers.

Seeing this, the ladies settled down to pray as well. Rosalind and Nadine lit the candles to burn the copied scriptures, a symbolic gesture to send blessings to the afterlife. Molly didn't know the proper steps to pray for the departed souls, so she joined in to help with the burning.

Eleanor sat silently as the rhythmic sound of the prayers washed over her. However, she felt a sense of inexplicable unease gnaw at her. As she silently recited the prayer to dispel evil, she felt great danger lurking in every shadow.

At Hell Monarch Estate, Jacob had been busy all day in the study. Everything for the night's arrangements had been meticulously prepared, and now, he awaited the final outcome.

Carissa and Violet were on standby. They were unwilling to go anywhere else, and Kyle was with them. He had made it clear he didn't intend to depart after arriving at the estate.

The assassins dispatched for tonight's task were a select group of highly skilled individuals. They were unknown to Carissa. They rarely made public appearances, and certainly wouldn't be seen at Hell

Monarch Estate.

As for the Capital Guard and the Garrison Unit, Jacob had yet to reach out to them.

Rafael must have coordinated with Michael beforehand. Jacob's earlier frenzy stemmed from concerns related to Daniel's family, and he had been running errands all over.

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Surprisingly, Jacob and the others were unconcerned about what would happen in Harmony Palace tonight. With the assassins on the move, they would surely breach the dungeons.

Given the many high priests attending the sacred ceremony at Harmony Palace, the Capital Guards and the Garrison Unit would likely be heavily focused on guarding the area. When the assassins were spotted, the people Jacob had in place would cause a commotion and draw the Capital Guards and Garrison. Unit's attention.

Once inside Harmony Palace, the assassins would head for the dungeon. They knew the residence's layout and where the dungeon entrance was, so they would lead everyone straight in.

However, Carissa was puzzled by something. The queen dowager had sent food offerings to support Eleanor, drawing a large crowd. Victoria wouldn't act so arbitrarily. In all the years Carissa had known her, she had never done anything like this.

The only one who might orchestrate such an arrangement was Salvador.

With Janice having been sent back to the Royal Management Department for questioning, it was only a matter of time before she revealed Eleanor's involvement. Was Salvador's heightened attention on tonight's ceremony a result of this?

But what could such attention accomplish? It would merely attract more people.

After pondering it for a while, Carissa asked, "Is the goal to draw in those closely associated with Grand Princess Eleanor? After all, she wouldn't invite them if she had no established relationships with them."

Jacob frowned. "I worry that the king might suspect something significant is set to happen at Harmony Palace tonight. While your theory is a possibility, I suspect His Majesty's true intention is to uncover what secrets Harmony Palace holds."

"Is it possible he knows about our plans?" Violet asked in surprise.

"Hard to say," Jacob replied as he turned to Violet. "His Majesty isn't only suspicious, but also a

mystery. It's also hard to determine if he has people lurking in Hell Monarch Estate. We've repeatedly screened for spies, but our checks won't help if someone is buried deep enough."

"Even if he does," Carissa replied, "it wouldn't be surprising. At least when we discuss this, no one else is around. It's just the four of us who know."

Kyle interjected, "Intuition! I've had private conversations with the king. He's clever and perceptive."

"Intuition?" Carissa echoed, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes. It’s a ruler’s intuition,” Kyle said. “You might not believe it, but those in power possess a unique sense of perception. Of course, this intuition doesn’t come from nowhere—it’s pieced together from various bits of information.”

Jacob nodded. “You should also be aware of the recent unrest among the citizens, Lady Carissa. The people are clamoring for a shrine to be built for Prince Rafael. Even though we’ve sent people to sing His Majesty’s praises to mix in some praises for him alongside His Highness, I’m sure His Majesty is displeased.”

Carissa nodded. “Plus, Janice’s situation comes at a precarious time. My uncle’s wife and children have gone missing too. All these events, combined with tonight’s ceremony at Harmony Palace, might lead him to believe the public outcry was orchestrated... If so, he might suspect someone is planning something.”

“Exactly!” Jacob chuckled. “If that’s the case, it’s a good thing. Even if he knows Grand Princess Eleanor and her people initiated tonight’s activities, the outcome will only confirm for His Majesty that His Highness doesn’t like the praise coming from outside, nor does he wish for a shrine. He might even expose the issue within Harmony Palace and remind His Majesty that his true concerns shouldn’t lie with the Hell Monarch’s household, but rather with others.”

“And since you two married, the Hell Monarch’s household has been following the rules. No arrogance, no forming cliques, and certainly no excessive dealings with powerful families. The king’s wariness towards you should have eased somewhat,” Kyle added.

Violet turned to Carissa. “Well, they do have a point. Men surely understand men.”

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When the clock struck eight, the assassins made their move.

A row of figures dressed in black silently descended upon Harmony Palace, swords at the ready. The priests were reciting their prayers in the main courtyard. By then, the noblewomen had finished burning their copies of the scriptures. Now, some were writing while others continued to chant prayers.

Suddenly, a piercing scream shattered the stillness of the night. The ladies fell silent, their voices abruptly

cut off.



“Assassins!”

The cry sliced through the air like a dagger, echoing heavily in Eleanor’s heart. She was right in the main courtyard, yet hadn’t seen any attackers.

That meant the assassins must have infiltrated the inner and back courtyards of Harmony Palace.

As she prepared to rush outside, Rosalind stood up and seized her arm. “There are assassins out there, Grand Princess Eleanor! It’s too dangerous!”

“Let go of me!” Eleanor spun around with a look fierce enough to shock everyone present.

Panic spread among the crowd, but the high priests and a few of the older noblewomen remained remarkably calm.

“The guards will handle the assassins, Grand Princess Eleanor. Do not put yourself at risk. We should

continue with our Zane said steadily.

Eleanor turned to the Spirit Elder, who was seated on the platform. His head was lowered in a gesture of compassion and devotion, yet his eyes flickered with intensity.

Realization struck Eleanor as she heard guards rushing toward the back. Her heart lurched.

Carissa’s plan wasn’t on the fifteenth

It was happening tonight!

She had deceived Henry and tricked Janice.

Carissa had sent those assassins. What was she planning? Was she going to storm the dungeons to rescue Carmen’s mother?

The dungeons!

A wave of dread washed over Eleanor. Ignoring the protests, she bolted toward the western courtyard.

The assassins were already engaged in a fierce battle with the palace guards and soldiers. Kurt had dispatched some household soldiers to protect the high priests and the noblewomen, ensuring they wouldn't be harmed in Harmony Palace.

Molly trembled as she turned to Fiona for answers. "Why are there assassins here? I'm terrified! Should

we run?"

Fiona glanced outside at the numerous soldiers guarding the perimeters outside and replied, "Running now would be even more dangerous. Who knows whom they're targeting?"

Many people had considered fleeing, but Fiona's words caused them to hesitate. With so many palace soldiers around, they were safer here than on the streets. Besides, they hadn't seen any assassins nearby. It was clear they weren't the intended targets.

Irene led the way to continue the prayers, and the other older ladies quickly followed suit. The autumn wind blew outside, which sounded eerily like walls.

The sounds of the struggle gradually reached them, the clash of blades accompanied by shouts

"Assassins! Assassins!"

In the darkness, two figures burst through the main door and shouted, "Help! Assassins! There are assassins!"

The noblewomen who had come as guests were alarmed by the commotion and thought the guards were losing the battle. In a panic, they attempted to flee. However, just as they stepped outside, an arrow whizzed through the air and struck the main door with a loud thud.

The women who had just darted out were so frightened that they nearly lost their wits. They scrambled back inside, some even crawling on the ground.

A few assassins had reached the front courtyard and were battling the household soldiers. But for the three assassins, fighting dozens of household soldiers was child's play. The household soldiers' swords barely grazed the assassins' clothing. The only sounds were the occasional clashing of blades. To anyone unaware, it would look like they were just fooling around.

The assassins weren't using lethal force. They mostly disarmed their opponents, then delivered swift kicks that sent the soldiers sprawling to the ground.

The main door swung open just then, and Michael led the capital guards inside. Tonight, Barrett happened to be on duty and had come along to assist. As soon as they entered, they saw the clash between the assassins and the guards.

Without hesitation, Michael drew his sword and charged in. The assassins were skilled, and the household soldiers struggled to land a blow even with the Capital Guard's support.

Cries of pain echoed from the back courtyard, prompting Michael to shout, "To the back! There are more assassins in the rear courtyard! Leave a few men here to protect the high priests and the noblewomen!"

## Chapter 708

Barrett noticed the crowded space and the presence of the high priests. If anything were to go wrong, the consequences would be dire.

He stepped forward to address Zane, saying, "Sir, it's best if you retreat to a safe place. Once the assassins are captured, you can continue your prayers."

Zane shook his head. "There's no need for that. Attend to your duties. This altar is already open tonight, and I will not leave until my prayers are complete."

"There are assassins! It's dangerous" Barrett insisted.

With his hands clasped in prayer, Zane replied, "The assassins are not here for me. If they harm me by mistake, then it is simply my fate."

Seeing he couldn't persuade the Spirit Elder, Barrett turned to the few remaining guards. "Stay with them and ensure their safety."

With that, he drew his sword and rushed deeper into the chaos.

Eleanor arrived at the western courtyard and stood her ground. Before her were over thirty guards..

This place was the most crucial of the four entrances to the dungeon. Eleanor was certain that Carissa aimed to rescue Carmen's mother.

If that wretched woman succeeded, so be it—Melanie Lester was already teetering on the edge of death. Even if she escaped, she might still die.

However, the western courtyard absolutely couldn't fall.

Michael and his men arrived at the western courtyard. Finding no assassins, he stepped forward and said, respectfully, "Grand Princess Eleanor, please return indoors and stay safe. Leave the matter of the assassins to us."

Upon seeing Michael, Eleanor's anger flared. There's no need! You must leave immediately! My residence has household soldiers. We don't require your intervention."

"The assassins are highly skilled, Your Highness. The household soldiers are no match for them."

"Nonsense! How could my soldiers possibly be overpowered by a handful of assassins? Leave now, or I will have you charged with trespassing!"

Inside the western cell block, Rafael had already heard the sounds of the battle outside and realized that the assassins had breached Harmony Palace. He swung the door to the cell block open and dashed up the stairs, throwing open the entrance to the dungeon.

"The assassins are in here!" he cried out.

Michael had been speaking to Eleanor, and he froze at the cry.

“Your Highness, I can’t ignore the safety of the noble ladies in light of the danger!” Michael said before leading his men toward the source of the shout.

Rafael managed to open three of the four entrances, leaving only the one in the western courtyard that

led to the eastern cell block. As he flew toward it, he saw Eleanor standing there, her face ashen.

He knew this place was critical.

What lay within?

Since he was already there, he might as well enter. Rafael planned to stir things up a little. Then, he could draw the assassins and the capital guards over there before slipping away.

He descended from the air, snatched a sword from a guard, and jumped into the fray.

To Rafael, these thirty guards had nothing more than flashy and useless moves. He quickly knocked several of them aside. Pushing Eleanor out of his way, he stormed into the western courtyard.

“Rafael! It’s you!” Eleanor cried, collapsing to the ground as she called after him, panic rising in her voice. Rafael!”

Without any hesitation, Rafael kicked open the dungeon entrance and strode down the steps.

“Get down there and kill him! Don’t let him escape the dungeon!” Eleanor shouted frantically.

The guards stumbled into the dungeon, and Barrett rushed to the scene along with a few others. After hearing that an assassin had entered, they hurried inside as well.

Eleanor dashed forward to block them. “You’re not allowed to go in! If anyone from the Capital Guard and Garrison Unit dare step one foot inside, I will have you killed!”

However, Barrett and the others didn't hear her hoarse cries. They assumed she was merely angry at the assassins and followed Rafael into the darkness

Rafael was the first to breach the dungeon. It was pitch black, but he quickly pulled out a fire starter and ignited it with a flick. Spotting a lamp on the wall, he moved over to light it.

The dim lamp flickered to life, casting a weak glow that illuminated the expansive dungeon. Weapons and armor were neatly arranged in an orderly fashion.

#### Chapter 709

On the ground lay bundles of arrows and several crossbows. There were also rows of knives and swords, along with a selection of bows. A few large barrels were stacked in one corner.

As Rafael approached, the pungent scent of gunpowder wafted toward him. The barrels were sealed tight and covered with several layers of material. Yet, the unmistakable smell of gunpowder lingered in the air.

The area where the barrels sat wasn't illuminated. The only source of light was at the entrance to the dungeon.

Rafael turned around just as Eleanor's household soldiers arrived. Their eyes widened in shock at the flickering light illuminating the dungeon. Many stood frozen, momentarily forgetting to confront the

assassins.

Rafael stepped forward with his sword drawn, taking down several household soldiers in quick succession. It was then that he spotted Barrett entering with a handful of capital guards.

Barrett barely had time to take in the scene before he charged toward the so-called assassin, weapon raised.

Rafael exchanged a few blows with Barrett, who was momentarily distracted when they locked eyes with each other in the dim light. Seizing the opportunity, Rafael darted up the stairs, ascending three steps at a time and leaving the dungeon swiftly.

Barrett paused, taking in the surroundings wide-eyed, his heart pounding with shock. He took a deep breath and exchanged glances with the other capital guards.

“Find Lord Brown!” he exclaimed, shaking off his astonishment. “Lord Lewis, the Garrison Unit’s chief, is here too. Locate them, quickly!”

The dungeon door slammed shut behind him.

Eleanor descended, her gown trailing behind her, a sword clutched in her hand. She raised it, pointing it at the capital guard attempting to rush out to find Michael.

In a cold and commanding voice, she declared, “No one is allowed to leave.”

The capital guards stepped back, looking apprehensive.

“Kill them,” Eleanor coldly ordered her household soldiers as she walked further into the dungeon.

Only five capital guards, including Barrett, faced nearly thirty household soldiers. While these soldiers had proven ineffective against Rafael, they were more than capable of handling Barrett and the four other capital guards.

The household soldiers raised their weapons, aiming at Barrett and his men. However, many in the room had never encountered anything like what lay within the dungeon. Such items were strictly forbidden for any residence to possess privately, and doing so would be tantamount to treason.

The household soldiers felt fear—not just of this being exposed, but also of Eleanor’s potential to silence them permanently once this was over.

As Barrett saw the dungeon door close, he realized Michael might not find the entrance in time even if the latter stormed the western courtyard. They could all very well die here.

That man in black had to be Rafael. He had exposed the secrets in Harmony Palace. How dare he run off and leave them to face the consequences?

Anger boiled within Barrett.

“Go! Kill them!” Eleanor shouted, her voice laced with fury. “What are you waiting for? If they live, you will all die! This is a crime punishable by death and confiscation of your family’s properties!”

The household soldiers let out battle cries, weapons raised as they advanced.

Barrett knew he and the four capital guards with him weren’t particularly skilled. He took the lead, swinging his blade with a loud clash as it met another weapon, sending a shockwave through his hands.

Knowing several of his opponents were tough, he took a deep breath. If he wasn’t careful, this could be the end of him.

“It’s useless!” he shouted amidst the chaos. “The capital and garrison guards are here. They’ll be here any moment. You’re unaware of the danger you’re in! Don’t cause your own demise!”

“Kill Barrett first!” Eleanor barked, gripping her sword tightly.

she was of

She held the sword with incredibly steady hands. At this moment, too aware that fear was pointless. She had always been ruthless, and even death held no terror for her. She wouldn’t give in until the very last moment.

Only one thought consumed her—if she survived this night, she would stop at nothing to kill Rafael and

Carissa.

Barrett was being besieged, and the other capital guards were already wounded. Though he fought valiantly and injured three household soldiers, the remainder focused solely on him.

A sense of foreboding crept over Barrett—he might die here today.



Yet, this fear ignited a fierce courage within him. Recent troubles at home had driven him to hone his martial arts skills, and he had made notable progress

He fought like a lone wolf, tapping into his most ferocious and valiant aspects.

Chapter 710

The assassins had already led Michael and Max Lewis into another dungeon.

Inside, they discovered Daniel and his family huddled together—along with seven or eight women, some mad and others weak from illness.

As soon as Michael laid eyes on Daniel and his family, his expression darkened.

“Get them out of here immediately,” he ordered. “Escort them with the ladies. There are capital guards and Harmony Palace household soldiers stationed outside. They’ll be safe there.”

Women were also imprisoned in the adjoining cells, but they were all severely disabled. Some had lost arms or legs, others had disfigurements, and some had even been mutilated beyond recognition. Their wounds had been treated carelessly, leaving many infected. One woman’s severed leg had already begun

to rot.

When the capital guards entered and witnessed this scene, they could hardly believe this was a grand princess’ residence.

It was more fitting to call it hell!

Pinching their nose against the terrible stench that wafted from the prisoners, the capital guards forced themselves to take each prisoner out.

In the main courtyard, Zane continued his prayers alongside several high priests. As the numbers of capital guards and garrison unit soldiers swelled, whispers spread among the nobles that perhaps the number of assassins was increasing too

Several ladies, led by Molly, wanted to flee.

However, Zane's voice rose with unusual sharpness as he said, "You can't leave now that you're here. You must see this through. Return to your seats."

Molly was genuinely frightened. She had never encountered anything like this before. Conflicted between the desire to escape and being ordered to stay, she began to weep.

"Why can't we leave if there are assassins on the loose? Sacrificing our lives for the dead is utter foolishness! Why would compassion demand human lives?" she wailed.

"The capital guards and garrison unit soldiers are here, so what are you afraid of? Just look at Lady Fiona. She's staying calm," Natalie responded coolly.

In truth, Fiona was anything but calm. Her heart was lodged in her throat.

Having followed Yuvan for many years, she was fully aware of all his plans and knew what lay in Eleanor's dungeon. If those items were discovered, the grand princess would be charged with treason.

Even if the late Augustus himself returned, she wouldn't be able to escape punishment. What's more, the current king was only her nephew.

Hearing Natalie's words, Fiona forced a smile. "If the noble elderly and young ladies are unafraid, why should we be? The Capital Guard consists of the bravest of our armored troops. They're not loafers."

"If that's the case, we'll continue our prayers while they catch the assassins Harmony Palace is filled with

the wails of restless souls, like the world outside. Can you hear them?" Natalie said.

Fiona settled back onto her cushion and murmured a prayer, asking the gods to grant everyone peace. and safety. Just as she steadied herself among the noble ladies, a man rushed in. He was cradling a child of about four or five, while a pregnant woman held the hand of an eight or nine-year-old.

The capital guards were escorting them, leading them inside in a hurry.

Someone recognized them and exclaimed, “Isn’t that the missing lady from the Sinclair family and her two children? I’ve seen them! How did they end up in Harmony Palace?”

“We were captured and brought here,” Thalia replied, her face pale and bearing the marks of terror.

Her eyes were still swollen from crying. As soon as she entered the room, her legs gave way and she fell

to her knees.

Rosalind hurried over to support her, “Quick, sit on a cushion.”

Thank

you,” Thalia said, her body trembling.

Nadine joined in to help lift her, managing to guide her to the cushion.

“How did you end up being taken to Harmony Palace? Why?”

Confusion spread through the crowd, mingled with doubt, though no one dared to voice their suspicions

openly

The older ladies present recognized Daniel’s face and felt a jolt of surprise.

Because Daniel had been away for years, very few had seen his face. Even in the capital, he rarely met with these women. To see a face resembling Hector’s suddenly appear at Harmony Palace on the night of the Emberfest Festival was genuinely startling

Yet, it also stirred memories of the past.

Natalie regarded him closely. “You’re from the Sinclair family? How is Hector Sinclair related to you?”

Daniel’s hair was a mess, but he still nodded respectfully. “I am Daniel Sinclair, and Hector was my elder cousin. I was kidnapped while leaving the city the other day. Fortunately, the capital guards rescued me.”

The older ladies who knew of that old tale sighed softly, lamenting the cruelty of fate.

Before they could ask more questions, another group was brought in. This time, it consisted entirely of women and young girls.