

War Song 711

Chapter 711

The newcomers reeked of filth. Among them were two who seemed utterly mad. They rushed forward to grab the fresh fruit from the offering table, gnawing at it as if they were starving.

A few others were so weak that they could only lie on the ground. Their faces were pale and drawn, indicating they had been ill for a long time.

Just as the onlookers were trying to comprehend the identities of these unfortunate souls, another group was ushered in.

Even before they entered, the stench hit those already in the room. It was nauseating, the foul odor reminiscent of rotting flesh. Molly covered her nose with a handkerchief and retreated to a corner, trying

to distance herself from the horrid smell.

The high priests opened their eyes. Upon seeing the limping women brought in—missing limbs, battered, and broken—a short prayer slipped from their lips.

The high priests were compassionate and had a high level of spiritual practice. Despite that, the sight of such suffering stirred their anger.

The noble ladies gasped as they witnessed the women being carried in. They instinctively stepped back in

horror.

Rosalind quickly unfurled her handkerchief to cover her mouth and nose, joining the other ladies as they approached to assess the situation. Upon laying eyes on the gruesome injuries, her face went ashen.

“Hurry! We need to get them to the infirmary!”

However, most people merely ran away. The smell was overpowering, and the sight was enough to make anyone retch. They felt sick to their stomachs.

“Is there a physician in the palace? Where is the household physician?” Nadine called out, grabbing a maid by the arm. “Find the household physician, quickly!”

The maids were startled by the chaos and froze in place. They were only attendants responsible for serving in the main courtyard and knew nothing about the dungeons. All they could see were the thin figures being carried out.

Some were familiar, while some were not. However, all of them were abnormally thin, injured, or maimed.

Hearing Nadine’s urgent plea, the maids instinctively scattered and rushed to find the household physician.

The noble ladies present normally had a flock of attendants fluttering nervously at the slightest injury. They were now completely dumbfounded by the scene before them, too frightened to take a step forward.

A woman with a broken leg was so weak she couldn’t even prop herself up. As she lay on the ground, her eyes flickered between despair and delirium.

Youu.

“Is it finally time to die? Just make it quick, I beg you! Give me a swift end!”

Her cries mingled with eerie laughter, creating a sound both terrifying and heartbreaking.

Irene bent down and grasped the woman’s hand, which was as thin and frail as a twig. “It’s all right, dear.

The physician will be here soon.”

The stench from the woman was overwhelming, even from several feet away. Yet, Irene seemed oblivious to it. With her free hand, she brushed aside the matted hair clinging to the woman's face, tenderly caressing her cheek.

"It's all over now. Everything is behind you."

Perhaps it had been a long time since someone had shown the woman such kindness, or maybe she 'hadn't heard a voice so gentle in ages. After a moment of stunned silence, she broke down in deep sobs, her cries piercing the air and breaking the oppressive silence of Harmony Palace.

Florence had been in the kitchen, overseeing the cooks as they prepared a nutritious soup essential for staying up all night. The kitchen was far away from the main courtyard, so when she finally arrived, she found the household physician had already been summoned.

Seeing the room filled with women who should still be in the dungeon, along with the Capital Guard and Garrison Unit she had seen on her way, Florence realized that they could no longer protect Harmony

Palace's darkest secrets.

After a moment of panic, a wave of relief washed over her. She leaned against the door and slowly sank to the floor.

Whatever the outcome, it was finally coming to an end.

However, the ordeal was far from over for those still trapped in the dungeon.

Barrett fought fiercely, taking down several attackers. Unfortunately, he was injured in the process. Though his martial arts training allowed him to evade critical strikes, the pain from multiple wounds left him on the brink of collapse.

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At that moment, Barrett was gripped by the fear of impending death.

Memories of his first battle at Victory Pass flooded his mind, when enemies had surrounded him and he nearly succumbed to their blades. Wyatt Sullivan had saved him, sacrificing an arm in the process.

That day, Barrett had also been fraught with the terror of dying.

As he was lost in thought, Barrett was suddenly kicked to the ground. Panic surged as he caught sight of a glinting blade rushing toward him. He rolled away desperately, tumbling until he landed at Eleanor's feet.

"Die!" Eleanor's face twisted in fury as she raised her sword, aiming for his chest.

Barrett seized the sword's blade with both hands, hoping to use its momentum to rise, but the household soldiers were already closing in.

Just as it seemed all was lost, a throng of capital guards burst in. Michael leaped from the staircase, delivering a swift kick that sent the household soldier aiming a blade at Barrett sprawling.

He saved Barrett just in time.

The fight raged on. The elite troops led by Michael quickly turned the tide, overwhelming their foes with relentless force. It wasn't long before swords were held to the throats of the remaining household

soldiers.

Eleanor watched as the situation shifted in an instant. Despite her earlier preparations, she was unwilling to accept the rapid and brutal defeat. She collapsed weakly to the ground, feeling as if her very bones had been stripped away.

The capital guards illuminated the dungeon with their torches, revealing it not as a prison but as a small arsenal. Upon spotting the gunpowder, a chill ran through Michael.

"Extinguish the flames," he ordered immediately.

A dim light flickered over the array of glinting weapons as the torches were snuffed out. Everyone present understood the implications of what lay before them.

Michael commanded that Barrett and the severely wounded capital guards be taken for medical treatment while the others were rounded up and led away.

As for Eleanor, he had no authority to execute her. Instead, he stationed guards at the dungeon and assigned others to watch her. His action allowed her some freedom of movement but forbade her from leaving Harmony Palace.

The decision of how to deal with the situation rested with the king, who would decide the fate of all involved.

Barrett and four other capital guards were gravely injured, and were taken to Harmony Palace's household physician for immediate treatment.

Rosalind had sent some people to summon more physicians, who arrived one after another. Michael had also sent for physicians from the Ministry of Health, turning Harmony Palace into a makeshift hospital.

Zane and the other high priests departed from Harmony Palace. As he turned back for one last glance, he

knew he wouldn't need to return the following year.

No more innocent lives would be lost here.

Under the capital guards' arrangements, Daniel, his family, and the other ladies left in an orderly fashion. As they stepped outside, their hands and feet felt icy, and cold sweat dripped from their brows.

They could hardly fathom that Eleanor could be so ruthless. With her status, she could have forbidden her prince consort from taking concubines. Yet, she had permitted them to enter her home only to treat them with utter cruelty.

Molly was visibly shaken. As she climbed into the carriage, she exclaimed, “Grand Princess Eleanor is too brutal! It would have been better if she had just killed them all!”

Fiona’s expression was dark. She was already troubled by the events in the dungeon and anxious for news, so she felt a surge of irritation at Molly’s words.

“Be quiet!” she snapped.

Molly was startled at Fiona’s response. She whipped around and snarled furiously, “How dare you speak to me like that?!”

She raised her hand to slap Fiona, but her intended target quickly seized her wrist, twisting it until she cried in pain. Then, Fiona retaliated swiftly and struck her across the face.

“Idiot! Don’t you realize the gravity of the situation?” Fiona yelled.

Molly was stunned. She clutched her face in disbelief as she looked at Fiona. “How dare you hit me? I’m the rightful wife, and you’re just a concubine...”

As her furious gaze met Fiona’s icy, merciless stare, a chill ran down her spine. The words on the tip of her tongue were suddenly swallowed back.

Fiona had always been obedient and submissive. Why was she so terrifying right now?

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In Harmony Palace, several matriarchs and Rosalind gradually left, leaving only Natalie behind. With so many women in need of treatment, it was essential to have someone in charge, especially since Eleanor had yet to be captured.

After Barrett and the others finished their treatment, they waited for the capital and garrison guards to complete their work before sending them back. They were placed on the elevated platform, separated from the women in the building.

Once Michael had dealt with the household soldiers and secured the servants of Harmony Palace, he gathered the stewards in one place. He ensured the situation was under control before turning his attention to Barrett and his group.

“How are you holding up?” Michael asked.

Among the five, two were severely injured. Their bleeding had been staunched, but they remained in critical condition. The household physician had advised against moving them, so they were covered with thick blankets. Barrett and the other two had also sustained serious injuries, but their situations were relatively better as none of their vital areas had been hit.

It was only now that Barrett began to feel the searing pain. When Michael asked about his condition, he

gritted his teeth and replied, “I’m managing.”

Michael nodded. “Good. That’s what I like to hear.”

Barrett hesitated momentarily before asking, “Sir, have the assassins been caught?”

“All the assassins escaped. Not a single one was apprehended,” Michael replied.

A surge of anger welled up in Barrett as he recalled how close he had come to dying in the dungeon.

“Sir, I suspect we’ve been used. I came face to face with one of the assassins. Although he was masked, I recognized him.”

Michael chuckled softly and gave Barrett’s shoulder a reassuring pat. “Do you know how I found the dungeon where you were held? Barrett, you’ve done well.”

Barrett froze.

Had he done well?

He hadn't entertained that thought, nor did he have time to ponder it.

Barrett mulled over Michael's words. How had he been found in that dungeon? After Eleanor entered, the dungeon door had been locked. If one didn't know the entrance, there was no way in.

Had the Hell Monarch turned back to open the door and let Michael and the others in to rescue him?

But with so many soldiers from the Capital Guard and Garrison Unit around, wouldn't it have been dangerous for Rafael to turn back after escaping? There would be no way to clear his name if he got caught or recognized. It would be impossible, even if he sacrificed himself in this battle.

Barrett was skeptical, but the thought of having achieved something ignited a surge of excitement within. Regardless of whether that man was truly the Hell Monarch or if he had come back to unlock the

dungeon door, the fact remained—Barrett had both accomplished something and been saved.

He desperately needed to prove himself. Initially, he had thought he was doomed to lead a mundane life as a capital guard. Now, though, he found himself with a glimmer of hope.

Perhaps it was just his usual bad luck, but the heavens seemed to have dropped a slice of pie right into his lap.

Meanwhile, Harmony Palace was ablaze with light.

Eleanor Sanford was her name, given by Augustus himself rather than the Ministry of Protocol. It meant benevolence“, as Augustus had wished for her to be broad-minded and cultured.

Unfortunately, she hadn't become what her father had envisioned.

Harmony Palace echoed with her furious roars.

“Why are you following me?! Get away! I'll kill you!”

Her voice was nearly hoarse, yet she continued to scream, her rage carrying from the backyard to the front. Every person she could see wasn't from her residence. The only one able to roam freely within Harmony Palace was herself.

"Where's Florence? Where is she?!"

Stepping back into the main hall, Eleanor's hair was in disarray, and she appeared utterly unhinged.

The battered and injured women in the main courtyard trembled in fear. Their terror of Eleanor had seeped into their bones, and just hearing her voice made it hard to breathe.

Natalie paid Eleanor no mind and focused instead on watching the physician treat each injured woman. She had already spoken to those who could talk and learned they had all been abducted.

Almost all of them weren't locals from the capital. Only one woman was from the capital—a pitifully thin one named Melanie Lester. She was so weak, she could barely sit up. She had been coughing relentlessly, nearly bringing up blood.

Eleanor grabbed Melanie's hair, her eyes wild with fury. "You wretched girl! Who permitted you to come out? Get back to the dungeon!"

No one anticipated Eleanor's sudden outburst. After all, she had walked through the main hall several times without acknowledging these women.

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As Eleanor yanked Melanie's hair, she tumbled to the ground. Tears streamed down her face, but she dared not make a sound.

The capital guards following Eleanor were hesitant to intervene physically. They stood by and yelled, "Let go! Release her!"

With her wild hair obscuring half her face, Eleanor glared at them with a chilling ferocity. "Who do you think you are to order me around? Go ahead, touch me if you dare!"

Eleanor dragged Melanie by her hair and advanced on the capital guards, who dared not touch her. The men were forced to step back.

Natalie rose abruptly and strode over, raising her hand to deliver a sharp slap to Eleanor's face. "You think you can act however you want? How will you deal with me, you madwoman?"

"How dare you?!" Eleanor released Melanie and lunged toward Natalie.

The capital guards could no longer stand by idly. They hurriedly stepped in to block her path. Eleanor's lungé failed; in her frenzy, she clawed at a guard's face and left deep scratches.

The capital guard winced in pain. Seeing Eleanor's frantic behavior, he gritted his teeth, swept his leg out to trip her, then sidestepped. She stumbled forward, her forehead crashing heavily against the floor.

"Bring some ropes! If you're too scared to tie her up, I will!" commanded Natalie.

The capital guards rushed out to fetch the ropes. Once Natalie gave the order, they wasted no time restraining Eleanor against a nearby pillar.

A bruise was forming on her forehead. She thrashed like a wild animal, but the bonds were secure. No matter how she struggled, she couldn't break free.

She shot Natalie a venomous glare, her voice dripping with fury as she ranted, "You old hag! I am a grand princess! How dare you insult the royal family? Do you understand the grave crime you've committed? Do you think I won't get my father to execute your entire family?!"

"Eleanor, there's no need for you to put on an act. You've made your choices, and now, you must face the consequences. Even if you truly are mad, the law of the land will still deal with you," Natalie replied coolly.

"What act, you old crone? You venomous witch! You better kneel and bow your head, and I might just spare your life..." Eleanor rasped, her voice hoarse and jagged.

Natalie dismissed her with a wave. She had watched the grand princess pace back and forth into the main hall, cursing crazily. It was clear what was swirling in the latter's mind.

While actions could deceive, eyes couldn't. Eleanor's gaze betrayed a desperate fear and guilt. It was the only weapon left in her arsenal. She would run out of strength from cursing sooner or later, and would naturally quiet down by then.

Hell Monarch Estate was as quiet as ever, save for the light burning steadily in the study. News had arrived—the assassins had retreated successfully, but Rafael had not yet returned.

Everyone waited silently, minds racing with thoughts of what to do next. Only Kyle remained leisurely

absorbed in his book.

Violet leaned her head on Carissa's shoulder and yawned. "If he doesn't return soon, it'll be dawn."

"He must be making sure everything is clear," Carissa replied, knowing his thoroughness. "If you're tired, you can sleep. I'll fill you in tomorrow."

"I'm not really tired. I just want to know if everyone has been rescued," Violet said, rubbing her eyes. "I'll wait even if I'm sleepy."

Carissa poured Violet a cup of coffee. "If the plan went smoothly, then everyone should be safe. I wonder how many were saved, whether Carmen's mother is still alive, and what secrets lie in the western courtyard."

Violet took the cup, disappointment flickering in her eyes. "Too bad we can't go see for ourselves."

"Sometimes, it's better not to see such horrors," Jacob said slowly.

But in truth, the reality remained, whether they saw it or not.

"Someone's back!" Carissa exclaimed, jumping up to open the study door.

To her relief, she found Rafael, dressed in black, just about to push the door open. Since his hand was already outstretched, he took Carissa's hand in his.

“Let’s talk inside.”

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Seeing the serious expression on Rafael’s face, everyone sensed he had discovered something significant in the western courtyard.

Rafael sat down, and Carissa quickly poured him some water.

“Here, drink something. I’ll have someone bring you the food we’ve got warming on the stove.”

He must be starving after going without food or drink in the dungeon overnight.

Rafael gulped down the water, his throat as dry as a desert.

Once Carissa had given her orders, she hurried back to the study..

Before anyone could ask, Rafael spoke up, “Carissa, your uncle and his family are all safe. Fortunately, they didn’t suffer any harm or beatings. They were just frightened from being locked in the dungeon.”

Carissa’s eyes widened. “So, my uncle was really captured?”

“Yes, and it was a good thing he was there. Otherwise, his wife and children would have been scared half

to death.”

Rafael poured himself another cup of water and downed it before continuing, “Most of the people in the dungeon were Henry’s concubines. They’ve all been rescued, but quite a few are injured or traumatized. The cruelty of it is appalling.

“Also, the entrance to the eastern dungeon was located in the western courtyard. That dungeon contained weapons, armor, and gunpowder. It seems they planned to send a group of people into the capital when the uprising began, and use those weapons and armor for a coordinated attack.”

“Of course! Was she not afraid of getting caught?” asked Carissa.

Though she had always suspected that Eleanor was hiding something in the western courtyard, she hadn’t realized the grand princess would be so bold as to stash weapons in her residence.

“If it were Hell Monarch Estate, no one would dare hide such things here. However, who would think a grand princess’ residence would have a dungeon, let alone a large stash of weapons? It’s actually the safest place, since no one would search Harmony Palace. Even if they did, they wouldn’t find anything. We only discovered the dungeon’s existence by learning about its entrance ahead of time,” Jacob replied.

Rafael nodded. “Exactly. No one would dare search Harmony Palace unless it was a matter of utmost importance. That’s why they chose to hide the weapons here—it was the safest option.”

Although Violet had known for some time that Eleanor was working with Yuvan, she couldn’t help but ask, “What’s her goal? She’s already a respected grand princess. What would she gain by helping Prince Yuvan seize the throne? Wouldn’t her status go down instead?”

Kyle shrugged. “Only she knows what she’s after.”

Everyone else was equally baffled by Eleanor’s actions. She might not have complete control as a grand princess, but she lived a life of privilege and wealth. What could possibly be worth risking everything, even her life?

Jacob suddenly recalled something and added, “Your Highness, the king might have known there would

be commotion at Harmony Palace tonight. The queen dowager sent food offerings, which is why many noble ladies went there.”

“I know. I saw,” said Rafael.

Lily arrived at the study door with a tray of food.

After she announced her presence, Carissa urged, “Hurry, bring it in!”

Once Lily and the maids served the food, they left, closing the door behind them.

Rafael rolled up his sleeves and dug in. The gnawing hunger was a miserable feeling.

Carissa's eyes softened with concern. "Don't eat too fast. Have some soup first."

"Okay." He looked up and grinned at his wife. "I'll listen to you, my dear."

After a few sips of soup, he continued, "This case will most likely be handed to the Supreme Court. I need to clean up and prepare for work. This is huge news, and it'll surely shake the court and the streets. If anyone has questions, ask quickly."

"Just eat! No talking, or you'll choke," Carissa admonished.

In truth, no one had many questions. The plan had succeeded, the secrets were out, and everyone had been rescued. The details could wait.

Rafael popped a piece of meat into his mouth, savoring the taste. "Oh, by the way. It was Barrett who led the team that found those weapons.

"Barrett?" Violet scowled. "Why him? That's such a cheap grab for credit!"

Rafael paused. "It's not that simple. He was injured.

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"This time, it's not just about rescuing people. We've uncovered something much bigger. We of the Hell Monarch household won't be able to take the credit. Whoever risks their life gets the honor. Let's drop the topic of Mr. Warren for now. Please eat, Your Highness," Jacob said.

Jacob didn't want to keep talking about Barrett, as he didn't want to make Carissa uncomfortable. Thus, he urged Rafael to eat and then clean up. The scent of the dungeon still clung to the prince.

However, Violet wasn't quite satisfied. "Barrett still played a role in our plan, and that bothers me. I'd rather Michael get the credit!"

She could never forget how Barrett had harmed Carissa and tried to seize her dowry. Even though they had fought side by side on the battlefield, they were simply not cut from the same cloth.

Violet would always look down on Barrett.

Jacob smiled. "Lord Brown will definitely get some credit. It's not like Mr. Warren will get sole credit. He didn't go into the dungeon alone, after all. Ms. Spencer, you really shouldn't dwell on it."

Violet glanced at Carissa. "Doesn't it bother you, Cari?"

Carissa shook her head. "Honestly, when I think back to those times, it feels like it happened in another life. It's so far away that I almost feel like I never even married into the Warren family. Barrett's name feels unfamiliar to me now. If that's the case, I might as well treat him like a complete stranger."

Violet shifted awkwardly. "Alright, let's consider him a stranger—a particularly annoying one."

Carissa laughed. "Exactly!"

Rafael glanced at Carissa. Even though he wasn't overly concerned about the past, he enjoyed hearing her say it. She wasn't lying—those were her true feelings.

With a smile on his lips, he happily finished his meal.

"Well, since there are no more questions, let's call it a day."

After returning to their rooms, Rafael had just finished bathing when a knock sounded at the door of Hell Monarch Estate. Someone from the palace urgently requested him to come at once.

It seemed Michael had already sent word.

Rafael changed into his official attire, then pulled Carissa close. “You should get some sleep. You’ll need to visit the Sinclair family and meet with Carmen tomorrow. You also need to take Jacob to meet his

sister.”

Carissa studied Rafael’s slightly worn face. “You’ve been working so hard these past couple of days. If this case goes to the Supreme Court, it will be a lot of work.”

He pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. “At least we’ve cut off one of Uncle Yuvan’s arms in the capital. Without Aunt Eleanor, he will have to reassess many of his plans.”

“But getting him to abandon the idea of rebellion won’t be easy,” Carissa replied.

“One thing at a time,” Rafael said as he secured his cloak. “I need to go now, or the king will be waiting

too long.”

“Alright, hurry back,” Carissa said, watching him stride into the darkness.

She yawned and turned back to her room, ready for some rest.

There were still two hours left before the morning court session, but the palace’s eastern gates were already open. Rafael rode straight into the palace, dismounting before the royal study. He handed his horse over to a palace attendant.

“Your Highness!” Derek rushed down the steps. “You need to go inside right away! The king and the prime minister are waiting for you.”

“Understood.”

Rafael knew the royal chancellor was bringing the report. He had instructed Michael earlier that if anything related to government affairs came up at Harmony Palace, Jeremiah should be the first to be informed, as only the prime minister could enter the palace at such late hours.

Upon entering the royal study, the flickering candlelight revealed the fury in Salvador's eyes. Jeremiah sat beside him with a grave expression.

Rafael knelt on one knee. "Greetings, Your Majesty."

"Rise!" Salvador looked at him, and said in a low voice, "The Supreme Court will handle the matter regarding Harmony Palace."

Salvador didn't specify what the issue was, assuming Rafael already knew.

From this statement, Rafael understood that Salvador was aware of the events that had unfolded that night. He likely hadn't anticipated that they might involve treason, though.

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Salvador had certainly not anticipated uncovering such treasonous material. He had thought it would only be some vile secrets from the inner palace, but this was far beyond that. He initially wanted to intervene, yet he hesitated to issue a direct order regarding the affairs of Harmony Palace.

Thus, he had opted to subtly influence things during the Emberfest Festival.

Salvador wasn't entirely sure anyone would take action against Eleanor that night, but the recent rumors had been rampant.

Whispers claimed that Samuel's courtesan was the daughter of a concubine from Eleanor's household. After sending people to investigate, Salvador learned that Henry had dealings with the Lester family, a prominent merchant clan in the city. Coincidentally, one of the Lester family's daughters had visited Hell Monarch Estate several times.

These fragmented pieces of information didn't paint a complete picture, but as in previous years, Eleanor had invited high priests to pray at Harmony Palace during the Emberfest Festival.

Then, there was Kyle, who had arrived in the capital just before the festival. Salvador recalled some past conflicts between Carissa and Eleanor, and speculated that the grand princess' sordid affairs might be linked to the Lester family.

Salvador couldn't say that he knew Carissa well, but he understood she had a strong sense of justice. If the Lester family had sought her help, she might have been inclined to assist them if she had been dissatisfied with Eleanor.

Most importantly, Daniel's wife and children had gone missing, presumably kidnapped. If Eleanor had indeed been behind this, Carissa would certainly not have stood by idly.

That was Salvador's entire train of thought up to now. However, he never could have imagined they would find weapons and armor in Harmony Palace. The significant stash of gunpowder was especially shocking.

Rafael stood, quickly processing the information in his mind, and decided not to feign ignorance. "I will carry out your order, Your Majesty."

Salvador turned to the prime minister. "Jeremiah, you may leave now. I have a few words to share with my brother."

Jeremiah rose. "I will take my leave, Your Majesty, Your Highness."

"Safe travels, Mr. Murray " Rafael saluted to see him off.

Jeremiah glanced at the prince, but said nothing and turned to leave.

Once the door to the royal study was shut, Salvador looked at Rafael. "Have a seat. Let's speak openly Tonight my brother

Rafael settled into his chair. "Alright"

Salvador fixed his gaze on Rafael Tell me, did you dispatch those assassins tonight?

Rafael rose and knelt on one knee confessing honestiv. "Yes, Your Majesty, i bear the blame."

Salvador's expression hardened "Did you discover her treasonous intentions early on? Why didn't you

report to me? Did you think I wouldn't believe you?"

A bitter smile tugged at Rafael's lips. Without evidence, how could he convince Salvador that Eleanor harbored treasonous thoughts? He feared that simply stating his suspicions would elicit an angry retort of absurdity.

Still, he kept those thoughts to himself.

Maintaining a serious demeanor, he replied, "I didn't discover any treasonous intent. Tonight's actions were not deliberate. They were sudden. Carissa's uncle was abducted as he was leaving the city, and soon after, his wife and children also went missing. We suspected it was Aunt Eleanor's work." Rafael paused to gauge Salvador's reaction. Seeing no questions from the king, he continued, "There is reason why we suspected Aunt Eleanor. During my journey back from rescuing the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team members, I encountered a woman named Carmen, who claimed to be the daughter of Lord Henry's concubine. Her mother's name is Melanie Lester. She resembles Carissa's mother, which caught Aunt Eleanor's attention. Aunt Eleanor took Melanie back to promise her to Henry as a concubine. "Carmen and her sister, Celeste—Samuel's courtesan and concubine—were born from this union. Carmen told me Aunt Eleanor ordered her to disrupt my relationship with Carissa. However, Carmen was unwilling to do so and realized it wouldn't work. She confided in Carissa about her situation, and asked for help to rescue her mother. She also informed me about what was happening in the dungeon."

"So, you devised your plan for the Emberfest Festival. Yet you just claimed it wasn't deliberate?" Salvador said, his eyes glinting with coldness.

"No. At that time, we couldn't discern what was the truth. Carissa and I would never act recklessly, especially since Aunt Eleanor is our aunt and a revered grand princess in our kingdom. If we sent people to Harmony Palace without verification, it would mean going against the royal authority. I would never do such a thing," Rafael explained.

Salvador's expression softened slightly. "So, it was because of the disappearance of Daniel and his family?"

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Rafael lifted his gaze to assess Salvador's expression.

"Yes," he said. "After their disappearance, both my household and the Sinclair family dispatched many people to search for them, but to no avail. It was only later that we considered the possibility of Aunt Eleanor's involvement."

“We asked Carmen to inquire among the servants at Harmony Palace. That was how we learned that on the night Daniel’s wife and children went missing, the household soldiers at Harmony Palace brought two children and a pregnant woman into the dungeon. That’s when we pinpointed Harmony Palace as the source of the incident.

“However, I couldn’t just barge in openly. I remembered that Aunt Eleanor usually invited high priests during the Emberfest Festival, and that the Garrison Unit and Capital Guard would focus their efforts on that area that night. So, we decided to use assassins to lure the capital and garrison guards into Harmony Palace, hoping they would rescue the captives.”

Salvador asked, “Is there anything else you’re keeping from me? Did you truly not know that Aunt Eleanor harbored treasonous intentions? Did you genuinely have no idea that there was so much armor and weapons hidden in Harmony Palace?”

Rafael raised his head with a resolute expression. “I truly didn’t know. Besides, she’s our aunt and a grand princess. Her status is esteemed, and she has no sons. Why would she conspire against the throne?”

That statement struck Salvador like a lightning bolt, truly awakening him to the reality of the situation. He fixed Rafael with a steady gaze, a glint of sharpness flickering in his eyes.

After a long moment, he said, “Let’s sit and talk.”

Rafael nodded and slowly took his seat.

Salvador’s mind raced as he filtered through the list of suspicious individuals. There was someone he doubted, but he deemed the likelihood of the man’s involvement extremely low. The man had spent so many years away from the capital, returning this time only due to Ruth’s illness. Moreover, there had been no unusual activities reported from Valken.

As for those currently in the capital, Hayden and Harvey were nearly impossible suspects. Salvador’s other uncles, like Christopher and Austin, were in their fiefs. They were too busy indulging in their extravagant lifestyles to be a concern.

No, Yuvan couldn't be ruled out. He had married a lady from the Spencer family, which provided war horses to Starhaven's army. The Spencers also forged weapons and armor for the Ministry of Defense.

But with just that and no troops, how could one mount a rebellion? The military forces across the regions were scattered, and uniting them was no simple task. The Sullivan family was not a possibility, and Oliver had just taken command of the Hell Monarch Army and the Sinclair Army. Those troops wouldn't be easily swayed into rebellion.

The most likely suspect was sitting right there in the royal study with Salvador.

Of course, if Rafael hadn't uncovered this matter, his chances of involvement would have been the highest. But now, it was impossible.

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If Rafael and Yuvan were involved in plotting a rebellion together, exposing what was stored in Harmony Palace would be too detrimental to their interests. Anyone with treasonous intentions wouldn't act so recklessly. Even if Carissa and Eleanor had their grievances, they wouldn't go that far.

Moreover, Yuvan couldn't easily sway Rafael. That much was certain.

After running through his thoughts, Salvador's gaze toward his brother softened considerably, though a flicker of darkness still lingered in his eyes.

He said slowly, "Whether we can get an answer from Aunt Eleanor depends on the methods of the Supreme Court."

"Do you have any suspects in mind?" Rafael asked.

Salvador hesitated for a moment. He almost voiced his suspicions, but then swallowed his words and instead said, "No, it all depends on who she implicates. What do you think? If you have a suspect in mind, feel free to say it. I'll grant you immunity."

Rafael sighed inwardly. In truth, Salvador should suspect Yuvan. However, he didn't voice that thought.

It was clear Salvador couldn't trust Rafael completely. That meant the prince couldn't use this incident as justification for the Supreme Court to investigate Yuvan.

If everything had to be done secretly, they would have to tread carefully around each other's suspicions. After a moment of contemplation, Rafael decided to be direct and said, "I suspect Uncle Yuvan." Salvador immediately shot back, "Why do you suspect him? Do you have any evidence?"

Rafael shook his head. "I don't have any tangible proof. You asked me to speak boldly, so I did. Aunt Eleanor and Uncle Yuvan were both raised by Lady Ruth. They have the closest bond. Uncle Yuvan also married a woman from the Spencer family, which provides warhorses to the kingdom's army..."

Salvador interrupted, "That alone isn't enough. What about troops? Who would he collude with?"

Rafael knew the "who" Salvador was referring to were the military generals. At present, there was no evidence linking Yuvan closely with any of them.

Regardless, it was evident that Salvador had begun to suspect the generals holding military power, indicating a major scrutiny would be launched in that direction. The first targets would likely be the Mystic Army and the soldiers from the Garrison Unit outside the capital.

As the commander of the Mystic Army, Rafael felt the weight of the situation. The deputy commander was Carissa, while Tyler Xavier was in charge of the garrison unit soldiers stationed outside the capital. Tyler was fiercely loyal, and given his age, he was unlikely to conspire against the throne.

Yet once the king grew suspicious, life for any of the generals wouldn't be easy.

Chapter 719

Rafael pretended to be in deep thought before replying, "As for the military generals, I currently have no

suspects."

Though Salvador found that answer unsatisfactory, he didn't lose his temper.

"The Supreme Court will investigate this case. I will assign people to look into the other matters separately."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Salvador began to roll the emerald ring on his thumb. "You mentioned before that you don't plan to have children anytime soon, right?"

"That's right. We have no plans at the moment."

"I see," Salvador replied thoughtfully. "Carissa is the deputy commander of the Mystic Army. Since you've taken on the role of Chief Judge, I intend to promote her to the position of commander of the Mystic Army."

Rafael was taken aback. "You mean, with actual power?"

"Exactly. She'll assume the position with immediate effect."

Rafael hesitated before saying, "But while there are precedents for female generals in our court, there are no examples of women holding such official roles."

"Precedents can be established," said Salvador.

Rafael struggled to understand the king's intentions. Was he truly willing to let Carissa take charge of security in the capital and the palace district without concerns? Or was there another motive at play?

"Carissa mentioned that she wants to establish a women's academy. She's been considering resigning from the deputy commander role for some time. She didn't act on it since it's a nominal title," Rafael said.

“Then, she doesn’t need to resign. She will no longer hold a nominal title. The Mystic Army includes the Capital Guard and the Royal Guard. I am handing over the military authority of the Mystic Army to her, and I hope she won’t disappoint me.”

Seeing his brother remain silent, Salvador couldn’t help but chuckle. “What’s the matter? Do you doubt her abilities? Do you think she can’t handle the responsibility? Or are you reluctant to let her step into the spotlight? Do you want to confine my female general to the inner household?”

Rafael smiled. “Not at all. I fully support her in whatever she wishes to pursue. It’s just that she has never mentioned wanting to serve in court. She only expressed her desire to start a women’s academy. Why not let me return and ask her opinion?”

Salvador didn’t give him a chance to refuse. “There’s no need to ask. I’ll issue a royal edict for her to enter the palace directly. As for her wish to establish a women’s academy, I believe the queen dowager will support it. Speaking of which, I have someone in mind to recommend to help—Rosalind, the royal chancellor’s granddaughter.”

With that, Rafael realized he could no longer push back.

He looked at the king and said, “You mentioned earlier that we should speak from the heart as brothers. Perhaps you could explain to me why you want Carissa to oversee the Mystic Army. Although the Capital Guard and Royal Guard are technically part of the Mystic Army, they’ve been operating independently. Does this mean you intend to entrust the command of both the capital and royal guards to Carissa?”

Salvador paused momentarily before responding, “The Mystic Army is divided into three divisions: the Capital Guard, the Royal Guard, and the Crown Guard. Carissa will oversee all of them, including the Garrison Unit.”

This left Rafael quite perplexed.

Previously, the Crown Guard had been under the command of the Royal Guard. After ascending to the throne, Salvador established a separate institution for the Crown Guard, to train his most trusted aides. Now, he was handing that responsibility over to Carissa. Was he really willing to relinquish control of the people he had nurtured for so long?

It seemed illogical, especially since Salvador had always been cautious of Rafael. Yet now, Salvador was promoting Carissa to such a high position without anyone to counter her authority.

Holding the command of the Mystic Army and all its divisions meant basically being in control of the capital and palace district. Why would Salvador suddenly place so much trust in the Hell Monarch's household?

Moreover, once Carissa was in charge, she would be privy to all of Salvador's suspicions about various ministers.

"It's settled then," Salvador declared. "You need not attend court today. First, take control of the situation in Harmony Palace and bring the people back for questioning. If you can't extract any confessions, hand them over to Commander Sinclair for interrogation."

Commander Sinclair!

Rafael frowned. This case was already under the Supreme Court's jurisdiction. Saying it would now be passed to Carissa for interrogation felt like a signal that if Eleanor didn't confess, they intended for Carissa to apply harsher methods.

Once Rafael stepped outside, he spotted Derek waiting at the door. Their conversation in the royal study had been quite loud, so he had surely overheard.

Rafael cast him a pleading look, and Derek lowered his gaze.

"Take care, Your Highness."

Chapter 720

After Rafael left, Derek entered the royal study and said, "There's only an hour left before court begins, Your Majesty. Allow me to assist you in changing your attire."

"Alright. Let's do it here," Salvador replied, gesturing with his hand.

Derek stepped outside and called out, "Bring the griffin cloak. The king will change now."

Before long, palace attendants entered, carrying the griffin motive cloak and a golden-threaded attire.

Derek dismissed everyone and personally helped the king change. Although Salvador's expression still held anger, it had softened considerably since receiving the news.

Salvador looked at Derek and asked, "You don't understand why I appointed Carissa as the commander of the Mystic Army, do you?"

As Derek—adjusted the belt, he replied, "Your wisdom is unmatched, Your Majesty. You must have your reasons for making this decision."

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Salvador spread his arms to allow Derek to adjust the underarms of his attire, his tone cool as he said, "What could possibly motivate Aunt Eleanor to rebel? What benefit would she gain from overthrowing me?" "I think Grand Princess Eleanor is quite confused. You have treated her very well," Derek replied. "The least likely person to rebel has gotten involved in a rebellion. Who can I trust?" Salvador exclaimed, his sleeves fluttering as he felt the simmering anger that refused to dissipate.

"But this matter should have nothing to do with the Hell Monarch's household," Derek argued.

"Of course it has nothing to do with them. Otherwise, why would Rafael have led people into Harmony Palace?" The light in the room highlighted Salvador's handsome features as his brow furrowed deeply. "I don't suspect him, but it's better to be safe than sorry. If someone stirs up trouble and he has ulterior motives, he could truly achieve something."

"Then, why would you let Lady Carissa command the Mystic Army and give her real power?" Derek asked, perplexed. "Isn't that equivalent to granting him authority?"

Salvador shook his head with a chilling gaze. "The Mystic Army is largely composed of Rafael's chosen men who are all loyal to him. Even though he currently holds the position of Chief Judge and isn't involved in the army's affairs, everyone except my crown guards will still follow him as soon as he gives a command."

Derek seemed to grasp the situation, realization dawning on his face. "So, Your Majesty, you want to ride the wave and officially hand over the Mystic Army to them?"

Salvador let out a scoff as he narrowed his eyes. "Wouldn't that be redundant? Do you think women lack ambition? Carissa returned with military achievements, only to be confined to the inner

household. “She’s a capable person. She’s backed by the many factions of Meadow Ridge, and is the legitimate daughter of Duke of Northwatch. Although Ryan will inherit the Duke of Northwatch’s title, she cares for him and will undoubtedly fight to lay a solid foundation for him. She will definitely hold the command of the Mystic Army firmly in her hands. A clever woman won’t be content to rely on a man. If she develops ambition, she could easily overshadow my brother.”

“So, Your Majesty believes she sees power as more important than her affection for His Highness,” Derek commented, finally understanding.

Salvador adjusted his crown, authority radiating from him. “Perhaps she doesn’t, but what if she does? I must give her this opportunity. If she tastes power, she won’t be satisfied hiding behind a man, even if that man is the king. Being a powerful minister is far more appealing than being queen.

“And all this time, my brother has been the one to show interest in her. She probably hasn’t developed any real feelings for him. A woman’s ambition often hinges on her ruthlessness. Her great success in capturing Ilyrian and Simonton City shows her strong and decisive methods.

“A woman like her shouldn’t hide behind a man. She should step forward and achieve more significant things. Should she oversee the Mystic Army from the summit of the court, or manage the inner household and the harem? She will come to understand that in time.

“If my brother lacks any other ambitions, having her by my side will be advantageous. She could become a sharp blade in my hand, aimed at the treacherous ministers who seek to usurp the throne.”

Having dressed completely, Salvador sat down again with a calm demeanor.

“Besides, the Duke of Northwatch’s family is renowned for their loyalty. Carissa won’t disappoint me. Don’t you agree?”

Derek smiled. “You’re absolutely right, Your Majesty. Lady... No, Commander Sinclair will certainly not let you down.”

As Derek turned to leave, he sighed quietly.

If Salvador genuinely wanted to promote Carissa, it would have happened long ago. His reasoning aside, him choosing to do so at such a critical juncture meant he also wanted her to investigate the rebellious traitors.

Salvador was convinced the Hell Monarch's household knew something. Once Carissa began her inquiry, she would undoubtedly leverage the information she had to uncover the truth and would yield exceptional results.

Simply put, Salvador wanted to utilize the Hell Monarch's household. At the same time, he couldn't bring himself to trust Rafael.

Derek hoped that when the time came to deal with the treasonous ministers, Salvador wouldn't turn against Rafael and Carissa once the threat was eliminated.