

## War Song 731

### Chapter 731

Rafael frowned as he read through Billy's testimony. The man was clearly terrified of dying.

He had confessed everything in painstaking detail—how Celeste seduced him and forced him to risk everything to poison Melanie Lester, the drugs he used, how the illness worsened, and even when he predicted Melanie would die. He also speculated on Celeste's motives, suggesting that she wanted to free herself entirely from Harmony Palace and escape its constraints by poisoning her own mother.

Though Rafael hadn't been handling cases for long, he could immediately see a flaw in this story.

"If Celeste really wanted to break free from Aunt Eleanor, killing her mom wouldn't help. There's a contradiction here. Aunt Eleanor's control over her hinged on her mom. If Celeste truly didn't care about her mom's life, she could have easily lived under Samuel's protection at Gracehold Estate and stayed out of Aunt Eleanor's grasp. And if she didn't want to be a concubine, she could've swindled a good sum from Samuel and disappeared. Aunt Eleanor wouldn't have found her that easily. Besides... she's clearly not afraid to go all out—Billy is almost sixty," said Rafael.

Matthew had spent years in the Supreme Court and seen all kinds of people. He replied, "Celeste was groomed for this kind of thing from a young age. She's used to using her looks and body as bargaining chips. It isn't very surprising."

"Bring her in for questioning." Rafael instructed.

"I've already sent someone to fetch her," Matthew said, "Lord Henry was quick to reveal that she was at Weaver Coffee. But by the time our people got there, she had already left. We're short on manpower."

For a regular case, the Supreme Court would have plenty of staff. But handling a treason case was different. More people would become involved, and if they didn't act quickly to control the key figures, some of them could easily slip away.

After all, Eleanor had operated in the capital for years. There was no way she hadn't managed to pull some officials into her circle. Otherwise, all the money she spent every year on socializing and connections would've gone to waste, right? And considering the origin of the weapons and armor, many people must've been involved in successfully hiding them in Harmony Palace.

Understanding the shortage of manpower, Rafael nodded. "I'll request a royal edict from the king tomorrow to borrow some men from the Capital Guard."

Despite being overwhelmed with work today, Rafael hadn't forgotten about Carissa's appointment as the commander of the Mystic Army.

"I'll head back to my estate for a bit. You should rest too. I'll be back in about an hour."

Harvey and Yuwan needed to be kept under close watch, but there wasn't any solid testimony linking them to the treason case yet. Salvador's stance was still unclear, and the Supreme Court was short on manpower, so this task would have to be handled by his people at Hell Monarch Estate.

"Yes, sir!" Matthew rubbed his temples, clearly exhausted. "Take a break, Your Highness. I'll rest in the back for a bit. After that, I'll go back to talking with Lord Henry."

He said "talking" instead of "Interrogating" because Henry was actually quite cunning despite looking like a coward. The moment the questioning got the least bit intense, he would pretend to have a fainting spell or complain of feeling unwell. And since Salvador hadn't officially revoked Eleanor's title yet, Henry was

still her prince consort. That meant some harsher methods couldn't be used.

Rafael understood this all too well.

"I'll head to the palace tomorrow and get a feel for His Majesty's stance on this matter. If he issues a clear order, it'll make our work much easier," said the prince.

"That makes sense," Matthew agreed.

Rafael grabbed his cloak as he extinguished two lamps, leaving only one dim light flickering.

"I'll head back for now,"

“Safe travels, Your Highness,” Matthew replied, following him out before heading to the back to take a quick rest before relieving Peter.

By the time Rafael returned to his estate, it was almost midnight. Jacob had arrived just fifteen minutes before him, having dropped his family off and eaten a quick meal at home.

Though he wanted to spend more time with his sister, he knew there were too many pressing matters to deal with. So, he didn’t stay overnight and rushed back to Hell Monarch Estate in the dead of night.

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Upon returning to the estate, Rafael found that his wife was still awake.

Lulu was busy pressing Carissa’s official uniform, the one for the deputy commander of the Mystic Army. Although it was just a nominal title, they had gone through the trouble of making her an official uniform back then, never truly expecting she would wear it.

The official uniform didn’t come with a ceremonial sword, and the black outfit was inlaid with emerald beads. If Carissa were to wear an official uniform from now on, it meant she couldn’t dress like a woman

anymore.

Lulu was filled with joy. When Barrett wanted to take Aurora as a rightful wife, he had belittled Carissa. Now, she was about to take on an official role. Even though being a commander was still a military position, Carissa wouldn’t be stuck in the barracks. All the pent-up frustration Lulu had felt was finally released.

“How did it go? Did you manage to interrogate anyone?” Carissa asked eagerly as

she approached her husband.

Rafael glanced at her official uniform and chuckled. “That’s the deputy commander’s uniform, but you’re officially the commander now.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ll wear it for now,” Carissa replied. Tomorrow morning, I’ll head into the palace and go to the Mystic Army’s barracks to take charge of everything. Even as the army’s former commander, you probably won’t have time to show up.”

Rafael wrapped his arms around her waist and grinned. “Whether I show up or not doesn’t matter. Ever since I returned from the Southern Frontier, I haven’t had anything to do with the Mystic Army. You handled Michael, which means you can handle everyone else. Or are you feeling a bit anxious and need me there?”

“No, I’m not anxious at all.” Carissa reached out to smooth her husband’s slightly tousled hair.

Seeing this, Lulu quickly took Pearl and stepped outside.

“You’re not nervous about facing enemies on the battlefield, so I imagine being a commander will come easily to you,” Rafael said, planting a playful kiss on her forehead. “Congratulations on becoming the first female official to enter the court since the founding of our kingdom.”

Carissa tilted her head slightly, a smile blooming on her face. “Perhaps the king just had a fleeting idea and will come up with an excuse to dismiss me in a few days.”

Rafael shook his head. “Mr. Walker personally came to deliver the royal edict. Did he say anything to you?”

Carissa relayed Derek’s words to Rafael nearly verbatim, then shared her thoughts, “I feel like overthinking is pointless. No matter what we do, the king will always suspect us. So, we might as well do what we believe is right without being overly cautious. I heard from Jacob that you’ve been holding back because of the Sinclair family and Ryan, but there’s no need to

Rafael gently pressed a finger to her lips to silence her “It’s not just that. There are many other reasons. But if you enjoy this position, that puts me at ease. Just go ahead and do your job. In fact, doing nothing or hesitating will only make the king more suspicious. It’s better to be proactive.”

Carissa smiled. “Yes, that’s my plan.”

Rafael took her hand and sat down with her. “The Supreme Court is short-staffed. Tomorrow, I’ll ask the king to borrow some people from the Capital Guard to help out, but I can’t be sure he’ll allow us to work together on this treason case. If he doesn’t grant permission, it might be possible to enlist the assistance

the Royal Citadel.”

“Right, you can ask him first. Once I’m appointed tomorrow after entering the palace, I’ll take it from there,” Carissa assured, then asked, “You haven’t told me yet—did you manage to interrogate anyone?”

“I questioned a few. We got to talk to Uncle Henry, but he didn’t reveal much.” Suddenly recalling something, Rafael added, “I also interrogated a physician from Harmony Palace. He said Celeste seduced him and instructed him to tamper with Melanie Lester’s medicine, and that she had intended for her to die. Do you think we should inform Carmen about this?”

Carissa was taken aback. “Why would Celeste do that? That’s her mom! Wasn’t she under Grand Princess Eleanor’s control because her mom was in the dungeon? Was she trying to kill her mom to gain her freedom? But that doesn’t make sense. If she didn’t care about her mom, why would she carry out Grand Princess Eleanor’s orders?”

“I don’t know her motives,” Rafael replied. “But that’s not the focus of our investigation. I just thought it was important to mention since I know you and Violet are in contact with Carmen. If the evidence is solid, Celeste could be charged with matricide, and we’d need to apprehend her. But she’s already made a run for it.”

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“Claire and the others might know where Celeste is, but I doubt they’re tracking her. After such a big case, they’re likely on standby in the capital,” Carissa said.

“I came back specifically to have them keep an eye on Yuvan’s residence in the capital, Edgeview Estate, as well as on Hartstone Estate. While they probably won’t dare make any moves right now, the production and transportation of those weapons involve a lot of people. Plus, the dungeon wasn’t full, so they are likely still working on getting more. Since Aunt Eleanor has fallen, Uncle Yuvan or Uncle Harvey will have to take over. We need to monitor them closely,” Rafael replied.

“Got it. I’ll talk to Violet about it later,” Carissa promised.

Rafael ordered someone to bring water so he could wash his face and change his undershirt. He still had some time to nap

Jacob was aware of Rafael’s return and had intended to ask him about the case. However, he heard that the prince was resting and would be heading back to the Supreme Court soon. So, Jacob decided to wait and return to the Supreme Court with him.

As the head archivist of a royal residence, Jacob wasn't part of the Supreme Court, but could offer advice to the prince. With Carissa now holding an official position, the burden of running Hell Monarch Estate would fall to Luke and Lily. Fortunately, Kyle had been around lately, so he could assist with various matters.

Rafael quickly drifted off on the couch. Though he wasn't particularly tired, he knew that getting a good rest would be a luxury before the case was resolved. Having trained himself on the battlefield to fall asleep at any moment, his body relaxed instantly

About an hour later, Rafael woke up to find Jacob waiting outside

"Lily prepared some snacks for you. Take them back with you and eat some if you get hungry," said Carissa as she helped her husband into his official attire

"Okay." Rafael rinsed his mouth with water before giving her a quick kiss. "I'm off now. I probably won't be back for dinner tomorrow. Get some sleep. Your audience with the king tomorrow is also important."

"Got it." Carissa saw Rafael off from the garden, then noticed Jacob waiting with a lantern. "You two hurry along now."

Lulu handed over the snacks, bowing slightly. "Take care, Your Highness."

Rafael accepted it and glanced back at Carissa before leaving with Jacob.

Carissa turned back to Lulu. "You should get some sleep too. I'll be up early tomorrow. You don't need to wake up to attend to me, Sydney will come by.

"It's no trouble for me. Tomorrow is your first day in your new position. I want to be up early," Lulu replied happily.

Carissa laughed. "Go to bed already, you silly girl."

Before dawn had fully broken the following day, Carissa rose. Sure enough, Lulu came in, her eyes heavy with dark circles. Sydney and Qiana had gone to bed earlier than them

so they prepared breakfast.

After Carissa washed up, she put on her official uniform for the first time. When it had arrived, she hadn't tried it on. While it felt slightly loose, it fit reasonably well once she tightened the waistband.

Sydney helped Carissa tie her hair and turned to inspect her with a smile. "You look truly impressive, Your Grace. If we didn't know better, we might think a handsome young man had just walked in."

"How

grand!" Lulu chimed in excitedly. "My lady is the commander of the Mystic Army, and she oversees tens of thousands of soldiers!"

Carissa playfully tapped Lulu's nose. "Look at you, all giddy. What, did you think I wasn't capable just because I wasn't a court official before this?"

Lulu grinned. "Of course not! Who can deny how capable you are? You're a princess consort now, so how could you not be? But being a princess consort is different. As long as the prince loves you, you can be a princess consort. But to hold an official position requires real skill, and you've got plenty of that!"

"Who are you talking about that has real skill?" Violet quipped, entering the room with a smile.

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Violet's eyes widened with astonishment. "Oh my! Let me take a good look at this honored person! Where are you off to, Your Excellency? Can I come along?"

Carissa playfully punched her friend's shoulder. "You showed up just in time. There's something I can't do without you.

"Whatever you command, Your Excellency, I shall carry it out," Violet replied teasingly as she curtsied.

Carissa rolled her eyes. “Can’t you speak normally? Do I need to give you a beating?”

Pulling out a handkerchief and waving it toward her friend’s face, Violet’s tone remained exaggeratedly sweet as she quipped, “Oh dear, you’re being so rude!”

Carissa grabbed Violet by the shoulders and tossed her over her shoulder.

She landed nimbly on her feet, flipping over with a laugh. “Now, now. What’s with the violence?”

Everyone burst into laughter, and Sydney remarked, “You’re just delightful, Ms. Spencer. It’s no wonder Lady Helen adores you so much.”

“Of course! Lady Helen loves me more than she loves herself,” Violet boasted with a haughty air, reminding everyone of Helen.

Carissa shot her an annoyed look. “Can we focus on the important stuff? I need to head out soon.”

Violet composed herself. “Alright. Everyone, step out for a moment. I need to discuss something serious with Her Excellency.”

The others stifled their laughter as they filed out of the room

Once everyone was gone, Carissa turned back with a beaming smile and asked, “So, do I look good?”

“I knew you’d be vain about this! You’re probably thrilled, aren’t you?” Violet grinned. “You look amazing- regal and full of spirit!”

Carissa studied her reflection in the mirror, barely recognizing herself. “I really do look good, don’t I?” Violet cupped her friends cheeks, practically bouncing with excitement. “Carissa, you’re truly remarkable! You’ve set a precedent for women in power! You bring glory to all the people in Meadow Ridgel Carissa couldn’t help but smile, though she tried to suppress it. “I never actually thought they’d give me a real position. To be honest, when the royal edict and appointment letter



arrived yesterday, I didn't feel much. But the moment I put on this uniform, I suddenly felt the weight on my shoulders. Yeah... I've got responsibilities now."

Her expression gradually grew serious. She understood that this role as a commander wasn't going to be easy, but she couldn't afford to bring shame to her family.

Violet took Carissa's hand. "Don't worry about anything else. Focus on your duties. I'll stay at the estate. When you need us, Rod and I will be here for you. Should I also ask Bun and Thia to come over? Alana and Leah are in the capital too—just let us know if anything comes up."

Carissa shook her head. "No need to get them to come here, at least not for now. I'm worried the king

only wants m

me to help with this case and will dismiss me once it's solved. No point in making them travel here for nothing. Besides, you and Claire are around to help.

"Have Claire keep an eye on Hartstone Estate and Edgeview Estate. Both Raf and I think they're still forging weapons. If they can't transport them, they'll likely try to destroy or hide them. We need to figure out where these weapons and armor are being forged. The Supreme Court will investigate too, but Raf suspects the people making them might make contact with Prince Yuvan."

"Leave it to me," Violet replied confidently.

"And then there's Celeste..." Carissa paused for a moment, then decided to tell Violet the truth, explaining, "You should go talk to Carmen. We deceived her with the whole October fifteenth plan, so she might feel a bit betrayed. She might think we didn't trust her. Tell her to be careful of her sister. Celeste got involved with one of the physicians in Harmony Palace and tampered with Melanie's medicine. It looks like she was trying to kill her mom."

\*She p

poisoned her own mom? That's brutal!" Violet stared at Carissa in shock. "But why?"

“Only Celeste knows the reason. Either way, go and warn Carmen. Celeste has gone into hiding. She’s probably looking for a place to lay low. Right now, the only person she can rely on is Carmen, so heads-up before something bad really happens. Also, send some medicine to Melanie or have Ivy check on her. Her condition is probably getting worse.

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Violet nodded. “Got it, Ivy and I will handle it. Don’t worry.”

Carissa pulled her down to sit as well. “There’s something else I need to tell you in advance, so you can prepare yourself.”

Violet plopped down next to her friend, raising an eyebrow. “Why so serious? You’re scaring me. What is it? Just spit it out!”

Still unused to the style, Carissa adjusted her hair as she spoke, “Grand Princess Eleanor is pretty much done for now. Prince Yuvan and his people will definitely be trying to find out whether she’s confessed anything or not. Anyone who’s had dealings with court officials won’t dare reach out to her. I have a feeling your cousin will come looking for you.”

Violet’s expression turned cold. “She won’t get a single word out of me. Don’t worry about me leaking anything. With her level of cunning, she couldn’t trick me if she tried.”

After a brief pause, she tilted her head. “Wait, are you asking me to pretend to be friendly and play along to fish information out of her?”

Carissa shook her head. “No, just treat her the same way you always have. Don’t change a thing. She’ll probably come with Lady Fiona, who’s sharp. If you so much as hint that you’re suspicious of Prince Yuvan, she’ll pick up on it.”

“That’s easy, then. Ever since Molly married Prince Yuvan, I haven’t given her the time of day. I’ll just keep doing that,” said Violet.

Carissa nodded in agreement. “Exactly. Don’t suddenly act all warm and friendly—that’ll obvious something’s up.”

“Got it. Aren’t you heading to the palace? Go on.” Violet waved her hand, urging her.

Canssa glanced at the sky but stayed seated.

“Why aren’t you leaving yet?”

just

make it

Carissa grinned sheepishly. “I was a little excited and... got up too early. It’s still dark out.” Violet chuckled. “If you leave now, the sun will probably be up by the time you get to the palace.” “There’s no morning court session today, and I doubt the king will be in the royal study that early.” Violet looked surprised. “Didn’t Mr. Walker tell you what time you’re supposed to go see the king?” Carissa smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, he did mention it when he gave me the royal edict—around nine in the morning.”

“What? It’s only five now! Why did you get up so early? You could’ve slept for another hour!” Violet exclaimed, scrunching up her face.

Carissa stood up, pacing in circles before dropping into a basic martial arts stance. “I’m just nervous, you know?”

Violet burst out laughing and grabbed Carissa’s hand. You’re gonna be the death of me! I thought you

weren’t nervous at all. Yesterday, you looked totally unbothered when you received the edict. Come on, let’s head outside and spar a little. It’ll loosen you up.”

“Great idea!” Carissa stretched her legs, clearly excited. “It’s been forever since I’ve had a proper workout. But just so we’re clear—this is just a friendly match, no serious fighting.”

“As long as you don’t go too hard, I won’t either.” Violet jumped a few times, still nimble on her feet. Besides, we’re only using fists, no weapons. Can’t get too serious without those.”

Out in the courtyard, the sound of fists cutting through the air echoed as Carissa and Violet went back and forth. They launched punches, blocked with their elbows, kicked through the air, and more.

It felt like they were back in Meadow Ridge, carefree and full of energy. The cool breeze helped blow away the heat rising from their sparring. As the sun began to rise through the mist, its soft glow didn't hide the strength they both radiated.

Travis had just woken up when he heard the sounds of fighting. He leaped into the air and bounded to the courtyard. Seeing how excitedly his friends were sparring, he joined in without hesitation.

“Here I come! Haha! Take this!”

“Hey! Why are you aiming at my face? I'll kill you!” Violet yelled as she dodged.

Travis laughed heartily. “What's wrong with hitting the face? Behold my invincible fist, Cari!”

With a loud thud, he aimed a punch right at Carissa's face, leaving her stunned.

For a moment, she was frozen in shock. Then, she roared, “I was supposed to watch your ‘invincible fist’, not get punched by it! Why would you hit me? Oh, for heaven's sake, I'm going to the palace today! My eye oh no, my eye!”

She dashed inside to check her reflection in the mirror. Luckily, her eye was only slightly swollen and red there was no bruising. But it hurt badly.

“You're done for.” Violet turned and punched Travis in the face. “That's what you get for showing off. We were just sparring, not going all out.”

That single blow sent Travis crashing to the ground.

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The courtyard was in chaos. Violet's furious shouting had sent Travis fleeing in panic, while Lulu and Sydney rushed to get a hot compress to reduce the swelling on Carissa and Violet's faces and eyes.

It wasn't entirely ineffective. After all, once they applied some powder, Violet's face didn't look as bruised anymore. But Carissa's eye socket was slowly turning black and blue.

Lulu offered to put powder on her too, but Carissa waved her off. "What a joke! Have you ever seen a court official wearing makeup? No, leave it."

"But your eye doesn't seem to open as wide as usual. You still need to appear before the king today. Wouldn't this be considered disrespectful?" Lulu said anxiously.

Carissa didn't think it was a big deal. During the audience, she would mostly keep her head down anyway. She rarely ever raised her head to meet the king's eyes directly. And even if she did, the distance between them would be far enough that it wouldn't be noticeable.

Carissa went to the stables herself to fetch her horse.

As she stroked its head, she squinted with one eye and whispered, "From now on, we're off to a new battlefield, Lightning. We'll face it together, side by side."

Lightning had been idle in the stables for too long, only occasionally being taken out for a walk or two. Usually, when Carissa went out, it was by carriage, which wasn't pulled by Lightning. Now, the horse snorted through his nose and scraped the ground with its hooves, clearly eager to go.

The stable hand stepped forward and respectfully said, "Don't worry, Your Grace. The saddle is brand new, and I've trimmed his hooves. Early this morning, I fed him the best hay and grain. Lightning is in excellent shape."

Carissa patted the new saddle. It was true what people said-clothes made the man, and a saddle made the horse. The new gear made Lightning's already regal bearing even more impressive.

She took the whip from the stable hand and boldly instructed, "Go see Luke later and ask for a reward. Tell him I sent you."

"Thank you, Your Grace! I wish you continued success."

The stable hand couldn't stop grinning, though he was curious as to why one of Carissa's eyes was swollen and bruised. But with a reward on the line, he wasn't about to ask.

After Carissa left, Violet also headed out with half her face still swollen. That troublemaker Travis had gotten involved again, so things were bound to go south.

There was no morning court session today, but Salvador was ever diligent and had risen early. Ever since the treason case came up, he hadn't been sleeping well.

Since Salvador ascended the throne, he had been suspicious that someone was plotting to usurp him. But up until now, those suspicions were based on nothing more than paranoia. However, he had hard evidence today. It proved that his earlier fears weren't unfounded-there really were predators lurking with ambitions for his crown. He hadn't slept well, and waking early had left him in a foul mood. Last night, even the queen had received a scolding when he stayed in her quarters.

At the crack of dawn, officials were already gathered outside the royal study, waiting to be called in. Rafael hadn't reported in yet, and Salvador had just finished discussing matters with Jeremiah when Derek came in.

"Commander Sinclair has arrived and is waiting for an audience, Your Majesty."

Salvador paused for a moment before finally recalling that "Commander Sinclair" was none other than Carissa. He let out a slow breath. "Summon her in."

"Commander Sinclair is granted an audience!" Derek announced loudly.

Carissa adjusted her hair and strode confidently into the hall. She was tall to begin with, but in her official uniform, she cut an even more impressive figure.

She knelt on one knee. "Greetings, Your Majesty. Long live the king!"

"You may rise," Salvador calmly replied.

Carissa stood. "Thank you, Your Majesty."

Salvador looked at her. "Lift your head. Let me see your spirit."

Carissa hesitated briefly before slowly raising her head. The hall doors were closed, but there was a Night Pearl glowing from the crystal chandelier overhead. During the day, its light wasn't usually noticeable. But with no natural light and the lamps unlit, the Night Pearl stood out.

Coincidentally, its soft glow fell directly on her face, revealing the bruise around her left eye.

Salvador's heavy mood lightened a bit at the sight of her black eye.

Teasingly, he asked, "What's this? Has the Chief Judge dared to lay a hand on you?"

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"Yes, Your Majesty."

The Mystic Army wasn't easy to manage, especially the high-ranking officers. The soldiers in the Mystic Army were chosen for their exceptional skills, and with skill came strong personalities—some might even call them troublemakers.

When Carissa first took command, Michael hadn't respected her either. She had to beat him in a duel to win his loyalty.

Salvador added, "There's something else I need to discuss with you. I have other plans for the Crown Guard's current commander, so I'm considering promoting Barrett to that position. Do you have any objections?"

Carissa was caught off guard. Barrett was originally part of the Capital Guard, so even if he were to be promoted, it should be within the same unit. Promoting him directly to be commander of the Crown Guard would be a big leap.

Besides, from what she knew, Barrett wasn't the only one who distinguished himself during the incident at Harmony Palace. Yet, he was the only one being promoted. And for it to happen on her first day as commander, people would surely assume she had a hand in it.

She was the Hell Monarch's princess consort, yet she was promoting her former husband.

What would people think?

Carissa understood that being the Mystic Army's commander wasn't going to be easy. There would undoubtedly be more situations like this in the future, where her actions would be scrutinized and criticized. If she couldn't handle the pressure, she might as well resign now.

"As long as it is your decision, Your Majesty, I have no objections," she replied calmly.

Salvador smiled, a knowing smile that hinted at something more beneath the surface. "Good. Then, it's settled. The Mystic Army's office is in the Capital Guard's headquarters. Once you get there, submit a recommendation letter to the Civil Department under your name. They'll issue the official transfer documents. I'll also formally establish an office for the Crown Guard. Of course, Barrett will essentially only be the deputy commander. You'll remain in charge."

He was really using her name.

Goodness, Salvador wasted no time putting her on the edge!

Well, that was fine. If her relationship with Rafael wasn't solid and they couldn't trust each other, this would surely plant the first seeds of doubt between them.

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Carissa didn't argue. After all, Salvador wasn't really asking for her opinion—he was practically issuing a direct order.

He gave her the position of commander, but at the same time, he promoted someone who had a grudge against the Hell Monarch's household. It was a move meant to sow discord between Carissa and Rafael

Maybe Salvador thought this would give him a sense of security,

As Carissa left the palace, Derek watched her retreating figure with a worried expression. He wasn't sure how many more tests of trust she and Rafael could withstand.

The truth was that Salvador could have appointed Barrett directly without involving the Mystic Army's commander. If he really wanted Carissa to handle the transfer, it didn't need to go through the Civil Department—just a simple notification would have sufficed.



But Salvador was trying hard to keep everything under his control, which only made things uncomfortable for everyone involved, including Barrett.

After leaving the palace, Carissa headed straight for the Capital Guard's headquarters. Since it was her first day on duty, Michael and Max were already waiting for her there with their men. Fortunately, no one seemed to pay much attention to the bruise around her eye. Or if they did notice, they at least had the decency not to stare.

The Royal Guard's commander, Alistair, hadn't arrived yet. Carissa knew who he was—Oliver's cousin. Their family had many sons, with Alistair being the most talented among them.

Oliver didn't have a good relationship with his relatives, especially Alistair. This was mainly because the latter was truly capable, while the former hadn't achieved much and

wasn't able to bring any fortune or honor to the family after inheriting the earldom. In contrast, Alistair had risen swiftly through the ranks, eventually becoming commander of the Royal Guard,

If they were still under the previous king's rule, the Royal Guard wouldn't have been part of the Mystic Army, which would have given Alistair even more authority. While the Royal Guard technically fell under the Mystic Army now, Alistair didn't seem to care.

But now that the units were officially merging and he would have to report to a woman, he probably wasn't too happy about it.

Carissa had long since investigated these key figures within the Mystic Army, and Rafael had discussed them with her as well. So, when Alistair didn't show up today, she didn't mind. She could accept having sharp-edged subordinates as long as they didn't cross the line.

Max didn't exhibit any doubt toward Carissa. In fact, he was rather respectful. Max and Thomas' mother, Alice, were siblings. In other words, he was Thomas' uncle.

When Max and Carissa met for the first time, he approached her confidently and said, "Thank you, Commander Sinclair. It's thanks to you and His Highness that Ivan was saved."

"Ivan Lewis? That's your nephew, right?" Carissa asked

"Yes," Max replied.

Carissa smiled. “He did well. Has he been assigned to a post now?”

“He’s currently serving in the Crown Guard, which is also part of the Mystic Army now,” Max said.

Carissa hadn’t known this. She only knew that Felix and Thomas still hadn’t been assigned their roles.

“What rank?” she inquired.

“Second–tier guard, Your Grace,” Max responded.

Carissa nodded. “Tell him to do his best.”

The Southern Frontier campaign had been Ivan’s first battle, during which he had been captured. But afterward, he joined the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team, where he earned some merits.

Naturally, Barrett had also distinguished himself at the Southern Frontier, especially during the final recapture of Simonton City after the Victory Pass battle. Yet, he had been promoted to commander of the Crown Guard, while Ivan had only achieved a second–tier guard status.

There was little that could be done about that. Ivan had fought on the battlefield as just an ordinary soldier, while Barrett had already been appointed as a general at the time, though various circumstances had led to his repeated demotions afterward.

Salvador still held high hopes for Barrett. The king favored people like him, whose weaknesses were clear and easily manageable.

After meeting with the necessary subordinates, Carissa said, “I had an audience with the king today. He mentioned that the Supreme Court is short–handed, so we need to transfer some personnel from the Capital Guard to help them out. Michael, please manage this and report any issues directly to me without delays.”

“Understood!” Michael nodded. “I’ll take care of it right away.”

“I’ll go with you. The king instructed me to personally conduct the hearings if anyone with noble titles is involved, so I need to be there,” Carissa added,

Just as they stepped out of the Capital Guard’s headquarters, they spotted Alistair approaching with the twelve captains of the Royal Guard.

Chapter 739

Alistair was in his thirties, with well-defined features and a strong, fit build that wasn’t overly large. As he approached Carissa with his men, there was a hint of disdain in his expression,

He nodded respectfully, but his eyes betrayed his arrogance as he said, “I apologize for my late arrival. I had matters to attend to. Please forgive me, Commander Sinclair.”

Carissa nodded slightly, glancing at the twelve captains standing in two rows behind him. Each one looked formidable, their expressions dismissive, as if they couldn’t care less about a female commander.

It was clear—the caliber of a military leader was often reflected in the nature of their soldiers.

“There’s nothing much to discuss today, so let’s disperse and get back to our duties...”

Before Carissa could finish her sentence, Alistair interjected, “Since there’s nothing of importance we’ve all seen each other, I’ll take my leave. There’s a great deal to attend to in the palace.”

With that, he turned and strode away, completely disregarding Carissa.

Frowning, Michael called out, “Alistair!”

The man in question didn’t even glance back, simply continuing on his way.

and

With a sigh, Michael turned to Carissa. “Your Grace, don’t take it to heart. Commander Prince just has a bit of a cold demeanor. It’s nothing personal.”

Carissa could sense Michael was defending Alistair, so she didn't press the issue.

"Alright, let's head to the Supreme Court," she said.

The Supreme Court was indeed bustling today. Rafael had returned after resting at home for a short while, but had been busy and hadn't interrogated Eleanor yet.

There were two reasons for the delay. First, they weren't in a rush to conduct the hearing. They planned to let Eleanor stew for a few days. Second, they needed corroborating evidence to counter her potential claims. As a result, all sorts of minor officials and consuls from Harmony Palace were summoned for questioning first.

Additionally, there were some individuals who had fled and needed to be apprehended for further interrogation.

Carissa and Michael arrived just in time. The artists at the Supreme Court had just finished sketching the fugitives based on the servants' descriptions and were ready to hand the portraits over to the Capital Guard for further investigation.

Everyone was so caught up in their tasks that they didn't even notice the commander was a woman. Carissa reached for the sketches and flipped through them one by one. It was only when Matthew caught a glimpse of her slender fingers that he finally turned his attention to her face. The moment he saw the bruise around her eye, he paused, then recalled that the Hell Monarch's princess consort was now the commander of the Mystic Army.

He glanced at Rafael, noticing that the prince's gaze was practically glued to Carissa's face. The tenderness in his eyes was almost palpable, tinged with an unmistakable hint of concern.

Chapter 740

Carissa jolted back, startled. "Don't do that! What if someone comes in and sees?"

"No one's coming in," Rafael said, amused at her serious demeanor that added an air of authority to her presence. "Alright, I'll behave. You sit properly too. What else did His Majesty say?"

He withdrew his hand and sat back down.

“His Majesty mentioned that we need to investigate the families of officials who have had too much contact with Eleanor. If anyone with noble titles is involved, I’m the one who will conduct the questioning,

Carissa explained.

“I see. That does involve quite a few people. You’d better be mentally prepared. Many may not yield any results, and it might just be a waste of breath.”

Just as he said that, Rafael suddenly realized something and asked, “Did His Majesty mean to bring them to the Supreme Court for questioning, or does he want you to go to them?”

“He said to bring them back for questioning.” Carissa clarified.

Rafael shook his head. “That’s not appropriate. Creating such a fuss will damage the reputations of those noble families and breed resentment towards the court. The Supreme Court is a public institution, and it’ll only lead to embarrassment if we bring them in without any evidence. I suspect this will make everyone quite displeased.”

Carissa frowned. “I hadn’t considered that. You’re right. Since we’re the ones handling the case, they wouldn’t dare to complain about His Majesty, but they would definitely take their frustrations out on us. I can’t believe I overlooked that.”

“You just took office today. It’s natural to be a bit nervous, Rafael reassured her.

After thinking for a moment, he suggested, “How about this? It might be tough, but for anyone who has had too much contact with Eleanor, you should go ask them directly. Only bring back those who seem suspicious.”

“Alright!” Carissa agreed.

“And there’s someone you really need to question—Florence,” Rafael added.