

War Song 741

Chapter 741

Florence, who was advanced in age, was kept in a small and relatively clean cell. She was also separated from the other Harmony Palace servants. Since being taken to the Supreme Court, she hadn't eaten or drank anything, nor had she spoken a word.

Matthew had personally questioned her and urged her to eat, but she just lay in her cell, appearing resigned to death,

Rafael was well aware that Florence wouldn't speak ill of Eleanor. After all, she had raised the grand princess, and their bond had long since transcended that of a mere servant and her mistress. Over the years, while people came and went from Eleanor's side, Florence had remained steadfastly loyal.

As a result, she was privy to all of Eleanor's secrets—many of which were quite sordid.

"Matthew interrogated Kurt today. We learned that Aunt Eleanor initially ordered that your uncle's face be ruined and his entire family be killed. It was Florence who intervened and told Kurt not to carry out the order. Otherwise, your uncle and his family would have already been sent to their graves, Rafael revealed.

"Grand Princess Eleanor's truly deranged! She'll go to any lengths to drag anyone who looks like my mother back to be a concubine for Henry and bear his children. As for anyone who looks like my father, she wants to ruin their faces and murder their whole family! Is she out of her mind?" Carissa snapped, her anger flaring.

"So, o

only Florence knows how many people Aunt Eleanor has harmed. She isn't just involved in treasonous plots. There are blood debts to consider as well. His Majesty might not care about the latter, but whether it's the living or the dead victims, they all deserve justice," said Rafael.

Carissa nodded in agreement.

While treason was a heinous crime, every life destroyed by Eleanor was unique and irreplaceable.

“I need to talk to her.”

“I’ll have someone bring her to an interrogation room.”

“Don’t bring any torture devices.”

Rafael chuckled. “We don’t have any torture devices in the interrogation rooms. There’s a designated room for that. If we need the devices, we either take the person to that specific room or bring the tools to them. So far, we haven’t used any torture methods in our interrogations. Come on, I’ll take you there.”

The architecture of the Supreme Court building, which covered a large area, was grand and imposing. The prison cells were located in the rear left section of the building, with one having to take several detours to

reach it.

In the back area, there weren’t many trees—just a few short ones scattered here and there. Now, most of their leaves had fallen, leaving the branches mostly bare. The interrogation rooms were toward the rear right, a row of about seven or eight small huts. Rafael opened one of them and instructed someone to bring Florence there.

The interrogation room’s small inner space was separated by a partition screen. During interrogations, someone could sit behind the screen and listen, hearing everything—even the faintest sigh.

The interrogation area allowed enough light for those behind the partition screen to see the expressions and movements of the person being questioned. However, without a light behind the screen, the interrogated individual wouldn’t be able to see who was behind the partition screen.

Carissa sat with her back to the screen and examined the interrogation room.

Aside from two tables and three chairs, there were no torture devices in sight. In front of her stood a desk lit by two lamps, one on each side, with a third positioned for the clerk. However, the clerk wouldn’t sit there today, and would instead record Florence’s testimony from behind the partition screen, sitting with Rafael.

The setup would create an illusion for Florence, making her believe she was alone with Carissa without any onlookers.

When Florence was brought in, she could barely walk, weak from not eating or drinking. She had to be supported by two men as they brought her inside.

Carissa looked at Florence's sunken cheeks and chapped, peeling lips. The old woman's eyes were devoid of life, and she radiated an air of desolation. She could barely sit upright, but as soon as she recognized Carissa, she placed her trembling hands on the table and struggled to straighten herself.

Chapter 742

Florence's cold and hollow gaze was fixated intently on Carissa, who returned her stare.

She had seen Florence during her visit to Harmony Palace, where the old woman had worn a stone-blue silk gown. Authority had been etched into every wrinkle of her face, instilling fear in many who crossed her path.

However, Florence was dressed in a wrinkled indigo outfit now, and her hair was a mess. Her eyelids sagged and dark spots marred her once-proud visage, revealing the toll of age and hardship. She looked painfully thin, her frailty accentuated by worry and her refusal to eat, making her appear near skeletal. Though Florence seemed indifferent, caught in a state of waiting for death, the truth was that she was anxious—otherwise, she wouldn't have aged so dramatically in such a short time.

Matthew had spoken to her, but she hadn't uttered a word, not even sparing a glance in his direction. Now, when facing Carissa, she spoke first, saying, "Don't think you'll hear a single word against the grand princess from me. I advise you not to waste your breath."

"Kurt said you saved my uncle and his family. If it weren't for you, they might not be alive. For that alone, I thank you," Carissa replied.

Florence scoffed and coldly said, "How presumptuous. I had no intention of saving them. It was my people who captured them. Whether they lived or died was entirely up to my whims."

"Regardless, they walked out of Grand Princess Eleanor's residence unharmed," Carissa remarked.

“Stop pretending. You want me to testify against Grand Princess Eleanor, don’t you? Don’t bother. The grand princess is innocent. She knows nothing of what transpired. Everything was orchestrated by Kurt and I, Florence shot back.

“What things are you referring to?” Carissa asked, regarding Florence with an unfazed demeanor. “There are plenty of unsavory matters hidden within Harmony Palace.”

“Are you talking about the women in the back courtyard? Hmph!” Florence’s eyes glinted with resentment as she locked her gaze on Carissa. “Anyone has the right to criticize that matter, except for you and your family. Your dad, Hector Sinclair, ruined the grand princess’ life. Those women in the courtyard were victims of your dad’s actions too.”

Carissa didn’t let anger show on her face, but her eyes were icy. “What terrible sins did my dad commit that harmed Grand Princess Eleanor and those women? Was he fickle? Did he deceive Grand Princess Eleanor’s feelings? Or did he gather those women for Lord Henry to ruin him?”

Florence chuckled coldly. “Yes, he did nothing at all. But do you dare say those women didn’t suffer because of him?

Carissa’s voice grew slightly harsher as she retorted, “Why wouldn’t I? Their suffering stemmed from the sment born out of Grand Princess Eleanor’s unrequited love. My dad had nothing to do with it. Even if you want to absolve her, don’t drag my dad into this and tarnish his reputation. As a member of the Sinclair family, I must say that my dad was unfortunate to have crossed paths with her.”

Florence fell silent, her hands gripping the edge of the table tightly.

Carissa’s gaze shifted from the old woman’s hands to her slightly trembling face. She could tell that Florence understood everything, yet chose to turn a blind eye out of favoritism and indulgence.

“You know the truth in your heart, but you refuse to accept it, Florence. You think that it was a privilege that Grand Princess Eleanor set her sights on my dad. Or perhaps, in your mind, she can do no wrong. “Everything she did was out of necessity, and any pain she felt justifies the harm she caused to others. For her happiness, you’d excuse anything and even allow her to hurt others. But Grand Princess Eleanor isn’t the only person with feelings, Florence. Everyone else is human too, with their own joys and sorrows. Those women had lives of their own, and because of your so-called heartbroken princess, they’ve been ruined for life.”

Florence's knuckles turned white. "You must acknowledge that some people are born noble, while others are born lowly, Lady Carissa. The noble can do anything to the lowly and call it a blessing to them."

Chapter 743

Carissa didn't find Florence's words ridiculous. Instead, she felt a twinge of sadness. Regardless of the old woman's current thoughts, it was clear she had once held those beliefs deeply.

Carissa chose not to counter Florence's claims. From the way she secretly spared Daniel and his family from Eleanor's wrath, it was evident her mindset had changed. The things she said now weren't meant to persuade anyone else—Florence was merely trying to convince herself.

"Alright, since everything was done by you and Kurt and has nothing to do with Grand Princess Eleanor, why don't you tell me how many women you've brought into Harmony Palace over the years, how many have died, and how many baby boys were killed?" Carissa asked.

Florence fell silent, her expression growing increasingly grim.

"They're already dead. You owe them some justice and should let the families of the abducted women know they don't have to search anymore. Besides, Grand Princess Eleanor has committed the heinous crime of treason and won't escape death. By revealing the identities of those women, you would be accumulating some merit on her behalf," Carissa pressed.

Slowly, Florence lifted her gaze to meet Carissa's. Her lips trembled violently—perhaps from hunger or perhaps from the weight of that accusation of treason toward Eleanor.

Carissa didn't push further. Instead, she fell silent and waited.

After a long pause, Florence's hoarse voice finally broke the stillness, asking. "Could you bring me a cup of water?"

There was a jug of water on the table that had been prepared for Carissa. She hadn't touched it, so she poured a cup and pushed it toward Florence.

"Here."

With hands that resembled brittle twigs, the old woman shakily grasped the cup. She drank it all in one go, then cradled the empty cup in her palms. She managed to offer Carissa a smile that looked more like a grimace.

“I remember...everyone. You must have searched every corner of Harmony Palace by now, right? There’s an apple tree outside my room, and next to it is a stone bench that can be moved. If you shift that stone bench, you’ll find a box buried beneath it. Inside the box is a notebook where I’ve recorded everything.”

She set down the cup, her hands slowly falling to her sides. She could no longer hold herself upright, and murky tears spilled from her eyes.

“Those concubines aside, there were three baby boys I can never get over. The first one... he didn’t cry when he was born. Instead, he smiled at me while I held him in my arms, his little gums pink and perfect. Have you ever seen a baby who comes into the world laughing instead of crying? I had never seen anything like it. I treasured that moment, and I smiled when he smiled.

Florence covered her face with her hands, unable to continue, her shoulders shaking with silent sobs.

Carissa clenched her fists, fully aware of the fate that had met all the baby boys in Harmony Palace. They entered this world and opened their eyes just long enough to catch a glimpse of it before being snuffed out. To inflict such cruelty on an infant was a heartlessness that made even a snake seem merciful.

After having cried to her heart’s content, Florence regained some composure and hastened in her narration.

“Grand Princess Eleanor deemed the baby who smiled at birth unlucky. Despite just having given birth, the concubine tried to snatch him away and even dared to defy the grand princess. In a fit of rage, the grand princess killed the baby right in front of Lord Henry. As for that concubine, she had her fingers and toes chopped off and suffered for days before dying. I... I was the one who did it. I was also the one who threw that baby to his death.

“Three years later, there was a pair of twins. I carried one in each arm as I walked outside. I showed them to Grand Princess Eleanor, then told her I would take them outside to suffocate them. That

was the first time I harbored a rebellious thought against the grand princess, I wanted to send them away. Once they were gone, their fate would be up to them...

“But it didn’t work out. That day happened to be your fourth brother’s Lunar Blessing Ceremony. Grand Princess Eleanor was absolutely furious and needed to vent... And just like that, not a single baby was allowed to live. It wasn’t only the boys. Not every baby girl survived either—it all depended on her mood.” Earlier, Florence had insisted she wouldn’t say a bad word about Eleanor, but now, she had done just that. It was clear she loved Eleanor, but those three boys would forever remain an insurmountable hurdle in her heart.

Chapter 744

As Carissa listened to Florence’s words, the rage inside her nearly consumed her.

It was the details of everything that had happened that truly shattered one’s heart.

Carissa fought to keep her anger in check and not let it show. She pretended to be unaffected as she listened calmly and rationally. The more Florence revealed, the more Carissa would have to use as evidence. When the time came to interrogate Eleanor, be it for the charge of treason or the crimes against those women, all of this would seal the grand princess’ fate.

“I know there’s no way Grand Princess Eleanor can escape what’s coming now.” Florence sighed. “But she used to be such a lively, cheerful girl. She was so noble, and she had the world at her feet. She could’ve had any man in the kingdom, so many of them would’ve lined up for her.

“And yet, she fell in love at first sight with General Sinclair, a mere military man. Of all people, it had to be him, who didn’t even care for her... At first, all I wanted was to make her happy.”

Lost in her memories, Florence no longer cared whom she was speaking to. She had kept these feelings bottled up for so long. Now that she was old, her heart had softened. The things she had once done without hesitation now chilled her to the bone when she thought back on them.

Her words were disjointed and came out in no particular order. It was as if she were merely voicing whatever came to mind.

“As long as she was happy, nothing else mattered. She was a princess—she could do whatever she wanted. She cursed King Augustus and blamed him for destroying her chance at happiness. He had once adored her more than anything, but the year she begged him for a royal edict to marry General

Sinclair, he refused. She knelt before him from dawn until dusk, and from dusk until dawn the next day, but still, he

wouldn't relent. He was so cruel.

"When Lady Chloe was still alive, King Augustus would give Grand Princess Eleanor anything she wanted. And what was General Sinclair compared to that? There are so many men in the world who are skilled in martial arts, not just him.

"Even if she insisted it had to be him, why couldn't he remain a general after becoming a prince consort? If tradition states a prince consort can't hold power, then change the tradition! For Grand Princess Eleanor, why not make an exception?"

Florence looked up at Carissa, her eyes filled with deep resentment, though her expression was conflicted and torn.

"The person I hate most in this life is General Sinclair, she admitted. "I've never seen someone so ungrateful. Grand Princess Eleanor couldn't get her dad's approval, so she went to General Sinclair directly. And what did he do? He avoided her like the plague whenever he saw her coming.

"She sent him gifts, so he ordered his servants to bar the gates and refused to let her people in. Worse yet, he quickly got engaged to someone else, and before long, he was married. He did it to crush her hopes entirely. In doing so, he broke her heart."

Florence sneered, her voice hoarse and aged yet filled with a frenzied hatred as she continued ranting, Everyone says he's a man of great stature, but he shattered the grand princess' heart and ruined her life. You fight for the rights of those women and concubines, saying they deserve their own lives—what about

Grand Princess Eleanor? Why should she be destroyed? I cherish her above all else! What gave General Sinclair the right to hurt her like that?"

Wiping her tears with the back of her hand, she revealed a desolate smile. "Yes, I hate General Sinclair so much, yet deep down, I can't help but admire him. Isn't that contradictory? The grand princess feels the same way. Hate, love, and respect—it can all be wrapped up in a single person. It's both ridiculous and tragic. Every move General Sinclair made, every report of victory or defeat from the battlefield... it all pulled at Grand Princess Eleanor's heart."

Suddenly, Florence placed her hands on the table. She leaned forward as tears streamed down her face.” When the news of his death reached us, I thought that whether it was love or hate, Grand Princess Eleanor would finally let go now that he was gone.

“But she didn’t. She cried for him until she nearly fainted. Afterward, she held me and said, ‘Florence, my heart feels so empty. It’s as if there’s nothing left. But why does it still hurt so much? It hurts to the point where I can barely breathe“.”

Florence sighed deeply, gradually retreating into herself. “I know Grand Princess Eleanor will never let go of General Sinclair in this lifetime. Even if he’s dead or turned to ashes, he still lives on in her heart. Life... it’s all fate, isn’t it?”

With that, she fainted, collapsing to the ground.

Chapter 745

Rafael and the scribe walked in from behind the partition screen. The prince first embraced Carissa. before instructing someone to take Florence away.

Carissa remained composed and calmly instructed, “Go to the apple tree and find that box. She noted down the origins of those women”

“Understood!”

The scribe left to carry out the task.

As Carissa leaned against Rafael, it felt as if her heart and throat had clogged up, leaving her with an indescribable discomfort.

“Let’s not dig any deeper,” Rafael said, concern etched on his face. “Don’t hold onto what she said. Your dad is blameless. It was Aunt Eleanor’s own obsession that harmed both herself and others.”

Carissa’s face had turned pale, and it took a while for her to finally find her voice again.

“I’m fine. I can continue the interrogation. Once Florence is better, I’ll question her again. At least we now know the origins of those women. We can send someone to inform their families. There’s

no need for them to keep searching or live in fear every day like Jacob's family, wondering if their loved ones are still out there. They will know those women are dead now.

Carissa's legs felt weak at the thought.

Once a person was gone, everything was lost. The pain of losing a loved one was no better than the agony of waiting in uncertainty.

Taking a deep breath, she steadied herself and added. Moreover, from what Florence said, we know that Grand Princess Eleanor hates King Augustus. King Sigmund was King Augustus' most favored son, which suggests she might be seeking revenge. It's likely that she and Prince Yuvan were plotting treason even while King Sigmund was still alive... At least now we understand her motive for rebellion."

Rafael nodded, still holding her close. "Yes, uncovering this information is invaluable to us. We won't need to question her further."

He had observed everything from behind the partition screen—Carissa's discomfort and her tightly clenched fists at her sides. In her heart, Hector was a towering hero. Yet, he had been drawn into the tangled web of Eleanor's passions and vendettas. After sacrificing so much for years, Hector continued to be blamed, and Carissa's anger and pain were palpable.

After taking a moment to compose herself, Carissa pressed her hands against Rafael's chest, fighting back the turmoil in her stomach.

"She's so cruel. How can someone be so vicious? Her so-called deep feelings don't move anyone, yet she's harmed so many people. Most of those women resembled my mom in some way. She even used my mom as an excuse to hurt others. I can't rest until see her ground into dust."

"Don't worry. Evil will be repaid in kind," Rafael said softly, patting her back. "Let's step outside for some fresh air."

"Okay, we'll interrogate Florence slowly once she wakes up."

The two stepped outside. Sunlight broke through the clouds, dispelling some of the shadows from the interrogation room.

Caked in thick makeup, Violet made her way to Lester Estate to see Carmen. Given her past dealings with Carmen, the Lester family members recognized Violet, but she was stopped at the entrance by the gatekeeper.

After Eleanor's downfall, the Lester family had lost both their powerful connection and their source of support. So, they had turned away Melanie Lester, who appeared ill and bedraggled. Instead of accepting her and Carmen into the family, they placed the mother and daughter in a shabby house not far from Lester Estate.

"I've told you there's no such person here. If you're looking for her, go find her in that little shack," said the gatekeeper, who was especially irritable with Violet.

Having taken a punch from Travis earlier that morning, Violet was already fuming. Now, being confronted with the gatekeeper's insolence at Lester Estate pushed her over the edge.

She seized his ear and shouted, "Lead the way!"

The gatekeeper yelped in pain, drawing the attention of the Lester family members inside. Melanie's elder relative, Andrew Lester, rushed out with some people. Upon seeing Violet twisting the gatekeeper's ear, he was enraged and opened his mouth to protest.

But before he could utter a word, Violet kicked the front door with a powerful thrust, sending it crashing down with a loud bang. The noise drained the color from Andrew's face, and he hesitated to approach her.

Violet continued to drag the gatekeeper by the ear, walking a short distance until they reached the small cabin. Once she knocked on the door and saw Carmen, she finally let go of him.

Chapter 746

Carmen was taken aback when she saw Violet. Then she recalled that Carissa and Violet had deceived her, and it left her feeling somewhat disgruntled. Even if their actions were for the sake of the plan, deception was still deception. So, Carmen could only muster the bare minimum of politeness.

"Is there something you need, Ms: Spencer?"

Violet wasn't one to ignore subtle cues. Seeing that Carmen was probably upset, she asked softly, "Can I come in and talk?"

Carmen stepped aside. "Please go ahead."

Carmen had just acted on impulse. After all, she knew that if Carissa and Violet hadn't kept the plan from her, she would definitely have told Henry. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined that her own dad would betray her.

The little cabin was modest. It had a tiled roof, and one could see the entire place in one glance. A small

kitchen was outside, while the interior consisted of a small hall and a single room. Sunlight fire to

through the gaps in the crumbling roof, clearly indicating that it was in disrepair. If a heavy rain fall, the place would surely become a pond.

Violet tried her best to ignore the discomfort, but sitting on the rickety old bench in the cramped hall with sunlight streaming down felt awkward. While Carmen went to help her mom, Violet seized the chance to climb onto the roof. If any tiles had simply shifted,

she could adjust them. However, as she reached the top, she found many tiles had already broken. Repairs would require buying new ones.

As Carmen was helping Melanie outside, Violet just jumped down, startling both mother and daughter.

"What were you doing on the roof?" Carmen asked.

"Didn't you see that the roof is damaged? If it rains, you'll be in trouble. And even if it doesn't rain, the wind will whistle through at night. Winter will be unbearable," Violet replied.

Carmen said softly, "I know. I'll find someone to fix it."

“Yeah, it definitely needs repairs,” Violet said. She glanced at Melanie, who looked unwell. “Why did you help your mom out? She should just go lie down.”

Melanie bowed to Violet and said, “I wanted to thank you and Lady Carissa, Ms. Spencer. If it weren’t for you both, I would still be in the dungeon—perhaps even dead by now.”

Seeing Melanie’s pale complexion and shaky stance, Violet quickly reached out to support her. “No need to thank us. Just go lie down. I’ve called Ivy. She’s a physician, and she’ll come to treat you soon.”

Melanie looked incredibly weak, and Violet feared even a simple sneeze might send her crumbling to the floor.

Melanie waved her hand dismissively and took a deep breath. “No, it’s fine. I don’t need treatment.” Violet raised a brow in confusion. Why didn’t Melanie want to be treated when she was sick?

But then Violet recalled how Carmen and Melanie must have been cast out by the Lester family. That meant they would be short on money.

Not wanting to address it directly, Violet said, “Cari—I mean, Lady Carissa made the arrangements. She’s

also

the one who sent the physician over. Whether you want treatment is up to you, but you can tell the physician when she arrives

Then, Violet turned to Carmen. “Help your mom back to bed.”

“I’m grateful for Lady Carissa’s help, but there’s really no need...”

Melanie began to protest again, but Violet simply steered her inside to lie down.

The room was even worse than the hall. There was one bed and a makeshift one formed by two benches pushed together, covered with an old quilt. It was likely what Carmen had been using to sleep here at night.

Violet couldn't help but ask, "Why won't the Lester family take you back?"

Though she didn't want to interfere in their family matters, she recalled that Carmen used to live with the Lester family and enjoyed a life of luxury.

Carmen's expression stiffened, and she pulled Violet outside the room and into the hall.

"Don't bring that up in front of my mom," Carmen said firmly.

"Okay." Violet replied, glancing at her before a realization struck. "You're out of money, aren't you?"

Carmen's face flushed with embarrassment.

"I've never had any money to begin with. The jewelry I had was given to me by the Lester family and Grand Princess Eleanor. Aside from that, I've never handled any money. Now, the Lester family won't take us back. I was only allowed to bring the clothes I was wearing and had to leave everything else behind."

Chapter 747

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Violet was puzzled. "But why? Your mom is a daughter of the Lester family, and you're their granddaughter. Why won't they take you back?"

Carmen shushed her. "Keep your voice down. My mom might hear you."

Violet suggested, "Let's step outside to talk. I need to wait for Ivy anyway. She thinks you're still at Lester Estate, so let's go wait for her over there."

They opened the door and stepped outside. As Violet walked a few steps away, she turned back to look.

“Is this cabin really where they let you stay?”

Carmen replied coolly, “It was originally rented out, but since it fell into disrepair, no one wanted to rent it anymore. They haven’t fixed it and said we can stay temporarily until the case is settled. Then, they’ll bring us back to the family’s residence.”

*Do you believe that?” Violet asked,

“I don’t. But for now, we have no other place to go. I plan to go out and look for work in a couple of days. Once I earn some money, I can find a better place.”

days.

“You’re going to look for work? What kind of work?” Violet inquired.

Carmen walked slowly, her brows furrowed. “I was thinking of becoming a personal maid for a wealthy family. I have some martial arts skills, but with my background, no one might want me. So, I haven’t figured out my options yet. If it comes to it, I could perform at markets or carry cargo at the docks. I’m strong enough for that.”

Violet nodded in agreement. “Yeah, your martial arts skills may not be the best, but you have the strength. Carrying heavy loads can earn you some money, right?”

Carmen gave Violet a sidelong glance, feeling that she was sometimes too blunt when speaking.

*I’ve looked into it before, but it’s still better than working as a server in coffeehouses or taverns.”

Though Violet lived a life of luxury, she understood the struggles of martial artists. Carrying heavy loads was tough work, and those who did it often faced mistreatment. Even serving as a female bodyguard in a wealthy household came with its challenges.

“Don’t you have any special skills?” Violet asked.

Carmen initially wanted to say her martial arts skills were it, but she hesitated. It felt a bit ridiculous to boast about them in front of Violet.

After a moment of reflection, she said, “I can cook a mean pulled pork.”

“Since you’re not afraid to put yourself out there, why not set up a stall to sell pulled pork?”

“I don’t have the capital,” Carmen replied.

“I can lend you some. No interest—just pay me back once you receive compensation from the case,” Violet offered.

“Compensation?” Carmen’s eyes flickered with confusion. “What kind of compensation will we get?”

“I’m not sure of the details, but with Grand Princess Eleanor having caused you all this trouble, there should be something owed to you. And speaking of which, aren’t you from the Kingsley family? Why didn’t they take you in?”

“The Kingsley family can barely look after themselves, and the Lester family is the same. They’ve been closely tied to Grand Princess Eleanor for years and benefitted from her protection. While they claim to have suffered, they’ve been enjoying the safety that comes with it,” Carmen explained.

They stood not far from Lester Estate as they waited for Ivy

Violet took a moment to gather her thoughts before saying, “Cari asked me to tell you something. Be prepared for it, and don’t take it too hard.”

Carmen raised her chin and smiled bitterly. “What more can I not accept? Even my dad, whom I respected, has betrayed me. I always thought he loved my mom and that we were on the same side, but he was just using us. Go ahead and say what you have to say. I can handle it.”—

Violet looked at Carmen’s slightly bony shoulders and sighed.

“Well, whether you can handle it or not, I need to tell you this—sometimes, the world can be incredibly cruel. The Supreme Court has questioned one of Harmony Palace’s household physicians, Billy. He admitted that your sister ordered him to add a drug to your mom’s medicine to worsen her condition.”

Carmen’s eyes widened as she took an instinctive step back, anger flooding her features.

“That’s impossible! Absolutely impossible! Why are you slandering my sister? What ulterior motives do you have? What do you want from us? I’ve had enough! You’ve already shown me your lack of respect during the Emberfest Festival plans and your distrust in me.

“I know my status doesn’t merit your trust, but now you’re trying to sow discord between my sister and me? Do you think my sister is living in luxury? Can she even command the household physician?

“Putting that aside, her greatest concern has always been for our mom and me. Everything she does is for our sake. Yet you say she wants to harm our mom? What do you really want from us?!”

Chapter 748

As Violet watched Carmen explode in anger, she felt an inexplicable shift within herself.

Since following Carissa to the battlefield and returning to the capital to face a pile of messy issues, Violet’s patience had improved considerably.

In the past, Violet would have likely stormed off if Carmen had spoken to her this way. She never cared about other people’s feelings and was always so headstrong, but now she wanted to be a better person.

Violet could understand Carmen’s anger and fear. Carmen had been used by her own family all this time and hadn’t received an ounce of trust. She had viewed Henry, her mom, and her sister as her family, a united front.

Yet Henry had betrayed her, and now she was being told that Celeste wanted to harm their mom.

To make it worse, Carmen had to hear this from an outsider. It was only natural she wouldn’t believe it.

Wanting to be understanding, Violet remained calm. “Regardless of whether you believe it or not, the fact remains. Billy’s testimony can’t be false. It wouldn’t escape the scrutiny of the officials at the Supreme Court. As for how your sister commanded him, she slept with him.”

Carmen trembled all over, tears welling in her eyes. “Shut up! How can you insult my sister like that? Just because she was a courtesan? She had no choice! She’s been suffering enough already, and you still want to slander her and drive a wedge between us!”

“Whether you believe me or not is up to you, I’ve told you what I know, and my responsibility ends here. If you ever want to borrow money for your business, just come to me. I can lend

you three hundred silver coins,” Violet offered.

Violet hailed from wealth, and she often measured friendships in terms of money. This was a practice rooted in the Spencer family, a lesson she had learned from some influential figures.

For Carissa, there were no limits—whatever she needed, be it a loan or a gift, Violet was willing to provide

But for Travis, Violet wouldn’t part with even a single coin—not after today’s confrontation.

Carmen had cooperated with Violet before, so three hundred silver coins seemed worth the investment. Carmen replied coldly, “I don’t need it. You can leave. My family’s affairs are none of your business. Just go!”

Violet met her gaze. “I’ll leave once Ivy arrives.”

“No need for that!” Carmen’s expression was frigid. “I can’t bear your good intentions. I don’t understand your schemes, but you won’t come between my family and me.”

“Is there something wrong with your brain?”

It was true that Violet was more patient than before, but even she had her limits.

Her usual haughtiness returned as she continued, “What could we possibly gain from scheming against you? Look at you—you’re broke and have no idea about anything going on in Harmony

Palace. You don't even know which of your sisters are acting as spies in which families. If you're talking about value, you're as useless to me as a piece of trash. Even the lowest servant in Harmony Palace knows more than you

Do you

do. Do

you think we need you?

"And let's talk about how we deceived you about the plan during the Emberfest Festival. If we hadn't done that, you would have blabbed everything to your dad. Then, that spineless man would have spilled everything to Grand Princess Eleanor.

"Would our plan have worked if that happened? Would we have been able to rescue your mom and the other women? Do you care more about the process or the outcome? The fact that your mom is now safely rescued is what matters to you, right?

*We had no choice but to deceive you. If you trusted your dad less, we wouldn't have had to hide things from you. If we had told you that Lord Henry was an opportunist back then, would you have believed us? No, don't bother thinking of a comeback. You definitely wouldn't have believed it.

"It's just like how I'm telling you now that your sister slept with Billy to bribe him to harm your mom—you won't believe that either. So, there's nothing more to say. I'll leave once Ivy arrives. Consider it as me fulfilling what Cari asked of me."

Chapter 749

Carmen's shoulders trembled as tears dripped down her cheeks.

Violet didn't offer her any comfort. Instead, she turned to look down the alley.

Why wasn't Ivy here yet?

After a moment, Carmen, her voice thick with emotion, said, "When I brought Mom back that day, she told me in the carriage not to trust anything my sister said. I think Mom already knew about everything, but I don't understand why my sister would do that."

Did Carmen finally believe Violet's words?

Violet turned back to her, surprise etched on her face. "Your mom really said that to you? Then, she must know. As for why Celeste did it, your mom also probably knows. You should ask her when you get back." Just then, Ivy rode into the alley on a donkey.

Violet waved her hand and called out, "Over here, Ivy!"

Ivy spotted them and approached, She was a bit confused as to why they weren't waiting by Lester Estate's entrance.

"Why were you waiting here?"

"They're not living at Lester Estate anymore. They're over there," Violet said. Then, she glanced at Carmen, "Don't act out of impulse. Your mom's condition is serious. Cari specifically told me to ensure she gets treated. You can disregard her good intentions, but don't let your emotions jeopardize your mom's health."

Ivy looked at Carmen, whose eyes were red

and swollen. "What happened? Does she not need treatment anymore?"

Carmen quickly wiped away her tears and bowed slightly. "Ma'am, please come with me."

"Alright, you two go ahead. I'll be leaving," Violet replied, her pride flaring.

She didn't want to argue with Carmen any further. She was aware her words could hurt, and she didn't want to subject herself to any unfair treatment either.

Carmen tugged gently at Violet's sleeve. "I'm sorry for how I acted earlier, Ms. Spencer. Please don't be mad. I just... I just can't accept this right now."

Tears streamed down her face again as she spoke, and there was a shattered look in her eyes.

“In just a few short days, I’ve learned that my dad betrayed me, the Lester family doesn’t want me, and my sister wants to harm my mom. I just don’t understand why it’s come to this. Is the world truly so cruel? They are my family. Why would they do this?”

The alley was cold, the wind howling as it drowned out Carmen’s sobs. Her nose was red from crying, and Violet felt a pang of regret for having spoken so harshly moments earlier.

Carmen had grown up in an environment where she had no one to lean on. Even her martial arts master, Greta, was one of Eleanor’s people. Yet, Carmen had a strong will. She had managed to rise above her circumstances, which was admirable.

If Violet were in Carmen’s shoes, she doubted she could survive such dire conditions, especially since Carmen had handed over her trust so readily to Carissa with that note. It was clear Carmen was someone who easily believed others, and people like that often ended up suffering.

Violet walked back with them.

After Ivy examined Melanie, her brow furrowed in concern. “Her lung condition is very serious. Has she been coughing up blood?”

Melanie managed a weak smile. “Yes, I’ve been coughing up blood for over a month now.”

Carmen stood anxiously to the side, her voice trembling when she asked, “Can she be treated?”

Ivy didn’t directly answer her question. Instead, she wrote a prescription. “First, we’ll start with medication. Here’s the prescription. The medicine isn’t rare. Any pharmacy should have it.”

Carmen looked at Ivy with hopeful eyes, silently urging her for reassurance, but Ivy didn’t meet her gaze. She pulled a bottle of medicine from her kit and placed it on the table.

*If the coughing gets severe, take one pill. It will help. But this medicine only alleviates the cough. You still need to take the prescribed medicine twice a day.”

Carmen recognized the emblem on the medicine box—it belonged to Arcane Sanctum, and their medicines were never cheap. She tugged at Violet’s sleeve and pulled her aside.

“Ms. Spencer, you said you could lend me some money. Is that still possible? I promise I’ll repay you.”

Violet reached into her purse and handed Carmen a banknote. “Here’s a hundred silver coins to start with. When you’re ready to do business, come back for another two hundred.”

“That’s too much! Just setting up a stall to sell pulled pork only requires a few silver coins,” Carmen protested.

“Take it for now. If you don’t use it, just return it. Besides, your mom still needs treatment and medicine.” Violet had seen how Ivy had avoided eye contact with Carmen, which indicated Melanie didn’t have much time left.

Carmen reluctantly accepted the money. “Alright, I’ll see Ivy out and get the medicine.”

Chapter 750

Once they were outside, Ivy stopped hiding the truth from Carmen.

“I have to be honest with you now. If your mom had received treatment just a month earlier, her condition wouldn’t have deteriorated this far. You should spend some time with her. Her days are numbered.”

Carmen felt her mind go blank. If she had any doubts about Violet’s words earlier, they vanished completely now,

Melanie had been in the dungeon and had received medicine, but it clearly wasn’t meant to treat her illness. The household physicians in Harmony Palace were skilled. If they had truly intended to help her, she would have shown signs of improvement.

But why? Why did Celeste do this?

Carmen stared blankly at the prescription and the banknote as tears streamed down her face uncontrollably.

Ivy was accustomed to the sorrows of the world, and she could only offer a gentle reminder. “Life is full of helplessness. You must learn to be strong.”

Violet was about to leave after Ivy left on her donkey, but seeing Carmen in such distress made her hesitate. She pulled Carmen back into the cabin. “No matter what, your mom still needs you to take care of her.”

Carmen tossed the banknote and prescription to the ground, then turned and rushed into the room. She knelt beside Melanie’s bed, and desperation laced her voice as she cried out, “Mom, please tell me why did

she have to do this?”

Melanie paused, momentarily taken aback before she understood Carmen’s question. After a long silence, she sighed heavily.

“Carmen, everyone has their breaking point. She might truly be worn out. I wanted you to stay away from her so you could understand. Before that happened, she was punished by Grand Princess Eleanor. Your sister carries her own burdens.”

“That’s not the real reason! I told her I’d gained Prince Rafael and Lady Carissa’s trust! Celeste also believed we could rescue you. But why? Why resort to such measures... How old is that household physician? Why would she do that?”

Carmen sank to the floor and sobbed hysterically.

She didn’t understand at all.

Violet sensed that Melanie knew why Celeste had acted this way—the pain in her eyes was all too evident.

Melanie stayed silent for a long time, and her tears flowed uncontrollably.

Finally, her voice trembled as she said, “It’s my fault for involving you both, Carmen. She had her reasons. If you two had always been in the same situation, she.

Violet watched Melanie closely, piecing together Carmen's earlier words, and a thought struck her.

She couldn't help but ask, "Carmen, when you mentioned gaining Prince Rafael and Carl's trust, could

Celeste have thought you really might marry the prince as a concubine? Since she couldn't stop that from happening she resorted to harming your mom. That way, you wouldn't have to follow Eleanor's orders, wouldn't have an excuse to get close to us, and wouldn't become the prince's concubine is that it?"

as

Melanie shivered, disbelief flickering across her face she looked at Violet. She quickly shook her head

"N-No, it's not like that.

Carmen's heart sank at the observed her mom's reaction. A cold dread washed over her,

She knew. Violet was right

Tears fell as Carmen laughed softly

fell as

reason? No wonder when I told her I had Prince Rafael and Lady Carissa's trust, she didn't seem happy at all. She stared at me for a long time before finally smiling. It was because of this? I've never cared for being a prince's concubine! All I've ever wanted is to rescue my mom and reunite our family"

Melanie trembled as she reached out to wipe Carmen's tears away, sorrow etched in her features. Forget about it. It was her choice how to act After I'm gone, you and her shouldn't have much to do with each

other

“How did you know she wanted to hurt you?” Carmen grasped her mom’s hand, her gaze falling on the streak of gray in her mom’s hair. “Did you know she was colluding with the household physician? How did you find out?”

Melanie smiled bitterly.

“She’s my daughter. I know her thoughts well. She visited me and said a lot of things. She was filled with resentment and bitterness because you’ve become familiar with Prince Rafael and Lady Carissa. The household physician used to send me a bowl of medicine every day. But after her visit, the medicine started to taste different Every night, I coughed terribly and vomited blood.”

“Im going to find her Carmen’s face was filled with rage as she sprang to her feet.

Violet stopped her “You won’t find her. She’s probably already left the capital.”