

War Song 761

Chapter 761

A woman shouldn't strike her husband, especially not in the face. Such behavior was unacceptable in a prestigious household like the Warren family, no matter their current status, and even ordinary people wouldn't resort to that. In moments of anger, it was more acceptable to hit someone's shoulder or arm. After all, a woman's fists didn't pack much power.

A slap to the face stripped a man of his dignity.

There were servants outside. How could Barrett retain his dignity in the estate at this rate? Especially now that he had been promoted to the commander of the Crown Guard.

That slap had knocked out whatever little joy remained in his heart.

Viola bit her lip, tears welling in her eyes. Deep down, she knew she had crossed a line, but pride held her back from apologizing.

"Forget it. Just leave," Barrett said, suppressing his anger.

He didn't want to argue anymore. He had suffered enough from their discord, and it drained him.

After hitting him, Viola felt a twinge of guilt. However, hearing his cold words stung her heart.

"I came to take care of you while I'm pregnant. I wanted you to recover quickly so you could take up your post, but your attitude has left me very disappointed."

Barrett closed his eyes, unwilling to engage or respond

His indifference cut deep into Viola.

She stood up, wiped her tears, and bitterly said, "Fine. If you don't want to see me, I'll go back to my family's home."

She knew that Barrett cared about her family's opinion. With her pregnant, he would undoubtedly be worried if she returned home. But as she and Poppy left, she didn't hear Barrett calling for her to come back. Anger and sorrow bubbled within her.

It felt as if Barrett hadn't cared at all...

In a fit of anger, she decided to return to her family's home with Poppy.

The sudden turmoil in the capital led the prominent families to keep their people on a short leash. Zoey felt the same, and although her family didn't interact with Eleanor much, being cautious was always wise.

So, when Zoey heard that Viola had come back home in tears, heavily pregnant, she regretted not issuing stronger orders to keep her out. Of course, that was merely a thought—she could never actually prevent Viola from returning.

Evelyn sent someone to summon her, but Zoey wasn't in a rush to head over. Instead, she first called for Poppy to come over and answer some questions.

Poppy had been secretly given an extra portion of monthly allowance, which was a reward for keeping an eye on Viola. If anything excessive happened, she was to report back immediately. Zoey needed to resolve the issue quickly before her sister-in-law caused any real trouble,

This time, Poppy hadn't come to inform them beforehand. Viola had rushed home in tears, clearly indicating an emergency had arisen.

When Poppy arrived and reported the situation to Zoey, she frowned. "Wasn't Barrett injured? How could she hit him?"

Poppy replied, "Yes, he was hurt. The physician says he needs to stay in bed for a few days. Initially, when news of Commander Warren's promotion came, Madam Viola was very happy. But when she heard that Lady Carissa was made commander and that Commander Warren would have to take orders from her, Madam Viola became upset."

Zoey furrowed her brow even deeper. Why was Carissa being appointed as commander bothering Viola? She had a petty, narrow-minded attitude and couldn't stand to see others succeed—when would she ever change?

“So, she slapped him? Did he fight back?”

Poppy shook her head. “No, Commander Warren didn’t strike back. He just told her to leave. In Madam Viola’s anger, she declared she would return to her family, and he didn’t try to stop her.”

Zoey’s brow tightened further. “So, is she with Mother now?”

“Yes, she’s crying in Madam Evelyn’s room,” Poppy replied timidly. “Madam Evelyn even asked you to hurry over.”

“Alright, you go ahead. I’ll be there shortly, Zoey said, giving a knowing glance to her head maid Jane, who understood.

After escorting Poppy out, Jane slipped her a portion of the monthly allowance, instructing her to keep close eye on Viola. When Jane returned, she found her mistress massaging her temples with a sigh.

“Madam Zoey, you really should go over. Madam Evelyn doesn’t know the full story, so she might end up worrying for no reason. After all, a mother always loves her daughter, no matter what.”

Zoey’s eyes turned cold. “I’ll go, but let me cool off first. I’m afraid I might lose my temper and really hurt her.”

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Evelyn was no fool. She understood her daughter’s character well. However, seeing Viola come home in tears, heavily pregnant, tugged at her heartstrings. After all, Viola hadn’t caused any trouble recently, and the past was behind them.

What mother could truly hold a grudge against her own child?

So, when she heard Viola mention that Barrett was neglecting her, even being indifferent to her returning to her family during her pregnancy, Evelyn decided to send someone to call Zoey. She wanted to see how to help mend Viola and Barrett’s relationship.

By the time Zoey arrived, Luna was already seated in Evelyn's room.

"You're here, Zoey!" Luna stood up, secretly relieved.

If Zoey was any later, she would have to find a way to escape.

Zoey nodded in acknowledgment. "Hello, Mother."

"You arrived just in time," Evelyn said, her expression serious as she sat in her seat.

Next to her was Viola, whose tears had yet to dry. Given her pregnancy, she could only choke out a greeting to her eldest sister-in-law without rising to pay her respects.

Zoey sat down and looked at Viola, feigning ignorance as she asked, "Why are you crying, Viola? Who bullied you?"

Viola hadn't actually intended to provoke her family into taking action. She only meant to scare Barrett a little. But after making a fuss and saying those words, she had no choice but to return home. It was too embarrassing to back down now.

Seeing her mother only heightened her sense of grievance. Not wanting Evelyn to think she was running home over trivial matters, she claimed that Barrett was deliberately cold to her and dismissed her feelings, and that others at Valor Estate treated her with disdain.

Little did she know that upon hearing this, Evelyn had sent for both Zoey and Luna. With Zoey being the most serious of the three women, discussing today's events would only reflect poorly on Viola.

So, when Zoey asked her what was wrong, Viola didn't dare recite the same grievances she had expressed to her mother. Instead, she simply said, "We had a few arguments. I just want to come home for a few days to find some peace."

Evelyn said, "Viola is pregnant now, yet everyone in the Warren family, including your brother-in-law, is treating her poorly and giving her the cold shoulder. I suspect it's because Viola went to the Farrell family previously. But since she and Barrett decided to be together, there's no point in making a fuss. After all, she's carrying Barrett's child!"

“Plus, with Oliver commanding troops out of the city, our two families need to stay united. How can they be expected to have a good future if they keep quarreling and throwing tantrums? That’s why I called you here to discuss it, Zoey. We might as well send someone to Valor Estate to invite Barrett over for a proper Talk. We need to encourage them to settle this peacefully. What do you think?”

Evelyn wasn’t aware that Barrett had been injured. Zoey hadn’t mentioned it to her, wanting to spare her

the worry. Instead, she had just sent over some medicinal herbs and tonics for his recovery.

However, since Viola came home crying, Zoey couldn’t keep it a secret any longer.

“Mother, Barrett was injured and is currently bedridden. Just yesterday, I sent someone over to Valor Estate with herbs and tonics, so it’s not feasible to invite him over.”

Hearing that Barrett was hurt immediately set Evelyn on edge. “How was he injured? What happened?”

Zoey looked at Viola. “Why don’t you explain, Viola? You know the situation best.”

Viola hesitated for a moment, but under Evelyn’s prompting, she had no choice but to recount how he had been injured at Harmony Palace. However, she chose not to mention his promotion. Although it was a good thing, working under Carissa wasn’t. It wasn’t worth showing off, and Viola didn’t want to draw attention to it.

Evelyn’s face paled when she heard he had been stabbed multiple times. “What’s the situation now? What did the physician say? Is his life in danger? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“He wasn’t hit in any vital spots,” Viola reassured her. The physician said he just needs to rest in bed for a few days, so you don’t have to worry about him, Mom.

Evelyn felt that something was wrong when she heard Viola’s words. “He’s injured and bedridden, so why would he get angry and neglect you? What on earth is going on?”

It was only then that Zoey called Poppy forward. “Explain what happened. Speak the truth. There’s no need to hide anything.”

Poppy recounted everything that had happened during Barrett and Viola’s argument, even mentioning how Viola had slapped Barrett.

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Upon hearing what had happened, Evelyn was so furious she nearly had a heart attack. She pointed an accusing finger at Viola and scolded, “This is utterly ridiculous! How is Barrett’s promotion not a good thing? Why do you have to say such depressing things and keep bringing up Lady Carissa? Does she appreciate being mentioned by you?”

“Since when did I ever teach you to slap your husband In the face? And how dare you come back to your mother’s house crying! I thought you were just having a little spat, but it turns out you’re the one causing the trouble! He’s been injured so seriously, and instead of taking care of him properly, you slapped him over a few harsh words. You truly never learn, do you? You’re going to give me a heart attack!”

Viola lowered her head, still feeling wronged but too afraid to argue. She could only choke out, “Mom, Zoey, it’s not that I want to fight with him. I’ve gone through so much to carry his child, and yet he still thinks of Ca—his former wife. Who could stand that?”

Zoey remained silent. She didn’t want to engage in this kind of conversation. Her mother-in-law was somewhat reasonable, and from now on, Viola’s issues would be handled by Evelyn. Zoey was just there

to listen.

Evelyn was infuriated by her daughter’s words. “Tell me, does he always bring her up in front of you?”

Viola’s eyes widened in disbelief. “He wouldn’t dare!”

Does he mention her in front of his family? What about in front of outsiders?

Viola replied, “No one in Valor Estate would bring it up except Aurora. As for outsiders, would he dare to mention it? But even if he doesn’t say it, he must be thinking about it.”

“Evelyn was losing her patience.

“If he doesn’t bring it up, why do you keep mentioning it? Do you not want to live a good life? You should think not only of yourself but also of the baby in your belly. You’re not a child anymore! This isn’t your first time being a wife. Why does it feel like you don’t have a brain? Do you think he’s always thinking about her? How do you know what’s in his heart?!”

Evelyn’s furious words made Zoey and Luna exchange glances. They stifled their laughter with handkerchiefs as a smile crept onto their faces.

Viola sobbed, “Aurora said so, and he didn’t deny it.”

Evelyn frowned. “You believe her just like that? You trust all the wrong things while dismissing what you should believe? You really lack any common sense! Do you think Lady Carissa is someone your husband can covet now? I think Barrett is quite practical and genuinely wants to be with you. You need to stop this nonsense and go back.”

Viola protested, “Going back like this would be so humiliating! I’m not going back. I want to stay a few more days at least.”

“Absolutely not!” Evelyn glared at her. “You will return right now!”

“Mom!”

Viola stood up and stomped her foot, but Evelyn quickly stopped her.

“Enough! What’s with your attitude? How old are you to be throwing a tantrum like a child? Your husband is injured and bedridden. You’ve slapped him and then got angry enough to run back to your mother’s house. You’re in the wrong here! If word gets out, people will say that our family raised our daughter poorly.”

Viola cradled her abdomen, tears streaming down her face. “I got so worked up today that my stomach hurts a bit. I’m afraid the stress has affected the pregnancy, and I can’t ride in a carriage anymore. If you don’t believe me, you can call for a physician to check on me.”

There was some truth to her words—her pregnancy was already unstable. After the argument and the commotion, her lower abdomen throbbed slightly with pain.

Evelyn was skeptical but ordered a physician to come. When the physician confirmed that the pregnancy was indeed unstable, Evelyn finally relented and allowed Viola to stay but also sent someone to Valor Estate to inform them. She didn’t conceal anything, stating directly that Viola’s impulsive nature had caused the issue.

Evelyn even sent some tonics to Barrett, apologizing and asking for his understanding, promising that she would discipline her daughter properly.

Rebecca wasn’t pleased with her daughter-in-law either, but since the Earl of Silverstone’s family was not to be offended, and considering Viola was pregnant, she managed to say a few polite words in response,

And so this farce passed. The Earl of Silverstone’s family took care of Viola’s health, and once she was feeling better, she would be sent back to Valor Estate.

However, Carissa came to Silverstone Estate in person two days later.

When Zoey heard this, she thought Carissa had come with the Capital Guard, especially since she was aware of the incident at Edgeview Estate.

But as Zoey hurried to the main hall, she realized Carissa was accompanied by only Violet.

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Carissa was unaware that Viola had returned to Silverstone Estate. She had come to discuss some matters with Zoey, and had chosen to come in the evening because she still had cases to handle during the day.

Moreover, the Earl of Silverstone's family had no close ties with Eleanor, so there was no need for formal visits. If she came during the day, she would have to bring the Capital Guard, just like she would to other estates. Otherwise, it would seem like preferential treatment.

Seeing Carissa dressed in women's attire rather than her official uniform, Zoey felt a slight sense of relief.

She greeted, "Hello, Your Grace, Ms. Spencer. It's good to see you!"

"Good day, Mrs. Prince." Violet had a special fondness for Zoey, so she followed Carissa despite feeling tired from the day's events.

*Please come in and take a seat," Zoey said with a smile, instructing the servants to bring refreshments.

Once they were seated, Zoey asked, "Your Grace, if you have something to discuss, you could have sent someone to inform me. There was no need for you to come personally."

"Mrs. Prince, there's no need for such formality. I'm here today to share a few things with you," Carissa said, glancing at the servants in the main hall. "Could you ask them to leave?"

Zoey exchanged a knowing look with Jane, who immediately instructed, "Everyone, you may leave now. No need to wait."

Once the servants had exited, Zoey turned to Carissa and said, "Please feel free to speak your mind, Your Grace."

Carissa inquired, "Have you heard of Ms. Ava Weaver from Weaver Coffee?"

Immediately, Zoey recalled what Caspian had said the night he came back after buying ravioli. She had felt suspicious about the woman, Ava, at the time.

Her heart raced, and she replied without hesitation, "Yes, I've heard of her. My brother-in-law met her a few times, but after that, I didn't hear him mention seeing her again."

She recounted the incident when Caspian encountered Ava at the ravioli stand.

“At the time, I found it strange and kept my eye on things. I even instructed the servants not to buy coffee from Weaver Coffee. Caspian didn’t have a good impression of Ms. Weaver either. When he returned to buy ravioli again, the vendor mentioned that Ms. Weaver hadn’t eaten the ravioli he prepared, Caspian asked if they had gone bad that day, but they hadn’t, so my brother-in-law thought she was wasteful. That’s why he hasn’t bought coffee from her since.”

Although Zoey didn’t fully grasp what was happening, she instinctively wanted to clear Caspian’s name. The fact that Carissa had come personally to speak about Ava indicated that there was something serious at play, especially since she was currently investigating the treason case involving Eleanor.

Carissa admired Zoey’s sharpness as she listened. A woman like her truly had the ability to support the family’s household.

“It’s fortunate there hasn’t been any contact. I came today to inform you that Ms. Weaver’s real name is

Celeste Kingsley. She is the daughter of Henry and his concubine, and she was sent by Eleanor to get close to Mr. Prince. You must have heard of the courtesan Samuel from the Earl of Gracehold’s family married. She is the same person.”

Zoey’s face turned pale with shock. “What? Thank goodness Caspian wasn’t deceived!”

The mere thought sent a chill down her spine. If Caspian had gotten involved with a concubine’s daughter from Eleanor’s household during this treason plot orchestrated by Eleanor, Carissa wouldn’t be here as the Hell Monarch’s princess consort.

She would be here as Commander Sinclair.

Zoey couldn’t help but feel grateful that Caspian was so oblivious to romantic advances. Being a courtesan, Celeste must be incredibly beautiful. Any other man might have already fallen into her trap.

Carissa paused for a moment, her gaze at Zoey growing more complex. “Yes, it’s indeed fortunate that Mr. Prince wasn’t deceived. However, over the past few days, the Royal Citadel has been

questioning the servants of Harmony Palace. One of the junior stewards revealed that Celeste had recently inquired about the Earl of Silverstone's preferences.

"She said that since she couldn't get to Mr. Prince, she might as well target the Earl of Silverstone directly. She reported this to Eleanor, who approved it. Celeste even bribed one of the servants from residence to gather information about Marshal Prince's preferences. Now, Celeste has left the capital, and I suspect she is heading to the Southern Frontier."

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Zoey tightened her grip on the armrests of her chair, a frown knitting her brow. Her expression grew complex, reflecting the weight of the revelation.

No one knew a husband better than his own wife.

Oliver had gone to the Southern Frontier with two concubines, and upon arrival, he had taken two more. Though they hadn't been formally recognized yet, it was only a matter of time before he granted them status since he had taken them in.

Zoey was strict in managing the household and the concubines respected her, which was why there had never been any scandals in the Earl of Silverstone's family. Zoey could almost guarantee that if Celeste managed to get close to Oliver, she wouldn't even need to try to win him over. Just showing her beautiful courtesan face would be enough to capture his heart.

Violet watched Zoey, sensing that she understood just how difficult it would be for Oliver to resist

Celeste's allure.

It was a sad situation. Zoey was a wonderful woman, but she hadn't met a good man. Despite serving as a marshal at the Southern Frontier, Oliver didn't deserve her.

Zoey tirelessly managed every aspect of life in the capital, tending to her mother-in-law, cleaning up after her sister-in-law, and warding off anyone who could harm the Earl of Silverstone's family.

Yet, happiness eluded her.

Zoey quickly regained her composure and looked at Carissa gratefully. "Thank you for informing me, Your Grace. I will send a letter to warn him."

Carissa replied, "Celeste has changed her appearance, and since Eleanor has never publicly acknowledged her identity, we cannot know what her intentions towards the Earl of Silverstone might be."

Zoey understood Carissa's meaning. Celeste was no longer merely a courtesan. With Eleanor's downfall, she was free. If she sought a benefactor, Oliver could certainly provide that for her.

If it were just that, Zoey wouldn't be overly concerned. However, Celeste was a concubine's daughter from Eleanor's household. The Supreme Court was aware of this, as was Carissa. If Oliver got involved with her, it could lead to complications that would be difficult to explain.

This could implicate the Earl of Silverstone's family and affect Zoey's children, and that was what truly worried her.

"Your Grace, if Celeste truly has an affair with my husband, what will the Supreme Court think...?"

-Zoey began her question, but quickly realized it was inappropriate. This was a case of treason, and she

was already immensely grateful for Carissa's visit to share such sensitive information.

To ask for more would be greedy.

However, Carissa understood Zoey's unspoken concern and replied, "As of now, we don't know. It will depend on how the king perceives them. If he believes they are mere pawns and victims of circumstance, then even if the Earl of Silverstone takes her as a concubine, it won't raise any issues. But if the king sees them as accomplices, then we would have a serious problem."

Violet chimed in, "Actually, based on the evidence we have so far, the former seems more likely. They were coerced into this. Eleanor controlled their birth mothers and forced them to do things against their will. If they refused, they faced severe punishments... But we shouldn't make any definitive claims, should we? After all, this is a treason case, and everything hinges on the king's judgment."

"I understand. Thank you for letting me know, Ms. Spencer."

Zoey was moved. She would always remember this kindness.

Carissa stood up. “We shouldn’t overstay our welcome. Goodbye for now.”

Zoey rose to see her off, her demeanor already returning to normal. Violet admired this about Zoey—she could always remain composed and handle her emotions with grace.

As they stepped out of the hall, they spotted Viola approaching, supported by Poppy.

When Viola saw them, her expression briefly faltered before anger flashed in her eyes as she confronted Zoey.

“What’s the meaning of this? Why did you call her here? Did you tell her about my situation with Barrett on purpose to embarrass me?” Viola snarled.

Zoey rubbed her temples in exasperation. Evelyn had been right. Viola seemed to have no brains.

Carissa shot Viola a curious glance.

Hadn’t Barrett just been promoted? What was there to be embarrassed about?

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Jane quickly stepped forward and assisted Poppy in helping Viola.

“The physician said it’s best for you not to move around too much, Madam Viola. You should head back and rest. Madam Zoey can see the princess consort off. You don’t need to.”

At the mention of “the princess consort“, Viola’s rationality snapped back into place. She realized her moment of anger had led her to act impulsively. If her sister-in-law was going to talk about Viola’s issues, why would she invite Carissa over? Most likely, Carissa was there to discuss the conspiracy involving Eleanor.

Feeling extremely awkward and a bit anxious, Viola gave a hasty curtsy to Carissa before leaving.

Carissa and Violet exchanged glances.

What had gotten into Viola this time?

As Zoey escorted them out, Violet asked, “What’s Viola doing here at this late hour? Is she back here to stay? Did she have a falling out with her in-laws?”

It wasn’t that Violet was particularly curious. It was just that Viola always caused a stir wherever she went. Plus, she had stormed in so recklessly just now, talking about something concerning Barrett, which clearly had something to do with Carissa.

That was why Violet couldn’t help but ask.

Zoey knew that family troubles shouldn’t be aired in public, but they were all aware of Viola’s faults. So, she didn’t hesitate to speak plainly.

“It’s a bit of a spectacle. She had a quarrel with her husband and returned to us. She’s staying here for a few days because she’s feeling under the weather.”

“Barrett’s been recovering at home after getting injured and getting promoted. It seems odd they would argue again, especially involving Carissa,” Violet said, her expression darkening.

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Zoey sighed with a bitter smile. “It’s just unreasonable fussing. Don’t let it bother you, Your Grace, Ms. Spencer.”

Violet muttered under her breath, “Troublemaker.”

Carissa and Barrett had already divorced and moved on with their lives, yet Viola still clung to the past.

After Zoey saw Carissa and Violet off, she returned to the inner courtyard. There, she spotted Viola waiting outside her quarters. Zoey glanced at her, but didn't say a word. Instead, she simply went inside.

Zoey was thoroughly disappointed in her sister-in-law and didn't feel like saying anything. It was hard to reason with someone determined to make trouble. Sometimes, no amount of kindness could save those who were set on self-destruction. If Violet kept causing a scene like this, it would be more than just embarrassing.

"Why were they here, Zoey?" Viola asked as she walked in, her hands propped on her hips.

Zoey settled into her seat. The people in the room knew she liked to drink fruit juice in the evening, so they had prepared it for her in advance.

After sipping a few times to soothe her throat, she replied in a calm tone, "Nothing too serious. They just asked me a few questions."

Viola frowned. "It's not about...that Grand Princess Eleanor conspiracy case, is it? Was she here to cause trouble?"

Zoey frowned. "You're asking for trouble with that kind of talk. She was here on official business. Even if she asks questions, it's just part of the procedure. If she were here to cause trouble, she wouldn't come at night and without the Capital Guard."

"What did she want to know?"

Zoey's expression was indifferent as she replied, "Whatever it is, it's not your concern. I see that your condition is stable now since you're able to move around at night. You should return home tomorrow."

Viola's face fell with disappointment. She had been staying at Silverstone Estate for three days now. Her mother had even sent medicine and tonics to Valor Estate, yet no one had come to fetch her.

Barrett couldn't come himself, but surely he could send someone!

If no one came to get her, would she be going back like this? It was far too embarrassing. How could she face anyone in the Warren family after this?

Yet, Viola knew she couldn't stay there any longer. She didn't want to continue the cold war with her husband. It was weighing on her heart.

Over the past few days, she had come to terms with everything. She was carrying Barrett's child and intended to make things right with him. Besides, he had recently been promoted to the Crown Guard's commander—a position that placed him close to the king.

Though Carissa commanded the Mystic Army and was his superior, the Crown Guard had always directly answered to the king, so there likely wouldn't be much change in their dynamics.

Zoey saw through her thoughts and said coolly, "I'll send someone to take you back tomorrow."

Viola pleaded softly, "Why not send Jane to Valor Estate to get someone to come for me? If I just go back like this, it'll look bad."

Zoey ignored her and instructed, "Jane, take Viola back to her room."

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After a few days, everyone who needed to be interrogated at Harmony Palace had been interrogated. Rafael felt it was time to question Eleanor.

Carissa was heading to Ironridge Estate to see Jessica today, while Rafael would be interrogating Eleanor. It was a coordinated effort from both sides.

Eleanor had been locked in the dungeon for about five days. At first, she pretended to have lost her mind. When she realized that tactic wasn't working, she stopped resisting, seemingly resigned to whatever fate awaited her.

At least, that was how it appeared on the surface.

In the interrogation room, the aunt and nephew sat across from each other.

Eleanor still wore the plain clothing from the Emberfest Festival night, but after days in the dungeon, her garments were wrinkled and her hair was disheveled. She looked drained, with dark circles under her eyes. In just a few days, she had lost a significant amount of weight, making her skin sag and giving her an aged appearance, as if she had aged five or six years overnight.

Sudden weight loss in middle age could be harsh, and it showed on her, especially since she had always had a sharp disposition. Now, her looks reflected her inner bitterness.

Rafael spoke first, “You kept those concubines locked away in the dungeon for a long time. Now that you find yourself in the same situation, how does it feel?”

Eleanor looked up and suddenly smiled. “It’s far worse than Harmony Palace’s dungeon.”

Rafael continued, “The king has issued a royal edict stripping you of your title. Today, the Royal Citadel’s governor will be visiting your residence to conduct a formal search.”

Eleanor raised her eyebrows, her tone laced with sarcasm as she said, “What difference does it make if my title is gone? What does it matter if I’m no longer a grand princess? I am still of royal blood. My father was King Augustus, and my mother was Lady Chloe. No one can change that.”

Her words dripped with irony and were tinged with a hint of resentment. It was as if being the daughter of Augustus was more of a curse than a blessing.

Rafael maintained his calm demeanor as he went through the motions and asked, “Where did those weapons come from? Why were you plotting rebellion? Who is behind this?”

Eleanor smirked, a flicker of defiance in her expression. “It’s pointless to ask. Since I’ve already been accused of treason, let it be a beheading if that’s what they decide. If they want to execute my entire family line, then let them do so. This is how treason is judged, isn’t it? Just relay my words to the king

verbatim.”

Rafael chuckled softly. The idea of executing her entire family line would also include him and Salvador. Furthermore, since she was married, that included her husband's family as well. The Marquis of Grovehill's family would certainly thank her for that.

Understanding the implication behind her mention of family annihilation, he added, "Don't worry. His Majesty doesn't intend to go that far. You also don't need to fear for Jessica, provided she wasn't involved in the rebellion."

Eleanor lowered her gaze, suppressing the only remaining attachment she had to this world—her daughter.

"Whatever. I don't care," Eleanor finally said, lifting her head to look at Rafael. She despised being seen through and hated feeling manipulated. "If you want to kill her, then go ahead. It's not like she's living a happy life anyway."

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"You still haven't answered my question. Where did the weapons come from? Why plot treason? Who's behind it? You've already been demoted to a commoner. If you don't confess, we'll have to resort to torture, and you won't have anyone but yourself to blame," said Rafael, his voice cold and distant.

"Why wouldn't I confess?" Eleanor blinked innocently. "I am, after all, of noble birth and cannot withstand the Supreme Court's punishment. Those weapons were naturally provided by my backers. The armor? I had someone steal it from the Ministry of Defense's workshop. You must have already examined it. It's identical to what the ministry uses. As for the one pulling the strings..."

She placed her hands on the table, a glint of cold cunning in her eyes.

"My dear nephew, it was you who directed this, wasn't it? You said you wanted to be king, and that you wanted me to assist you with everything I had.

"But why would I help you? Naturally, it was because you discovered the tragic fate of the concubines who died in my palace. You held my greatest weakness, so I had no choice but to assist you. Surely, you wouldn't dare to act without taking responsibility, would you?"

The scribe hesitated for a moment, and Rafael turned to him. "Record this accurately. Make sure every single word is noted and submitted to the king for review."

The scribe nodded. "Yes, Your Highness!"

Eleanor burst into laughter. "How amusing."

Rafael replied, "Yes, it is quite amusing. Now, tell me more. When did I start using the matter of your palace's concubines to threaten you? Where did I first mention my desire to rebel and ask for your help? Who was present at the time? How did I keep in contact with you whilst on the battlefield? Did we exchange any letters?"

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Eleanor tilted her head, her laughter fading as she spoke earnestly.

"It has always been Jacob who contacts me, remember? You said you couldn't show your face, and couldn't let anyone have leverage over you. So, after you first mentioned your plans to rebel, Jacob took care of everything.

"If you bring him here and interrogate him rigorously, the truth will come out, won't it? Oh, and later, when you returned from the battlefield, the one responsible for contacting me, besides Jacob, was Carissa. Wasn't she the one who had those martial artists deliver the weapons? Just bring her in and torture her- she'll confess too."

As she spoke, a slow smile crept across her face.

"But if you don't torture them, you can't use torture on me either. That would be treating us differently. Besides, since I'm pointing to you as the mastermind, you can't be in charge of this case. Get someone else."

Rafael replied, "You don't need to worry about that. The king will decide after reviewing your testimony. If he thinks it necessary to change the interrogator, then you won't see me again."

Eleanor looked at him with a smile, but her eyes were filled with malice. “I truly hope I never see you again. You’re revolting. A prince known for your military achievements, yet you married a woman who was once divorced. That is how you’ve brought disgrace to our royal family.”

Rafael reminded her, “You’re no longer part of the royal family. You don’t need to worry about that.”

Eleanor huffed. “You have no sense of shame. I insult you, and you don’t even get angry. Your shamelessness is infuriating. If you didn’t have leverage over me, do you think I would have allowed myself to be used by you in this treasonous plot? You’re useless. You were too scared to keep weapons in your own home, so you hid them in mine instead. Many of those weapons were smuggled back from the Southern Frontier battlefield by you, including the armor.”

The scribe turned pale upon hearing her words, terrified of the implications.

Should he be recording all of this? Once it was on paper, the testimony needed to be submitted to Salvador. This was the first interrogation, and the king would surely want to know everything Eleanor had

said.

Rafael nodded at him, neither angry nor amused. “Write down everything she says.”

A venomous glint flickered in Eleanor’s eyes. “Of course, the harder I bite, the more you can distance yourself. But don’t think you can escape, Rafael! You’ve ruined me, and I won’t let you off the hook. Even if I’m headed for hell, I’ll drag you down with me.

“His Majesty is sharp and will uncover the truth. Rafael Sanford, you’re the real traitor plotting rebellion! I’m just a pawn in your game. The world will see your true colors. Those who say I conspired to rebel are

blind and foolish. I’m just a woman with no sons—what purpose would treason serve for me? Our kingdom doesn’t even allow female officials. How could they accept a queen to rule the kingdom?”

“Women do hold official positions now,” Rafael corrected. “Take Carissa, for example, the one you claim is conspiring with me. She is now the commander of the Mystic Army. She oversees the

Capital Guard, the Garrison Unit, the Royal Guard, and the Crown Guard. She is also involved in the investigation into

your rebellion.”

Eleanor froze, then fury ignited in her eyes. “Her? Hah! His Majesty is truly confused! He’s setting such a precedent for her again and again, just for Hector’s merit. Is it not enough that she enjoys a lifetime of wealth and power? Now, she’s even been given real authority? The Mystic Army is the city’s shield. Does he want to destroy himself?”

Rafael smiled and replied, “I think His Majesty’s decision is quite wise. Commander Sinclair’s capabilities are evident, and her family has been loyal to the court and the king. They despise traitors who disrupt the country. With her guarding the city, any traitor attempting rebellion has no chance of success. Those who have plotted for years may find their efforts wasted.”

“You’re insane!” Eleanor stared at him in disbelief.

It was clear Rafael was saying this for Salvador’s benefit, but the king wasn’t foolish. How could he not see through the prince’s intentions? By stating that Carissa was guarding the city, Rafael implied that traitors would never succeed in rebellion.

However, it also hinted that if Carissa turned against them, no outside reinforcements would be able to get into the city either!

To test Salvador’s trust in such a way was utterly reckless. How could the king believe them?

In all of Starhaven, they were the greatest threat to his throne!

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Rafael grinned. “This concludes my interrogation.”

“Is that all you’ve got?” Eleanor scoffed, her tone icy. “Aren’t you going to ask more? Go on, keep going.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t be the one interrogating you. Someone else will take care of that. Prepare yourself. Tonight’s session might last until dawn,” Rafael said as he stood.

Eleanor glared at him fiercely. “Do you really think I’m scared? No matter who interrogates me, I won’t give you a different answer. Don’t think for a moment I’m unaware of your schemes, Rafael! You’ll never escape your punishment. Bring on whatever tricks you have. You’re going down with me!”

“There are no tricks. Everything will be handled according to the law,” Rafael said, striding out of the interrogation room.

Once Rafael left, Matthew entered and took a seat.

“Eleanor, I’m not here to question you about the rebellion. We found multiple corpses and dozens of baby skeletons in the ancient well at your residence. I’ve already interrogated your household servants, and they all said you were responsible for these deaths. Will you confess?”

Eleanor shot him a cold glance and said nothing, her expression one of disdain.

Matthew leaned back in his chair. “No rush. We can take our time.”

At Ironridge Estate, Jessica glared at Carissa. The Marquis of Ironridge, Leopold, was also present. Carissa mainly wanted to question the couple, so no one else was present.

It was well known that Eleanor and the matriarch of the Marquis of Ironridge’s household were not on good terms. Despite being in-laws, they rarely interacted. Jessica was the type to frequently demand to go back to her maternal home, and Eleanor paid her attitude no mind.

Over time, Margaret had grown tired of dealing with Eleanor and saw no need to meet with her unless absolutely necessary.

“We honestly didn’t know anything about it. I’ve never even heard of that dungeon,” Leopold said, quickly distancing himself from the situation, his expression resigned. “You know my mother-in-law dislikes me, Commander Sinclair. I can count the number of times I visited Harmony Palace on one hand.”

Carissa turned to Jessica and asked, “According to the testimony from the steward and several servants, the women in Harmony Palace’s inner household have endured considerable torment from you. Do you recall a maid named Camille Hudson?”

“Those are just baseless accusations,” Jessica retorted coldly. “Now that Harmony Palace has fallen, they want to shift all their wrongdoing onto me. I don’t even know who Camille is, so how could I have killed her?”

Leopold suddenly tensed.

Carissa’s gaze sharpened. “I never said Camille was dead, Lady Jessica. If you don’t know her, how do you know she’s dead?”

Jessica froze, then turned to the scribe, Kirk, and shouted angrily, “Don’t write that! I’m being coerced into a confession! I didn’t kill Camille!”

But Kirk ignored her and continued writing. Jessica sprang to her feet, rushing over to snatch the paper. Michael stood in her way, forcing her to retreat a few steps.

“If you don’t cooperate, I’ll have to take you back to the Supreme Court and let the officials there question you, Lady Jessica,” Carissa said coolly.

“How dare you, Carissa Sinclair?!” Jessica spun around, her eyes filled with resentment. “This is all part of your and Rafael’s scheme! My mother didn’t plot against the throne. Those weapons were merely for self- defense. As for those women, they willingly became concubines. They chose to enter our household and live lavishly, so they must accept the consequences.”

Carissa’s eyes turned frigid. “It seems you’re playing dumb on purpose. You know full well whether those women chose to be concubines or were forced into going to Harmony Palace. Since you refuse to talk, we’ll head back to the Supreme Court.”

“Try laying a hand on me and see what happens!” Jessica snapped.

The Capital Guard hesitated, and even Michael took a step back when she advanced.

But Carissa didn't let up. In a swift motion, she stepped forward and twisted Jessica's arm behind her back, causing her to cry out in pain.

"Let go of me! That hurts! Let me go...!"

Leopold paled, shocked that Carissa had the audacity to lay hands on his wife. While he didn't have a deep emotional bond with Jessica, having her taken to the Supreme Court would bring shame upon the *Marquis of Ironridge's household.

"Commander Sinclair!" Leopold called out, hoping to plead for her.

Carissa shot him a cold glare, silencing the words on his lips.

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Carissa shoved Jessica forward, releasing her.

Her tone was icy when she spoke, "You'll answer my questions truthfully. If you refuse to cooperate, you won't get a third chance, and I'll take you straight to the Supreme Court. Your mother has already been demoted to a commoner.

"His Majesty has been merciful enough to allow you to keep your title, but if you don't cooperate, your involvement in Camille's death will be reported to the highest authority. A county duchess charged with murder? Who could possibly protect you then?"

Jessica's left arm hung awkwardly at her side, dislocated and sending sharp pain through her body, making her eyes well with tears. Though she loathed Carissa, she also understood that the woman meant business—she was ruthless.

Leopold stepped forward to support Jessica as she sank back into her seat. His voice was cold and steady as he said, "Commander Sinclair is carrying out her orders. Just answer her questions."

He didn't care for Jessica's wellbeing, but if she was to be taken away, it would be after he officially divorced her. He couldn't let her be dragged through the public streets while she still had the title of the Marquis of Ironridge's wife.

"I didn't kill her!" Jessica yelled, her fury boiling over. "I just told my servants to slap her a few times. She ran into a wall by herself!"

Jessica raised her right hand to shield her face, breaking down into sobs.

“How was I supposed to know she’d run into a wall? That wasn’t the first time I’ve had someone beaten. ‘I’ve done it before without them killing themselves. I only had them slap her to blow off some steam, and it was all your fault! If you hadn’t fought with me, I wouldn’t have gone back to Harmony Palace in such a foul mood!”

Leopold felt a chill run down his spine. “What are you saying? Every time you went back to Harmony Palace after an argument with me, you took it out on them? And you’ve even killed one?”

“Who knew she would die? It was her own foolishness! What does that have to do with me?”

Jessica wiped her tears with her sleeve, her left hand throbbing painfully as more tears streamed down

her cheeks.

“You...” Leopold looked angrily between Jessica and Carissa.

He knew Jessica had a cruel streak, but he never imagined she could be responsible for someone’s death.

“How can you be so heartless? Just because I argue with you, you take it out on others?”

Leopold’s household had always adhered to the true aristocratic way, rarely resorting to beating or selling servants. When Jessica first arrived, she had caused quite a stir, but Margaret had swiftly taken control of the household, ensuring strict rules were followed. Despite Jessica’s title, Margaret maintained a firm hand, leaving Jessica unable to act out openly.

Yet, it seemed Jessica would always return to Harmony Palace to vent her frustrations. No wonder she had to escape there each time she threw a tantrum.

Carissa watched Jessica, who was now wailing uncontrollably, her expression icy.

“A few slaps? Is that really all it was? Everyone in Harmony Palace knows you love using your shoes to hit people’s faces. You only stop when their cheeks are bruised and blood is running from their mouth, nose, and ears! How many times did you beat Camille? You left her deaf in both ears, and for a while, her mouth bled constantly. You specifically targeted her!”

Seeing the shock on Leopold’s face, Jessica panicked and shouted, “What difference does it make? Hitting someone in the face doesn’t kill them! Either way, I’ve never killed anyone!”

Outside the main door, a servant sent by Margaret was eavesdropping. Hearing this, she hurried off to report back.

When Margaret heard the news, her face changed instantly and she leaped to her feet. “What? Is that true?

“It is, Madam Margaret. She admitted it herself.”

Margaret sat back down and raised her hand. “Go out and continue listening.”

“Yes, ma’am!” The servant hurried out.

Leopold’s secondary wife, Emma, was also present. After hearing the news, she looked stunned. “Mother, what should we do? If she’s implicated in these crimes, it will reflect badly on our household.”

Margaret trembled with anger, her lips quivering. It took her a moment to regain her composure.

“She’s so malicious! I’m sure His Majesty will not allow her to keep her title. She must pay for what she has done.”