

War Song 781

Chapter 781

Gareth suddenly exploded in fury. He jumped up and slapped Cecilia harshly across the face.

“You treacherous woman! After everything I’ve done for you, you dare betray me?!” he roared with outrage. Cecilia fell to the ground, blood slowly trickling from the corner of her mouth. She braced herself on the ground, still kneeling, though tears streamed uncontrollably from her eyes.

Her lips quivered, her voice breaking as she said, “I’m sorry... I have no excuse. I know my sins are unforgivable.”

“You’ve doomed us all!” Gareth spat as he fiercely kicked her. “I once asked you if you had any family and you told me you were an orphan! How dare you lie to me?!”

Cecilia’s body trembled as she let out a muffled sob, knowing there was no hope of ever regaining Gareth’s pity or love.

Carissa let out a barely audible sigh as she watched from nearby. Thankfully, the king had already made his decision yesterday about the daughters of Henry’s concubines. Otherwise, the Duke of Oakspire’s family would have been done for after this revelation, with none of them able to escape unscathed.

Now that Salvador had declared the women victims in this matter, he wouldn’t go back on his word. Putting off visiting the Duke of Oakspire’s family and the Quinton family had indeed proven to be a good decision.

Looking at Cecilia, who lay sobbing on the ground, Carissa asked, “The two blueprints you took—were they for armor and ballistae?”

The gathered men were mostly seasoned warriors of the Duke of Oakspire’s family, so they instantly understood the gravity of Carissa’s question.

They also realized that she wasn’t looking to claim false glory. If she wanted to do that, she could have

Carissa declared that Cecilia had stolen the armor and ballistae blueprints and taken her away. That way, would have secured her achievement on the spot.

But Carissa was giving Cecilia a chance now. If the latter answered that she hadn't taken such blueprints, there was still a way out of this. Armor and ballistae blueprints had implications far beyond ordinary

weapons.

Every gaze turned to Cecilia, their eyes fixed with anticipation.

Gareth's face was contorted with fury as he warned, "Think very carefully before you answer."

Cecilia looked up with tear streaks glistening on her cheeks, her delicate face filled with sorrow.

Her trembling lips parted as she spoke in a pained voice, "No, there were no armor or ballistae blueprints. One was a broadsword, and the other was a spear. Since my mom died, I've stopped listening to Grand Princess Eleanor's orders. I have children in this household, and I no longer want to be their puppet. That's why I kept avoiding the people my dad sent to seek me out."

A collective sigh of relief swept through the room, but it barely had time to settle before everyone turned their tense eyes back to Carissa, anxiously awaiting her next move.

Now, whether it was Norman, Gareth, or anyone else from the Duke of Oakspire's family, the fierce

resistance they'd shown before had completely vanished. Instead, Norman looked more afraid than he ever had in his life

After all, if Carissa claimed she doubted Cecilia's story and pushed for more answers, she could easily expose more secrets. Even if nothing new came out, everyone knew how the Duke of Oakspire's family had treated Carissa and the Capital Guard today—barring them entry, hurling insults, even splashing water to drive them away. The arrogance of it all was enough to make them feel humiliated and foolish just thinking back on it.

A woman like Carissa likely wouldn't forget an insult easily, and laying out charges against the Duke of Oakspire's family wouldn't be hard for her if she wanted revenge.

They all eyed Carissa nervously. She was watching Ceilin, who was still crying softly, but her sobs were now subdued, as if she had already accepted her inevitable fate.

A suffocating silence hung in the air, broken only by Cecilia's quiet sniffles.

Carissa finally turned to Norman. "Lord Norman, keep an eye on her yourself. Until this treason case is fully investigated, she's not allowed to leave the estate

The silence thickened as they all stared at Carissa in shock.

That was it? She wasn't even taking Cecilia with her?

"Might I have a word with you in private, Lord Norman?" Carissa asked.

"Of course," Norman responded, his voice uncharacteristically low.

A man known all his life for his short temper, whose voice usually boomed even in casual conversation, now spoke for the first time in a tone utterly drained of power.

Carissa turned to Michael and instructed, "I'll step outside with Lord Norman. Ask Cecilia under what circumstances she handed over those two blueprints see if she was under any kind of coercion."

When Gareth heard this, he felt a glimmer of relief. The tension in his chest eased a bit, and his eyes turned red-rimmed.

He had earlier struck Cecilia because he wanted to make it clear that his family had nothing to do with this matter. He also wanted to gain a bit of Carissa's sympathy as a woman by showing his supposed resolve in disciplining Cecilia. That way, Carissa might not be too harsh with Cecilia if she took her away.

Chapter 782

Norman stood up and gestured for Carissa to follow him to his study.

After taking a few steps, he turned back and asked, “Would it be alright if my eldest son came along?”

Carissa knew the duke was referring to Mikhail, whose nature she understood well. She was aware that he wasn’t as valued by Norman as his younger brothers

“That’s fine,” she replied.

Stunned, Mikhail hesitated. He knew his dad never favored him and thought him to be too mild and lacking passion. Norman always chose to discuss important matters with his third and fourth sons. But instead of calling Gareth this time, Norman had unexpectedly requested that Mikhail join the discussion.

In the study, Norman instructed his servants to light a candle with a calming scent. His temper often ran high, so this candle was a staple in his study. However, it wasn’t for his benefit today. He hoped the calming scent might help Carissa overlook the hour wait outside and the indignity of almost being splashed with water.

Once they were seated, Carissa got straight to the point, saying, “I’ll be direct with you, Lord Norman. I’ve already reported yesterday’s findings to the king. His Majesty has officially declared that all of Lord Henry’s concubines’ daughters are victims. I only came here after he made that decision.”

Norman took a moment to process this, then asked, “What are you saying?”

However, Mikhail understood immediately. He rose from his seat and bowed to Carissa. “Thank you for your mercy, Commander Sinclair.”

“No need to thank me,” Carissa replied calmly. “I didn’t do it for your family alone. The women are truly victims. Eleanor held Lady Cecilia’s mom’s life in her hands, and she could only save her by following Eleanor’s orders. Like Lady Cecilia, many were forced to carry out different tasks under threats.

“However, Lady Cecilia’s role was the most sensitive, given that the weapons and armor found in Harmony Palace closely matched those produced by the Ministry of Defense. If I had come to Oakspire Estate before reporting yesterday’s findings to His Majesty, every single person involved

would have been considered an accomplice. That would implicate not just the concubines' daughters, but also everyone in the residence where they live."

Finally, Norman grasped the full weight of her actions. He gave Carissa a complex look, still unsure of her motives. What she described wasn't the perspective of an ordinary woman. He couldn't shake the feeling that she had an ulterior motive.

"Why did you help us? What are your conditions?"

already told you—I wasn't helping you. I just don't want to see the innocent suffer."

Norman shook his head. "Impossible. Every official investigating a treason case hopes to implicate as many people as possible. The more families involved, the more credit they'll earn."

Carissa looked him straight in the eye. "Do you remember what happened with the Earl of Gracehold's family? When that courtesan stirred things up, she wrecked the marriage between the Duchess of

Everpeace and one of the top scholars, Samuel Langley. He was stripped from the National Examination Register and lost his position as heir, causing the Earl of Gracehold's family to fall from grace.

"That was Eleanor's goal—to drag the loyal noble families down, one by one. The truly powerful families are hard to topple from the outside, so she worked to break them down from within. And she did it in a way that ensured no one would sympathize with them when it happened. The people even applauded it."

She continued, "In reality, the noble families are the least likely to support rebellion. They thrive only if the kingdom is stable. If there's a regime change, the new ruler will target them first to gain public favor. That's why, if someone attempts treason, the noble families will rally with the court to oppose it.

"Eleanor spent years laying these traps to undermine them. If I implicate every household connected to the daughters of Lord Henry's concubines, I'd be falling right into her hands. Why would I let her win? Neither my household nor Prince Rafael's household is in need of more credit."

Her words struck a nerve in Norman, leaving him deeply conflicted.

He had assumed Carissa's perspective would be narrow, as she was the first female official in such a high position. He thought she was likely keen to use this treason case to solidify her standing. But her vision went far beyond that and was free of personal gain.

Now, Norman understood why Salvador valued her so highly, even though the Hell Monarch's household had enough military accolades to overflow.

At that moment, Norman found himself impressed, but pride held him back from an apology. However, while a father might not have understood his own heart, a son often did.

Sensing Norman's restraint, Mikhail stepped forward and bowed deeply to Carissa.

"Thank you for safeguarding our family and the other noble families, Commander Sinclair. I apologize for keeping you waiting outside and for the discourtesy shown today. Once this case concludes, I will personally visit to extend our formal apologies."

Carissa smiled and shook her head. "That won't be necessary."

Chapter 783

Carissa didn't feel relieved even after leaving Onkspire Estate. She still needed to face the Quinton family tomorrow. And beyond them, there was also Hayden, to whom Eleanor had also sent someone.

Carissa didn't plan on bringing the Capital Guard to Hayden's residence, Willowbrook Estate. Instead, she intended to visit him with Rafael in the evening and fill him in. After all, the elderly prince had returned to the capital alone, with all his descendants serving in far-off territories.

However, Salvador was still understandably cautious of him, especially since the person backing Eleanor remained unidentified. Without proof, the king would be wary of all his vassals.

That night, Rafael arrived at Willowbrook Estate with Carissa, carrying a gift to keep up appearances. The old prince certainly knew how to enjoy himself. After dinner, the household songstresses took turns performing for him, serenading him with music.

When Rafael and Carissa arrived, Hayden was reclining on a lounge chair, eyes closed, tapping a rhythm on the armrest as he listened. The songstress, her face veiled, played a string instrument as she sang. Her voice was as clear as a nightingale, sweet and Illting.

Her slender, fair fingers glided over the strings, each pluck and strum filling the room with pure, ethereal music, like streams flowing through high

mountains. The music was enchanting, and it felt as if one's troubles faded away after listening to it.

Rafael and Carissa listened to the song from the doorway, fully captivated despite not knowing what piece was being played. When the song ended, Hayden opened his eyes, and they stepped inside.

"Coming so late—hardly seems like you're bringing good news," Hayden greeted with a smile.

Rafael raised the gift in his hand with a grin. "Great—uncle, since when is a gift not good news?"

Carissa smiled and greeted Hayden politely, "Good evening, Great—uncle."

Hayden's eyes narrowed as he looked her over, a smile spreading across his lips. "Ah, here's our kingdom's first female official—bold and spirited, every bit a match for the men."

"You flatter me, Great—Uncle," Carissa replied with a smile.

"Sit down!" Hayden said with a wave.

The songstress bowed and took her instrument with her as she left. Meanwhile, servants streamed in, bringing coffee, pastries, sweets—anything they could possibly need. Having been on the move for hours, Rafael and Carissa happily took the opportunity to relax. They sipped their coffee and sampled the delicacies without reserve.

Hayden looked to be in fine spirits. He glanced at Carissa as he said, "I asked Rafael to bring you here ages ago, yet it's only now that you come. Makes me wonder if you had any sincerity at all. There's another reason for your visit today, isn't there?"

Rafael chuckled. "Nothing slips past your sharp eyes, Great—uncle. Yes, we're here today because of the treason case. Eleanor sent someone to your estate. Are you already aware?"

Hayden's smile turned smug. "Whether I knew or not makes little difference. Here, the only thing she can do is eat and drink to her heart's content. She can't take a single step past the estate gates."

"Well, that's a relief," Rafael joked. "Your estate truly is place of privilege."

"A place of privilege Indeed, Hayden sighed. "When she arrived, she declared her identity right away and begged me to find an excuse to send her away. She said I was too old and complained that I smelled like an old man. Imagine that!

"My whole life, no one's dared insult me like that. Outrageous! So, out of spite, I treated her to the finest food and drink, and now she's gained a fair bit of weight. I'll have her brought out to show you two just how well she's been pampered."

With that, Hayden called out, "Bring our plump lady out here, so she can perform her act for the prince and princess consort!"

Rafael and Carissa exchanged a glance, both a bit surprised. Declaring her identity and begging to be thrown out right after she arrived? Wasn't the woman worried about her biological mom?

Chapter 784

Soon, an old steward led in a woman dressed in a pale pink gown. She had a soft, round face, and the dress clung a bit too tightly around her plump figure, especially around her midsection. She wasn't extremely large—just enough for the ill-fitting gown to accentuate her roundness.

Even with the extra weight, her natural beauty shone through. Her features were delicate, her skin was fair with a healthy glow, and her eyes sparkled like stars in the night sky.

The steward had already informed her of their guests, so she entered and greeted them politely. Greetings, Prince Rafael, Lady Carissa. My name is Chaya Kingsley."

Her smile was bright and sweet, suiting her softness. It was the kind of smile that instantly made people feel at ease.

"Chaya—what a lovely name," Carissa remarked, observing her thoughtfully.

There was something different about Chaya, unlike the other concubines' daughters. She didn't have Celeste's seductive allure, Carmen's prideful strength, or Cecilia's quiet sorrow. She was just sweet. Her eyes were full of light, as if untouched by the darkness surrounding her.

She returned Carissa's compliment with a cheerful smile, saying, "We all have nice names. My dad may not be good for much, but he does have some knowledge. Chaya—sounds nice, doesn't it? But the meaning's not great. Just a shadow, hidden and unseen. But I've lived quite a life here in Willowbrook Estate. Well, that's enough. If you're here to take me away, so be it. I can die with no regrets."

Hayden laughed. "My dear girl, if they were here to take you away, they wouldn't have come with gifts in the evening. They'd have shown up with the Capital Guard in broad daylight."

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"Oh," Chaya said, her gaze drifting to Carissa, admiration glinting in her eyes. "Commander Sinclair, you truly bring honor to us women. If only I could be like you... but no, I couldn't handle all that work. I'd rather stick to eating, drinking, and having fun."

Carissa laughed as she turned to Hayden. "Seems you've picked up a real gem here. She must keep you

you well entertained, Great-uncle."

Hayden waved his hand dismissively and pretended to be annoyed. "A gem? More like a freeloader! She can't sing or dance, yet has the nerve to say I smell like an old man. I'll feed her up until she's as round as a pumpkin. Then, she'll lose the right to complain about me!"

Though Hayden wore a look of mock displeasure, his tone was one of indulgent delight.

After the banter died down, Chaya grew more serious as she explained, "My dad sent me here, figuring that with Prince Hayden alone in the capital and away from his children, I'd have the chance to win his favor and make him hang on my every word.

"But once I arrived and saw him—honestly, he's way too old! And he's not big on rinsing his mouth either. Every time he speaks, a whiff of bad breath hits me. How am I supposed to serve him in bed like that?

“So, I tried to get him to send me away. I thought if I annoyed him enough, he’d be furious enough to send me out of the capital and I could just slip away. But no, he didn’t give in. He has kept me here, feeding me five or six times a day. He doesn’t let me do much, and occasionally calls me over to listen to music with him. Other than that, he lets me do whatever I want. I’m as free as a bird here.”

“What about your mom? Aren’t you worried about her? Carissa naked.

Chaya shrugged. “Worrying won’t do any good. Even if warmed Prince Hayden’s bad, it wouldn’t be enough to save her. All I can do is live well myself and try to keep my mom from fretting over me. That’s the most respectable thing I can do for her.”

Sitting down, she added, “I’ve known since I was a kid that I’d eventually be sent away. My mom told me as much. She always said, ‘If you can beni it, bear it. If not, you’d be better off cutting your losses and ending it. Life’s tough, but if it’s unbearable, then don’t suffer through it. Life’s too short for that.’”

Chaya smiled as she spoke, but her words hit a little heavy.

“Funny thing is, though she told me that, she never really lived by it herself. She had it rough, but never let herself give in to death. I came here intending to put up a fight, but now, life’s just too comfortable. So, I’m not going anywhere. I’ll enjoy this while I can. And if one day Prince Hayden decides I’m fattened up enough and wants to get rid of me, I wouldn’t say anything against it.”

She chuckled, eyes sparkling with a kind of strange optimism. “But for now, I’m safe. Seems like I got lucky again.”

Hayden chuckled along, a warm, grandfatherly fondness glimmering in his gaze.

Chapter 785

After leaving Willowbrook Estate, Carissa felt a weight lift from her chest.

The concubines and daughters in Harmony Palace had become an unbearable mountain of guilt pressing down on her, Carissa knew all too well why those women had been imprisoned in Harmony Palace, and she knew their misery was Eleanor’s doing. Though Cnossa refused to take on any blame for her parents’ actions, she couldn’t shake the deep sadness she felt.

Seeing those women, hollow-eyed and trembling at the slightest sound, had been heart-wrenching.

Meeting Chaya had been a small balm, a fleeting comfort like a colorful bubble glistening in the sun- beautiful yet fragile, and once popped, only the dark reality remained.

As the night wind whipped at the carriage curtains, Rafael wrapped an arm around Carissa. Neither spoke. Each was lost in thought, yet thinking about the same thing.

Eleanor's recent actions had rattled Yuvan, making him recoll once more. Now, he would be thinking of

and the ways to get out of the capital. But he wouldn't dare make a move just yet, not with Ruth still ill treason case unresolved.

Salvador's decision to delay closing the case was wise. So long as it remained open and Eleanor was alive, Yuvan would be left in a state of restless fear. It might only last a year or so before he had to choose -to either give up his ambitions entirely or stake everything in a final gambit.

Yuvan had once had a golden opportunity, but was too greedy, wanting both the throne and a clean reputation. Perhaps he never believed that the Southern Frontier could truly be reclaimed or that Sandoria wouldn't try to fight back this time.

As Rafael and Carissa's thoughts converged, they spoke in unison, "For now, Yuvan will have to stick to the shadows."

The couple exchanged a smile-being married had really brought them closer.

"His Majesty must still suspect him," Rafael murmured

"These days, His Majesty suspects everyone. But it's clear that Yuvan is his main target," said Carissa.

"Are you going to the Quinton family's residence tomorrow, or will you just send Michael?" Rafael asked. "Since it's the queen's family and with the late king's teacher involved, sending only Michael wouldn't be proper. I'll go myself. I don't have to say much. I just need to ask a few pointed questions," she said.

Recalling the actions of the Duke of Oakspire's family, Rafael replied, "I'll go with you tomorrow. It's a rest day, so Lord Quinton should be home. I'll speak to him personally. Lord Quinton usually takes his family out on his days off, so I'll send someone ahead to notify him."

"Alright," Carissa agreed readily.

She didn't want to waste time waiting outside for an hour, let alone face a barrage of unhappy expressions. Besides, with Kiera married to Logan, Carissa didn't want to strain relations. If Rafael accompanied her, Malcolm would get the message loud and clear—he was meant to handle this personally. After all, this wasn't a matter that should be exposed to the public.

After word spread that Carissa had visited Oakspire Estate with the Capital Guard, the Quinton family anticipated that they were likely next on the list. By evening, someone from Hell Monarch Estate arrived at the Quinton family's residence, notifying that Carissa would be paying Malcolm a visit at around nine in the morning.

When a servant relayed this to Malcolm, he frowned. "They asked for me by name? So, I'm supposed to wait around for her?"

"Yes, sir, that's what they specified," the servant confirmed.

Malcolm was annoyed. The fact that they had specifically asked for him to wait but hadn't sent any formal notice clearly indicated that the visit was related to the treason case.

"Fine, pass along the word—if the princess consort arrives with the Capital Guard, don't obstruct them. Let them in, but have Mark handle it. No one else needs to make an appearance."

The servant bowed. "Understood, sir!"

The next morning, Malcolm left early with his wife, planning to avoid the confrontation altogether.

Just as Rafael and Carissa were about to depart, a message arrived from Salvador, summoning Carissa to the palace. With his wife occupied, Rafael took Jacob with him to the Quinton family's residence. When they arrived, the Quinton family's steward, Mark, was dumbfounded.

Why was the Hell Monarch at the door when the master of the household was conveniently “out“?! Mark didn’t dare to inform Rafael that Malcolm had gone out. After all, someone from Hell Monarch Estate had sent word last night that Malcolm should wait for their visit.

So, Mark hurriedly called the men of the Quinton family to greet the prince while also sending someone to find Malcolm and bring him back.

Chapter 786

Rafael waited a full hour, but Malcolm never showed up.

The prince was furious. He couldn’t believe the audacity of the Quinton family. He had sent someone to Inform Malcolm last night, and yet today, there was no sign of the man.

It seemed they thought Carissa’s visit warranted a deliberate snub. While it wasn’t as blatant as the way the Duke of Oakspire’s family had treated her by keeping her waiting outside, it was hardly better.

Rafael was fiercely protective of his wife. He wouldn’t tolerate anyone bullying him, and he certainly wouldn’t stand for anyone mistreating Carissa.

Without caring about whether Malcolm wanted the rest of the Quinton family to know about this matter, he called out to the assembled Quinton men, announcing, “You should all know that Eleanor placed a pawn in your family—a mistress Lord Malcolm Quinton has kept outside for three years, with whom he has a daughter.”

Having said his piece, Rafael turn

wake.

and strode away with Jacob in tow, leaving a stunned silence in his

The members of the Quinton family could hardly believe what they had just

heard.

How could this be possible?

They prided themselves on their scholarly reputation and strict adherence to decorum. It was unthinkable that anyone in their family would keep a mistress. Even the number of concubines in their household was limited, and the hierarchy between wife and concubines was well-defined.

A concubine was essentially the property of the primary wife—managed by her and could only attend to her husband according to the schedule she arranged. That rule had been followed for a long time and was as strict as national laws for the Quinton family.

Malcolm had never been one to indulge in lust. He rarely ventured into the quarters of his concubines—maybe two or three times a month at most. Most of the time, he stayed in his wife's quarters. Their love was a well-known tale in the capital, a harmonious pairing that everyone admired.

Yet, here was Rafael, claiming Malcolm had kept a mistress all along?

“That’s impossible! Absolutely impossible!” Herbert Quinton, one of the older Quinton family members, exclaimed.

He shook his head vigorously and looked at the astonished faces of his relatives, especially at Malcolm’s eldest son, Lionel Quinton.

“Lionel, your dad isn’t that kind of man! There must be some misunderstanding.”

Lionel held a third-rank official title and was highly esteemed by Salvador. He was also the future head of the Quinton family. In his eyes, Malcolm was flawless, the epitome of perfection. He had often declared that he would model his life after his dad. Now, he felt disgusted, as if he had swallowed a fly. Herbert was Lionel’s second uncle, and his words were unfathomable. If anyone else had made such a claim, Lionel might have dismissed it. But coming from the Hell Monarch, it carried an undeniable weight. Noticing the troubled expression on his eldest nephew’s face, Herbert barked an order to Mark, “This

must not leave the family. If even a single word gets out, I’ll hold you responsible.”

Beads of sweat formed on Mark’s brow as he nodded hastily. “Yes, air, I will ensure that no one speaks of this. This matter won’t leave this estate.”

With a scowl, Herbert snapped, “What matter? This claim hasn’t been substantiated at all! It’s not even a matter! The Supreme Court only investigates treason cases. As for the accusations against the concubines’ daughters, those are the result of Carissa’s Investigation.

“What does a mere woman know about such matters? she knows anything, it’s just hearsay from gossiping women! She must have heard some outsiders slander our family and took it to heart without even verifying the truth. We will pursue this!”

He said those words not only for the present Quinton family members, but also for Lionel to hear.

Upon hearing it, Lionel’s expression softened a bit. He reflected on Malcolm’s character and the affection between his parents. There was no way his dad would keep a mistress.

If

If Rafael had been the one investigating, Lionel would have trusted his judgment. But Carissa’s inquiry seemed to be based on nothing more than a few whispers taken at face value without any proper investigation.

As for why Carissa hadn’t come, it was likely because she had been snubbed at Oakspire Estate the day before and figured the Quinton family wouldn’t allow her in. So, she had likely asked Rafael to mention it on her behalf.

Lionel also noted that Rafael had been careful and had wanted to tell Malcolm personally, which was why he had sent someone to pass the message the day before. However, Malcolm had thought Carissa was the one delivering the news, and being a second-rank official, he couldn’t accept an investigation led by a woman, which was why he had taken his wife and left the house.

Then, after waiting for an hour, Rafael’s patience ran out. Since he couldn’t see Malcolm, he likely told everyone directly because he was angry. If Malcolm had been present, Rafael would have told him that such a rumor was going around and asked if it was true. If it wasn’t, the prince would have urged him to investigate.

Yes, that was it.

So, the information might not be true at all.

Chapter 787

However, Lionel still felt a gnawing unease. Even if he managed to keep this under wraps from outsiders, there was no way to hide it from those within the household. With so many people around, the news would surely reach his grandfather and mom.

So, Lionel turned to his uncle and said, "Uncle Herbert, I'm going to speak to Carissa directly about this. I need to know where her information came from. If she merely heard some idle gossip from outsiders and felt bold enough to claim that Dad has a mistress, I won't let this matter go."

"Alright. Go, quickly!" Herbert urged.

What others thought didn't concern him, but Herbert didn't believe for a moment that his brother was capable of such a thing. The Quinton family's teachings were a heavy weight on their shoulders, and as

the current head of the family, Malcolm would never be foolish enough to engage in such behavior.

Lionel rode swiftly to the Capital Guard's headquarters, only to learn that Carissa had been summoned to the palace. Though he lacked the privilege to enter the palace at will, he could report his intention to see his sister, the queen. With that, Kylie's people would come to escort him in.

He quickly inquired if Carissa was in the palace. Upon confirming she was still inside, he instructed someone to inform Kylie and request that she send for Carissa.

When he arrived at Everspring Palace to see Kylie, he wasted no time and said, "Carissa is in the royal study. Please send someone to fetch her."

"What's going on?" Kylie asked, sensing the gravity in her brother's demeanor.

Carissa's role in assisting the Supreme Court with the treason investigation was a delicate matter. Did it somehow involve the Quinton family?

"Just send someone," Lionel insisted.

“Lydia, go at once and wait outside the royal study. If Carissa comes out, bring her straight here,” Kylie quickly gave her orders.

Lydia nodded and hurried off without delay.

After watching the maid leave, Lionel turned back to his sister and said, “Yesterday, Carissa took the Capital Guard to Oakspire Estate. They waited outside for an hour before they were allowed in. Dad suspected she’d come to our estate today, and sure enough, someone from Hell Monarch Estate came by last night to inform him to be ready for her arrival at around nine in the morning...”

Before Lionel could finish, Kylie’s noble features flushed with anger. “What? She sent someone to tell Dad to wait for her at a specific hour? I’ve heard she casually inquires at the various estates, but why does Dad have to wait for her? What kind of important business does she think she’s handling?”

“Let me finish.” Lionel met her gaze steadily. “Dad wouldn’t meet with her in person, so he took Mom out this morning. He often takes her out on rest days anyway. He informed Mark that the Capital Guard could enter, but little did we know that it would be the prince himself who came.”

*Rafael?” Kylie looked momentarily taken aback. “He brought the Capital Guard with him?”

“No. He just came with Jacob. He insisted on speaking only with Dad. But since Dad left early this morning, he was already at the temple by the appointed time. We sent someone to call him back, but he still hadn’t returned after an hour.

“His Highness likely felt we were deliberately dismissing him, especially after he had already sent someone to inform us last night. So, when he couldn’t see Dad, he just told us that Dad has been keeping a mistress outside, who is one of the concubine’s daughters from Eleanor’s household.” Kylie gasped in disbelief and drew in a sharp breath. “That’s Impossible. Absolutely impossible. Lionel calmly continued, “I know the Capital Guard is looking into the concubines’ daughters from Eleanor’s household. When someone from Hell Monarch Estate sent word last night, I’m sure it was Carissa who was supposed to come today. But nobody expected her to be summoned to the palace this morning, which was likely why His Highness—came instead.

“However, Carissa knows the most about this whole affair. That’s why I want you to bring her here after she’s done with her meeting with His Majesty, so we can ask her about it. If she merely heard a

few baseless rumors and jumped to conclusions about Dad keeping a mistress, then we need to get to the bottom of it.”

Chapter 788

Obviously upset, Kylie said, “Regardless, Dad would never do such a thing. There must have been a mistake in their investigation. This hasn’t spread too far, right?”

“Only the people within the estate know. Uncle Herbert issued a strict order prohibiting anyone from speaking of it outside,” Lionel replied.

“Was Dad home when you left for the palace?”

“I left before he came back. I went to the Capital Guard headquarters to find Carissa, but when I heard she had been summoned to the palace, I rushed over ght away. I was hoping to clarify things with her so we could plan our response,” Lionel explained.

“Regardless, I absolutely refuse to believe that Dad is keeping a mistress,” Kylie stated coldly.

Lionel had initially believed it, simply because it had come from Rafael. However, after hearing Herbert’s words and reflecting on them, he felt a mix of doubt and suspicion.

This wasn’t something Rafael had uncovered—it was the Capital Guard’s investigation. While undoubtedly skilled, Carissa was still a woman in a man’s world. She might have believed some baseless rumors without proper investigation, just like any gossiping housewife.

The Quinton family had been thriving in recent years, attracting jealousy and resentment. Unsavory whispers often circulated about them. It was entirely possible that someone, unable to bear seeing Lionel’s parents so happy together, had concocted tales of Malcolm keeping a mistress.

High society was full of jealous, malicious people with loose tongues.

“Regardless, we need to find out where Carissa got her information. Otherwise, Mom will be heartbroken and Dad’s reputation will be at stake,” Lionel said, his tone serious.

Deep down, Kylie harbored a sense of animosity toward Carissa. Salvador had once wanted to bring her into the palace as a concubine, but later, it became clear that it was all part of his political maneuvering to force the Hell Monarch to relinquish his military power.

But Kylie couldn't forget the look in Salvador's eyes when he had been discussing it with her. There had been a smoldering intensity in his eyes that she had never witnessed before, not even when he gazed at his favored concubine, Sylvia.

Salvador's interest in Sylvia was driven by political motives. Her dad was the Minister of Justice, and he held considerable sway within the government. As Salvador's own military influence was limited, an alliance with someone of Patrick's stature could bolster his position in unexpected ways.

Kylie had never been overly concerned about Sylvia's favored status. Any affection tainted by political motives was never true love. Her intuition as a woman told her that Salvador truly felt differently about

Carissa.

Now that she had become the Hell Monarch's princess consort, the king's glances during the last palace banquet—filled with an unusual complexity—had been telling.

Carissa had been in the royal study for nearly two hours. Although she had been granted a seat, she was quite anxious. Salvador had inquired about Cecilia, something that hadn't yet been reported to him. Clearly, he had sent someone to the Capital Guard to gather information beforehand. This showed just

how deeply he was invested in the case.

When she first arrived, Salvador had said something loaded with meaning.

"Women naturally support one another. While it's fine to assist one another, we must adhere to the truth and avoid favoritism. You are the first female official of our era. You cannot tarnish the dignity of women nor let the queen dowager down."

Carissa reiterated to him how the concubines and the daughters had suffered under Eleanor's rule, and that they were mere pawns being used for others' schemes. Most of them hadn't followed Eleanor's orders or hadn't managed to comply fully. She asked whether their cases could be handled with more leniency.

Further, even if the court didn't take action against them, most—would still be expelled from where they currently were. Those who were driven out would be placed under the Capital Guard's supervision until the treason case was fully investigated and closed. As for those who remained, they would be strictly monitored, with the respective households held accountable.

After some contemplation, Salvador accepted her reasoning. However, he insisted on a deeper investigation into Cecilia's case. He planned to address it personally.

Meanwhile, news had already arrived that the Defense Minister, Davis, and Tyler Xavier, a commander stationed outside the capital, had arrived. They had also dispatched someone to the Supreme Court to retrieve the weapons that had been confiscated from Harmony Palace, intending to compare them with those from the Ministry of Defense.

The primary focus was on the armor's materials, while a separate team had already been sent to examine the ballistae. The other weapons were merely for show and brought along as part of the ongoing

investigation.

Chapter 789

After a thorough comparison, they found that the armor from Harmony Palace was actually made with better materials and craftsmanship than the Ministry of Defense's armor.

The battle gear made for generals was especially impressive. When tested in Salvador's study, the armor withstood several blows without any damage, while the blades of the swords chipped instead.

However, the ballistae tested were deemed a lower quality than the Ministry of Defense's, which slightly eased Salvador's anger.

At least it proved one thing—Cecilia hadn't lied. She hadn't stolen the designs for the ballistae or armor, as the two were clearly distinct. Still, Gareth was likely to face repercussions. It was unacceptable for him to let such critical weapon blueprints leak.

Fortunately, Salvador had not changed his stance on the concubines' daughters, and was quite supportive of Carissa's proposal for their unified supervision. After all, those women had indeed been manipulated, and no real harm had come to anyone. By doing this, he could earn a reputation for benevolence.

As for Celeste, whose actions had thrown the Earl of Gracehold's family into chaos, Salvador had weighed the matter carefully. Ultimately, Samuel's lack of decisiveness was to blame. So many women had entered noble families without causing too much upheaval, yet only the Earl of Gracehold's family had been turned upside down. So, they would bear a significant share of the responsibility for that.

With those decisions made, Carissa finally let out a sigh of relief.

Salvador dismissed Davis and the others, keeping Carissa behind for a private discussion. His eyes showed no signs of fatigue. He seemed to have boundless energy for the treason case.

"Commander Sinclair," he said, his tone serious. "I have a question for you, and I need you to answer truthfully."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Carissa replied, steeling herself.

Salvador regarded her with the penetrating gaze of authority, filled with pressure. "Who do you think is behind Eleanor?"

Carissa immediately felt apprehensive. Rafael had asked this question before, and Salvador was also clearly looking into it.

Why bring it up now?

"Let me rephrase that. My brother mentioned Yuvan. Do you share this opinion?"

Carissa nodded without hesitation. "Yes, I believe that as well."

"Is there any evidence implicating Yuvan in this matter, according to the investigations by the Supreme Court and the Capital Guard? Excluding Fiona's involvement in sending women to Eleanor," Salvador asked, his eyes locking onto Carissa's with a depth that felt like an ocean,

"I know about the incident involving Avis, which led to a complete rift between Yuvan's family and you. Are your judgments clouded by personal feelings? If you suspect him, there must be a reasonable basis or evidence for it. What proof do you currently possess? You can't just say your

suspicious are based on gut feelings. This is a treason charge. If you suspect someone, you need to present evidence.

“Or perhaps your guild has uncovered something? For instance, before you went to the Southern Frontier, you told me that your senior guild members discovered that Westhaven soldiers were aiding Sandoria. Now that you suspect Yuvan, was it because they discovered anything relevant?”

Carissa felt a rush of panic. She couldn’t implicate her guild in this matter. The evidence she had was either from the investigations of Skywing Spire or Rafael’s discreet inquiries. They knew the situation but lacked concrete proof. Without that, she couldn’t claim they had evidence, and as for Winona’s findings, those couldn’t be presented to Salvador, who was wary of such things.

“There is no evidence so far to prove that Eleanor, Prince Yuvan, or even any other princes have had secret dealings, Your Majesty. However, there must be a process of elimination in investigations. After ruling out others, Prince Yuvan appears to be the most likely suspect among them. I’m merely hypothesizing boldly, but will be cautious in verifying it. I’m not concluding that the person behind Eleanor is necessarily Prince Yuvan,” she replied.

Salvador continued to scrutinize her. “I recall your senior guild member is quite adept at gathering intelligence. Didn’t she provide you with any insights?”

“Winona has not investigated these matters, Your Majesty. She only happened to discover Westhaven soldiers at the Southern Frontier during her travels. She knew this was a significant issue for our kingdom, which is why she sent me a carrier pigeon.”

Salvador looked somewhat disappointed but also relieved. “Very well, you may go. There’s nothing more for now.”

As Carissa took her leave, her mouth felt dry and her stomach growled with hunger. A chill crept into her heart. Managing this task was indeed challenging. It was no wonder that the higher officials rose, the less hair they had.

From Salvador’s expression, Carissa sensed he was both hoping Winona would provide some information and fearful that she might truly be as formidable as she seemed. If Winona was powerful, it meant the Pathfinders Guild was powerful—and Carissa was part of that guild.

Thus, this crisis could not be allowed to escalate.

Chapter 790

Just as she took a few steps out of the royal study, Cassa was intercepted by the queen's head maid, Lydia, who smiled and curtsied.

"Your Grace, it's been a while since we last met."

Carissa returned the smile. It has. What brings you here, Lydia?"

"Oh, it's nothing urgent. Her Majesty mentioned she hasn't seen you in some time and would like to invite you to Everspring Palace for some tea."

Carissa's throat was parched and she felt the pang of thirst. However, she also knew that an invitation from the queen rarely came with good intentions.

Could she decline?

Seeing the determined look on Lydia's face, she realized that refusal wasn't an option.

"Alright, then. Please lead the way."

"Of course, Your Grace," Lydia replied cheerfully before setting off.

The distance from the royal study to Everspring Palace was a bit of a trek, but the weather was pleasant, with a gentle breeze that eased some of the oppressive atmosphere from the study. As she walked, the tension slowly bled out of Carissa's body.

Although Kylie was not very friendly with her, dealing with the queen was far more manageable than facing Salvador's intimidating presence.

Upon arriving at Everspring Palace, Lydia guided Carissa inside.

As they entered, Carissa spotted a man dressed in luxurious clothing standing up to pay his respects. She recognized him immediately—Lionel, the queen’s brother, a third-rank Councilor, and a trusted minister of Salvador’s since his ascension to the throne.

Carissa bowed respectfully. “Greetings, Your Majesty.”

“Rise,” Kylie said, her voice calm and distant as she sat regally on the throne.

Lionel respectfully greeted, “Commander Sinclair.”

Carissa returned the greeting, “Lord Lionel,”

“Please be seated,” Kylie instructed.

Carissa thanked her and took a seat on the left side of the room, while he settled across from her.

Once seated, he wasted no time in saying, “I have something to ask you, Commander Sinclair. Please answer truthfully.”

“Your Majesty, may I have a glass of water?” Carissa requested, feeling too thirsty.

“Serve refreshments!” Kylie commanded without hesitation.

As they waited for the refreshments to arrive, Carissa asked, “What is it you wish to ask, Lord Lionel?”

He hesitated, a flicker of discomfort crossing his face as he broached the subject. Ultimately, he endured the humiliation in his heart and looked at Carissa directly.

“Today, Prince Rafael came to our residence and said that my dad has been keeping a mistress outside. She is said to be a concubine’s daughter from Eleanor’s household. You were the one who discovered this, right, Commander Sinclair? Where did you get this information?”

Carissa was taken aback. She had discussed this matter with Rafael the night before, and they had agreed to speak with Malcolm privately. Why had it been spread to the other family members?

Rafael was a tactful man. He would have respected Malcolm's position.

Unlike others who directly brought the women from Eleanor's household into their homes as concubines, Malcolm had kept the one sent to him outside as a mistress. So, it was inappropriate for Rafael and Carissa to announce the matter in the open.

Instead of answering, Carissa asked, "Are you saying His Highness mentioned this in front of everyone today?"

Lionel's expression grew frantic. "Yes! Just tell me how you heard of this. Who did you hear it from?" Although Carissa couldn't fathom how a matter that should have been kept private had suddenly become common knowledge among the Quinton family, she replied, "We investigated the matter ourselves. It wasn't something we heard from anyone."

Lionel grew agitated. "Investigated? How did you investigate it?"

Carissa maintained her composure. "I don't think it's necessary to explain how we conducted our investigation to you, Lord Lionel. His Majesty is aware, that's what matters."

"But what evidence do you have? If you can't provide any evidence or explain how you investigated it, I won't believe you."

"You won't believe me?" Carissa raised an eyebrow, confused.

Had Malcolm denied Rafael's words?

"Did Lord Malcolm deny it?" she asked directly.

Lionel shook his head. "My dad doesn't know about this yet. He left early this morning."

"So, he didn't meet His Highness?" Carissa questioned.

Lionel nodded.

Carissa suddenly understood how the other Quinton family members had come to know about it.

Since Malcolm had gone out today after being informed of their visit last night, Rafael probably waited at the residence for quite a while and likely grew impatient. Furthermore, he must have recalled how Carissa had waited outside Oakspire Estate yesterday and gotten angry, so he had just left without giving much explanation.