

War Song 811

Chapter 811

The next day, Lionel went to Pearwater Convent to pick up Amara.

Carissa was present, so he pulled her aside for a moment Conder Sinclair, please don't worry. My mom will treat Amara well and won't make things difficult. I have half-brothers and half-sisters borne by my dad's concubines, and my mom has always been kind to them."

Carissa replied bluntly, "I don't doubt your mom will be good to the child. However, I need to clarify something. Yesterday, your mom asked me what the child's name was. I told her it was Briar. As for whether you will use 'Amara' after returning, that's up to you."

Lionel sighed softly. "Thank you, Commander Sinclair.

"Since you're bringing the child back, will you let her meet Casey?"

Lionel nodded. "That's fine. In fact, my mom said yesterday that if my dad wants to take Casey back to our residence, she would agree."

Carissa looked at him in surprise. "You're not that simple a person, Lord Lionel. Be a little kinder to your mom and consider her feelings.

Lionel hurried to explain, "Please don't misunderstand. My mom isn't petty. She thinks about the big picture to avoid giving anyone a handle against our family."

"I'm not misunderstanding. I know your mom is considering the greater good, but that doesn't mean you can treat her like she has no heart. In a situation like this, who do you think suffers the most? It's not your dad. It's your mother. Yet even in her difficult position, she's still thinking about the future of your family.

You can't match her vision."

Carissa rarely showed such patience when communicating with members of the Quinton family. Yesterday, she had wondered if Marjorie was being too kind-hearted.

Upon reflection, Carissa realized there was a reason for it—Marjorie didn't want the Quinton family or Kylie to be attacked later over this issue, so she would rather take the hit now.

Lionel's eyes glimmered with sorrow. "I know my mom must be hurting. But if we're talking about who's suffering the most, it's definitely my dad. This incident has caused many of our family's young men to lose their respect for him. He's sacrificed a lot over the years to maintain our family's honor, and he's been struggling with nowhere to vent his frustrations. That's why he didn't refuse Casey when she came

to him.

"Commander Sinclair, you're in the court too, so you should understand how difficult it is to hold an official position, especially since my dad is the Civil Minister. He's always tirelessly recommending capable people to the court and evaluating officials..

Carissa understood that men often spoke from a man's perspective, and their stance shaped their perceptions. So, she didn't argue.

"Alright, Lord Lionel. I'm just offering a suggestion. After all, this is your family matter, and I don't want to Interfere. You should handle it as you see fit."

Lionel awkwardly said, "Alright, I'll take Amara back first. As for whether I'll bring Casey later, I'll ask my mom again. If she agrees, I'll send someone to fetch her. For now, let's not meet her."

Carissa wanted to remind Lionel not to keep calling the child Amora, as it was just another wound for his mom. However, it was clear he didn't see it that way. Bringing it up again would only seem meddlesome.

With that, Lionel left with the child without allowing her to meet Casey. He hadn't even asked Casey if she wanted to go to the Quinton family's residence.

After taking care of a few matters, Carissa decided to check on Casey.

She was sitting alone in a shared room, and her roommate hadn't returned yet. She hugged a blanket, sitting on the bed. Since arriving here, she hadn't said much at all, and she hadn't eaten anything today.

"Why aren't you eating?" Carissa asked gently.

Casey lifted her head and softly asked, "Did he leave?"

Carissa nodded. "He's gone."

A small sigh of relief escaped Casey. "The matriarch of the Quinton family will treat her well. I'm very reassured."

Casey had approached Malcolm for a mission, so naturally, someone had investigated the Quinton family's situation.

"Are you alright?" Carissa Inquired.

"I couldn't be better," Casey said with a smile, lifting her gaze to meet Carissa's. Her long hair fell around her face, framing her eyes and making it look bigger than usual. "It feels almost unreal. How could the heavens be so kind to me? I really can't believe it. I'm even afraid to step outside. What if I open the door, and someone takes me back to Harmony Palace to be punished?"

"Take a walk. You'll see that everything is more real than it seems. By the way, if the Quinton family wants to take you back to their residence, would you want to go?" Carissa asked.

Chapter 812

"My condolences," Carissa said softly.

"She passed away in my arms. She was coughing terribly and throwing up blood. In a way, her passing is a relief," Carmen choked out, her voice breaking.

Carissa felt a pang of sorrow in her heart. “If you want to bury her on the mountain at Pearwater Convent, you don’t need to ask the abbess. I can make that decision. That mountain was granted to us by King Sigmund after my dad achieved merit.”

“Really? Thank you, Your Grace,” Carmen replied, her gratitude evident.

Carissa nodded slightly. “I’ll send someone to assist you. Have you already arranged for a coffin?”

Carmen responded, “Yes, I’ve purchased one. Ms. Spencer lent me some money, but I didn’t use it. The Lester family is providing a coffin for my mom. I didn’t agree at first, but I couldn’t refuse them. They’ve already prepared my mom for burial, and we’re just waiting for the funeral. I really don’t want to owe them anything.”

Carissa understood the Lester family’s coldness. They likely feared being implicated. But now that Melanie had passed, their worries were no longer relevant, which was why they were willing to help with the funeral.

“If there’s anything I can do to assist, just let me know, The Capital Guard will provide support,” Carissa offered.

“There’s one more thing. I’m now completely alone, and there are many disabled people here at Pearwater Convent. I want to stay and care for them. I just ask for a place to sleep and three meals a day in exchange,” Carmen said.

‘Carissa was more than happy to agree. “Alright, thank you for helping them.”

“They’re all suffering souls,” Carmen said softly. “Fortunately, I’ve trained in martial arts, so I can handle the hard work.”

Chapter 813

The next day, Henry was to be executed, with Rafael serving as the supervising officer. The Capital Guard was responsible for setting up the perimeter and maintaining order.

Rafael had initially been reluctant to let Carissa attend. While Henry was despicable, he wasn’t the mastermind behind the chaos. Plus, the brutality of a beheading was not something he wanted her to

witness.

But Carissa had already seen all kinds of cruel scenes. Even if Henry wasn't the ultimate culprit, his self-serving actions and weakness had led to the suffering of so many. He was truly guilty of unspeakable

crimes.

Thus, she insisted on going.

By early morning, the area outside the execution ground was packed with people. Since the execution was scheduled for noon, the Capital Guard hadn't arrived early to manage the crowd, leading to a noisy scene. Vendors had even set up stalls and were selling their goods nearby.

The timid townsfolk wouldn't come to watch, and children were strictly prohibited. Even if there wasn't a ban, parents wouldn't allow their children to attend.

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Yet, there was never a shortage of onlookers, especially with the prince consort's identity drawing larger crowd. After all, seeing someone of high status executed wasn't an everyday occurrence.

Executions were generally more frequent in the autumn, as many death sentences would be carried out after the fall harvest.

At the appointed hour, Michael arrived with the Capital Guard to maintain order. They erected ropes to 'mark the boundaries and ensured the crowd stayed behind the line.

Henry was still at the Supreme Court, as he hadn't yet been brought to the execution site. Before heading to the gallows, the Supreme Court would offer him a lavish meal, allowing him to fill his stomach for the journey ahead.

At first, Henry wasn't particularly afraid. But when the food arrived, he began to tremble uncontrollably. He lost his appetite and remained silent.

Peter, the Supreme Court's representative, came to see him off and urged, "Eat. It's better to be a well-fed ghost than a starving one."

As soon as Peter said that, Henry nearly lost control of his bladder.

His hands shook as he picked up his cutlery, only to set them down again. He looked up at Peter and asked, "Is...is anyone from the Marquis of Grovehill's family coming to see me?"

Peter said, "That name doesn't exist anymore. None of the Kingsley family members came for you. I've told them before that they could visit you, but they've decided not to. They said you're guilty of grave crimes and they don't want to see you."

Henry buried his face in his hands and began to sob.

Seeing this, Peter asked, "Do you have anything to say? If you can identify the mastermind behind this

life." plot, I could plead for leniency on your behalf, maybe even save your

Peter wasn't willing to let this final opportunity slip away. Henry knew a lot, but was too afraid to speak. out, fearing it might Implicate his family.

Now that the Kingsley family seemed indifferent to his fate, it was a chance Peter could seize.

Henry stifled his tears, grappling with a fleeting Impulse driven by fear and anger. But he was already. accustomed to sacrificing for the Kingsley family—it was ingrained in him. He couldn't turn against them.

Their absence was for the best. That way, they wouldn't have any ties to him and wouldn't be dragged

down.

He picked up the cutlery and began to eat slowly. His hands trembled so much that he could barely hold them steady, yet he still managed to shove pieces of meat into his mouth.

Seeing this, Peter realized he wouldn't be getting any information from Henry. Nevertheless, he pressed on, determined not to give up.

"If you come forward, Prince Rafael could plead with the king to pardon the Kingsley family. You wouldn't have to die."

"That's impossible." Henry-lifted his head, managing a wretched smile. "It's impossible because I don't know anything."

Henry had to insist he knew nothing at all. To have knowledge meant becoming an accomplice. At that point, his life wouldn't be the only one to be forfeited; the Kingsley family would face extermination as well.

In the end, Henry was going to die. Why drag everyone else into hell with him?

Peter fell silent, choosing not to push further. There was still enough time. So, he let Henry eat at his own

pace.

Tears dripped onto the plate as Henry took a deep breath, trying to hold back the tears and suppress the fear of death. But the dread still filled his heart, suffocating him.

Chapter 814

Henry began to ramble, "None of this was what I wanted! If I could choose again, I would never have pursued Eleanor. My family may have been in decline, but it was still a marquis' family. The foundation was still there—how bad could it possibly get?

"I came from a scholarly background. I could have taken the national examinations. There wasn't just one path before me. How could I have been so foolish? I was truly too foolish. I had such a bright future ahead. I could have married a virtuous woman, taken a couple of concubines, and had three or four sons and a few daughters. The marriage would have made my family stronger. Instead, I thought I was taking a shortcut, but I didn't realize it was a dead end."

The cutlery fell from his hands as his shoulders shook with sobs.

Peter picked them up for him. “Dwelling on the past is pointless. Action is what matters now. You can still share what you know. There’s still a chance to turn things around. If you keep silent, you’re sealing your

fate”

Henry covered his face and cried for a moment before lowering his hands, wiping away tears and snot with his sleeve. After enduring torture, his movements were slow and clumsy, and he hunched over,

“No matter what, it’s still a dead end. There’s no way out.”

Peter had been around the court long enough to see all kinds of villains, many of whom regretted their choices when death loomed near. They would confess anything in hopes of buying a chance at survival.

But Henry, though not a great villain, had a startling clarity of mind. Even now, as he faced execution, he weighed the pros and cons. With his intelligence and calm demeanor, how could he have fallen prey to Eleanor’s manipulation?

At the end of the day, it all came down to greed.

At first, Henry may have resisted. Then, he was half-heartedly drawn in. Eventually, he found himself fully involved and pulling the strings from behind. He believed Eleanor to be the mastermind, thinking that playing the victim would shield him from blame.

But he was wrong.

Peter didn’t press him further, simply waiting in silence

Eventually, Henry stopped crying and lifted his head to ask, “If my head is cut off, will I die instantly?”

Peter replied dismissively, “I’ve never had my head chopped off, so I can’t say for sure. But I’ve heard from the coroner that when the head is separated from the body, there’s a brief moment of awareness—like realizing your head has been cut off. Of course, I haven’t experienced it myself, so who knows if it’s true?”

“How terrifying!” Henry stared at Peter, his entire body trembling uncontrollably.

“You’re right. That kind of death is truly frightening, especially with so many people watching.”

Henry broke down again. “How did I end up like this? It’s all Eleanor’s fault! She’s the one who ruined me!”

“It’s your own doing,” Peter said as he stepped outside, sensing that it was nearly time to head to the execution ground.

Before long, the bailiffs from the Supreme Court came to drag Henry away. He was utterly unable to stand, his body too weak to muster even the slightest strength.

Rafael and Carissa rode ahead, with the prisoner cart following behind. A crowd gathered to gawk, but no one threw anything at Henry—only the sound of jeers and curses filled the air.

Henry’s hair fell over his face, and his former air of authority had completely vanished. He resembled a stray dog, desperately scanning the crowd for a glimpse of his family. Just one sight, no matter who it was, would ease the terror churning in his heart.

But he saw no one—not even a servant from his household.

Suddenly, a chilling thought struck him—would there be no one to claim his body after he died? The Kingsley family wouldn’t come to collect his remains, would they?

If no one did, the Supreme Court would simply toss his corpse into a common grave. Here he was, the son of a marquis, a scholar by background, once a prince consort—yet in death, he wouldn’t even have a proper coffin.

The sun hung high overhead, bright and unyielding. As noon approached, so did the moment of his execution. The closer it drew, the more Henry's fear intensified.

Chapter 815

When they arrived at the execution ground, Henry was dragged out and forced to kneel in the center. The executioner, a burly figure holding a gleaming blade, stood beside him. The sight of the blade sent Henry into a panic, and he found it hard to remain kneeling. He desperately scanned the crowd for help.

The noise around him was deafening, yet all he could hear was the pounding of his own heart. It was like a drumbeat, and it felt as if it might burst from his chest at any moment.

He didn't see Rafael, the official overseeing the execution, but he faintly heard the prince's voice. He tried to turn and catch a glimpse of the man, but a board tied to his back blocked his actions. All he could see was the executioner's disgusted expression as he covered his nose.

At that moment, Henry realized he had lost control of his bowels. The sheer terror felt like a venomous snake, burrowing into his very skin.

He was beyond terrified.

Finally, amidst the throng, he spotted a familiar face.

A wave of relief washed over him, and his voice came out hoarse and tremulous, "Chaya...!"

Hayden stood at the edge of the crowd with the plump woman beside him. Chaya's dark eyes were fixed on Henry. Their gazes met, but she seemed entirely indifferent to the fear and joy radiating from her dad. She looked at him with an expression devoid of emotion.

"Do you want to give him something to eat?" Hayden asked Chaya.

"I think he's had enough to eat," she replied.

Hayden nodded. “Yes, they usually serve people a lavish meal at the Supreme Court before their beheading, but do you have anything you want to say to him?”

Chaya pondered for a moment. “Can I go up and talk to him?”

“You can deliver a last message.”

“Then, there’s something I want to ask him.”

“Let’s go. I’ll take you to meet the supervising officer. He’s my nephew, so he won’t mind my old man scent.” Hayden chuckled.

“I don’t mind your smell either. I just think you’re old,” Chaya replied as she followed Hayden.

Her outfit fit well today, making her look more rounded than particularly heavy—an appearance that exuded a certain fullness and prosperity.

Hayden led the way to the execution platform and said to Rafael, “She wants to ask the soon-to-be-beheaded man a question.”

Rafael glanced at Carissa, who nodded. “I’ll go with you.”

While there wasn’t much affection between Chaya and her dad, she had been sent to Hayden’s side. Carissa’s presence would prevent any trouble from arising during their exchange.

“Alright, I appreciate it,

Commander Sinclair,” Chaya said, understanding the need to avoid any problems.

As they approached the execution ground, Chaya added, “I just have one question. I won’t take up too much time.”

“Sounds good!” Carissa replied.

She didn’t ask what the question was and simply accompanied Chaya.

When they reached the execution ground, Chaya knelt in front of Henry and stared at him.

Henry's lips moved as he tried to process the sight of her, excitement bubbling within him.

"Chaya, you came to see your dad! You came to send me off, right? You're here to collect my body, aren't you? Oh, Chaya, you're such a good girl."

Chaya shifted back slightly, using a handkerchief to cover her nose. "I'm not here to collect your body. I just want to ask you—what does it feel like to be facing execution? Are you scared?"

Henry froze, staring at her as if he hadn't quite understood her words. "What?"

"I don't know if I'll get dragged into this, but if I do, I might end up facing the same fate. So, I thought I'd come and ask how you feel about it. I need to be mentally prepared."

Henry's chest heaved, his face turning ghostly pale. "You..."

Chaya lowered her handkerchief. "Do you believe in karma? Mom said that doing bad things comes back to haunt you, and that it can affect your children. Being your daughter is my misfortune."

With that, she stood up and turned to Carissa. "I'm done now. We can go."

Henry let out a mournful wail. "No! This isn't what I wanted!"

Carissa hadn't expected Chaya to come just to deliver such an offhand remark. As they walked back, she said, "You won't be executed."

"I know that. I just wanted to taunt him a bit. My mom and I both loathe him. He ruined her life." Chaya shrugged. "I didn't choose to be his daughter, but I didn't have a choice."

Chapter 816

Carissa found Chaya to be a truly remarkable young woman. She had grown up in such a harsh environment, yet her focus was solely on living each day to the fullest and not compromising herself when she could avoid it.

As for her dad, Chaya felt neither love nor hatred—just disdain.

Chaya turned to Carissa and asked, “If no one is there to collect his body after the execution, where will it end up? Will they hang it up for all to see?”

“If there are no family members to give him a proper burial, he’ll be given a quick burial. They’ll only display his body for all to see if he’s the mastermind behind the treason case,” Carissa replied.

Chaya hummed in response, her curiosity satisfied.

She returned to Hayden and remarked, “There are still some leftover pound cakes at home. Let’s eat those when we get back. They won’t taste good if they sit out for too long.”

“You don’t want to watch anymore?” Hayden asked.

“I’m afraid of blood. It’s better if I don’t see it,” Chaya replied.

Hayden still indulged her as usual and said, “Alright, let’s go. I’ll take you to the lake tomorrow.”

“Why would we go to the lake in this cold weather?” Chaya scoffed. “We could stay home, enjoy some coffee by the fire, and roast a few pieces of lamb. Isn’t that better?”

“I wanted to take you out to clear your mind. You’re such an ungrateful girl,” Hayden teased. Then, he turned to Rafael and sighed. “I’ve spent my whole life at the mercy of women, and here I am, still the same in my old age.”

Rafael wanted to remind him that they were at an execution ground and that the mood shouldn’t be so lighthearted. But seeing Hayden genuinely happy, he chose not to dampen his spirits.

“I can relate. I’ve been at the mercy of women my whole life too,” said Rafael.

Hayden patted his shoulder. “Alright, don’t let me distract you from your duties. Go chop off heads or whatever. I’ll be taking my little friend with me.”

Rafael helplessly pointed at the man on the execution ground. “It’s his head that we’re chopping off.”

“Of course.” Hayden chuckled as he led Chaya away.

As noon approached, the mournful tune for Henry’s fate began to play. With the clang of Rafael’s command emblem hitting the ground, the executioner lifted his gleaming blade.

The midday sun glinted off the steel. For a moment, it appeared almost to have absorbed blood as it shimmered a vivid red. But upon closer inspection, it was just the red sash around the executioner’s waist reflecting a flash of crimson.

At the moment the blade was raised, fear exploded within Henry’s chest. His mind blanked out and he fainted.

The executioner yanked the plank from Henry’s back and swiftly swung the blade down. There was a

sickening crack as the blade severed his head halfway, leaving it hanging at an awkward angle.

Gasps and screams erupted from the crowd as blood gushed out, and many covered their eyes in horror.

The first strike hadn’t fully decapitated him, but it jolted Henry back to consciousness. He felt disoriented, unable to process the sensations—there was no pain, just a heat radiating from his neck and the feeling of something flowing out.

Then, his head rolled away with another swift chop.

The screams intensified and the onlookers recoiled. Watching an execution was thrilling for some, but many couldn’t handle the brutality and fainted. Those people were quickly escorted away by the Capital Guard.

Carissa turned away after the first strike, only glancing back when the head fell, signaling to Michael to begin clearing the area.

The Kingsley family members had not made an appearance throughout the ordeal.

Michael dispatched someone to Grovehill Estate, but the doors were locked tight and no one came to open up. It was clear they had no intention of claiming the body.

He ordered Henry's corpse to be cleaned up and sent to the charity cemetery. If no one claimed it within three days, it would be buried in a common grave.

This was merely a formality. Everyone knew the Kingsley family wouldn't show up to claim the body. Today was also the day Melanie Lester was laid to rest.

The funeral was simple. The Lester family hired workers to carry the coffin up the mountain, where it was buried at Pearwater Convent for Melanie to rest eternally.

Carmen wept as she planted a small pear tree sapling at the grave, but someone warned her that planting in winter rarely yielded success. It would be better to wait until spring.

"I'll plant it now and again when spring comes. I believe my mom's tenacious spirit and resolve will surely allow the sapling to survive the winter," Carmen insisted.

Chapter 817

Carmen didn't set up her pulled pork stall. Instead, she joined Pearwater Convent to handle its procurement needs.

Since most of the residents at the convent were frail and delicate, they were unable to maintain a strict vegetarian diet for long. So, a new building had been constructed nearby where they could prepare nourishing meat soups to help restore their health.

In short, anyone craving meat could go there.

However, the abbess had strict rules—no animals could be killed on the premises, whether at the convent or in the new building. So, every day, Carmen would descend the mountain to buy meat and carry it back

up.

But after just two or three days, no one wanted to eat meat anymore. Perhaps the peace that the convent provided for their souls had fostered a sense of faith within them. They gave up meat of their own accord without needing anyone to tell them to do so.

Fortunately, Pearwater Convent had plenty of wild mountain delicacies. They gathered medicinal herbs and local specialties to brew nourishing soups for the residents. Many officials' families also sent some herbs like Heartsage and Evergreen Root. Although they were of lower quality, they still helped improve the residents' health.

As for the other staff of Harmony Palace, all necessary arrangements had been made, leaving only

Florence.

The queen dowager had specifically ordered Florence to be allowed to go to the Heritage Bureau each day to deliver meals to Eleanor. However, she couldn't enter to serve Eleanor. She could only pass the food through a small door at a side entrance on the lower right corner of the main door—where she could catch a glimpse of the former grand princess as she bent down to deliver the dishes.

For Florence, this was a great blessing.

But watching the former grand princess crawl on the ground, unable to stand, broke Florence's heart.

The grand princess was once a paragon of grace in silk fineries adorned with precious jewels, the pride of the heavens, and one who used to throw away any clothes that got dirty. Now, she had been reduced to a pitiful state. She was confined to a filthy place where she ate, drank, and relieved herself all in one spot, with a terrible stench filling the air.

Eleanor's once fair skin had turned rough and weathered. Strands of white hair were woven throughout her dark tresses, and in this light, the white seemed to outnumber the black.

The former grand princess had grown old.

As for the captain of Harmony Palace's guards, Kurt, he had been sent to the Southern Frontier for five years of hard labor. Luckily for him, he hadn't been in Eleanor's for long and had refused to carry out her orders to harm Daniel's family. This counted as a merit that balanced out his faults, though five years of grueling work were still unavoidable.

With these people dealt with, Harmony Palace was reclaimed. On the day the name plaque of the residence was taken down, many citizens gathered to watch.

Matthew, a deputy minister of the Supreme Court, took the opportunity to educate the crowd. He warned them against harboring malicious thoughts and committing evil deeds.

"Otherwise, even the powerful, like the former grand princess, can come crashing down."

The name plaque was smashed and tossed aside. Though it had been made of fine wood, it was so ruined that it couldn't even be repurposed into a stool leg. Some citizens picked it up to use for firewood.

As for Fiona, she had once delivered a girl to Eleanor, and that girl had met a tragic end. After investigations, it was confirmed that Wendy had initially been promised a future as a concubine in the capital, and her family had provided a dowry. However, once she left, she never returned, leaving her family in despair until their deaths.

This incident stemmed from Fiona's reckless matchmaking, making her partly responsible for Wendy's demise. As a result, she was ordered to pay three hundred silver coins as compensation to Wendy's relatives.

To show her remorse, Fiona willingly offered three thousand silver coins to appease Wendy's family, along with a donation of thirty thousand silver coins to Pearwater Convent.

It seemed as though the dust had settled, but everyone knew the case was far from over. Eleanor had been a grand princess without a son, yet she claimed to be the mastermind behind the rebellion.

No one believed her.

After Yuvan's failed assassination attempt, he couldn't shake the feeling of unease. Every time he entered or exited the palace to attend to Ruth, he feared Salvador would summon him for questioning.

Salvador never called him, which only fueled his anxiety. Given the circumstances of the treason, it was less likely for a mere subject to be suspected. Attention would naturally fall on the princes.

Strangely, Salvador seemed to treat the matter as settled. He had asked neither Yuvan nor Harvey about it, nor had he questioned any other princes in the capital.

The more this continued, the more Yuvan's heart raced with fear.

After all, Eleanor was still alive.

Chapter 818

After Barrett recovered from his injuries, he officially took up his position.

He began by expressing his gratitude, and Salvador spoke to him for an hour. Amidst the admonishments, Salvador also conveyed his trust in Barrett, leaving him with red-rimmed eyes as he exited the royal study.

The king had established the Central Command Office Since Carissa had to attend to her duties there, Barrett went to pay his respects to her as she was his superior.

They were once husband and wife, yet now, Barrett knelt on one knee to offer his formal greeting.

The Capital Guard's deputy commander, the Garrison Unit's chief, the Royal Guard's commander, and the Crown Guard's commander were all present, marking the gathering of key figures.

Barrett's emotions were a tangled mess. He expected Carissa to make things difficult for him, but after the formalities, she simply said, "You may rise. Do your job well."

He stood, lowering his gaze. "Thank you, Commander Sinclair."

Michael stepped forward and patted him on the shoulder. "Congratulations, Barrett, or rather,

Commander Warren! When are you treating us to drinks to celebrate?”

Michael had once been Barrett’s superior, and Barrett held him in high regard. He smiled and respectfully replied, “Whenever you have the time, Michael.”

“I’m not the only one. Don’t forget about the rest of the Capital Guard!” Michael laughed.

“Of course,” Barrett replied, awkwardly smiling as he stole a glance at Carissa. “I’ll host a banquet at my home another day and invite everyone.”

“Sounds great.” Alistair nodded. “We’ll definitely show up. I just wonder if you’ll grace us with your presence then, Commander Sinclair.”

Alistair was currently obedient on the outside but not on the inside, so he deliberately asked that question in hopes of putting Carissa on the spot.

Carissa sat in her chair, narrowing her eyes at Alistair, whose bruises still hadn’t faded.

“Alistair, as the commander of the Royal Guard, your skills are lacking. In a few days, I’ll personally conduct an assessment. All twelve divisions of the Royal Guard are required to participate. Make sure to

inform them.”

Alistair frowned, dissatisfied. “Is only the Royal Guard being tested? What about the Garrison Unit and Crown Guard? And the Capital Guard? Aren’t they included?”

Carissa replied coolly, “They will all be assessed, but we’ll start with the Royal Guard. The others will wait their turn. I’ll choose the appropriate time for their evaluations.”

“Why the Royal Guard first?” Alistair pressed.

Carissa was blunt and showed no mercy. “Because I believe your skills are inadequate. If you fail the assessment, you won’t be able to hold your position anymore and I will find someone more capable.”

Alistair shot back, “My skills are sufficient to lead the Royal Guard. But if you insist on comparing yourself

to me, then who can compete with you?

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Carissa snorted. “Your skills aren’t as good as mine, and your rank isn’t either. So, why are you making such a fuss? It looks like you have a lot of time on your hands, so you should refine your skills to ensure palace security. I’m giving you three days to prepare. After three days, we’ll meet at the Capital Guard headquarters for the assessment.”

Alistair inwardly groaned. Competing against Carissa would be like signing up for a beating. Not only would he take the brunt of it, but the twelve divisions would suffer too—they’d hate him for this.

Women could be so petty.

After Carissa left, Alistair turned to Michael with a pleading look. “You’re on good terms with her—can you put in a good word for me?”

Michael huffed, looking at him with disdain. “I’m just a dog. I can’t even speak. What do you expect me to do?”

With that, he turned on his heel and walked away.

Alistair rubbed his nose. Fine, sometimes men could be even more petty than women.

He rushed after Michael and grabbed the latter’s arm. “That was just a joke! We’ve known each other for years, and we’re both from the Mystic Army. Don’t be so petty!”

“It’s already generous that I didn’t beat you up,” Michael shot back, eyeing him coldly. “Let go.”

“Sorry! I didn’t mean it like that. I just thought it was embarrassing for us men to have a woman in charge. It’s not like I’m against you—who asked you to be so chummy with her at the time?” Alistair retorted.

Chapter 819

Michael said coldly, “I don’t care if she’s a man or a woman. If she’s more capable than I am, I won’t have a single complaint. Besides, she was appointed by His Majesty. If you oppose her, are you trying to go against the royal edict? You’ve been in the Royal Guard for so many years, but you’re still full of yourself and look down on women. If you’re a man with real skills, then defeat her and make her unable to lift her head in front of you. Isn’t that better than any words you could say?”

Alistair replied, “Looks like you’re really mad at me.”

“It’s you who has the temper. I’m not angry at all.” Michael shrugged Alistair off and turned to leave.

Feeling dejected, Alistair returned to the inner hall of the Central Command Office.

Seeing Max and Barrett still there, he plopped down in a chair and asked, “Are you both on her side as well? Max, I know you are—you follow her orders without question. But Barrett, do you really support her? She’s the one who once divorced you and didn’t want you anymore.”

Max shook his head at him. “Alistair, will you die if you don’t say something rude?”

“I’m just being straightforward. I say what I mean to avoid beating around the bush. I’m not good at mind games.”

“Who’s playing mind games with you? Don’t flatter yourself. Being straightforward just means you have a sharp tongue,” Max said, then walked out without another word to Alistair.

There were plenty of matters to attend to in the Garrison Unit—wasting time chatting wasn’t very dignified.

Left behind, Barrett and Alistair exchanged glances.

“Don’t take it to heart, Barrett,” Alistair said in a friendlier tone.

Viola was Alistair's cousin. Even though Alistair and Oliver had their differences, they were still family and should stand united.

"What I just said was just a comment. Don't let it bother you. But I trust you're not truly on board with Carissa, are you?"

Barrett thought for a moment. "What matters most is getting the job done. I've heard Viola talk about you, and I know you're generous and broad-minded. Among the side branches of the Earl of Silverstone's family, you're the only one she respects. So, I believe you prioritize your duties."

Alistair chuckled dryly. "That makes me sound like a petty person."

He didn't believe Viola would say something like that. Viola had her nose so high in the air that the only person she truly respected was her brother.

Barrett didn't want to offend anyone, especially not Carissa. He had just taken office, and if he lost this position, he felt there was no way he could climb back up.

Seeing Barrett silent only added to Alistair's irritation, so he simply rolled his eyes and left.

The thought of the

upcoming assessments was already giving him a headache, and it wasn't just his own. All twelve captains would be assessed together. This was bound to earn him some resentment.

Once everyone else was gone, Barrett called in the Crown Guard. Established during the previous king's reign, the Crown Guard was divided into two units—the Regal Crown Guard and the Sovereign Sentinel. Although their numbers were small, they were all elite.

Barrett spotted a familiar face—Ivan. He knew Ivan was a second-rank guard and a member of the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team, and he was also Thomas' cousin.

Glancing at his notes to see where everyone was stationed, Barrett learned that Ivan had been assigned to the Regal Crown Guard unit. Wanting to promote him, Barrett decided to transfer him to the Sovereign Sentinel unit, where he would be allowed to carry a sword.

As for the others, they would continue their duties without any immediate changes.

Barrett felt a mix of anxiety and responsibility in this new role. Salvador had high hopes for him, but that also meant he had to follow Carissa's lead. If she decided to make things difficult for him, doing his job would become a challenge. She hadn't openly challenged him yet, but her lack of warmth unsettled him.

He considered talking to Carissa, hoping to clarify that there was a line between public duty and personal matters. If she still held a grudge against him, he would be willing to apologize.

Reflecting on their past, especially the time of their divorce, he recalled telling Solomon that he hoped she wouldn't have regrets. Now, looking back, he couldn't help but find it absurd.

Who was the one truly regretting things now?

Chapter 820

Since Barrett had just taken office, he needed to work longer hours. He often personally inspected various parts of the palace, except for the inner court.

When he wasn't on patrol, he could be found waiting by the door of the royal study or back at the Central Command Office, ready to submit his logs when the shifts changed,

The guards on duty were required to record their findings after each patrol. They needed to note down if they found any irregularities. If everything was normal, they also still had to document that. Barrett was free to leave the palace at five in the evening, but he often didn't depart until nearly seven.

As he was leaving, he unexpectedly ran into Yuvan. Barrett knew the prince typically entered the palace early in the morning and left before closing time, so it struck him as odd that Yuvan was leaving so early today.

"Your Highness," Barrett greeted, bowing slightly.

Yuvan smiled back at him. “I haven’t had a chance to congratulate you on your promotion, General Warren. I’ve always believed you were capable. Previously, your talents were simply overlooked, I wish you continued success in the future.”

Barrett felt a bit overwhelmed by the praise. “Thank you, Your Highness.”

With his hands clasped behind his back, Yuvan continued, “When you have some free time, come to Edgeview Estate with your wife for a visit. My wife isn’t familiar with the capital, and if your wife has time to show her around, I know she would appreciate it.”

“I’m grateful for your kindness, but my wife is currently pregnant, so it may not be convenient for her to travel,” Barrett replied.

“Of course. Then, why not come by the estate for a chat? We could catch up,” Yuvan suggested with a cheerful smile. “What a joyful time for you! A promotion and a soon-to-be dad! I’d like to congratulate you once again.”

Barrett found Yuvan to be quite amiable, but he wondered if the prince’s friendliness was a bit excessive. Not daring to say anything about it, Barrett simply thanked him and shifted the topic. “Why are you leaving the palace so early today, Your Highness?”

Yuvan stretched a bit and casually replied, “My mom has taken her medicine and is resting, so I thought I’d leave early. I’m feeling a bit tired today. Otherwise, I would’ve invited you to the estate for a drink. I know you’ve made significant contributions at Victory Pass and the Southern Frontier.”

The mention of Victory Pass sent a shiver down Barrett’s spine. “I will surely visit the next time I get the chance.”

Yuvan smiled but didn’t say anything further.

Once they exited the palace, the two men rode the same path for a while before parting ways. Not far behind them, Carissa trailed, catching snippets of their conversation, mostly centered around Yuvan praising Barrett.

Barrett's expression was a mix of surprise and caution. While he wasn't foolish, the approval from someone in a high position flattered him.

Upon returning home, Carissa shared the news with Rafael.

Afterward, she quickly clarified, "Just to be clear, I'm only concerned because he's my subordinate and now serves as the Crown Guard's commander by His Majesty's side. That's why I'm nervous... Wait, I'm not nervous. I mean, that's why I paid attention to these things."

Rafael chuckled and pinched her cheek lightly. "No need to explain. Do you think I'm that petty? You should be cautious about anyone who gets too close to Yuvan now. You're doing the right thing."

Carissa linked her arm with his. "I was just worried you might misunderstand. I know you're not petty at all.

Rafael removed his outer cloak and handed it to Sydney before pulling Carissa down to sit beside him. "I hear you're planning to assess the Royal Guard. Are you thinking of getting involved personally?"

"Word travels fast. Did Michael tell you?"

"He did. Is it because Alistair challenged you?"

Carissa laughed lightly. "Not entirely. Since taking office, I've been busy with the treason case and haven't had a chance to conduct any assessments. The Civil Department evaluation is coming up at the end of the year, and as their superior, I have to write their performance reviews. This assessment won't just be for the Royal Guard. The Garrison Unit, the Capital Guard, and the Crown Guard will be included as well." "Surely the assessment won't be limited to just martial skills?" Rafael asked.

Carissa knocked her fists together, a rare, playful sparkle in her eyes.

“Not strictly, but martial skills will definitely be the priority. Alistair shouldn’t be too much of a problem; he used to manage the entire Royal Guard himself. But now, there’s a new commander over him, so he’s bound to feel some resentment. I need him to adjust to having a superior. If he’s not on board, the Royal Guard won’t be either. If there’s a real emergency and I can’t mobilize them, it could lead to disaster.”

Rafael chuckled. “Oh, sounds like someone’s about to get a beating.”