

War Song 901

Chapter 901

When Carissa left, Alistair naturally followed behind her.

Alistair had a big mouth, and today, the topic of Carissa and Barrett's conversation-Aurora's massacre of civilians-was no longer a secret.

What bothered Alistair the most was Dominic's involvement. He knew Dominic was innocent. The man had been gravely injured at the time, nearly dying. It was no wonder the treaty had been signed by Aurora.

Alistair felt a deep sense of injustice for Dominic. Upon returning to the Royal Guard headquarters, he couldn't help but voice his thoughts.

Who in the Royal Guard didn't respect the grand generals, Hector and Dominic? So, when Alistair spoke up, more people started to speak out on Dominic's behalf. The Royal Guard wasn't one to openly plead for justice, but they would certainly discuss it in private.

This was Carissa's first move-she had to stabilize the foundation of her grandfather's credibility and the respect he commanded among the people. Additionally, the admiration of the military officers in the capital was just as vital. When a plan had to unfold gradually, these factors were non-negotiable.

Fortunately, the so-called victory at Victory Pass had been a deliberate attempt by Salvador to elevate Barrett and Aurora, ensuring Barrett's absolute loyalty. Salvador awarded the glory of the victory to Aurora and refrained from lavishly rewarding Carissa's grandfather and uncles.

This precedent of elevating subordinates directly while bypassing the marshal had occurred before-Carissa's dad had risen in this way. Hector, however, had earned his position through real military merit; unlike Aurora, who had only relied on deception.

With Aurora now imprisoned, the Ministry of Justice began its secret interrogation. The proceedings were kept under wraps, but Salvador sent Barrett and Ian to oversee them.

Ian used to be the head of the crown prince's personal guards. He had been with Salvador since the latter was crown prince, building a network in silence. However, Salvador had made sure his men stayed in the shadows. Once exposed, his chess pieces would no longer be hidden.

During Salvador's time as crown prince, he had always followed Sigmund's directives. Ian had kept a low profile. After Salvador ascended the throne, many had forgotten about Ian entirely.

Recently, Ian had become more active. Salvador had appointed him as deputy commander of the Crown Guard, just below Barrett. This was Salvador's way of protecting Ian, using Barrett as a shield.

The reason Salvador had Barrett and Ian oversee the interrogation was because Aurora's testimony had to align with Barrett's account. Ian's role was to supervise the proceedings.

That night, no one at Hell Monarch Estate spoke. They were all in the study, organizing the information they had gathered so far. Though the lines of the investigation were already clear, they had to go over everything again. There could be no mistakes.

The facts were set, and there was no changing them. It was impossible for Carissa's grandfather to walk away completely unscathed. If generals and commanders didn't take responsibility for the mistakes of their subordinates, it would set a dangerous precedent. If a commander's underling harbored ambitions or committed a grave crime, they could simply blame a loyal subordinate to escape punishment.

Neither Rafael nor Carissa had entertained the idea of completely exonerating Dominic. They only hoped to minimize the punishment as much as possible.

The light flickered over Rafael's strikingly handsome face as he furrowed his brow. His thumb rubbed the side of his index finger in a nervous gesture—a subtle sign of his unease.

"We have to do everything we can to prevent war between the two kingdoms. As long as there is no renewed

conflict, this will remain a matter for the two kingdoms to resolve diplomatically. We can avoid the situation where death sentences are even on the table," he said.

Rafael knew his words were harsh.

The words "death sentence" were never something they had spoken aloud, but the reality was unavoidable. If the two kingdoms went to war again over the incident at Fawnrun City, Aurora, who had claimed the glory, would certainly be executed. And Dominic, the marshal of Victory Pass, would probably meet the same fate.

Carissa trembled, fighting back tears.

Seeing this, Kyle felt a pang of sympathy for her. "His Majesty should take into account General Sullivan's years of service, his advanced age, and his long tenure defending Victory Pass. He hasn't even been able to return to the capital. The ministers will surely vouch for him, so a death sentence shouldn't be on the table."

Carissa took a deep breath, forcing the tears back and steadying herself. "We can't rely on His Majesty's goodwill. What if he doesn't care? We can't take that chance. Raf is right-war between the two kingdoms must absolutely be avoided. Once war starts, even if the king truly wants to protect Grandpa, there won't be a way to save him."

Even more troubling was the possibility that Salvador might not want to protect Dominic at all.

Chapter 902

Rafael shifted closer and took Carissa's hand in his. "Don't worry too much. We won't let things get to the worst possible point."

Carissa knew that his assurance, though strong, didn't have much solid ground to stand on. People's hearts were the hardest thing to control, especially the new king of Westhaven. Since becoming crown prince, Edmund had used the Fawnrun City massacre to stir up public anger. Now that he was king, he could do whatever he wanted unchecked.

Jacob compiled the gathered information and summarized it, "King Edmund doesn't seem to care much about the throne. He's using his immense power to seek justice for his brother and the massacred civilians, pushing us to give up our borderlines.

"He's even considering war, but Westhaven's military is still recovering from their previous conflict with Sandoria. They've lost soldiers and resources, and they've been stuck in a stalemate with us for years. We've also had major battles with them at Victory Pass. They need time to recuperate.

"A lot of Westhaven ministers oppose war, with Grand Princess Lisandra being one of the strongest voices against it. Having her lead the envoy party coming here is probably King Edmund's way of backing down. It will likely be his only concession. If we can't reach an agreement with Westhaven's envoys, the anti-war faction will probably be completely silenced."

Lisandra was the eldest daughter of the former king of Westhaven, and the sister of both Arthur and Edmund. Now that Edmund had ascended the throne, she held the title of grand princess.

It was Lisandra who had helped Edmund rise to power. When Westhaven's previous king fell ill, she had taken over the governance of the kingdom, so her influence in Westhaven was immense.

There was a saying in Westhaven: If Lisandra weren't a woman, she would have been made the crown prince. While Westhaven allowed women to wield political power and hold official positions, they would never let a woman ascend to the throne.

Kyle suddenly spoke up. "I've met her a few times. She's very capable-strong-willed and decisive."

"You know Grand Princess Lisandra, Mr. Spencer?" Jacob quickly asked. "Does she have any weaknesses?"

Kyle thought for a moment before replying, "She values family, the throne, and the people."

"Those are weaknesses, but they are also her armor," Rafael said.

Carissa nodded. "At least her arrival shows that the anti-war faction has temporarily suppressed the war faction. This is our opportunity."

Jacob sighed. "It's an opportunity, yes, but she'll want a lot in return. Some things we can't give, and others... Even if we can, should we?"

The biggest point of contention was the borderlines. However, the current borderline was the one Starhaven had acknowledged. The conflict started when Westhaven repeatedly encroached during Starhaven's weak years, leading to decades of ongoing border disputes.

The room fell into silence after that. Rafael stood and suggested they disband for the time being, waiting to see if the Ministry of Justice would uncover any new information they didn't already know.

Back at Orchid Hall, Lulu stepped forward. "Your Grace, all the jewelry has been sold. The banknotes are safely stored in your private vault. The total is five thousand three hundred silver coins."

Rafael glanced at her and asked, "What jewelry?"

"The things sent over by the Warren family. I didn't realize I had given away so much," Carissa replied.

Rafael ruffled her hair gently. "You gave them your heart and they didn't value it. That's on them, not you."

Carissa smiled faintly. She hadn't exactly bared her soul to them, but she had cared for them from the bottom of her heart.

"It's in the past." She turned to Lulu. "No need to store the banknotes away. Give it to Vivi for the embroidery workshop's expenses."

"Understood," Lulu replied, her voice soft with concern.

She could see that her mistress wasn't in a good place. Carissa was clearly struggling, losing sleep over everything.

"Why don't you take a bath? It might help you sleep better."

Carissa met her worried gaze and didn't resist her suggestion. "Alright."

Lulu bowed to Rafael. "I'll go prepare it now."

Rafael took Carissa's hand and led her inside. He removed her official cloak, his fingers gently massaging her scalp.

"You haven't been sleeping well these past few nights. Your head's hurting, isn't it?"

Carissa's scalp felt tight and her neck was stiff. She hadn't been able to sleep, and the tension in her body was affecting her blood circulation. The headache made it even harder to find peace.

Under his soothing touch, some of the tension eased away.

Rafael's heart ached for her. Carissa had become so accustomed to being strong that it was rare for him to see the carefree smile she used to have when she was at Meadow Ridge. The pain of losing her loved ones had hardened her, turning the once bright and lively girl into the resilient, unyielding warrior she was today.

Chapter 903

That night, Rafael held Carissa quietly as they slept. Her breathing was steady, as if she had drifted off to sleep.

Rafael knew she hadn't. Curled up in his arms, she lay still with not a single movement, each steady breath so controlled it seemed deliberate.

She didn't want him to worry.

At the Sullivan family's residence in Victory Pass, the royal edict had arrived. The messengers sent were Felix and Homer from the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team. Naturally, they were accompanied by people from both the Crown Guard and Royal Guard.

Felix and Homer were both fourth-rank generals, but had yet to be assigned significant duties by the king. This task, delivering the royal edict to Victory Pass, was their first real assignment. If they performed well, Salvador might start using them more frequently.

Yet, this task felt like an impossible burden. Most of the soldiers and officers still looked up to Dominic and Hector. They were here under the guise of delivering an edict, but in reality, they were escorting him. Felix and Homer both felt deeply uneasy about the situation.

Originally, a Crown Guard officer, Galen Kimber, wanted to leave that day itself. However, Felix and Homer managed to convince him to allow Dominic to say his goodbyes to his family, and they would depart the following day.

At the Sullivan family's residence that night, everything was the same as usual. The meal was served at the regular time, and the same number of dishes were prepared as before.

This day had been expected to come eventually, and everyone was mentally prepared. However, at this meal, no one could eat except Dominic.

"Dad!" Wyatt put down his cutlery and looked up at his aging father, his eyes red-rimmed. "I'll accompany you back to the capital."

Dominic calmly continued eating and simply said, "No need."

"His Majesty has issued an edict for Wallace to take command of the troops. It would make sense for me to accompany you back to the capital. Besides, I'm just a broken shell of a man now. Whatever happens, I can bear the responsibility on your behalf," Wyatt argued.

"Ridiculous!" Dominic shot him a sharp glance. "What do you mean, a broken shell? You've only lost an arm. You can still wield a blade with one hand. You're still a general. His Majesty has ordered your eighth brother to take command, but Wallace doesn't have your experience. Westhaven is stirring up trouble now. You must stay here and hold the line."

"Dad..." Wallace also set down his cutlery, his voice trembling with unshed tears.

Over the past year, the brothers had discussed countless times how they could help their dad escape the consequences of that disaster. Unfortunately, there was no way out.

"What Wyatt says makes sense. You were seriously injured by the arrow back then, and all decisions were left to us. But as you've said, Wyatt is more experienced than I am, so he should remain at Victory Pass. I'll accompany you to the capital. I'll shoulder all the blame," Wallace said.

"No, Wallace, you can't go! I will!" Shane said. "Uncle Dominic, I've already packed my things. I'll set out with you first thing tomorrow."

Dominic glanced at the table full of sons, daughters-in-law, grandsons, and granddaughters. He saw the concern in their eyes and smiled faintly.

He put down his cutlery and wiped his mouth. "Enough. Why is everyone fighting to go with me? You think this old

body of mine can't handle things, huh? You think you're tougher than me?"

Wyatt choked up. "Dad, that's not what we mean. It's just that the Fawnrun City incident... Someone has to take responsibility. Whoever it is, it doesn't matter. It was my mistake, and it's my duty to bear the consequences." "You? You're not ready to take it," said Dominic.

The old man's face softened, a rare hint of tenderness showing. He was usually a stern and tough man, never one to show emotion toward his sons and grandsons.

"I must handle this matter. I'm the leader of the army in Victory Pass. As long as I'm still breathing, whatever happened in Fawnrun City is on my shoulders," he added.

"Aurora... she's done a lot of harm!" Cindy, Wyatt's wife, spat angrily. "She and Barrett are both vile! Father has always been strict with the military troops. For all these years, we've never violated the agreement between the two kingdoms not to harm civilians.

"Then, she comes along, and what does she do? She slaughtered entire villages! How could she be so vicious? How could she even do such a thing? I just want to go back to the capital and tear them both apart!"

Chapter 904

Cindy's heart was a mix of anger and sorrow. Her husband had sacrificed his arm to save Barrett, losing half of his martial skills in the process. Luckily, there was no war, so Wyatt could still train his one-handed sword techniques. However, he would never be able to wield a spear again.

Wyatt saved Barrett, but what for? That ungrateful wretch! He dared to get involved with Aurora right under their noses! How could they have been so blind back then? How had they not seen it coming?

It was their fault for not being more careful. If they had known, they would have punished Barrett and Aurora right there at Victory Pass. How could they have let them go back and harm Carissa?

Cindy doted on Carissa deeply. When she was born, Cindy had been in the capital, and she had never seen such a soft and adorable baby. Carissa was like a precious angel. There was no child in the world more beautiful than her.

Before Carissa turned three, Cindy would visit Northwatch Estate every few days just to hold that sweet little girl. Later, when Cindy moved with her husband to Victory Pass, she still made trips back to the capital every two years. However, as her own child grew, needing to study and train, and with the constant friction between Victory Pass and Westhaven, Cindy no longer dared to leave.

When Hector and his six sons died, Cindy had accompanied her husband back to the capital for a visit, but Carissa was already training at Meadow Ridge and hadn't been notified to come home. So, Cindy had missed seeing her.

The events that happened after that reached the Sullivan family through letters.

When Carissa got divorced and returned to Northwatch Estate, the Sullivan family planned to return. Not long after, they heard that Carissa had gone to the Southern Frontier battlefield. Soon after, she made a name for herself, returned victorious, and married the Hell Monarch.

By then, the Sullivan family knew they could never go back to the capital.

The incident at Fawnrun City was still unfolding, and no one knew what disaster it might bring. The Sullivan family dared not return to the capital, fearing that they might drag Carissa into it.

Thinking of Carissa, Cindy's tears flowed uncontrollably. She wanted nothing more than to grind Barrett and Aurora into dust. But even more, she pitied Carissa. How had that child endured everything she went through? As Cindy cried, the other women in the room began to weep as well.

Cindy wiped her tears, stood up, and said, "Father, I don't care anymore. I'll go back to the capital with you."

Dominic sighed, knowing that his daughter-in-law was heartbroken for Carissa. "If you want to go back, you can. See her for a few days, but you must return quickly. You can't accompany me to the capital. Rest a few days before setting out."

To put it nicely, he was returning to the capital on royal orders.

To put it bluntly, he was being escorted back.

Salvador had still left the Sullivan family in charge of the military authority at Victory Pass, so it was clear that the fallout from Fawnrun City wouldn't touch them. Therefore, Dominic didn't want his daughter-in-law to travel with him to the capital. The fewer people who knew, the better to avoid drawing unwanted attention and dragging Cindy's natal family into it.

Although Cindy's father had already retired to his hometown, her older brother still worked at the Ministry of Finance, a post known for its wealth and prestige. Too many eyes were on him. Dominic didn't want his troubles to cause anyone else harm.

Even if he didn't want to, the troubles still affected his granddaughter, Carissa. Over the past year, he and Rafael had been exchanging letters about Fawnrun City. The more he thought about it, the more his heart ached. When his granddaughter faced a crisis, he couldn't help her. Now, he would only make things worse for her because of his issues.

He stood up and said firmly, "This is settled. No more discussion. Once I leave, you will continue as you always have. Remember this-if Westhaven dares to cross the border, we must restrain ourselves as much as possible. Don't let it escalate into a full-blown war. And be sure to enforce the agreement between our two kingdoms to never harm civilians."

"Yes, Dad. We will remember."

"We will remember that, Uncle Dominic."

Dominic returned to his room. He didn't light a lamp, and he wouldn't allow anyone to wait on him. Since his wife passed away, he had become accustomed to sitting alone in the dark. From his early days in the military to now, over fifty years of service, he had gotten used to this solitary existence, finding stability in an otherwise unstable world.

He had been a general under Augustus. There had been another grand general at that time, Matthias Warren, whom Dominic had been happy to be related to through Carissa's marriage. When Barrett came to support them at Victory Pass, Dominic had been quite pleased.

Now, he realized how blind he had been-blind to the truth, blind in his heart.

The affair between Barrett and Aurora at Victory Pass had remained a secret from the entire Sullivan family. That alone showed how truly blind he had been.

Chapter 905

The generals under Dominic's command had gone to find Felix and Homer at the observation tower where they were staying, intending to present the situation. As they watched the tanned-skinned generals, their faces full of worry and urgency as they spoke of Fawnrun City, Felix and Homer couldn't help but feel a deep unease.

"It's absolutely true," one of the generals said, his voice tinged with regret. "General Sullivan had no knowledge of this. At the time, he was shot with an arrow, and the military physicians said he wouldn't survive. General Sullivan pulled through with sheer willpower, and he was bedridden for nearly three months before he could even walk again. His body's never been the same since. He's too frail to endure any more strain."

"Exactly," another general said. "Commander Warren's mission to Fawnrun City was at my suggestion. General Sullivan had no part in it. You should take me back to the capital for questioning, and I'll take full responsibility. If you want my head, you'll have it when we get there."

Yet another general spoke up, "General Quinton, General Larkin, you both previously served under Marshal Sinclair at the Southern Frontier. Let's be honest, is there no room for negotiation on this matter? What exactly does His Majesty plan to do? Give us an honest answer. If all that's needed is someone to shoulder the blame, I'll do it." One after another, the generals insisted on taking the blame themselves, not wanting Dominic to be involved. Felix sighed helplessly. 'Generals, General Larkin and I aren't in a position to make decisions. We've been sent to convey His Majesty's orders. You don't need to worry so much. The Hell Monarch will find a way to handle it.'

"How can we not worry? This isn't how royal edicts are usually given. You were sent here to escort General Sullivan back to the capital. If you weren't, wouldn't the royal edict be sent by a fast rider instead?" said one of the generals, Igor.

His eyes were red with anxiety, and his voice thick with emotion as he added, "He's about to turn seventy- seventy! And he's still holding the fort at Victory Pass. He's given his entire life to defending Starhaven's borders and protecting the people. We can't let his reputation be tarnished because of someone else's mistake!"

Another general, Daryl, was also clearly frustrated. "That's right! Commander Warren and the others were never our soldiers. If anyone should be held accountable, it should be Commander Warren or His Majesty himself. It was the king who sent them here!"

Felix and Homer exchanged a glance, their faces darkening. They both turned toward the door, hearing the footsteps of someone in the Crown Guard uniform passing by. Daryl's voice had carried too loudly, and the Crown Guard soldier surely would have heard his words.

Though they couldn't see who it was, Homer quickly stood and ran outside, determined to see who had overheard them.

Steve, another general, snapped, "Daryl, don't talk nonsense!"

Everyone had been so worked up that they forgot the Crown Guard was still present.

Daryl, face pale with embarrassment, quickly tried to explain, "I didn't mean it that way, General Quinton, General Larkin. I was just anxious and spoke out of turn. Please don't take offense. We are deeply grateful for His Majesty's help in sending reinforcements to relieve our immediate crisis back then."

Felix knew they couldn't let this go on any longer. He cut in, his voice firm, "You all should return now. His Majesty will make his judgment."

He lowered his voice and added, "Enough talking. Please go back now."

Daryl realized his mistake. He turned pale and didn't dare say another word.

The others exchanged uneasy glances, realizing how dangerous Daryl's words had been. They couldn't help but feel a pang of fear.

Igor took a deep breath and said, "Let's go, then. We shouldn't trouble the two generals any longer. I'm sure the Hell Monarch will have a way to help General Sullivan out of his predicament."

One by one, the generals stood up, wanting to plead a bit more but afraid that speaking further would only make things worse. They feared they wouldn't be able to help Dominic and would only create more trouble instead.

Felix kept his anxiety in check and stood up as well. "Take care!"

As they left, Felix hurried outside, just in time to see Homer return. He quickly asked, "Who was it?"

"Kevin Ziegler," Homer replied.

"Law's cousin?"

"Yes. I wanted to catch up with him and talk, but just as I was about to, Galen called him over."

Felix's expression darkened. "This could be a problem. Galen is the king's confidant. If Kevin tells him what General Daryl said, then no matter who actually said it, the king will think General Sullivan believes the same." Homer's face turned grim. "I know. He definitely heard it. Now, it's just a matter of whether he'll tell Galen."

Felix nodded, his mind racing. "Both Galen and Kevin aren't from the Mystic Army. They used to serve as personal guards when the king was crown prince. From what I've seen, they're very close to each other."

Homer frowned. "This is troublesome."

Chapter 906

That evening, Felix and Homer tried several times to find a chance to speak privately with Kevin. However, he was always in the same room as Galen, and the two of them came and went together. Despite their efforts to separate them, they couldn't get rid of Galen.

Finally, they waited until Kevin went alone to the toilet. Homer kept an eye on Galen, while Felix stood guard outside the toilet, waiting for Kevin to come out. Kevin was unaccustomed to the local food and water, so he stayed inside for quite a while. By the time he came out, Felix was shivering from the cold.

The light was dim in the area. When Kevin stepped out, he saw a shadow and jumped in surprise.

After recognizing who it was, he relaxed and said, "Oh, it's you, General Quinton. You startled me."

Felix stepped closer and was about to speak, but Kevin smiled and said, "If you can hold it in, why don't you wait a bit longer? Let the smell inside clear out."

Felix chuckled.

As Kevin addressed him formally by title, Felix decided to do the same, saying, "I was waiting for you, Sentry Ziegler. There are a few things I want to talk to you about."

Kevin, his voice indifferent, replied, "Don't say anything here. Let's talk inside. Aren't you cold?"

He shivered slightly, feeling his legs numb as though ants were crawling up them.

Felix lowered his voice. "Sentry Ziegler, the generals who were looking for me tonight-they've served under General Sullivan for many years. They're worried about him, so they spoke out of turn. It was an honest mistake." Kevin's tone remained calm, saying, "General Quinton, are you hoping I won't report this to His Majesty? If it was just an innocent mistake, they wouldn't have shouted about it. I advise you not to interfere. Let them say what they want, and you mind your own business. As for me, I'll report as needed. Don't forget, this is the first official mission since you all returned. If it's not done well, your future's as good as gone."

Felix felt the cold settle in his chest at those words.

He even changed his tone, trying to get on his good side by speaking familiarly, "Kevin, let's not bring up the past. Out of consideration for your cousin, Lawrence, just pretend you didn't hear that, alright? We're as good as brothers, aren't we? Anything can be talked through. Consider it as doing Homer and me a favor-we'll owe you one."

"Don't try to use my cousin to pressure me." Kevin waved his hand dismissively, raised his chin slightly, and continued, "You must know that the Crown Guard is now independent of the Mystic Army. We now have six units. Whether I become one of the captains depends on how well this mission goes. As you can see, there are twelve of us. It won't be easy to earn a spot."

Felix stopped him, despite his body shaking from the cold. "Kevin, I know you respect General Sullivan, and I understand that General Dylan spoke in the heat of the moment. But if General

Sullivan gets blamed for this, it would be an unjust accusation. General Dylan will also be punished for it."

"That just proves General Sullivan isn't strict enough," Kevin replied. "General Dylan thought he could speak recklessly just because he's in Victory Pass. To say something so disrespectful-if nothing happens this time, something will happen next time."

He pointed at Felix. "Don't follow me anymore, and don't say another word. If you do, I won't hesitate to include you as well if I report it to His Majesty."

With that, he walked past Felix and strode away.

Felix was filled with worry. He wanted to chase after Kevin, but he knew there was no way to change his mind right now. He would have to wait until they were on the road again to talk things over.

At least one thing was certain now-Kevin hadn't told Galen. If he was going to take credit for a report, he

wouldn't have told anyone.

After Dylan and the others left the observation pavilion, they were all uneasy. They made their way straight to Dominic's residence. Dominic wouldn't see them, but when the young generals heard what had happened, they didn't know what to say.

Wyatt couldn't bring himself to scold them, knowing they had acted out of frustration. He had also always been straightforward and often spoke without thinking.

Wallace sighed deeply. "General Dylan, not only have you harmed yourself with those words, but you've also put my dad in danger."

"I'm sorry... Why can't I control my mouth?" Dylan slapped himself in frustration, tears streaming down his face. "I don't care if I die, but if this causes trouble for General Sullivan, I'll never be able to atone for it, no matter how many times I die."

Chapter 907

"What's the point of saying this now?" Shane grabbed him. "At this point, there's no use. I'll go to the observation tower and ask General Quinton myself. Let's see if he did hear anything."

"He definitely heard," Igor said, lifting his head.

His eyes were filled with uncertainty. Even in the face of thousands of soldiers, he had never been afraid, but now he was terrified. This was a situation he didn't know how to handle.

"Dylan yelled so loudly-unless they're deaf, anyone could hear it."

"I'll go find them and ask for their help. This can't reach His Majesty's ears!" Shane shouted. "Get the horses ready."

With that, he strode out.

Wyatt watched the generals. He knew they had been by his dad's side for most of their lives, and that their concern for him was what drove them to seek out Felix.

He sighed. "My friends, words can bring disaster. From now on, we must be careful with what we say. No more speaking out of turn."

The others nodded quickly, but what good was it now? Could they undo the damage?

"Even without the Crown Guard present, we shouldn't have said anything in front of General Quinton and General Larkin,"

Wallace sighed and rubbed his temples, a headache building. Their dad would return to the capital by royal order, but Wyatt wouldn't be the one to take over command of the troops here. Instead, it was passed to Wallace. He was the youngest, and not even Dominic's biological son.

Clearly, Salvador had his own intentions and was trying to sow division within the family. If there was any strife or conflict here, Salvador could send another general to take over Victory Pass.

As it stood, who could stabilize Victory Pass? Aside from the Hell Monarch, who else could handle it? Salvador wouldn't send the Hell Monarch, so if anyone else came, they would either be too inexperienced or too eager to gain military merit and rise to power.

Thankfully, the Sullivan brothers were united. No matter who held the command, when their dad was present, they followed him. When he wasn't, they listened to Wyatt.

When Shane arrived at the observation tower, Felix invited him to his and Homer's room. The room was small, with two beds, a small dining table, and two stools.

The observation tower had once been a temple, but after the temple relocated to the mountains, this building was repurposed to accommodate officials and visitors from the capital or other regions.

Felix gestured for Shane to sit, while Homer settled on the bed. After Felix relayed Kevin's words, Shane's face drained of color, turning ashen.

With Dominic's return to the capital, the stakes were high. It had been a gamble on divine favor, but those words would undoubtedly offend the king beyond redemption.

"Is there any way out of this?" Shane asked, his voice trembling after a long silence.

"Before you arrived," Felix began, "I contacted some people we have in Victory Pass. They're helping to send word to Prince Rafael. I'm sure you've heard of the Septimus Tetra reconnaissance team. All of them were saved by His Highness. We're hoping His Highness can convince the Marquis of Elderglen to stop Sentry Ziegler before he returns to the capital and talk him down."

Shane was a bit surprised. "You have people in Victory Pass?"

"They're not our people," Felix clarified. "Before we came to Victory Pass, Lady Carissa gave us contact

information for them, so we could send messages back to the capital quickly if anything happened."

"Is Sentry Ziegler from the Marquis of Elderglen's family?"

"He's the Marquis of Elderglen's nephew."

Shane couldn't feel fully reassured. Felix had just said that even with that connection, he had been refused.

It wasn't hard to understand why. Everyone wanted to rise in the ranks, especially those who were working directly for the king. Who wouldn't want to climb higher? Opportunities like that didn't come often, and it didn't take much effort-just a simple report, and the reward would be theirs.

"Please relay to Cari that if a conversation can be had, then have it. But if not, no other measures should be taken. The Sullivan family has always prided itself on being upright. If anyone's to blame, it's ourselves for speaking without thinking and giving others leverage," Shane said.

Felix and Homer already held great respect for the Sullivan family, but after hearing Shane's words, their admiration deepened. If it had been someone else, someone ruthless, they might have arranged for an assassination on the way back to the capital to silence Kevin for good.

However, the Sullivan family truly did everything with integrity.

Chapter 908

In the capital, Claire received a message via pigeon from Victory Pass. Without reading it, she immediately passed it to Violet, who would be able to take it directly to Carissa.

Understanding the gravity of the message, Violet opened it without hesitation. After reading it, she immediately mounted her horse and rode straight to the Capital Guard headquarters. During this time, Carissa should be there.

It was completely normal for Violet to come and go from the Capital Guard headquarters. She was now a special martial arts instructor, and Salvador, knowing her exceptional skills and that she had no interest in becoming an official, had deemed her the best person to train the Mystic Army in martial arts.

Though the Crown Guard had become independent, martial arts training still fell under the jurisdiction of the Capital Guard headquarters, which was why they came to Violet.

Upon reading the message, Carissa let out a heavy sigh. This was the last thing that should have happened.

On a smaller scale, one could say that Dylan spoke out of turn and said something careless. A reprimand or perhaps twenty lashes would be enough to resolve it.

But on a larger scale, this was a disaster. The words could be interpreted as the Victory Pass generals collectively agreeing that Salvador was to blame for the massacre at Fawnrun City.

Salvador had always focused on the accomplishments he had made after his ascension. Redrawing the borderline at Victory Pass was considered one of his greatest achievements, as was the reclamation of the Southern Frontier.

But if someone were to say that the slaughter of Fawnrun City civilians was his responsibility, he would not hesitate to execute many just to prove to the world that he had been furious about the massacre.

Moreover, the king shouldn't be held responsible for the matter at all.

"What do we do now? Jacob and Kyle aren't in the estate, and His Highness is at the Supreme Court. I had no choice but to come to you," Violet said.

She knew all too well how dangerous those words were. Not only the current king, but even the previous king, who was usually more forgiving, would find it impossible to tolerate such an accusation.

After all, Salvador had sent reinforcements to Victory Pass, and those troops had been dispatched under Dominic's orders. If Salvador were to take responsibility for this, would that mean every failure on the battlefield would also be his fault?

If anyone were to take the blame, it would be Barrett, without question.

Carissa held onto the note, then lit a lamp to burn it. Nothing could leak out before Kevin returned to the capital.

Carissa collected herself and spoke with calm precision, "Ask Lord Edwin for help. When Kevin gets back to the capital, stop him. See if Lord Edwin can convince him. If Lord Edwin can get him to hold off on reporting, it will be fine. But if Lord Edwin can't persuade him, General Dylan's life will be in danger, and my grandpa will have one more crime to answer for."

"Are you going, or should His Highness go?" Violet asked, agreeing with the plan.

Edwin would likely help out given his ties to Lawrence, but the real question was whether he could persuade Kevin. Carissa paused for a moment.

"Whether Lord Edwin can convince Kevin is still uncertain," she said. "If he can't, those words will eventually reach His Majesty. But recently, every time Raf and I visit any noble house, someone has been reporting to the king. When Kevin returns to report, the king will know that we knew about it in advance."

"You're right. Being cautious in everything is never wrong," Violet replied thoughtfully.

She had become much more grounded lately, learning to pay attention to details. As Jacob often said, sometimes

it was the smallest details that determined success or failure.

"So, who should we send? We can't let others know about this."

Carissa thought for a moment before deciding, "Sebastian."

Lawrence still needed to recover from his illness. Sebastian had saved his life, so ever since his return to the capital, Sebastian had continued treating him.

Though Lawrence had been granted the title of Earl of Dunewind, he still lived at Elderglen Estate. If they informed Lawrence about the situation, he would not sit idly by.

"I'll go to Arcane Sanctum to get my wrist treated. It's sore from all the sparring I've been doing lately," Violet said decisively.

With that, she was already on her way.

That night, Sebastian arrived at Elderglen Estate with his medical kit. When Edwin and Lawrence heard the news, their expressions immediately darkened.

Lawrence was the first to respond, "Dad, we can't let Kevin report this to the king."

Edwin not only understood the importance of returning favors, but he also knew that Dominic had been unfairly wronged in this case. If those words reached Salvador, it would be a death sentence without question.

"Don't worry," Edwin said, his voice low but firm.

It was only two words, but they carried the weight of a thousand decisions.

Sebastian bowed his head in gratitude. "I am deeply grateful."

He knew this wasn't easy for Edwin. If Edwin couldn't stop Kevin, the Marquis of Elderglen's family would be dragged into the mess as well once Kevin reported it to the king.

Chapter 909

After Sebastian left, Lawrence turned to his father. "Dad, no matter what it takes, we must stop Kevin."

Edwin nodded. "Don't worry. I won't let General Sullivan fall into such an unjust situation."

Even if it meant losing his noble title, there were some things and people Edwin would protect with everything he had. His ancestors had been military officers, and they had earned the title of marquis on the battlefield. If he had to give up his title to protect Dominic, Edwin believed his ancestors would understand and not fault him.

Edwin wasn't confident he could convince Kevin. The young man had always been strong-willed and had learned early on to plan for his future. Unfortunately, luck had never been on his side. Every time something important came up, Kevin would either fall ill or something would happen to prevent him from making a name for himself.

For years, Kevin was nothing more than a low-ranking guard in the crown prince's personal guard unit. Even after Salvador's ascension, when he was placed in the Mystic Army and later made part of the Crown Guard, he still hadn't risen much in rank. His chance to go to Victory Pass only came because Galen had recommended him to Ian.

Kevin had always wanted to stand out. Now that he had such an opportunity, he wasn't going to let it slip away easily.

After Sebastian left Elderglen Estate, he sent word to Hell Monarch Estate.

However, Rafael wasn't too concerned. He knew Kevin was an upright person, though lacking in luck. He suspected that Kevin was internally struggling with whether or not to speak out. If Edwin talked to him, it was highly likely that he would remain silent.

Moreover, if Kevin truly wanted to use the situation to advance, it would make more sense for him to be open with Felix, who was from the Quinton family and related to Logan, a prince consort. What they could offer Kevin in terms of benefits would far outweigh what he could gain from simply reporting the matter.

Having spent so many years beside the king, Kevin should understand him well. While Salvador might temporarily praise or promote him, the cost would be losing his trust.

Salvador feared powerful military officers and influential families, but as a man, he respected Dominic. He wouldn't want anyone stabbing the general in the back.

Rafael explained all this to Carissa, trying to reassure her.

"If Grandfather saw you like this, he'd only be worried. Don't stress yourself out too much. We're not fighting alone. Go out and listen. Ever since Commander Prince spoke up, there's been a lot of talk about your grandfather. Many people are speaking out on his behalf, and a lot of officials are supporting him. Even some lower-ranking officials are discussing it in taverns," he said.

The minor officials, in contrast, weren't so cautious. Whenever they gathered for drinks, they spoke freely.

Dominic had the people's favor-he was a hero in the hearts of many.

As the conversations turned to this hero, reminiscing about Dominic's youth and reflecting on his current state, people couldn't help but feel the poignancy of his aging years. This only added to the sense of tragedy and heroism, making their admiration even deeper.

As the days passed, the public discourse, which had initially been manageable, began to spiral out of control. As it gained momentum, people started voicing all kinds of opinions. Some began to suggest that Barrett, who had led the attack on the supply depot, should be held accountable for his actions, as should Aurora.

After all, Dominic had been incapacitated by an arrow and couldn't make decisions at that time. If anyone were to be questioned about the failure, it should be those who had been responsible for the operation, not just the marshal.

Barrett would certainly be held responsible, but there was also the matter of Wyatt. He had temporarily taken over as marshal after Dominic was injured by the arrow.

Some talked about how Wyatt had lost an arm while trying to save Barrett. His situation was already dire enough, having spent so many years guarding Victory Pass, with no personal stake in the wealth and prestige of the capital. Despite losing an arm, he didn't return to the capital but continued to defend Victory Pass. Wasn't that something to be respected?

As talk turned to the Sullivan family, the conversation shifted to the Duke of Northwatch and his six sons. After praising their deeds, many people were filled with contempt for Barrett and Aurora's actions.

Aurora and Barrett found themselves caught in a whirlwind of criticism. People rallied against them. Everyone voiced their support for Dominic, condemning the actions that had led to his suffering.

All this overwhelming public opinion, which flowed like a great river, had started with Carissa. She had merely set the ball rolling by having Alistair overhear her conversation with Barrett. After that, nobody from Hell Monarch Estate interfered.

Rafael knew that once a spark was lit, it would quickly spread, becoming a wildfire.

Someone would step in soon enough.

Chapter 910

With such intense public opinion, it was clear someone had been pushing the narrative. Salvador suspected it was someone from Hell Monarch Estate, but after a thorough investigation, he discovered, much to his surprise, that the trail led directly to the prime minister, Jeremiah.

The articles and the storytellers in coffeehouses and taverns spreading the rumors had all been sent by Jeremiah. As the investigation unfolded, it became evident that the prime minister hadn't tried to hide his involvement. He hadn't planned on deceiving Salvador at all.

Salvador sat quietly in the royal study for a long time before turning to Ian.

"Let's pretend we never looked into this. Keep your mouth shut."

Jeremiah had planned to retire before Sigmund's passing, but the previous king's sudden death caught everyone off guard. Thinking that Salvador, as a new king, might struggle to stabilize the court, Jeremiah stayed on and continued to assist vigorously in state affairs.

Among all the ministers, if there was one person Salvador trusted most, it was Jeremiah. Along with Trevor, they were the only two individuals he felt comfortable relying on.

Salvador recalled the recent discussions with Jeremiah about Victory Pass, where the latter had always seemed hesitant to speak freely. There had been signs all along.

Jeremiah and Dominic had been key figures since the reign of Augustus, and they were old veterans who served as both civil officials and military officers. Salvador remembered something Jeremiah had once said-without the generals guarding the borders, there would be no peace or prosperity within the country.

Though their relationship seemed distant on the surface, and they hadn't seen each other for a long time, both men respected each other.

On the evening of February 13th, Felix and the others brought Dominic back into the city.

For the past few days, the citizens had been gathering at the city gates, aware that Dominic had been summoned back to the capital. They had waited, and now, the day had finally arrived.

The sun set, casting a blood-red hue across the sky. The tall, battle-worn general sat atop his sleek black steed, flanked by the officers of the Crown Guard. His back remained straight, his skin the color of dark bronze, as if covered with a layer of varnish. Despite the snow, rain, and wind, his face showed no sign of cracking, as though his skin were made of iron, impervious to the harshest elements.

When he saw the throngs of people waiting for him at the city gates, shouting his name, his usually stern face showed a momentary shock.

Dominic had expected nothing but the anger and curses of the people upon his return. After all, his lax military discipline had led to tensions between the two kingdoms. Plus, the massacre of the village was a brutal act. The people, he thought, could never forgive him for such a thing.

After the initial shock, his eyes burned with a fierce heat. It was still cold in early February, but here they were, standing in the biting wind, raising their arms to encourage and support him.

Edwin was also in the crowd, dressed in simple green attire, his black cloak pulled up to obscure his face. When the press of people stopped their horses from moving forward, he squeezed through the crowd until he reached Kevin's horse.

"Mr. Ziegler, the old madam is ill. Please come back with me to see her."

Kevin recognized him. He hesitated for only a moment, then turned to Galen, who was by his side.

'Galen, my family's steward has come to fetch me. He said my grandmother is very sick. It seems like it'll take a while for the crowd to disperse and allow us to move, so I'll head back to my family's estate first."

Galen glanced at the person standing next to Kevin's horse. He was wearing plain green attire and a black cloak,

with the collar concealing his face. Judging by his posture, Galen assumed he was likely the steward of the Marquis of Elderglen's household.

"Then, go quickly," Galen said.

Kevin dismounted and grabbed Edwin's hand. "Let's go!"

They hunched their shoulders as they made their way through the throngs of people, the roar of the crowd deafening in their ears. One by one, the shouts began, chaotic at first, but then starting to form into a unified chant.

*General Sullivan, we support you!"

Kevin was forced to cover his ears. The sound was so loud he feared his eardrums would burst. As they moved, the crowd only seemed to grow thicker.

Edwin gripped his wrist, pulling him toward a narrow alleyway. They made their way deeper into it, gradually leaving the chaos behind. At the end of the alley stood a young elm tree, just beginning to bud. They stopped beneath its branches, speaking in the quiet.

"Uncle Edwin," Kevin said, bowing his head respectfully.

Edwin's expression was serious. "Let's cut to the chase, Kevin. You know why I've come for you. If you're willing to come with me, it means there's room for negotiation, doesn't it?"

Kevin fell silent for a moment, then slowly nodded.

A weight lifted from Edwin's chest. A nod was enough.

*Tell me what you want. I'll make it happen."

Kevin's gaze was steady, his voice firm as he said, "I want to be a direct apprentice of Sage Violet, just like Commander Prince, Deputy Commander Brown, and Commander Lewis.

"What?" Edwin blinked, caught off guard by the request, momentarily stunned.

Kevin's cloak fluttered in the wind. "I must become the highest-ranking martial artist in the Crown Guard. Only by earning it through my strength will I be able to keep it without fear of losing it easily."