

## War Song 921

### Chapter 921

Dominic looked at his granddaughter's thin shoulders. His heart ached with a feeling of unbearable sorrow.

After all that she had already gone through, how could he bear to ask her to endure even more? How could he let her use the tragedy of her family's destruction as a bargaining chip to fight for his survival?

"Grandfather, Carissa's right," Rafael said gently. "All of this is interconnected-it's impossible to separate them. And it's not just for your sake, but to avoid war between the two kingdoms as well."

If they were to tackle the issues separately, Westhaven might indeed admit their wrongs. They might even apologize and offer compensation, but doing so would weaken their bargaining position.

Dominic understood that logic. Still, it was too cruel to ask Carissa to bear the weight of it all. He couldn't continue the conversation.

At this moment, grandfather and granddaughter faced each other. There was nothing they could say. Family matters were too sensitive, while national affairs were too painful to discuss. But it was rare for them to meet, so neither of them wanted to part ways so soon.

Rafael found the safest topic to bring up-Meadow Ridge.

He smiled and said, "Carissa, why don't you tell Grandfather about your time at Meadow Ridge? I'm sure he'll find it very interesting."

Dominic's eyes lit up immediately. "Ah, yes! You trained under Sage Adrian at Meadow Ridge, didn't you? I've met him a couple of times. It's a shame we didn't get to talk more. What's he like? Is he strict and stern? With your martial arts skills, you must have gone through a lot of hardship under his guidance. I imagine he's been a very strict teacher."

Carissa laughed. "Sage Adrian isn't strict at all. He's more like our big brother, and he's even more mischievous than we are! That's why our martial uncle, Sage Everett, doesn't like his style. Every time he finds an excuse to punish us, it's just to teach Sage Adrian a lesson."

Dominic was surprised. "Mischievous? That doesn't sound right. I've met him, and my impression was that he was always cold and serious, distant and unapproachable. How could you call him mischievous?"

Carissa laughed again. "He's been fooling everyone. His so-called cold and serious demeanor? He's just shy around strangers and afraid of socializing. Once you get to know him, he talks non-stop and shares everything. After a little wine, there's no secret he can keep. He also loves to tinker with things and makes a mess at the Pathfinders Guild. That's what drives Sage Everett mad."

'Really? I never would've guessed." Dominic was utterly surprised. "I thought since he was a guild master, he was extra serious. I didn't know he was such a fun-loving person on the inside!"

"That's right." Carissa rested her chin in her hand, her eyes sparkling. "When I was nine, I came back home for a month. He sent someone to fetch me. When I got to Meadow Ridge, he had them set off firecrackers every few steps, saying he wanted to make holes in my clothes so I wouldn't dare leave Meadow Ridge for so long again." Dominic laughed heartily, only speaking after he composed himself, "That's just a child's prank!" 'Exactly! When I first went to Meadow Ridge, I was terrified of ghosts. One night, he dressed up as one and tried to scare me. I was so frightened I cried. Then, he pulled off his ghostly disguise, looked at me seriously, and told me that there's no such thing as ghosts. He also said that even if there were, ghosts are weaker than humans."

Dominic couldn't help but chuckle, realizing how absurd it sounded for a grown man to try and scare a little girl with a ghost costume.

'Because of that, Sage Everett grounded Sage Adrian," Carissa added with a mischievous grin.

"Your martial uncle can ground your mentor?" Dominic asked.

"Yeah, he's in charge of the Pathfinders Guild's discipline and rules. There are over a thousand rules, but the

punishments? There's no consistency to them. Sometimes, if Sage Everett is in a bad mood, he'll dig up old grievances and punish people for those."

Dominic's laughter filled the room. "Your martial uncle sounds like quite the interesting character."  
"No, he's boring."

"Yes, he's definitely interesting!"

Rafael and Carissa answered at the same time, but their responses couldn't have been more different.

## Chapter 922

In truth, Rafael had always found the Adrian that Carissa spoke of to be somewhat unfamiliar. In the prince's eyes, Adrian's actions were measured, neither overly serious nor overly indulgent, but with a certain degree of protection toward his apprentices.

And when Carissa described Everett, he was a man of erratic moods, quick to punish without warning, and seemingly feared by everyone.

Dominic watched them with a curious expression. "So, is he interesting? Or not?"

Carissa groaned. "Raf is Sage Everett's direct apprentice, so of course Sage Everett is good to him. It's no surprise he thinks his mentor is interesting. But Sage Everett is only kind to him. With the rest of us? We get nothing but harsh punishments. Even my senior apprentice, who's calm and steady, he sees as too frivolous."

Dominic gasped in surprise. "Wait, so you two are fellow apprentices?"

Carissa corrected quickly. "He joined later than I did, so he's my junior apprentice."

\*So, how does this junior apprentice treat his senior apprentice?" Dominic asked playfully.

Carissa's cheeks turned a soft pink. "Very well!"

Dominic gave Rafael a knowing look. Sometimes, a man didn't need to say much-the way he looked at someone was enough to show how much he cared.

Back at Victory Pass, Dominic had worried in silence. When Carissa remarried, would the Hell Monarch ever feel any disdain toward her? He had never quite understood Rafael's true intentions in marrying her. Was there some sort of conspiracy or hidden plot behind it all?

When Dominic exchanged letters with Rafael, there was very little mention of his relationship with Carissa. Most of the letters focused on matters of Fawnrun City, leaving Dominic with even more questions.

After all, as a prince and a man of great accomplishment, didn't he have a wide range of choices for a wife? Even if Salvador feared Rafael's military success and disapproved of him marrying into a noble family, the options available to him were endless.

Dominic had once considered the possibility of love being the reason behind the marriage. Even then, it was a fleeting thought. If he truly believed that, he would have lost his vigilance. That would only have harmed Carissa.

Now, however, Dominic saw it clearly. He knew exactly what it looked like when a man had feelings for a woman; he had seen it in Hector's eyes when he looked at Melanie, and in the way his sons looked at their wives.

He listened as Carissa continued talking. In truth, Dominic already knew most of the things she was saying about Meadow Ridge, including the personalities of Adrian and Everett. How could he not? His precious granddaughter had been sent to Meadow Ridge when she was just a little girl. Of course, he would investigate everything thoroughly.

Two hours later, Carissa let Rafael lead her away with obvious reluctance. Just before they left, she suddenly turned around, her eyes glistening with tears.

"I'll bring Ryan here in a couple of days," she said.

Dominic smiled through the ache in his heart. "Good. Go on, now. I should get some rest."

At the gates of Hell Monarch Estate, Kyle was waiting with Violet and Travis. He noticed Carissa's red-rimmed eyes and knew that she had been crying.

Violet stepped forward, linking arms with Carissa. "I made some dessert. Let's have something sweet."

Rafael didn't seem upset about Violet openly stealing Carissa away. He understood. Sometimes, when one was feeling down, being with closest friends helped to relax more than anything else. Besides, Violet had made dessert personally. What could he say?

Inside the side hall, Carissa ate the dessert slowly, finishing a bowl in no time.

"Is it good?" Violet asked.

Carissa put down the bowl. "It's a bit salty, but the spice is just right. It masks the sweetness a little." "Salty? It tastes just fine to me. Life's like that, you know? You need a little bit of everything-sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, salty-to really savor it," said Violet, her comforting words coming with her signature lightheartedness.

Carissa smiled faintly, her eyes still red and puffy. "Vivi, I'm fine, really."

"I know you're fine." Violet nodded. "Do you remember the sparring match we had at Blue Stone Spring?"

"Of course. You lost to me three times.

"We only sparred three rounds," Violet said, propping her chin in her hand. "The first time, I went wild. The second time, I screamed, and the third time I cried. You mocked me for being weak and unable to accept reality. You were so cocky back then."

Violet let out a small laugh. "I remember thinking, 'Just wait until you face defeat. Let's see if you cry, or completely lose it like I did.'"

## Chapter 923

Carissa tapped the rim of the bowl, her nails clinking against the glass. A soft, clear sound rang out.

"Sometimes, not crying and not making a scene is actually more painful than the tears and noise," she murmured.

"I figured that out later," Violet said, rising to her feet and wrapping her arms around her friend. "That's why I'll always be by your side, until you give me back that arrogant Carissa from Blue Stone Spring."

Carissa pushed her away gently, quickly wiping away tears that had fallen.

She smiled and asked, "Does it have to be the Carissa from Blue Stone Spring? What about the one who beat you under the apple tree? Or the one who beat you outside the Inferno Guild? Or the one who defeated you on the mountaintop..."

Violet ground her teeth in frustration. "Shut up already! It looks like you haven't had enough of my life's bitter, sour, sweet, and salty. How about I bring you a whole pot of it and see if I can numb your tongue?"

She put her hands on Carissa's shoulders. "You're really getting on my nerves."

Carissa wiped her tears on Violet's sleeve, but then suddenly threw her arms around her friend tightly, her shoulders trembling. She clung to Violet for a long time, her shoulders shaking without stopping.

Violet's face was wet with tears, but she said nothing. It was just like when they were younger. After the sparring match, Carissa had laughed at her for crying, only to hold her again afterward.

After what felt like forever, Carissa pulled back, choking on her words, "Thank you."

Violet handed her a handkerchief. "Don't wipe your tears and nose on my clothes. Use your handkerchief."

Carissa took the unsightly handkerchief in her hand, still crying and laughing at the same time.

"Is this the one I gave you last time? You still carry it around?"

Violet sat back down, her nose stuffy. "No. The one you gave me was thrown away long ago. This one is from your estate. I got it from Lulu."

Carissa wiped her tears away, her eyes swollen and red. "Why would you take those? There are plenty of pretty handkerchiefs at your house."

Violet sniffed dismissively. "Only these can prove that you're weaker than me."

Carissa couldn't help it anymore-she burst into laughter.

Outside, Travis was leaning against the wall when he heard her laugh. Slowly, he slid down until he was sitting on the ground. Hugging his knees tightly, he pressed his face into them, quietly wiping away his tears.

Lately, even though no one mentioned the Sinclair family massacre during their discussions, everyone knew it was an unspoken shadow hanging over them. With the arrival of the Westhaven envoy, the case was bound to resurface. Tonight's visit to Sullivan Estate was the beginning of that conversation.

He was worried about Carissa. After she and Rafael left tonight, Travis' heart hadn't calmed down. When he followed Jacob to revisit the events, what Carissa had casually brushed off with a simple sentence, saying that her family was dead, had unraveled into something far more harrowing. Scene by scene, the tragedy came to life before his eyes.

He had never been able to imagine how Carissa had endured it all. Now, it seemed even harder to comprehend.

Travis had no parents, but he had his mentor and guild members who were strict yet loved him deeply. If they were all brutally killed, he would go mad. He wouldn't care about the so-called "greater good". When he saw his enemies, he would do whatever it took to take revenge, even if it cost him his life.

However, he understood why Carissa could endure it. Her grandfather and uncles were all loyal generals, placing the kingdom before their family, and she was proud of that. Yet, it also bound her, preventing her from seeking

revenge the way she once could.

Travis sat there for a while, listening to the teasing between them inside, before he saw Kyle outside. He quickly stood up and walked over, hushing the other man with a finger to his lips.

"They're just chatting."

"Did she cry?" Kyle asked softly.

"Vivi calmed her down. Now, they're just talking."

Kyle sighed. "It's fortunate she has Violet by her side. Sometimes, it's the girls who understand how to comfort each other. Us big guys, we can't do it with that much delicacy."

Travis nodded. "You're right. Let's head to the study. Prince Rafael and Jacob are probably discussing matters and planning the next move."

The first step was to ensure Dominic wasn't detained at the Ministry of Justice. That battle had already been won.

## Chapter 924

The next evening, Cindy arrived in the capital. She didn't go anywhere else first, but made her way straight to Hell Monarch Estate.

Carissa had known her third aunt was coming back, but hadn't expected it to be so soon. Dominic had said it would be several days before they could meet. When she heard Violet cheerfully bounce over to inform her of Cindy's arrival, she had just taken off half of her official uniform. She quickly put it back on and dashed out.

It was still light out, and the sunset was beautiful. The evening glow painted the sky with layers of soft red and orange, casting a warm light over Cindy, who was directing the servants as they carried her things inside. "Aunt Cindy!"

At the sound of her name, Cindy quickly turned around. Before she could even get a clear look, a figure rushed toward her and enveloped her in a tight hug.

With Carissa in her arms, it finally felt real. Tears immediately welled up but were quickly held back, leaving only a sharp pang in her nose.



Cindy smiled and said, "What's this? I've only just arrived, and you're already trying to throw me out of the gates by ramming into me?"

Carissa held Cindy for a long time before letting go.

With a wide grin on her face, she said, "I'm just happy to see you, Aunt Cindy."

Cindy cupped Carissa's face in her hands. No matter how hard she tried, tears wouldn't stop pooling in her eyes. She smiled, but her lips trembled.

"Silly child, let me see how much taller you've grown. My goodness, you're already half a head taller than me!" Cindy raised her hand above her head to measure their heights, laughing until tears spilled from her eyes. Carissa laughed brightly. 'Of course, I've grown taller. How old do you think I am now?"

Cindy pinched her niece's cheek lovingly, Carissa had clearly grown, but Cindy knew that growth had come through so much hardship.

Carissa stuck out her tongue playfully before subtly turning away to take a deep breath, pushing back the ache in her chest.

She feigned interest in the servants moving things around and asked, "What's all this?"

\*These are all the birthday gifts we've collected for you over the years. I brought everything back this time," Cindy answered.

'So many?"

"It's not too many. Just one gift for each year. It's been accumulating for quite a few years." Cindy paused for a moment, her gaze growing teary. "Some of it is from your seventh uncle. Go ahead, see if anything here suits you." Carissa hummed in response, taking a moment to gather her words before speaking, "I'll have someone check if Raf has returned. You go in and have some tea, Aunt Cindy. Violet, please take care of her while I'm gone."

With that, Carissa hurried toward the door. Cindy watched her disappear in an instant, and the smile on her face quickly faded. Tears fell in heavy drops as, with Violet's help, she staggered inside.

Carissa stood outside for a long while, calming herself before slowly making her way back inside.

Cindy had also regained her composure, and she asked Violet many questions about Carissa. Through Violet, Cindy learned that Dominic was staying at Sullivan Estate rather than in the Ministry of Justice's prison after returning, and that Carissa had already gone to visit him. The news put her mind at ease.

Watching the young woman in official uniform step back into the room, Cindy smiled with a sense of pride. Carissa had not only grown up, but she had also achieved something significant, carving out a name for herself in a world that often limited women.

"Come, sit down and talk with me." Cindy gestured for her niece to join her, setting aside the topic of the gifts for now.

Smiling warmly, she added, "I heard from Ms. Spencer about so many things you've done. Tell me, how's the position of commander treating you? Does it feel fulfilling?"

"Of course!" Carissa sat beside her aunt, her tone bright and full of satisfaction. "It feels very fulfilling."

She used to speak with this proud tone more often, but it had become rare. She wanted her aunt to see the Carissa she used to be.

As expected, Cindy smiled widely at her words and ruffled her hair. "As long as it's fulfilling, that's all that matters. Young people should live happy lives."

Carissa rested her head on her aunt's shoulder. Cindy had aged a lot, the hair at the temples now gray. The last time Carissa had seen her, there were only a few strands of silver, which her aunt had tried to hide. Now, it was impossible to cover, and Cindy no longer bothered to try. Otherwise, she would have touched it up before coming back to the capital.

Cindy was concerned for Carissa, but Carissa's heart ached for her aunt as well. The battles at Victory Pass and the harsh winds of war had changed her, leaving her less concerned with her appearance than when she had been in the capital as a noblewoman.

## Chapter 925

After Carissa sent someone to call Rafael over, Cindy said, "I've heard that Lady Helen is staying here. Please take me to her so I can greet her."

Reminded of this, Carissa quickly agreed, "Alright, we'll go now."

Helen had already heard from Gillian when Cindy entered the estate. Knowing that Carissa and her aunt hadn't seen each other in such a long time, Helen figured they would have plenty to talk about. She decided to stay in for the evening meal so they could have some time to catch up.

Not long after, Carissa and Violet brought Cindy in to pay their respects. Helen was quite pleased; she could tell that Cindy was well-raised and followed proper etiquette. After Cindy performed the formalities, Helen motioned for her to sit down, eager to chat.

"It must have been a long journey. Were you exhausted?" she asked.

Cindy glanced at Carissa with affectionate eyes. "My heart was set on returning home, so it didn't feel tiring at all."

Seeing the loving expression on Cindy's face, Helen sighed softly, understanding that Cindy cared deeply for Carissa.

"It's good that you're back. Lady Heather is your sister-in-law. Since you're her elder, you should have a word with her. She's been acting so recklessly," said Helen.

When Cindy looked confused, Gillian explained all the foolish things Heather had done. Cindy had already known about Leona, but she hadn't realized how careless Harvey and Heather were. The fact that they had neglected their daughter was beyond her.

Violet was standing to the side and couldn't help but vent her frustration, recounting all the things Heather had done to Carissa. Cindy's anger flared-she was ready to march over to Hartstone Estate and confront Heather.

Carissa and Violet kept quiet about Harvey's collusion with Yuvan, so Cindy still thought of the prince as timid and weak. Her fury made her curse Heather right there in front of Helen.

Harvey was a prince, so Cindy couldn't curse him. However, Heather was from the Sullivan family. As a sister-in-law, Cindy had every right to reprimand Heather without anyone daring to say otherwise.

Helen, who found it satisfying to hear Cindy vent her anger, said, "It's best to call her over while Prince Harvey is away from the capital. Give her a proper scolding. She doesn't care for her own daughter, nor does she look out for her niece. What good is she as a princess consort if she can't even manage her own family?"

Cindy's frustration was clear, but she knew there was no rush to confront Heather. There was no sense in letting it spoil her mood for the evening.

Helen understood the situation and smiled knowingly. "You haven't seen each other in a while, so I'll skip dinner tonight. Carissa, why don't you accompany your aunt downstairs? The two of you can catch up and enjoy some time together."

Carissa nodded. "As you wish, Mother."

Cindy stood to take her leave. "I'll come again tomorrow to see you, Your Grace."

Helen smiled and nodded. "Very well, go ahead."

Helen then asked Violet to stay, saying she would dine with her to avoid interrupting the conversation. The bond between Carissa and Cindy was as close as mother and daughter, and there was surely a lot to catch up on.

Violet was appreciative of Helen's rare moment of thoughtfulness and was happy to stay.

When Rafael heard Cindy had returned to the capital, he hurried back to the estate to greet her. Cindy greeted him with a formal curtsy, which he returned with a bow before they both sat down.

Cindy had met Rafael before, but hadn't paid much attention to him. Now, looking at him more carefully, she saw

that he and Carissa made quite the pair. It was clear that he genuinely cared for Carissa, and Cindy's heart warmed with affection for him.

The three of them shared a meal. After Rafael left to give them privacy, Cindy spent another hour chatting with her niece.

Finally, she said, "I'm a bit tired now."

"I'll escort you back to rest, Aunt Cindy," Carissa quickly offered, standing to help.

Cindy didn't refuse. She allowed Carissa to take her arm as they stood, smiling. "Alright!"

Lily had already prepared Frostspire Hall for Cindy's stay. She had brought five people with her on this trip-four for her protection, and one long-time maid, Dina, who had already gone ahead to help organize the rooms, waiting for Cindy's return.

After escorting Cindy back to the courtyard, Carissa watched as her aunt patted her hand and adjusted her headpiece.

"Go on back now, and see if you like the gifts," said Cindy.

Carissa lowered her gaze. "I'll like them no matter what. I'm sure of it."

Seeing the way her niece avoided looking at the gifts, Cindy's heart tugged with a quiet ache. She pulled Carissa into another embrace and sighed.

"It's okay if you don't want to look. Just leave them for now."

## Chapter 926

The gifts had already been delivered to Orchid Hall, where Rafael was carefully arranging them one by one. He had already bathed and was waiting for Carissa to return.

Earlier, he had gone to the Ministry of Justice to review Aurora's testimony. He had planned to skip having dinner at home to stay and observe their evening re-interrogation of Aurora, but Matthew had sent someone to inform him that Carissa had requested his return as she had family arriving in the capital. When he heard that, he immediately mounted his horse and returned home.

Cindy's return to the capital pleased him greatly. Once the negotiations began, he intended to involve himself regardless of whether Salvador allowed him to participate. When the time came, he might not be able to take care of Carissa. With Violet and Cindy by Carissa's side, he felt he could relax, knowing she would be looked after.

In the past, he believed Carissa could endure anything. But this time, the negotiations involved the Sinclair family's massacre. That was a wound buried deep in her heart, and he knew these days would be especially hard on her.

Hearing footsteps, he quickly wiped away the serious expression from his face and replaced it with a charming smile as he rose to greet her.

'Back so soon?'

Carissa removed her headpiece with a soft hum. 'Aunt Cindy was tired. I escorted her back so she could bathe and rest early.'

She glanced at the gifts neatly arranged on the table and coffee table, each one beautifully packaged in brocade boxes, with two chests marked with the names of their senders. Her gaze lingered on the four brocade boxes on the coffee table. They were from her seventh uncle, Wade. It felt like something had burned her, and she quickly looked away.

"Do you want to open them?" Rafael asked.

"Not for now." Carissa then called out, "Lulu, have someone move the gifts to the storeroom and place them separately."

Lulu hesitated before entering, her confusion evident. "Your Grace, won't you take a look?"

In the past, whenever gifts from Victory Pass arrived, Carissa would eagerly tear into them. Why wasn't she opening them this time?

\*Not now. Just move them downstairs,' Carissa replied.

Lulu nodded and left to instruct the servants to carry the gifts to the storeroom. Since she wasn't sure what was inside, they couldn't be cataloged just yet, so she had them set aside in a corner for the time being.

Rafael didn't bring up the gifts, simply instructing Pearl and Sydney to prepare hot water for Carissa's bath. He personally retrieved her nightclothes and placed them on the mahogany wood rack behind the partition screen. Once she went inside to bathe, he lit a candle with a calming scent in the room, which helped induce sleep.

Having settled the gifts, Lulu followed Carissa inside to assist her. She knew what her mistress was going through, having suffered a similar pain herself. Lulu grew up in Northwatch Estate and had also lost all her relatives in that brutal massacre. Her heart ached with the same sorrow. Over these past few days, it had been difficult for her to keep her emotions in check.

Lily had been a constant companion, urging her to take some time for herself and rest. However, Lulu couldn't sit idle. Every time she was asked to take a break, her thoughts turned to the past, and the pain was unbearable.

Carissa lifted her head from the steaming bath and saw Lulu entering with a towel.

"Lulu," she called softly.

"Yes, my lady?" Lulu hurried over, handing the towel to Pearl.

Seeing the dark circles under Lulu's eyes, Carissa understood the latter hadn't been sleeping well either. Carissa's voice softened as she said, "I need to go to the palace early tomorrow to request special approval from the queen dowager. I'll also need to return to the Capital Guard headquarters afterward, so you'll accompany Violet to pick up Ryan tomorrow."

"Of course!" Lulu readily agreed when she heard she needed to pick up Ryan.

\*A lot is going on right now, so you won't have much time to rest. Be sure to get some sleep tonight, or you'll be too tired tomorrow. We can't afford to make any mistakes these days."

"I understand, my lady."

Lulu nodded, relieved that she had something to do. When she was busy, her mind stayed occupied, and she didn't have time to dwell on painful memories. Besides, she wanted to be by Carissa's side. Only when she was near her mistress did her heart feel at ease.

"Good. Now, go rest. You've got an early start tomorrow," Carissa instructed.

Lulu had planned to stay until after Carissa's bath, but seeing Pearl and Sydney already present, she bowed and quietly withdrew.

## Chapter 927

After her bath, Carissa dismissed everyone and draped herself over Rafael's shoulder like a lazy, weak cat.

"I heard you went to the Ministry of Justice today."

"Yeah. They were interrogating Aurora. I reviewed the testimony, but it's the same old story. They'll continue questioning her tonight."

"Has she confessed to everything?"

\*From what we know, yes, but there's something in her confession that implicates Grandfather. She insists it was his orders that led to the massacre of the villages."

Carissa's eyes went cold. "So, now it's about making her change her statement, not getting a confession."

Rafael nodded. "That's what I requested, and the Ministry of Justice is cooperating."

"She's blaming my grandpa by claiming she was just following orders and that she wasn't the mastermind," Carissa hissed.



Rafael's expression hardened. "She thinks as long as she's not the mastermind, she can escape death. But don't worry, I won't let her get away with it. Her testimony alone isn't enough. When they went to Victory Pass, Grandfather was shot with arrows twice. The first time was during the first battle they encountered, and the second when they were heading to Fawnrun City. At the time, Grandfather was unconscious. How could he have given her any orders?"

"She's cornered and desperate, but we'll overturn her testimony no matter what. Will her cousin, Zeke, be brought in tomorrow?" Carissa asked.

"Everything's been handled. They'll be questioning him tonight as well, but I returned early. The Ministry of Justice is still interrogating. Don't worry, I'll go back there personally tomorrow."

"Alright."

Carissa felt Zeke, who was with Aurora during the Fawnrun City incident, might be their key. Whether she acted under orders or on her own, he could testify to that.

The next day, Rafael first went to the Supreme Court, then to the Ministry of Justice.

Meanwhile, Carissa went to the palace to seek Victoria's special approval in the hopes of having Ryan meet with Dominic. Technically, this was something she could request from Salvador. However, asking him would entangle things with politics too much and wouldn't be appropriate.

Seeking Victoria's special approval was a different matter. Because of her long-standing connection with the Sullivan family, Victoria readily agreed to allow Ryan to meet with his great-grandfather.

Since Dominic was residing at the Sullivan Estate rather than being held at the Ministry of Justice, Victoria deemed it a family matter. Thus, no one dared to interfere by calling it a political issue.

Victoria was kind, offering comfort as she took Carissa's hand. She assured her that Salvador would likely show leniency, given Dominic's long years of service to the country.

"Don't worry too much," Victoria said.

Not only did she grant permission, but Victoria also sent along supplements with her trusted chamberlain, Keith. She instructed him to stay there and assist as well.

Carissa was deeply moved by this gesture. It was something she couldn't have arranged herself. While the people who attended to Dominic were all assigned by Derek, the Griffinblade Unit was still stationed at the estate. Their presence there meant palace servants would never defy them, and their comings and goings were strictly monitored.

However, Keith was different. As the head chamberlain close to Victoria, even the Griffinblade Unit had to show

him respect. No one would dare stop him from entering Sullivan Estate.

With the matter settled, Carissa returned to the Capital Guard headquarters. After a quick glance at the duty roster, she summoned Michael and a few others to make sure nothing urgent required her attention.

When she was certain there were no pressing matters, she instructed, "If anything important comes up in the next few days, look for me at Hell Monarch Estate. If it's not urgent, handle it yourselves as you see fit."

Michael nodded. "Don't worry, Commander Sinclair. The preparations for the Westhaven envoy's arrival are nearly complete. There shouldn't be any major issues for now. Please attend to your other matters."

Carissa turned her gaze to Max. "Keep your men in check. During the Westhaven envoy's visit, make sure they don't cause any trouble."

"Understood," Max replied. "The Garrison Unit is currently undergoing evaluations as per your instructions. Anyone failing the assessment will be dismissed. Many of them aren't part of the Mystic Army to begin with, so it doesn't matter if they're removed."

"Good," Carissa said, rising to her feet. "That's all for now. You're dismissed."

When Carissa returned to Hell Monarch Estate, Violet and Lulu had already brought Ryan back and were chatting with Cindy.

Carissa instructed her servants to prepare the carriage and have the items she had ordered a few days ago-fine quilts, clothing, money, charcoal, and medicinal herbs for healing-loaded into it.

Lily had also made a variety of pastries that used to be served every time Dominic returned from Victory Pass. She had made plenty, filling up a three-tiered food container.

Having received Victoria's special approval, Cindy also accompanied Carissa.

Keith and Carissa's carriages arrived almost simultaneously at Sullivan Estate. Keith directed the Griffinblade Unit to assist in carrying the goods inside. Among the items were some of his personal clothing, as he intended to stay for a few days.

He was tactful enough not to intrude on the family's time together, but he had an explanation for his presence here if the king asked. After all, Keith was a trusted figure under Victoria. Who would dare question his presence?

Dominic was overjoyed to see Ryan. After the boy went through the formalities of greeting his great-grandfather, Dominic bent down and lifted him into his arms, laughing.

"You're as heavy as a little piglet! It's clear you've been eating well."

"I've been eating a lot and growing taller, too," Ryan replied, putting on a cheerful, lively expression.

Carissa had asked him to be happy and smile more to put his great-grandfather's mind at ease.

"Have you practiced martial arts yet?" Dominic asked with a smile, lowering Ryan gently before standing up. As he supported himself with one hand on his waist, Carissa immediately noticed how much weaker his body had become.

"I haven't started yet. Sebastian says my legs aren't fully healed. He wants me to wait until the bones are in place and properly healed before I can begin training," Ryan answered.

A flicker of concern crossed Dominic's eyes. "That's fine. For now, focus on your studies. Once your legs are fully healed, you'll need to start practicing martial arts to strengthen your body. We must study well and train well. Learn to read and understand, keep your mind sharp, and build a strong body. That way, you'll be able to carry the weight of the duke's estate. Do you understand?"

"I will follow your teachings, Great-Grandpa," Ryan said obediently.

Dominic ruffled Ryan's little head gently and smiled at Carissa. "You've done a good job with him."

Carissa shook her head modestly. "I can't take credit. It's the teachers at the academy and Lord Klein who've done well by him."

Cindy privately mentioned Heather to Dominic, and he frowned upon hearing the news.

"I heard she came the other day, but didn't ask to come in and see me," Dominic said. "She's both callous and weak. She doesn't even resemble a daughter of the Sullivan family."

"I planned to visit Hartstone Estate today, but upon thinking it over, with all that's going on right now, it wouldn't be appropriate to go and scold her. She's a grown woman, so whatever she's done, she must face the consequences, I don't intend to get involved," said Cindy.

Dominic nodded. "You don't need to seek her out, but if she comes to see you, you should say what needs to be said."

"Yes. I understand, Father," Cindy replied.

The three of them stayed at Sullivan Estate and had a meal with Dominic before leaving.

Rafael had spent most of the day at the Ministry of Justice. They had already interrogated Aurora using torture, but she stubbornly refused to stop blaming Dominic.

Zeke and several others had testified that Dominic hadn't given orders to massacre the villages. They explained that Aurora had discovered that a group of Westhaven soldiers were hiding in a nearby village and had ordered the massacre on impulse to find them.

Still, she refused to change her testimony.

Rafael didn't personally interrogate her, but after reviewing her confession, he immediately tore it up and ordered, "Continue the interrogation."

The Minister of Justice, Patrick, had once received great help from Sebastian and was cooperating with Rafael. But after days of questioning, Aurora's confession had remained unchanged. He believed that continuing the interrogation would lead to the same result.

"Your Highness, I must have something to present to His Majesty," Patrick said with a troubled look. "We've been interrogating her for days, but no new testimony has come forward. It's becoming difficult for me to continue without results."

## Chapter 929

"What's the point of presenting a false or incomplete confession to His Majesty?" Rafael shot back. "He'll just tear it up himself."

Patrick sighed. "But we've already interrogated her for so many days. We've used torture, yet she hasn't budged. We can't use any harsher methods for fear of harming her. I believe another round of questioning will yield the same result."

Rafael's gaze turned cold. "Then, continue the interrogation. You know as well as I do, Mr. Lloyd. She must change her testimony. General Sullivan is not the one truly responsible-she is. If she refuses to cooperate, then we'll have to bring in Commander Warren and interrogate him."

Patrick's eyes widened in shock. "Your Highness, His Majesty has not authorized the interrogation of Commander Warren. He has no intention of involving him in this matter."

Rafael scoffed. "If General Sullivan is already implicated, then why not Commander Warren? Has His Majesty issued an order forbidding you from questioning him?"

Patrick hesitated. "While there's no explicit order saying we cannot question him, there was no order to arrest him either."

Rafael fixed Patrick with a piercing stare. "I didn't say anything about arresting him. I said to bring him in. He was in charge of the Fawnrun City operation. Bring him in and ask him some questions. What's the problem? If His Majesty questions you later, just say it was my instruction."

Patrick was puzzled. In the past, Rafael and the people from his household avoided drawing attention to matters involving them, as they were always fearful of arousing the king's suspicions.

Now, Rafael was pushing for an interrogation without Salvador's authorization-even asking for Barrett by name. Wasn't this directly inviting trouble? Why wasn't Rafael concerned about provoking Salvador now?

After thinking it over, Patrick said carefully, "Your Highness, I would advise against getting too involved. If the interrogation brings out any new confessions, I'll let you know immediately."

Rafael's expression hardened, his voice unwavering, "Didn't you hear me clearly, Mr. Lloyd? What I said was, if Aurora does not change her confession, bring Commander Warren in for questioning."

Patrick looked at him, confused. "But what good will questioning him do? His Majesty clearly wants to protect him. Why provoke him now? Why upset His Majesty at this time?"

"Because Commander Warren was the one in charge of the Fawnrun City operation," Rafael replied with firm resolve. "His testimony can prove that General Sullivan didn't authorize Aurora's actions. It'll corroborate the testimonies of General Sullivan, Zeke, and the others, and reveal the truth."

Patrick chuckled, understanding at last. Even then, he thought it was all a bit unnecessary.

"Actually, whether we bring Commander Warren in for questioning or not, the current testimony already proves that Aurora is lying. Her confession can't be trusted. His Majesty should be aware of this, and I believe he will handle it impartially. Westhaven should accept the truth as well," he said.

Rafael shook his head. "Your 'shoulds' and 'believes' are filled with uncertainty. What I want is the truth laid out clearly before His Majesty and the Westhaven envoys."

Patrick paused to think, then understood what Rafael meant. They hadn't questioned Dominic yet, so Aurora's confession was still the key. While Zeke and the others' testimonies contradicted Aurora's, they hadn't had direct contact with Dominic, so their statements couldn't completely disprove hers.

Only Barrett's testimony, if aligned with theirs, could counteract Aurora's. At the very least, it would make the truth more believable.

However, it was clear that Salvador didn't want Barrett involved in the matter. Even though Barrett should be questioned and held accountable, Salvador seemed intent on protecting him. What could Patrick do? As Minister of Justice, opposing the king could only bring trouble.

Rafael saw through his hesitation, and said plainly, "Enough. I'll send someone to fetch him. You just need to handle the questioning."

Having heard that, Patrick could only comply. "Understood. In that case, will you also be speaking to His Majesty, Your Highness?"

Rafael nodded, rising from his seat. "I'll report to His Majesty now to spare you the trouble."

Patrick exhaled in relief. As long as he wasn't left to take the blame, he was more than willing to help. After all, he agreed that Barrett shouldn't be allowed to sit this one out.

Since Aurora had been taken away, Barrett had been a bundle of nerves. He was afraid Carissa or Alistair might go to Salvador and accuse him of trying to help Aurora escape.

There was another reason for his unease. He couldn't see a way out of the Fawnrune City mess. He couldn't figure out why Salvador was protecting him, but with Dominic already summoned back to the capital to answer for his actions, what chance did he have to escape blame?

After days of anxiety, Barrett's worst fear was realized when someone from Hell Monarch Estate came to inform him that the Ministry of Justice had called him in for questioning.

His heart sank.

What he feared was finally happening.

Chapter 930

In the royal study, Salvador took a sip of his coffee and looked up at Rafael.

"I wasn't aware the Supreme Court was investigating this case along with the Ministry of Justice. Did I issue such an order? Or is it that after your investigation into Eleanor's rebellion went nowhere, you're now trying to help the Ministry of Justice with their case out of the kindness of your heart?"

Salvador's words carried a note of questioning, tinged with displeasure.

With the usual "understanding" between them, Rafael would normally be expected to confess to a fault, kneel, and then withdraw to maintain the appearance of harmony between the king and his brother.

So, Salvador resumed drinking his coffee slowly after he spoke, waiting for Rafael to kneel and make an apology. Deep down, he was accustomed to his brother's silent endurance and deferential nature.

But this time, Rafael didn't kneel to apologize. Instead, he stood tall and replied, "Your Majesty, Commander Warren was the commanding general of the Fawnrun City operation back then. He can't possibly be uninvolved in everything that happened there."

Salvador froze for a moment, then slammed his cup down heavily onto the desk. Derek, standing nearby, hastily dropped to his knees in alarm.

Salvador's voice darkened with more anger as he spoke, "You were once the marshal who recaptured the Southern Frontier. I ask you after such a massive catastrophe, if Commander Warren is held accountable, will General Sullivan be allowed to escape punishment? After all, he is a Grand General and leader of the troops at Victory Pass."

Meeting the king's gaze with a calm but firm expression, Rafael responded curtly, "No, he can't."

Salvador's voice grew sharp, saying, "Then, why drag another person into this? You must understand that before Westhaven's envoy inquired into this matter, I had no intention of bringing it up, let alone punishing General Sullivan and Aurora."

"Everything we're doing now is just to appease Westhaven. I know you don't like Commander Warren. He was once married to your wife, so I can understand your resentment. But as a prince and



an official of Starhaven, you should be thinking about the greater good. You shouldn't be using this as an opportunity to step on someone you hate, even to the point of confronting me. You've truly disappointed me."

Rafael stood his ground, not bowing or shrinking back.

"Your Majesty, this has nothing to do with personal grudges. When Commander Warren led

the troops to Fawnrun City, General Sullivan was severely injured and on his deathbed. As the Grand General of Victory Pass, it's true that he must bear responsibility for failing to prevent the massacre of civilians.

"But if Commander Warren hadn't been involved, the blame would have fallen solely on General Sullivan for making poor decisions and choosing the wrong people. Westhaven will seize on this and force us to kill General Sullivan to placate their anger."

Salvador's gaze darkened with intensity. "Then, he truly chose the wrong person. He wasn't unjustly accused."

"He was," Rafael countered. "General Sullivan didn't make a mistake in choosing Commander Warren, who did burn the supply depot and complete his mission. The real mistake was Aurora's, someone Commander Warren brought along. She wasn't even one of the soldiers stationed at Victory Pass.

"Even if it was General Sullivan's command to send Commander Warren to Fawnrun City, Aurora was one of Commander Warren's subordinates. He didn't have to bring her along. I believe Commander Warren and Aurora had already formed a bond on the battlefield, and he wanted to give her a chance to prove herself. That's why he brought her along. That is also why Commander Warren is responsible for much of this."

Salvador sat frozen, his anger rising to the point of speechlessness. It took him a long time to speak, and when he did, his voice was sharp with fury.

"I have my judgment on who's responsible for what," he said. "This is not a matter for you to interfere with. You've overstepped. As for your assumptions, those are nothing more than your personal thoughts, not the truth."

Rafael was unfazed. "That's why I had the Ministry of Justice bring Commander Warren in for questioning. If he didn't have personal feelings for Aurora and wasn't the one who chose to take her to Fawnrune City, then the truth will be clear once the Ministry of Justice questions him, right?"

"You're making a fuss for no reason," Salvador snapped. "Once Commander Warren enters the Ministry of Justice and gives his statement, he will be implicated."

Rafael held his ground and replied slowly, "See, you already know he's involved, Your Majesty. If you already know, how can the outside world not? There are many soldiers at Victory Pass, so how can the common people not know? Westhaven has been plotting this for so long-don't you think they know? If they do, it won't just be a matter of simply questioning a few people to appease the situation."

Salvador narrowed his eyes, his anger flaring dangerously. "Rafael Sanford!"

Derek, still kneeling on the ground, hastily called out, "Your Majesty, please calm down!"