

## War Song 941

### Chapter 941

Lisandra felt a slight unease as she watched Leroy and Icarus leave the banquet. When they returned, there was an exchange of glances between them, as if they were confirming something.

Her brow furrowed deeper, a sense of something being off growing stronger. But there was no way she could ask Icarus to explain. Asking him to step out again during the banquet would be far too conspicuous. Anyone with eyes would notice something was wrong.

Westhaven was on the brink of internal chaos, and Lisandra had no desire to stir up further conflict. She had come here to seek justice, but her real purpose was to stabilize Edmund's claim to the throne and ease the unrest among the people.

When they had gone to the Southern Frontier to seek justice, they had already suffered significant losses-both men and resources. The heavy financial aid given to Sandoria had drained the national treasury, so the kingdom could hardly endure another costly war that would further harm the common people.

If war was to come, it would have to wait at least five years.

The palace banquet carried on with music from musicians and performances from dancers, but everyone was lost in their own thoughts. They hid behind fake smiles as they observed one another from the shadows.

By the time the banquet ended, it was late. Lisandra led the envoys in their formal farewells.

Salvador, who had drunk to the point of near drunkenness, returned to his quarters with the help of the palace servants. Tonight, everything at the banquet had seemed peaceful. As for tomorrow's negotiations, which would no doubt be filled with tension and danger, he didn't need to be directly involved.

Salvador found a certain satisfaction in Rafael's selfishness. It made him feel like a real, living, ordinary person. The constant talk of selflessness and serving the nation and people-those words were nothing but hollow to him.

A person without desires was the one to fear most, as human nature was inherently selfish.

Of course, there were true, loyal servants of the crown, like Dominic, whom Salvador respected. Dominic's loyalty wasn't something he just spoke of. He proved it through action for most of his life.

But human hearts were fickle.

Salvador had already sent people to investigate Valken, but so far, there was no evidence to suggest any trouble there. He had also dispatched agents to Stonebridge County, which was part of Eleanor's territory. If Yuvan dared not act openly in Valken, he would most likely be hiding in Stonebridge County.

In his investigation of the treason case, Salvador felt a deep, unsettling helplessness.

It wasn't that there weren't capable people available. The court was filled with talented individuals, and Salvador's dad had left him an excellent mix of civilian and military advisors-perhaps the best the kingdom had ever seen.

But they were Sigmund's people. Whenever there was disagreement or differing opinions on court matters, they all ended up bringing up the late king. Salvador would use them, but he wouldn't trust them as his closest confidants.

For matters regarding Yuvan's covert investigation, he left it to Ian. However, Ian's people were still leagues behind those from Hell Monarch Estate.

Outside the palace gates, carriages and horses moved like water. Once Lisandra's carriage had departed, others gradually made their way out. Carissa and Rafael had barely climbed into their carriage when Leroy walked over, his demeanor noticeably more polite than before.

"Your Highness, tomorrow marks the official start of negotiations. I'd like to have a word with you before then. Would you be amenable to joining me at a coffeehouse for a drink now?" he asked the prince.

Carissa pushed back the carriage curtain to reveal her cool, composed expression. "Mr. Stellwyn, it's already late. Might we not save the conversation for tomorrow?"

Leroy chuckled. "Are you worried I might lead His Highness astray to some brothel, Your Grace? There's no need to worry, I'd just like the chance to sit down and speak with him alone before negotiations begin. I want to clear the air, so to speak.

Leroy didn't promise complete transparency, but before such a crucial moment, sitting down to feel each other out was common practice.

And given that Starhaven was clearly at a disadvantage here, it was only right for them to take the initiative and make an effort to gauge Westhaven's position. Rafael would have no grounds to refuse now.

Rafael only hesitated a moment before saying, "You should return first. I'll join Mr. Stellwyn for a drink.

Carissa nodded. "Very well. Then, I shall head back now."

"We'll be leaving now," she called out to her maid and coachman, who were actually Violet and Travis. The two answered in unison, "Yes, Your Grace."

Leroy watched the carriage disappear into the night, a sly, victorious grin spreading across his face.

## Chapter 942

On Royal Street, the only sound was the clatter of horses' hooves and the occasional rattle of carriage wheels. There was nothing else to break the silence.

Travis was expertly guiding the carriage. He was getting better at it with every passing day-after all, he was now the owner of a carriage.

Violet sat inside the carriage with Carissa, resting her head on her friend's shoulder. Feigning weakness, she complained, "You all got to go inside, eating and drinking to your heart's content, while we were stuck out here in the cold wind. Thankfully, Lulu had us bring some meat and pastries from home. She even thoughtfully packed some coffee in a water pouch. If we hadn't had that, I might have passed out from hunger by now."

Carissa chuckled. "It's truly a sin to leave you hungry, Ms. Spencer. After this is all over, we'll have to throw a feast to make it up to you."

Violet didn't seem offended. Instead, she gave a playful smile and quipped, "You know me best. The one thing I can always indulge in is spending money."

Violet enjoyed spending money on the people around her, especially those she was close to. When it came to strangers, it depended on their situation. If she felt sympathy for them, she would be willing to spend a bit on them.

Carissa leaned her head against Violet's, their two heads resting together. They didn't need to listen to the sounds outside-Travis was handling everything.

At Hartstone Estate, a dim light flickered in the study, casting shadows across a face weathered by wind and time. The usual signs of weakness and hesitation were gone, replaced by a dangerous gleam in his eyes as they reflected the flickering light.

They couldn't afford the slightest mistake during tonight's mission.

War between the two kingdoms had to happen now, or their opportunity would be lost. The chance at the Southern Frontier had already slipped away. This time, they couldn't afford to miss it.

Salvador was already suspicious of them, so they couldn't afford to aim for both power and a righteous reputation now. What did it matter if they were called traitors and rebels? The victors would write history and determine how it would be remembered.

Now, to succeed in their plan, they needed war to break out simultaneously again at the Southern Frontier and Victory Pass, mobilizing their scattered forces across various regions to stir up internal chaos. Then, they would blame Salvador for his cruelty, claiming his actions led to widespread turmoil, and use this as justification to lead a righteous campaign.

Harvey's visit to Westhaven was a necessary step to find Leroy. Among all the people in the enemy kingdom, he and Edmund were the most eager for war. But since Harvey couldn't meet the king, he had to turn to Leroy.

He and Leroy had secretly formed an alliance. Leroy had one condition: to ensure Westhaven's victory at Victory Pass. He didn't ask for much-just the capture of Victory Pass and the relocation of

its people to a nearby city. The only way to guarantee their success at Victory Pass was to kidnap Carissa and take her to Westhaven. She was the apple of Rafael's and the Sullivan family's eye. With her in their grasp, they could secretly threaten Rafael, preventing him from joining the war, as well as coerce the Sullivan family into withdrawing from Victory Pass. Yuvan's suicide soldiers would be working with Icarus in their large-scale plan to capture Carissa. Her martial arts skills were formidable, so they couldn't afford any mistakes. They had to strike swiftly and take her without delay.

Icarus was Westhaven's greatest fighter. As long as Rafael wasn't present, Leroy and the suicide soldiers would have no problem kidnapping Carissa.

Harvey closed his eyes. Tonight was the first step toward success, and a critical one at that. There could be no mistakes.

Leroy should be able to draw Rafael away. The negotiations were tomorrow, so the prince would be eager to probe Westhaven's stance before that.

The plan would succeed, without a doubt.

"Your Highness."

A knock on the door jolted Harvey upright, and he quickly recognized his wife's voice.

Irritated, he responded coldly, "What is it?"

Heather's anxious voice came through, "Your Highness, I just wanted to ask where you went earlier. The queen dowager sent a physician to check on you, and she knew you weren't in the estate."

"No need to ask so many questions. Rest for now. If there's nothing important, don't come near me," Harvey replied, his voice devoid of emotion.

He was already aware of Victoria's actions, but it didn't matter. There was no evidence to back up any claims, nor would Salvador bother with him, a useless prince.

Even if there was suspicion, Harvey could always come up with a reasonable explanation. It was absurd that Heather was so frightened over something so trivial. While she and Melanie Sullivan were sisters, Heather lacked even a fraction of Melanie's courage and intelligence.

## Chapter 943

Heather lingered outside the room for a long while before slowly walking away, a deep unease settling in her chest. Ever since Harvey returned home, he seemed like a different person.

There were also several unfamiliar faces in the estate. These strangers didn't seem to regard her at all, despite the fact that she was a princess consort. When they crossed paths, they didn't bow or step aside, walking straight past her as if she were invisible.

The sound of horses' hooves broke the stillness of the night, their rhythm jarring in the otherwise silent streets. The cobbled roads were deserted, with the capital's nightlife limited to the lively areas in the east and west cities, or along the river. The cheer and laughter there never reached the quiet of the southern district.

As a horse neighed, then came to a sudden halt, the air seemed to hum with an unusual tension. The light from the lanterns on the carriage didn't reach far, and the moon was hidden behind the clouds, leaving the surroundings eerily dark.

Travis held a riding whip and had a long blade strapped to his leg. He closed his eyes, listening intently to the slightest change in the air, his ears twitching as if to catch every subtle sound.

Carissa held her whip, its length coiling at her feet like a red serpent, ready to strike. Violet gripped her sword, her index finger lightly pressing against the hilt's opening. With a mere flick, the blade would slide free from its sheath.

In the darkness, more than ten shadowy figures descended without a sound, their feet barely disturbing the dust beneath them—a clear testament to their mastery of the Lightfoot Skill.

In an instant, Travis unleashed his battle prowess, his power like a thunderclap. He flicked the whip, drawing his blade with lightning speed. His Lightfoot Skill carried him as if he were riding the wind.

With a single leap, his blade was already slicing down toward one of the attackers. The assassin narrowly dodged the fatal blow, but the long blade still drew blood, the scent of it fueling the assassin's bloodlust.

Inside the carriage, the two women burst through the curtains, Carissa's long whip hissing like a striking serpent. The force of it sent two attackers reeling back.

Violet unsheathed her sword in a fluid motion. Without even pausing to twirl the blade, she stepped on Carissa's whip and leaped forward. With her deft hands, she sent her sword dancing in the air, creating a web-like shield of light that blocked the assassins outside.

Dressed in black and masked, Icarus also wielded a long knife. Master of all eighteen martial arts techniques, he was especially deadly with his blade. He had expected that with so many people involved, capturing Carissa would be a quick and easy task. But to his surprise, even with the ten or more men and himself, their first strike had been thwarted.

It didn't take long for him to identify their weakness. The coachman and the swordswoman were both highly skilled fighters. Those two were difficult opponents, but on the other hand, Carissa seemed weaker. If he could just tie up the other two, capturing Carissa would be easy.

He turned to face Travis, swinging his massive blade down with powerful force. When the two blades collided, he expected to cut Travis' weapon in half. Icarus believed his blade, infused with inner force, would be as sharp and unyielding as obsidian.

A clang rang out and sparks flew. Both men felt their hands go numb, almost losing their grip on their blade handles.

Icarus knew Travis was skilled, but hadn't expected his inner force to be so powerful. It seemed that defeating him quickly would be impossible. However, a prolonged fight was out of the question. If it dragged on, reinforcements would arrive.

Icarus signaled for the suicide soldiers to deal with Travis and Violet, then cautiously moved toward Carissa with two of his men. He planned to have her subdued within ten moves.

The flash of blades quickly surrounded Carissa. Icarus noted that her reactions were sharp, managing to dodge his long knife three times in a row. But her weapon was just a whip. How many times could she defend herself with that?

The suicide soldiers moved like lightning, their swords flashing in every direction, keeping Carissa from escaping. Icarus' long blade descended in powerful strokes, slicing through the air. Mid-swing, he flipped it to hit her neck with the back of the knife. The force of the blow would surely knock her out cold-Icarus was determined to capture her in one swift move.

But in that fleeting moment, Carissa somehow evaded it.

Icarus froze, shock spreading through him.

What the hell? She had no way to escape, with the suicide soldiers' swords surrounding her on both sides and his blade coming down from above. She had nowhere to run except to retreat or burrow underground.

Yet, she hadn't moved at all-she was still standing right where she was.

## Chapter 944

Icarus hadn't even seen how Carissa dodged the strike. He only knew that his long blade had cut through empty air. When he focused again, she was still standing there, as if she hadn't moved an inch.

The lanterns on the carriage cast two faint glows, illuminating Carissa's face, which seemed a little pale. Her expression, cold as frost in the biting wind, softened into a smile directed at him.

The smile sent an immediate shiver down Icarus' spine. In fact, it wasn't just a shiver-it was a sharp, painful jolt.

It took him a moment to realize what had happened. Her whip had lashed through the air, striking him across the face and tearing away the black cloth covering his face. He spun around in midair, swiftly covering his face again.

He leaped to the top of a wall and turned around just in time to see the red whip, coiling like a venomous snake, wrap around the neck of the suicide soldier on Carissa's left. With a powerful tug, she yanked him into the air, her feet pushing off toward the other suicide soldier on her right.



In a smooth, fluid motion, she dragged the first suicide soldier toward the carriage. His weapon fell to the ground with a clatter. Just before it hit the earth, Carissa's foot shot out, sending the sword flying into the air.

She flew up alongside the suicide soldier, swinging her leg horizontally. The sword arced gracefully through the air, striking the second suicide soldier and burying itself deep into his stomach.

The entire sequence unfolded in an instant. Even though Icarus had witnessed it up close, there was nothing he could do. It became clear to him now-the real threat was Carissa, not her two servants.

Grinding his teeth, Icarus charged forward, swinging his blade to sever the whip. If he didn't, that suicide soldier would be dead.

Carissa yanked the whip, throwing the suicide soldier into the air at such a rapid speed that it nearly blurred Icarus vision. He immediately altered his course to avoid striking his own man. However, it would have been better if he hadn't done that. The moment he changed direction, the blade bit into flesh-his long knife had cleaved the suicide soldier's head clean off.

She had predicted the direction of his blade.

Impossible! This couldn't be real!

His technique, Phantom Blade, was a series of deceptive moves with over a dozen variations. It was a martial arts masterpiece. In Westhaven, no one had ever escaped its reach. Obviously, no one had ever predicted the direction of his blade either.

But now, as if to mock his confidence, Carissa's whip danced through the air like a net, casting even more sweeping shadows than Icarus' Phantom Blade. In close combat, his massive blade was useless. Meanwhile, her whip could extend or retract, as well as switch between soft and rigid, and every move of hers aimed straight for his neck.

Barely able to lift his blade, he could only use the hilt to block, unable to land a proper strike. He struggled to defend himself, unable to even spare a glance at the others.

Why hadn't anyone come to help?

Icarus didn't know how many attacks he had blocked, but with each one, he was pushed further back. Desperately, he tried to create some distance, but Carissa kept the pressure on, her whip striking relentlessly. He had already been hit several times, each lash leaving his body burning with pain.

At that moment, the pride and confidence of Westhaven's greatest fighter was shattered, destroyed by the relentless, almost insulting way Carissa wielded her whip.

And now, Icarus feared he might not escape tonight. If they got their hands on him... the consequences for tomorrow's negotiations were too dire to even consider.

As his thoughts grew more frantic, his focus slipped. He made more and more mistakes, and eventually, there

was no way to dodge the whip. It wrapped around him like a serpent, tightening around his neck. With one sharp pull, Carissa yanked him forward. Her hand moved like lightning, ripping the tattered black cloth off his face. His entire face was exposed under the dim glow of the carriage's lantern.

"Commander Icarus," Carissa said, flashing him a smile. "I appreciate the challenge."

She tightened the whip again, spun him around, and forced him to look at the fallen suicide soldiers behind him. Most of them were down, with only three or four still standing, struggling in vain to escape. Meanwhile, the coachman and the swordswoman moved with ease, as if waiting for something.

Fear wrapped around Icarus like the dark night itself, suffocating and cold. He barely had time to process this when the sound of hooves shattered the silence of the night, breaking through the lingering bloodlust. His face turned pale and he could barely breathe.

"Commander Sinclair!"

A horse galloped toward them, its rider quickly dismounting. Behind him, more than twenty horses followed, each carrying a member of the Capital Guard.

"What happened?"

It was Michael, the deputy commander of the Capital Guard. The soldiers trailing behind him were naturally the guards who patrolled the streets at night.

## Chapter 945

When Lisandra returned to Concord Lodge, she realized that neither Leroy nor Icarus had come back. A sense of unease gripped her heart; she felt that something had gone terribly wrong.

Her uncle, Leroy, was the most reckless and troublesome member of the Stellwyn family. It wasn't that he lacked ability on the contrary, he was bold and skilled-but his arrogance and impulsive, reckless behavior often led him to act without thinking.

Lisandra turned to one of the female officials, Penny Durham, and ordered sharply in a firm tone, "Bring Amos to me! Immediately!"

Amos was one of Westhaven's Secretaries of State and also Leroy's brother-in-law. The two had been in close discussion throughout the journey, so he certainly knew what Leroy and Icarus had planned for tonight.

After returning to his room, Amos had been waiting for news. He knew exactly what Leroy was up to. This wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision. Everything had been carefully arranged. When Amos had last seen Leroy, the mission was already half-complete, with the latter successfully luring the Hell Monarch away.

Once Rafael was out of the way, capturing Carissa would be easy. After all, when they came tonight, the couple had only brought a coachman and a maid with them. As long as the prince was out of the picture, it didn't matter how skilled Carissa was in martial arts. She would have no chance against Icarus and the elite suicide soldiers Harvey had dispatched.

The operation was bound to succeed.

"Mr. Bailey, Her Highness requests your presence," came Penny's voice from outside the door.

Amos stood up and opened the door. While this plan had been kept secret from Lisandra, now that it was in motion and sure to succeed, it was time to inform her.

The grand princess had always been against starting a war. She only wanted justice from Starhaven, but the truth could only be revealed on the battlefield. Without military action, how could they renegotiate borders or receive the apologies and reparations they were owed?

Amos followed Penny into the side hall where Lisandra resided. Under the dim light, the grand princess' expression was cold and stern, a far cry from the gentle demeanor she had shown at the palace banquet earlier that evening.

Without waiting for his greeting, Lisandra's voice cut through the silence, sharp and accusatory, "Where are Leroy and Icarus? What are you lot plotting behind my back?"

Amos bowed and answered, "Your Highness, Mr. Stellwyn is responsible for luring the Hell Monarch away, while Commander Icarus and the suicide soldiers are tasked with capturing Lady Carissa."

"\*Nonsense!" Lisandra slammed her hand on the table, her face red with anger. "How dare you? This is Starhaven, not Westhaven! You've taken it upon yourselves to abduct the Hell Monarch's wife? If this fails, have you considered the consequences?"

Amos confidently replied, "Your Highness, please do not worry. Failure is impossible. Even if something goes wrong, it will not be our fault."

"How could it not be our fault? Icarus went personally," Lisandra snapped.

"Your Highness, please remain calm," Amos replied, trying to soothe her. "Do you remember that man who accompanied us to Starhaven? The one next to Mr. Stellwyn? He's Prince Harvey. He was part of the plan tonight. He sent those suicide soldiers, who are all from Starhaven. Even if tonight's mission fails and we cannot abduct the Hell Monarch's wife, Commander Icarus can still walk away unscathed."

Lisandra shook her head, disappointment filling her eyes. "You've underestimated everything. The Hell Monarch's wife spent her youth learning martial arts at Meadow Ridge. Her skills are likely no less than Icarus'. 'Before you tried to capture anyone, did you bother to find out who you were dealing with? And let's assume, for a

moment, that you succeed. What happens when the Hell Monarch realizes his wife is missing? Do you think he won't suspect us? Tomorrow is the day of the negotiations..."

The grand princess paused, taking a deep breath before glaring at him. "I see now. You all have been so focused on the idea of war that you've forgotten about diplomacy entirely."

\*Mr. Stellwyn and I just wanted to be prepared. We never said we wouldn't negotiate. And frankly, Your Highness, I believe war wouldn't be such a bad option. Starhaven has been oppressive and you've always said you wanted justice. Prince Arthur was your brother. Don't you want to avenge him?" Amos countered, determined to defend their actions.

Her anger evident, Lisandra responded sharply, "I came to Starhaven to seek justice, not to bring about war. Do you think the only way to achieve justice is through bloodshed and destruction? You all sit comfortably in your high positions, throwing around the idea of war like it's nothing. Why don't I see any of you charging into battle, fighting as soldiers?"

Amos didn't show her the same respect he would have in Westhaven. Instead, he sneered and said, "I'm a civil official, Your Highness. Of course, I can't fight on the frontlines. But Mr. Stellwyn can. During the battle at Victory Pass, he led the campaign, forcing the Sullivan Army to retreat. He even nearly killed General Sullivan."

His words made it clear, despite the subtlety, that he was pushing Lisandra to see things his way. His attitude only reinforced the suspicion that Edmund was orchestrating this entire scheme behind the scenes.

Edmund had agreed to the negotiations outwardly, but had never truly given up on the idea of war.

Lisandra's face paled. She sighed heavily, her voice filled with weariness as she spoke, "I've warned you all time and again-never underestimate your enemy. Over the years, my dad and I have worked tirelessly to bring stability to the kingdom. But none of you care about the people.

"Have you seen the national treasury's records? The famine last year-did you see the devastation? A desire for revenge could lead to the people suffering, being displaced, starving, or even resorting to cannibalism. Those of you in power sit comfortably in your positions, indifferent to the lives of the common folk. In your hands, Westhaven will eventually collapse."

Knowing that victory was all but assured, and with Edmund's royal edict backing him, Amos straightened his back, his expression firm.

He furrowed his brow and said, "Your Highness, such words are unflattering. To speak of the fall of Westhaven with such certainty-that's not something I expect to hear from you. To belittle your own country like that is beneath someone of your position. I don't think Mr. Stellwyn's actions are in any way misguided.

"As I've said, it's a two-pronged approach. If they're willing to negotiate, we're prepared to talk. But if they refuse, war will be inevitable. Capturing the Hell Monarch's wife is a move akin to what Aurora did to the former crown prince. Should war break out, having the Hell Monarch's wife as a prisoner on the battlefield at Victory Pass will force the Sullivan family's forces to retreat. It'll be just like how Marshal Liam signed that humiliating treaty after Aurora captured our crown prince.

Lisandra's fury ignited as she slammed her hand on the table. "You're being utterly foolish! When Marshal Liam did that, it was because Aurora captured our heir. At the time, the court was in disarray due to my father's illness, and the country was on the brink of collapse.

"If we hadn't stabilized the throne, the entire government could have fallen. And now, you compare the Hell Monarch's wife to an heir to the throne? I was right in saying you are all reckless and naive. Have you ever taken the time to understand Lady Carissa? Do you know anything about the Sullivan family's generals or their army?"

Amos didn't see Carissa as much of a threat. Yes, her dad was Grand General Hector and she had fought at the Southern Frontier, but she was still a woman-unprepared for this kind of confrontation. With Icarus leading the charge and Harvey's suicide soldiers by his side, failure was simply not possible.

"Of course we do," Amos said, dismissing Lisandra's concerns. "This wasn't a rash decision. The plan has been meticulously arranged. Carissa will fall into our hands without fail. As for where she'll be held, we've already secured Hartstone Estate. From there, we'll find a way to send her out of the city safely. If the negotiations fail, they won't dare harm an envoy. We'll retreat to Westhaven safely and declare war."

Lisandra's gaze hardened. "So, once we retreat to Westhaven, we'll officially declare war? Are you telling me that the moment we left for Starhaven, King Edmund already began gathering troops at Fawnrun City?"

Amos met her gaze coldly. 'Exactly. His Majesty is decisive and wise, a monarch who would never falter out of sentimentality. I believe that men, not women, should rule the world. I'm not suggesting you're weak, Your Highness, but there are times when retreat is not an option.'

Penny couldn't hold back any longer and interjected coldly, "It sounds like you're not only looking down on Her Highness, Mr. Bailey, but also women in general.

Amos gave a faint smile and raised his hand in a small, respectful gesture to Lisandra. 'Your Highness, I didn't mean any offense.'

Penny's eyes flashed with anger. "You say you didn't mean it, yet your words clearly show otherwise."

Lisandra raised her hand, signaling for Penny to hold her tongue. Amos shot her a smug look, a glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

"If there's nothing further, I will take my leave," Amos said, his tone casual, almost dismissive.

Lisandra looked at him coldly. "If you look down on women so much, then be prepared for women to slap that arrogance right off your face."

Amos laughed softly, a hint of derision in his voice.

"Your Highness, such words only serve to lift someone else's spirit while diminishing your own. Two kingdoms are at odds, and yet, you're only concerned about defending women? The unfortunate truth is that the Hell Monarch's wife is a Starhaven native. No matter how highly you raise her, it won't help your desire to elevate women to power."

With that, he bowed and withdrew.

Though enraged, Penny could only comfort Lisandra, saying, "Your Highness, don't let such short-sighted people provoke you. We can deal with him when we return to the capital."

Lisandra sighed deeply, her voice filled with weariness as she replied, "Why should I be angry with him? No, what angers me is the king. Can this impulsive behavior be a blessing for Westhaven? He's followed Arthur for so many years, but learned nothing. I went through hell and back to help

him rise to power, hoping he would carry on Arthur's legacy. Instead, all he thinks about is revenge. He's forgetting the people and the kingdom."

As the state of the nation weighed heavily on her mind, Lisandra felt utterly drained. She had been involved in politics for years, yet it often seemed like those around her were bent on opposing her.

Perhaps they weren't fighting against her personally, but rather her very identity as a woman.

Despite her talent for governing, no one would heed her. Progress was almost impossible. Before, she had the backing of her dad, the late king. But now, with the current king's lack of support, she felt powerless-as though she were nothing at all.

## Chapter 947

By the time it was nearly midnight, the lights in Glimmering Tower were still on. However, a 'Closed' sign hung at the entrance.

The private room on the third floor, once a peaceful drinking space, now bore a jug of wine and a few small dishes set out for snacking.

Rafael had come without his guards, and Leroy had only brought a single attendant who stood by the door. The wine was half-drunk, and though the two men spoke of tomorrow's negotiations, neither revealed any crucial details.

Leroy's goal was to keep Rafael here for as long as possible without sharing anything important. He suspected the operation had already been completed and their target had already been captured.

On the other hand, Rafael seemed to remain blissfully unaware of the plan. Leroy's satisfaction grew as he thought about how easily they had lured the Hell Monarch away. People always talked about how difficult Rafael was to deal with, yet it had only taken a few well-placed words to get him to fall into Leroy's trap.

Still, Leroy didn't let this lull him into thinking Rafael wasn't vigilant. After all, tomorrow's negotiations were vital. Starhaven was fully aware of their weak position, which was why they were eager to hear what terms Leroy would offer. It was clear they were desperate.



What made Leroy laugh, though, was Rafael's absurd arrogance. Every word out of his mouth suggested he wasn't afraid of war. Leroy could hardly contain his amusement.

"So, are you telling me you're not afraid of war, Your Highness?" he sneered. "But can you guarantee that, if war breaks out between our two kingdoms, your king will allow you to lead the troops? From what I've heard, your king is quite wary of you and would never let you command the army again."

"Whether I lead depends on the situation, not on what the king thinks now," Rafael replied smoothly.

"Situation?" Leroy's laugh was laced with scorn. "That's even more ridiculous! If things get out of control, do you think you can ride in and turn the tide? You're overestimating yourself, Your Highness."

"Is that so?" Rafael's smile remained as he leaned back in his chair. "Well, I suppose we can always give it a try."

The confidence in his eyes made Leroy pause for a moment, a flicker of doubt in his chest. But then he reminded himself that they held the upper hand, and decided there was nothing to worry about.

He snorted dismissively. "We'll see tomorrow, Your Highness. I hope you'll still be this full of yourself."

The sound of the midnight gong rang out, and Leroy stood.

"It's getting late. Let's call it a night. We'll continue at the negotiating table tomorrow."

He couldn't wait to return and hear good news from Icarus. Once Carissa was in their hands, they could make their demands at the table. If Starhaven refused, the negotiations would be over. The Westhaven envoys would leave for home with their mission accomplished.

If there was anything else Lisandra was dissatisfied with, Edmund would handle it once they returned home.

Yet, Rafael didn't move to leave. He simply smiled at Leroy. "Don't rush off, Mr. Stellwyn. Stay a little longer. You never know-someone might come looking for you soon."

"Someone might come looking for me? Who would? Who even knows we're here?" Leroy asked, puzzled.

"The people at Glimmering Tower all know we're here," Rafael replied casually.

"Isn't this Glimmering Tower?" Leroy's suspicion grew. "Do you own this place, Your Highness?"

"Technically, it belongs to Commander Sinclair."

"Commander Sinclair?" Leroy frowned.

Who was Commander Sinclair? He had never heard of a senior official in Starhaven with the surname Sinclair.

As if reading his thoughts, Rafael added with a knowing look, "My wife and princess consort, the Mystic Army's commander, is Commander Sinclair."

Carissa didn't own Glimmering Tower-it belonged to the Pathfinders Guild. Many might not know that, but Rafael did. He knew because all the accounts for the Pathfinders Guild were handled by Everett.

Leroy looked at Rafael, unsure what exactly he was getting at.

So what if Glimmering Tower belonged to Carissa? She was probably already at Hartstone Estate by now. She wouldn't be here.

Just as he was about to speak, he heard hurried footsteps approaching.

The shop doors of Glimmering Tower, which had already been closed, swung open.

A loud voice rang out, "Is His Highness here?"

"Yes, His Highness is here, someone quickly responded.

"Hurry, report to him that Lady Carissa was attacked!" the voice continued urgently. "The assassin was Commander Icarus, Westhaven's commander of the Sovereign Guard. He has already been sent to the Supreme Court."

Leroy's face drained of color, his expression going as white as a sheet.

## Chapter 948

Leroy snapped back to reality and bolted down the stairs in a frenzy.

Several guards in uniform stood by the counter in the lobby on the first floor, speaking with the messenger who had come to report.

Leroy's heart skipped a beat. When he had arrived, there had only been the shopkeeper and a waiter-no guards. When had they arrived?

The messenger was none other than Michael, accompanied by three others. Upon seeing Leroy, his face twisted with fury.

"Mr. Stellwyn, what is the meaning of this?! Did you try to assassinate Commander Sinclair?" he snarled.

Leroy glanced around; not seeing Carissa, a surge of anger flared across his face. 'Impossible! Don't slander us with baseless accusations!'

Icarus couldn't have failed! The plan had been carefully set-his group of over ten against only three people. There was no way it could have failed. And with Icarus' skill, even if they were prepared for him, they could only have prevented the mission from succeeding. They couldn't possibly have captured him.

It had to be a setup. Carissa had been taken, and now, they were trying to frame Westhaven. This was clearly a trap to get Leroy to slip up!

Fury built in him as he turned sharply to Rafael. His voice was cold and seething, snapping. "Hell Monarch, what's the meaning of this? Are you staging an act to frame us? Trying to gain leverage at tomorrow's negotiations? Don't be so despicable!"

However, Rafael ignored him and turned to Michael. "You said Carissa was injured. Is it serious?"

"It's not too bad, just a wound to her arm. She's already at Arcane Sanctum for treatment. Afterward, she'll go to the Supreme Court," Michael replied.

Rafael's eyes softened with a brief flash of concern. How did she end up injured?

However, he quickly regained his composure and asked, "Are you certain the assassin is Icarus Mendez from Westhaven?"

"Yes, it's him, along with a dozen or so other men in black. Commander Sinclair killed several, and the rest were brought to the Supreme Court. They tried to commit suicide with poison, but Commander Sinclair managed to extract the poison from their mouths."

"Impossible! If you keep making baseless claims, there won't be a need for negotiations tomorrow!" Leroy snapped.

A chill settled over Rafael's expression, his tone icy as he said, "Why are you so anxious, Mr. Stellwyn? Why not go to the Supreme Court and see for yourself?"

Leroy glared at him, speaking each word with finality, "Impossible! Commander Icarus could have never attacked your princess consort!"

Rafael sneered. "Is it that he could never attempt to assassinate my wife, or that he could never fail and be captured? When confidence crosses into arrogance, Mr. Stellwyn, it leads to downfall. Overconfident people often end up stumbling."

Leroy remained defiant, though his bravado lacked conviction. "In any case, it's impossible."

"Then, come with us," Michael said.

'Fine, let's go!' Leroy's voice was cold.

He refused to believe Icarus could fail. This was all a trick to deceive him.

The group made their way outside and mounted their horses. The route to the Supreme Court passed by Arcane Sanctum.

As they passed it, Rafael spoke again, 'Let's stop by Arcane Sanctum and pick up Carissa.'

Leroy's eyes flickered with suspicion. Though he didn't know exactly where Arcane Sanctum was, he did know it wasn't far from the Supreme Court. If they were trying to deceive him, why not go directly to the Supreme Court? It was farther away, and they would have more time to test him.

But if they went to Arcane Sanctum, it would be impossible to see Carissa there. Wouldn't that reveal their deception?

Leroy's gaze shifted to the Hell Monarch, who was riding ahead with a straight back and holding the reins firmly. Leroy tightened his grip on his reins, his fingers trembling slightly. Something about the situation tonight was off, though he couldn't pinpoint exactly what was wrong.

Their plan to abduct Carissa was a well-kept secret. While it wasn't perfectly planned, Leroy had trusted Icarus to carry it out carefully. The operation wasn't hasty by any means.

If they had to decide which part of the plan was easier, it would have been deceiving the Hell Monarch, who was the lead negotiator for tomorrow's talks. So, it was only natural for him to want to assess the situation before the negotiations.

Icarus and his suicide soldiers couldn't possibly have lost to Carissa and two mere servants! That was, unless someone had tipped them off and allowed them to prepare an ambush ahead of time.

Yet, this operation had been kept so secret that Icarus had only learned of it during the palace banquet. After receiving the order, he hadn't left Leroy's sight. Plus, Icarus would never have exposed himself unless he was completely desperate.

Suddenly, it struck Leroy-if this operation had indeed failed, the only person who could have betrayed them was Harvey. Was he pretending to ally with Westhaven to get close to them?

Leroy's mind raced with uncertainty, but he refused to believe the mission had failed until he saw Carissa for himself.

## Chapter 949

Outside Arcane Sanctum, two lanterns hung, casting a faint glow. As Rafael and the others arrived on horseback, Carissa, supported by Violet, emerged from the building.

The moment she stepped outside, Leroy's body stiffened and his heart pounded wildly.

Had they truly failed?

A wave of red fury flooded his eyes. It had to be Harvey-he was the one behind this! That traitor hadn't wanted to ally with Westhaven to rebel. He was sent by the king of Starhaven!

Carissa's hair was slightly disheveled, and her injured arm was bandaged. She had changed into a new outer garment, likely brought to her by someone from home.

Rafael immediately dismounted and quickly approached her under the flickering light, his voice laced with concern, asking, "Are you alright?"

Carissa's tone was filled with frustration and grievance as she replied, "If I hadn't reacted quickly, Commander Icarus would have dislocated my entire arm. I don't know why he has such a deep grudge against me. To go so far as to personally lead an assassination attempt

Despite her words, she still reached out and grasped Rafael's hand, patting it lightly to assure him she was fine.

Leroy could hear the accusation in her words. Disbelief flickered in his eyes as he studied Carissa, as though he was trying to discern whether she was truly the Hell Monarch's

princess consort.

"This is impossible!" His voice was hoarse, tinged with desperation. "I want to see Commander Icarus. I refuse to believe he could do such a thing!"

Rafael held Carissa's hand, then turned to face Leroy with an icy expression. "Then, we'll go to the Supreme Court and settle this once and for all."

Leroy's face paled, his disbelief deepening as he watched the Hell Monarch help his wife onto her horse.

Even the maid mounted with agility, her movements swift and graceful. It was clear that she was no ordinary servant. She was skilled, her martial prowess evident. This wasn't just any maid.

The Supreme Court was brightly lit late into the night.

Icarus and the five suicide soldiers who were freshly captured hadn't been imprisoned yet. Matthew, along with his team, was conducting a late-night interrogation.

When Leroy entered the interrogation room and saw Icarus, he was stunned beyond belief. The man looked utterly disheveled. A deep lash mark ran from the top of his head to his chin, nearly splitting his face in two. The scar looked terrifying. His body was also covered in multiple lash marks. Given Icarus' martial prowess, it was clear he hadn't been overwhelmed by a group of skilled fighters. The injuries on his body were all from a single person.

Leroy instinctively glanced at the red whip hanging at Carissa's waist.

Could it be her? How could that be possible?!

"Mr. Stellwyn!" Icarus urgently called out in Westic the moment he saw Leroy.

Leroy furrowed his brows, looking around at the people present. They were all part of the interrogation and could presumably understand Westic. Leroy couldn't possibly ask Icarus about the details or tell him to deny it.

Instead, he could only ask in Westic, "They say you ambushed the Hell Monarch's wife and injured her. Is that true?"

Just as Icarus was about to claim he was innocent, Rafael interrupted coldly, "What else could it be? The stealth attire he's wearing is the same as the ones the suicide soldiers wore. It's not as if Commander Icarus went off to enjoy a walk in the middle of the night in those clothes right after attending a palace banquet, right?"

That was when Icarus remembered he was wearing the same kind of stealth attire as the suicide soldiers. There was no way he could plead innocence now.

"A walk? Hah!" Michael snapped. "When I arrived with the Capital Guard, they were already in the middle of the assassination. A dozen of them were attacking three people. Had I arrived any later, Commander Sinclair would have been dead in their hands!"

Matthew sharply demanded in fluent Westic, "Your spies from Westhaven killed the entire Sinclair family. Now, you can't even spare Commander Sinclair. What kind of deep-seated hatred do you have with the Sinclair family?"

Leroy and Icarus both gasped in shock. If there was one thing that Westhaven was guilty of in this conflict, it was the slaughter of the Sinclair family.

With the mention of the Sinclair family and their ties to Westhaven, the entire incident was sealed. The world would believe that the assassination attempt was real.

What was worse was that this assassination attempt happened right before the negotiations. If word got out, no one would believe Westhaven was coming to negotiate in good faith.

Harvey's attempt to approach them was nothing but a facade. It was all a Starhaven plot. They had set a trap with a dozen suicide soldiers, and Leroy had foolishly walked right into it.

Leroy lifted his cold, piercing gaze and locked eyes with the Hell Monarch. He wanted to shout that Starhaven had sent Harvey to Westhaven to set this up, but he swallowed his

words when he saw the chilling depths of Rafael's gaze.



No, he couldn't act on impulse.

This was still just a guess. He couldn't keep falling into their traps over and over again.

## Chapter 950

Rafael knew Leroy was an impulsive and reckless man.

The trap had been easily defused, and Icarus had been captured on the spot. Now, Leroy would doubt Harvey and wonder if this was all part of a joint scheme.

However, Rafael saw Leroy's mouth open and then immediately close. That indicated that while Leroy was rash, he wasn't foolish.

However, Rafael wasn't disappointed and ordered, "Matthew, continue the interrogation."

After giving his command to Matthew, he turned to Michael. "Take Mr. Stellwyn back to Concord Lodge and report this matter to Grand Princess Lisandra."

"Understood!" Michael responded, then turned to Leroy. "Mr. Stellwyn, please follow me."

Leroy glanced at Icarus, then adjusted the sleeve pocket where the king's edict was kept, signaling for Icarus to remain silent.

Seeing the motion, Icarus' heart sank. He realized he had been discarded like a pawn. He had been caught on the spot, with no room to evade responsibility. Still, he couldn't let Westhaven's negotiation fail because of him. There was no choice left-he would have to bear this burden alone.

As Leroy left the Supreme Court, he felt a coldness creeping through his limbs. His heart seemed frozen in his chest.

Where had things gone wrong? Had there been an ambush? Or had it been just the three of them?

Looking at the whip marks on Icarus' body, it was clear he had been attacked by only one person. When Michael arrived at Glimmering Tower, he angrily claimed that a dozen men had surrounded three people, which meant the Hell Monarch and his party might not have prepared in advance.

Could Icarus and the suicide soldiers have simply been overpowered?

That conclusion was hard to accept. If it had truly been just three people, it would have had to be the coachman, the maid, and the Hell Monarch's wife. Even without the suicide soldiers, that combination couldn't possibly defeat Icarus.

No, the Capital Guard had arrived just in time. It suggested that they might have been prepared ahead of time. Had the Capital Guard been the ones to beat Icarus?

But that didn't make sense, either. Leroy had already investigated the Capital Guard and Royal Guard. Few of them were highly skilled. From the marks on Icarus' body, it was clear he had been in a dire situation before the Capital Guard even arrived.

What was frustrating was that there was no way to get a clear answer now. The true situation remained a mystery.

When Leroy hesitated to mount, Michael asked, "Mr. Stellwyn, would you like a hand getting on your horse?"

Leroy steadied his thoughts, mounted his horse, and straightened his back. "Let's go."

Amos was waiting for the news at Concord Lodge. Midnight passed, and there was still no sign of Leroy. A twinge of unease began to stir in him.

Could there have been some unforeseen trouble?

Amos had already offended Lisandra beyond repair, but he knew she wouldn't act against him in Starhaven as she would want to preserve her reputation. However, if he failed to carry out the king's orders, he knew Edmund wouldn't protect him when he returned to the capital. If Lisandra decided to implicate him, his position would be in jeopardy.

Just as anxiety began to cloud his thoughts, there was a knock at the door. "Mr. Bailey, Mr. Stellwyn has returned. Grand Princess Lisandra requests your presence."

He immediately stood up and opened the door. "Did Commander Icarus return with him?"

"No, Mr. Stellwyn arrived with Starhaven's deputy commander of the Capital Guard." Amos' heart sank-had Icarus failed?

He hurried to the main hall of Concord Lodge. As soon as he entered, he saw Lisandra sitting on the main seat with a frosty expression. The Starhaven deputy commander had already left. Leroy sat beside her, looking dazed and as if struck by a heavy blow.

"Mr. Stellwyn, what happened?" Amos asked, his voice trembling.

Leroy lifted his gaze, his voice low and gritted as he hissed, "We were fooled! Prince Harvey can't be trusted. Commander Icarus failed and was captured."

"What? We were tricked?" Amos was stunned. "Even if it was a trap, wasn't Commander Icarus supposed to escape? How could he have been captured?"

"I saw him." Leroy slammed his fist on the armrest, furious. "He was brought to the Supreme Court. His entire body was covered in whip marks. It was Prince Harvey. It has to be him! That scoundrel-I'll kill him!"

Lisandra remained cold and composed, and her gaze was fixed on them. Her expression was indifferent as she asked calmly, "At this point, are you still blaming Prince Harvey? Where's your brain? I warned you all not to underestimate women. Did you investigate Lady Carissa? Did you send people out without thinking? Does someone like Icarus even matter to Lady Carissa?"