

## War Song 971

### Chapter 971

In the council hall of Hell Monarch Estate, Jacob laid out the profiles of the three female officials: Penny Durham, Yuna Rutherford, and Yasmine Stein.

"These three are Grand Princess Lisandra's close confidants. In Westhaven, women rarely hold important government positions. However, Ms. Durham was the first female official to rise to a fifth-rank position.

"Grand Princess Lisandra highly favors her. Next is Ms. Stein, the legitimate daughter of the head of Westhaven's Stein family. Marshal Liam's wife is her aunt. Finally, there's Ms. Rutherford. She comes from a commoner background and earned her place by topping the women's imperial exams. She's been working alongside Grand Princess Lisandra on state affairs. All three have been with the grand princess since their late king's time, and our investigation shows they are all highly loyal to her."

Rafael picked up the documents, carefully scanning the details-names, ages, personalities, backgrounds, family information, when they started their careers, and what they had done. After reading through them, he turned his attention to Penny's profile. "She's been with Grand Princess Lisandra the longest and has always been loyal, so it's unlikely to be her," Jacob pointed out.

"She served as a female official by the late crown prince's side for two years?" Rafael asked, looking up.

Jacob nodded. "Yes. She was selected by Grand Princess Lisandra, and was sent to the late crown prince's side. Much like us in Starhaven, a crown prince has his own smaller court to handle administrative affairs, which helps him with the transition... oh!" His eyes widened in realization.

"She served by Prince Arthur's side for two years and was loyal to him. That means she's likely to support King Edmund and Mr. Stellwyn! She's in the pro-war faction."

"Where's Travis?" Rafael said immediately. "Have him drop by Concord Lodge and inform Carissa and Violet about this. Tell them to keep a close watch on Penny. Also, they should monitor Grand Princess Lisandra's condition closely."

He couldn't go himself. As the lead negotiator, the Westhaven envoys would become wary if he appeared at Concord Lodge in person.

Travis was stationed by the door of the council hall. Everett said he should be on stand-by there when he had no pressing matters to attend to.

Upon hearing Rafael's instructions, Travis immediately said, "I'll go right away."

With that, he dashed off like the wind, disappearing in an instant.

Winona sighed. "The unfortunate part is that we can't send anyone to secretly monitor Concord Lodge."

"That wouldn't be a good idea," Everett said. "If you send someone to spy and eavesdrop during the negotiations and they find out, they'll think we're trying to pry into their private discussions. That won't help the peace talks." "Yes, sir," Winona replied.

Afterward, she excused herself to use the restroom and left.

Meanwhile, Travis had already saddled up and was galloping toward Concord Lodge.

At Concord Lodge, Carissa didn't take immediate action after she finished talking with Aria. Instead, she made sure to find out who was opposed and who supported Lisandra's plans. Once she had the information, she told Aria that if they needed to summon Sebastian once the discussion was over, they could send for him at once.

After returning to their quarters, Carissa and Violet immediately discussed the matter. Violet's expression darkened as she listened. "What should we do? Could this be a trap?"

Carissa shared her concerns. Right now, the Westhaven envoys were divided-some supported Lisandra, and others opposed her. Without being sure whether Lisandra was in danger, they couldn't just force a physician inside. If there was any conflict and Lisandra emerged unharmed, it would blow up into a huge issue.

Even if Lisandra was truly unconscious, it might still be a scheme. Someone could have poisoned her to make her appear i waiting for the right moment to force out the opposition. Once they had the physician in place, they could treat her and clear the poison, making it look like nothing

happened.

The situation was tricky.

Still, a decision had to be made no matter how difficult. If it turned out to be true and Lisandra was in danger of dying here, the pro-war faction would seize the opportunity to take control of the negotiations. They would push for one thing only-war.

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Carissa hesitated for a moment before saying, "Go and bring Sebastian here. I'll think of a way to slip inside and take a look."

No matter what, it was best to have Sebastian ready just in case.

Violet nodded. "Alright, I'll go now."

She hurried out and saddled the horse. The night air was still cold, and it would be quite troublesome for Sebastian to come out in this weather.

Halfway there, she crossed paths with Travis, but it seemed like he didn't notice her. He rode straight past. She called out to him, and it took a moment before the sound of galloping hooves returned.

Carissa instructed the Capital Guard to stand watch at the entrance, ensuring no one entered. If it turned out to be a trap, they had to be cautious and prepared. There was no harm in being extra careful. After that, she left the gatehouse and wandered around the perimeter of Concord Lodge.

Since the area outside was filled with her men, she didn't think there would be much risk in walking around. After a while, she scaled the wall at the back of the courtyard and slipped inside.

The security inside was clearly less strict than before, though it was hard to tell if that was intentional or not.

Carissa knew Lisandra resided in the eastern courtyard, but she was some distance away from there and had to be cautious to avoid detection. As she moved into the central courtyard, she noticed there were more guards. She crept along the corridor, pressing herself against the wall. Fortunately, the lanterns weren't very bright, and her footsteps were light enough not to alert the guards.

The guards were talking, but Carissa couldn't understand their conversation. She felt frustrated. If only Winona were here she could speak fluent Westic, Sandorish, Nerathic, and many other regional tongues.

Carissa climbed to the roof, planning to cross it. As soon as she reached the top, she saw a shadow flicker across the roof of the eastern courtyard.

It was still a bit far away, and the light was too dim for her to see the rooftop clearly. For a moment, she thought she saw something flash by, and the shadow seemed to vanish.

Her heart skipped a beat. Could it be? Had they really sent someone in? Was it an assassin?

Just as Carissa was about to leap over to take a closer look, the shadow appeared again. This time, it stood up and faced her. Then, the glow of a firestick lit up, aimed right at the person's face.

Carissa almost laughed out loud.

It was Winona!

But what was she doing here?

With Winona around, there was no need for Carissa to investigate further. She silently retreated and climbed down the wall, slipping out quietly.

Winona might not be as skilled as

Carissa in martial arts, but her Lightfoot Skill was undoubtedly superior. Just watching her land earlier without a sound was enough to prove it.

Carissa made her way back to the gatehouse, but she had little interest in the coffee now. She kept peeking out the window, anxious to see if Violet had arrived with Sebastian.

After waiting for what felt like an eternity, she finally heard the sound of hooves.

She rushed out to see three horses coming to a halt-Travis and Violet were helping Sebastian off his horse.

Carissa stepped forward and greeted him, "Thank you for coming, Sebastian."

"It's nothing," Sebastian replied. "Can we go in now? What's the situation?"

"Just a little longer." Carissa turned to Travis. "What brings you here?"

"Let's talk inside," Violet said, ushering them all in.

The four of them crowded into the gatehouse. Travis relayed the

information about the possibility that one of Lisandra's female officials was conspiring with Yuvan.

Carissa's expression turned grim. "So, Grand Princess Lisandra may really be in trouble."

"It seems likely," Violet said, glancing into the room. From a distance, she couldn't make out much. "Is there anything unusual?"

"Winona went in to investigate. If what she finds checks out, we'll go in," Carissa answered.

"Winona's here too? That's a relief." Violet sighed.

With Winona's understanding of their language and her Lightfoot Skill, she was likely to avoid detection.

Carissa helped Sebastian adjust his cloak. The old man had been in such a rush to leave, he had grabbed the first cloak he could find and thrown it on.

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After a while, Winona appeared at the entrance of Concord Lodge. It was likely she hadn't come alone. When Carissa had seen her earlier, she had been dressed in stealth attire. But now, she wore

her usual attire and her stealth attire was nowhere in sight. Carissa hurried over to greet her and asked, "What's the situation, Winona?"

"I stayed on the roof of Grand Princess Lisandra's quarters for a while. She's unconscious. There are a few maids by her side. I overheard them talking-she came back from the Diplomatic Affairs Department not long ago and suddenly went into a fit. She even bit someone. After that, she lost consciousness," Winona replied.

"She went into a fit and bit someone? Could she have gone momentarily insane?" Violet exclaimed, astonished.

"Did you hear what they said in the main courtyard?" Carissa asked.

"They were arguing in the main courtyard. Some wanted to summon a royal physician or Sebastian, but others opposed it. Since I was on the roof, I couldn't tell who was for or against it." "Was there a woman among those opposing?"

"Yes," Winona replied. When she saw Travis, she knew Carissa and the others must already know that one of Lisandra's female officials was involved. "But I can't be sure if it was Penny." "Were many people opposing calling for a physician?" Carissa pressed.

"About three or four people. But it wasn't just opposition-they were weighing the situation. One woman, though, was adamantly against it. She argued that our Starhaven physicians were no match for their royal physician, and there was a risk of harm." "So, the people opposing are mainly concerned that Grand Princess Lisandra might suffer if the wrong decision is made, and they're worried about the consequences?" Carissa clarified.

Winona nodded. "That's one way to put it."

Carissa didn't hesitate. "Then, let's go!"

Travis stopped her for a moment. "Should we inform His Highness? Perhaps he should make the decision."

"No," Carissa said firmly. "This is my decision, not His Highness'."

She immediately sent a message for the Capital Guard on watch to come over, and ordered, "You will go in with Mr. Travis and Ms. Spencer. Try to avoid any conflict and do not engage with any envoys." "Understood!" the capital guards responded in unison.

Travis and Violet led the way with the Capital Guard, while Carissa and Winona followed closely behind with Sebastian in tow.

The Westhaven guards saw them

coming in full force and immediately stepped forward to block their path. Violet and Travis tried to

communicate with them, but it was e like a Conversation between a chicken and a duck-neither side could understand the other. This led to the envoys from the main courtyard coming out.

"What are you doing? What's going on?" Leroy shouted as he appeared, visibly furious.

Carissa stepped forward. "We've learned that Grand Princess Lisandra is unwell, and we've brought Starhaven's renowned physician here to treat her."

"No need for that." Leroy waved his hand dismissively. "We have our royal physician. Step back."

Penny's expression changed slightly as she approached. "How did you find out?"

Carissa looked to Winona, her eyes silently asking a question-was it her?

Winona recognized the voice-it was the same one she had overheard earlier, the woman who had opposed summoning a physician. She nodded in confirmation.

Upon hearing Penny's words, Leroy snapped out of his thoughts and turned to Carissa with renewed fury. "That's right, how did you know? Did you break in? Or have you been spying on us? Eavesdropping on our conversations?"

"During the negotiations, we were

aware that Grand Princess Lisandra

was unwell," Carissa said, raising her

voice. "We came in just now to use the restroom and overheard your guards discussing her condition, saying it was quite serious. Hence, we brought Sebastian here to treat her. We're doing this because we don't want Grand Princess Lisandra's health to affect the

negotiations."

"Absurd!" Amos scoffed. "How could it affect the negotiations? Tomorrow's talks won't be canceled. We aren't reliant on just Grand Princess Lisandra for negotiations." Garrick stepped forward. "Since they're already here, we might as well let them in. Her Highness hasn't woken up yet."

"No!" Leroy immediately objected. "Who knows what they're really after?"

Penny's face was also filled with suspicion.

"I don't agree, either," she said. "Our

royal physician, Mr. Glover, is the one who understands Her Highness' condition best. How can we allow just any physician to treat her? Even though we're not at war, the relationship between our two kingdoms is still somewhat hostile. Also, we're in the middle of a

delicate negotiation. If they take advantage of this and harm Her Highness, can we take responsibility for that?"

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Although Penny was a low-ranking female official, she had Lisandra's favor and full trust. Just now, it had been her fierce opposition that had swayed others, turning supporters into opponents.

Still, there were a few, like the Diplomatic Affairs Department officials, who supported inviting Starhaven's renowned physician, Sebastian. His reputation had reached Westhaven; when Westhaven's previous king had been gravely ill, some court officials had even suggested summoning Sebastian for treatment.



However, the late king refused to entrust his life to someone from Starhaven, which was why the idea was abandoned.

The argument raged on. Carissa and Winona, seeing the chaos, quickly moved Sebastian toward the eastern courtyard.

"Stop them!" Penny shrieked, her voice cutting through the tension.

"Let me explain. Listen to me..." Violet stepped forward, grabbing Penny's arm. "We're only doing this for Grand Princess Lisandra. There are maids by her side. If we do anything suspicious, your people will see."

"Yes, that's right," Travis added, stepping between them and Leroy. "Don't worry, our physician will just check her vital signs. Where's your royal physician? Hurry up and follow them. It would be better if he was also present."

Javier Glover, a Westhaven royal physician, had already rushed into Lisandra's room. Though there were two medical attendants with Lisandra, the Starhaven group had moved to enter the room. Fearing trouble, Javier immediately followed. "Let go of me! Let go!" Penny shouted at Violet, her eyes wide with panic. "What do you want to do? Are you trying to hurt me?"

"No, of course not," Violet assured her softly, clearly not interested in confrontation. "If you need to go in, we'll go together."

"Yes, let's all go in together. We're all here for Grand Princess Lisandra's health," Travis called out loudly.

The Capital Guard and the Westhaven guards began to push and shove. Carissa had given orders not to engage physically, so the Capital Guard, though shoved, could only use their shoulders to counter the pressure.

The scene descended into chaos. Because Travis was dragging Leroy and Violet was tightly holding onto Penny's hand, they were being forcefully moved toward the eastern courtyard.

Carissa and Sebastian had already reached the eastern courtyard. Meanwhile, the maid, Aria, had returned to Lisandra's quarters to tend to her, having stepped out briefly to listen in on the ongoing debate to see what decision had been made. When Aria saw Carissa enter with Sebastian, her eyes lit up. She hurried to meet them and asked, "Have you brought Mr. Dalton with you?"

In the bedroom, aside from the

medical attendants, there was a

female official and a few maids. The female official, seated by Lisandra's bedside, was wiping the grand princess' face. As soon as she saw them enter, she lifted the sheer curtains and stood up with a wary expression.

When Aria spoke, the female official's expression brightened.

"Sebastian Dalton? Did they agree?" She quickly approached them and bowed respectfully. "Mr. Dalton, please check Her Highness' heart rate."

Sebastian took the medicine box from Winona and walked over. Aria moved a stool closer so he could sit by the bed.

The sheer curtain was pulled down, and they could see Lisandra lying with her eyes tightly closed through it. It was impossible to tell her complexion.

Aria gently placed Lisandra's hand out for Sebastian, allowing him to check her heart rate. He removed a red cloth from his chest and draped it over Lisandra's wrist before, beginning to feel her heart rate.

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Everyone held their breath in silence, waiting for his assessment.

After a moment, Sebastian released his hand and looked up at the female official. "Could you lift the curtain a little more so I can see her face and eyes?"

The female official was Yuna, who

understood the urgency of the situation and the importance of Lisandra's health. She quickly puffed back the curtain and fastened it on the golden hooks on either side.

Lisandra's face wasn't pale, as expected. Instead, it had a strange, unusual flush to it; a deep redness that didn't look quite right.

At that moment, the noise of an argument outside grew louder. The crowd pushing and shoving had reached the door.

"Since everyone's here," Violet called out, "we might as well all go in and have a look."

Penny yanked her hand away from Violet's grip, glaring furiously at the latter. Without wasting another moment, she rushed inside.

The others followed closely behind. Leroy remained outside, shouting angrily that they were blatantly disregarding Westhaven's authority.

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Penny stormed in and saw that Lisandra's curtain had been lifted. Her face darkened, and she immediately snapped at Yuna, "How dare you?! How could you let a man from outside see Her Highness' sleeping form?" She moved to step forward and pull the curtain down, intending to have Sebastian thrown out.

However, Yuna blocked her path. "Since she's already been seen, it's better to let the physician diagnose her properly."

Though Yuna was of lower rank and status than Penny, she hesitated only briefly before responding firmly, "Nothing is more important than Her Highness' health. She's been unconscious for more than four hours. If we don't find the cause soon, it may do serious harm to her."

Penny's eyes widened in fury. "Yuna Rutherford! How dare you?!"

The other female official, Yasmine, stepped forward to support Yuna. "Since they're already here, let them take a look. What's the harm? Why are you so against it? You've been opposing everything seems to me you don't care much about Her Highness." Penny glared at her. "Stop spouting

nonsense! When have I ever not cared for Her Highness? The people of Starhaven are deceitful and malicious. Have you forgotten about the massacre of the villagers? How can we trust them?"

Winona was listening to the exchange, and she quickly fired back in Westic, "It was Aurora Yates who did the massacre. You can't blame all of Starhaven for it. Your Westhaven spies slaughtered the entire Sinclair family. Does that mean all of you are bad people too?" Garrick stepped in and said, "Enough, all of you! This is not the time for fighting. Her Highness' health is what matters most. Even Mr. Glover couldn't determine what caused Her Highness to fall into a frenzy and lose consciousness. Let Mr. Dalton do his diagnosis." Klaus nodded in agreement. "Right. They've already come in, and Mr. Dalton has already checked Her Highness' heart rate. First, we need to rule out poisoning."

"Her Highness has not been poisoned," Javier spoke up.

Penny stared at Sebastian, her brows furrowed. She knew she couldn't stop them now. If Javier had said there was no poison, then there was no poison. Carissa and Violet, unable to understand the language, exchanged a look. Since they were already inside, they might as well see what happened next. After diagnosing and observing Lisandra's condition, Sebastian called Winona over to translate. He had questions for Javier.

"Were there any symptoms before she lost consciousness?" Sebastian asked.

Winona translated the question, and Javier quickly explained the general situation. Winona then relayed the information to Sebastian.

"Grand Princess Lisandra has

always suffered from headaches,

which have been more frequent over

the past year. She had a few

episodes on the way to Starhaven as well the symptoms usually consist of severe headaches and vomiting.

"But this time, after returning from the Diplomatic Affairs Department, she went into a frenzy and bit people. I seemed as if she lost control and she was extraordinarily strong. After biting someone she was subdued and then passed out. She hasn't woken up since."

Javier showed Lisandra's medical records for the past two months to Sebastian. There hadn't been much change-she was dealing with chronic stress, heightened irritability, and an overall imbalance in her health.

Winona translated this part to

Sebastian, saying, "Grand Princess Lisandra has always had a weak constitution, with an overall imbalance in her health. In the last few years, she's been burdened by her duties at court and has suffered a great emotional blow, which has caused both her physical and mental state to deteriorate, worsening her pain."

When Winona relayed this, both Carissa and Violet understood that the "great emotional blow" referred to Arthur's death.

After hearing this, Sebastian remained silent. He put down the medical records and started checking on Lisandra again.

Watching him check the grand princess again, Penny couldn't contain herself and said, "You're still checking her heart rate? Are you trying to live up to your reputation as a renowned physician?"

Penny spoke in Stellish, so Sebastian understood every word.

He looked up at her, his gaze steady and calm. "I've already diagnosed her. I'm just verifying the results to be thorough."

Penny glared at him. "Mr. Glover already told you everything you need to know, so of course you've got a diagnosis."

Sebastian huffed. "What he said is mostly correct, but not entirely. Grand Princess Lisandra can be considered as having been poisoned."

"That's nonsense!" Penny yelled.

Her face turned pale, and she rushed forward as if to shove Sebastian aside. Violet quickly stepped in to block her. Having heard enough of Penny's interference, she realized that Penny was the one Travis had warned them about. She grabbed Penny firmly and barked, "Shut up and let Sebastian finish!"

Before Sebastian could speak, Javier interjected, "That's impossible! There are no signs of poisoning at all. What do you mean that Her Highness can be considered as having been poisoned?"

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The Westhaven envoys first looked at Javier, then at Sebastian. In their hearts, they were inclined to trust Javier as he had treated Lisandra for many years and was undeniably loyal. His long-standing dedication earned him their trust. However, Sebastian's medical skills were also exceptional, and his reputation was highly regarded even in Westhaven.

Winona translated Javier's words, and Sebastian withdrew his hand from Lisandra's wrist.

He turned to Winona and said, "Tell them-it's poison."

"We can understand you just fine. There's no need to translate," Garrick quickly interjected.

Most of the envoys present were fluent in Stellish, with only one or two having limited proficiency.

"So, tell us, what kind of poison is it?" asked Garrick.

Sebastian glanced at Carissa. At that moment, she recalled the case from Brightmoor District-the woman who had been infected by Soulgrip Threadworms. That frail woman had grown immensely strong, even going into a violent frenzy. However, that was different. That woman had been controlled, whereas Lisandra had slipped into a deep unconsciousness. So, Carissa didn't dare to make a conclusion from that.

On the other hand, Javier stuck firmly to his opinion, explaining, "Her Highness has always been weak, and she has been suffering from persistent headaches for years. Now, with her blood circulation blocked and the pressure in her head building, it's likely that there's swelling or a tumor in her brain. My diagnosis can't be wrong."

Winona relayed this to Sebastian, who shook his head.

"There's no swelling in her brain," he said. "The blood flow is indeed obstructed, but that's because there's a poisonous worm in her brain. The reason I call it poison is because it is, in fact, poison. But unlike traditional poison, it doesn't show typical signs. It doesn't manifest in the heart rate, but it disrupts the mind and intensifies headaches. If this poisonous worm stays in her head for too long, it could be fatal."

"Impossible!" Penny clutched her handkerchief, her eyes filled with disbelief.

She switched to Stelish and spat angrily at Sebastian, "What poisonous worm? Ridiculous! And to claim it could endanger Her Highness' life-you're a quack, not a renowned physician. Preposterous!" Sebastian had seen countless people in his time, so he immediately noticed Penny's fear of being exposed.

He said nothing; instead, he calmly opened his medicine box and retrieved a small wooden case. Once he opened it, the others saw a small, black object about the size of a finger inside. It emitted a faint, mysterious fragrance. Sebastian handed the small object to Javier, then turned to Winona. "Have him light this in front of Grand Princess Lisandra. That should prove whether I'm telling the truth or not."

Winona translated, and Javier took the object, sniffing it. Though he had seen many things in his time, he couldn't recognize the item in his hand. He merely thought that the scent was refreshing and soothing. "What kind of incense is this?" he asked.

There was no need for translation. Sebastian understood the question and replied, "This is a medicinal herb soaked in a special solution. It's designed specifically to combat the Soulgrasp Threadworms. What Grand Princess Lisandra has been afflicted with is Threadworm Toxin. Those infected by it can be controlled by the person who inflicted it."

"The reason Her Highness fell unconscious is that her body is fighting against the control, unwilling to submit. The chance of successfully resisting is slim. In my lifetime, I've only seen one person manage it, and it was someone with an exceptionally strong will. Alas, the result was death. Falling

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unconscious is only the first step. If the threadworms aren't drawn out within 12 hours of the onset of unconsciousness, it will begin to corrode the brain, leading to death."

The mention of death turned everyone's faces pale.

The color drained from Penny's face as she murmured, "Impossible... That can't be true."

Her reaction caused Garrick and the others to look at her curiously.

"Penny, you keep saying it's impossible. Why are you so certain?" he asked.

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"I..." Penny's eyes lingered on Lisandra, whose face was still flushed with unnatural redness. A wave of uncertainty swept through her. "I just feel... It sounds so far-fetched. A poisonous worm? I've never even heard of such a thing."

"The world is vast. There are plenty of things you've never heard of. If lighting this can cure Her Highness, why not try it?" Garrick replied.

Penny hesitated, still conflicted. "We can't be sure if what he's saying is true. What if lighting this thing is the real poison?"

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Leroy furrowed his brows. This matter had nothing to do with him. He had recognized Penny's strange behavior, but it didn't matter what she had done. As long as Lisandra couldn't participate in the negotiations, the power to make decisions rested in his hands. However, there was one condition-Lisandra's life couldn't be harmed. After all, she was his niece. Arthur was gone. Even though Lisandra didn't share Leroy's stance on the war, he simply couldn't take her life.

He found it odd that Penny, who had always been Lisandra's trusted confidant, would betray her. Was Penny in favor of the war? She had opposed it previously. And clearly, she didn't want Lisandra to die, nor was she willing to give up just like that. Penny couldn't be acting alone-someone must be pulling the strings behind her betrayal.

Who was it? Edmund?

Questions swirled in Leroy's mind, but he had no answers.



His suspicions about Penny stemmed from his ties to Harvey, but the others wouldn't have noticed anything, as she had always been one of Lisandra's most loyal subordinates.

While Leroy was lost in thought, Winona turned to Penny and said, "We're all here. If that's poison, we'll all be poisoned together."

"If you're using poison, I'm sure you all have the antidote," Penny retorted.

Winona leaned back and said calmly, "Why would we do that? What good would it do us if we poisoned all of you here in Starhaven?"

The Westhaven envoys understood that the people of Starhaven would never do such a thing. They turned to Javier, hoping for reassurance. If he agreed, they would feel more comfortable about the incense.

However, Javier remained silent. Though he was familiar with parasitic toxins, he had never seen them used in practice, nor did he know the antidote. He couldn't be certain whether Lisandra had been poisoned by Soulgrip Threadworms, nor was he sure if this small object would awaken her.

Sebastian noticed that no one was speaking, and grew impatient. He raised his voice and said, "Her Highness has been ill for several hours now. If the poison isn't neutralized within 12 hours, even a god would have a hard time saving her. Every hour we delay only worsens the damage."

With that, he turned to leave with his medicine box in hand.

Garrick and Javier quickly stepped forward to stop him.

"No, you can't leave!"

Sebastian was no patient man. He gave them a cold look. "Since you don't believe me, I'll only watch her die if I stay here. I'm too fragile to bear such sights. It's best if I leave."

Yasmine looked at Penny for a

moment, then glanced at the rest of the room. "Why don't we just listen to Mr. Dalton and light the incense? If it's poison, they'll all be affected. If it's harmless or doesn't wake Her Highness, we'll be no worse off, and we can think of another way."

This was also the consensus of the Westhaven envoys. But aside from Garrick, who had spoken earlier, none dared to take responsibility. Now, Yasmine, the eldest daughter of the Stein family and Lisandra's trusted ally, had spoken. If anything happened, she would take the blame.

Naturally, no one else objected. Even Penny remained silent as she clutched her sleeve, her expression complicated. In the end, everyone nodded in agreement.

Under their watchful eyes, Sebastian

lit the incense and placed it near Lisandra's pillow. When it was first lit, it emitted a delicate fragrance, but after a while the scent became strangely off. The familiar fragrance remained, but now carried a strong, bloodlike odor. As the bloody scent spread, it was tainted with a rotten stench that overpowered the earlier pleasant scent completely.

Everyone quickly covered their noses, their hearts pounding as they anxiously watched Lisandra. Before long, something that shocked everyone present happened.

Lisandra's ears and nostrils began to expel tiny, almost transparent threadworms about the size of a thread. After crawling out, they all entered the incense burner through its hollow openings. Yuna gasped in horror. "Oh my god, what is that? It's terrifying!"

"Is that the Soulgrasp Threadworms?" Javier asked, utterly stunned as he had never seen such a thing before.

The poison was alive!

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There were four threadworms in total. The last two were a different color-their first half was red while their second half was a faint pink, perhaps from having absorbed blood. "If all four threadworms had their fill of blood, Grand Princess Lisandra would have been beyond saving," Sebastian said calmly.

He placed the incense burner aside, and everyone instinctively took a step back. They had never seen anything so horrifying, and couldn't help but feel a chill run through them. Carissa and Violet exchanged a look, both feeling a wave of disgust, their skin crawling.

Penny was so frightened, she could hardly stand. She braced herself against the table, her lips trembling and her eyes wide with disbelief.

Sebastian remained calm. "Her Highness will wake soon. Mr. Glover, check on her and see if you can detect any stagnation in her blood now."

Leroy nudged the stunned Javier. "Go."

It took a moment for Javier to snap out of his daze. He moved to the bed, checking on Lisandra for a long while before shaking his head and taking a deep breath.

"How is this possible? Her vital signs are completely different!"

"After expelling so many poisonous worms, of course they have changed."

Yuna, who sat by the bed, began instructing Aria to prepare water so they could feed Lisandra once she woke.

"Prepare some water with salt and sugar for her as well," Sebastian added.

His medicine box contained many remedies, some of which would be ideal for Lisandra's condition. However, he wouldn't administer any of them until she was conscious. Only once she woke and allowed him to treat her would he begin prescribing the proper medicines. Aria hurried off to prepare the sugar-salt water. In her haste, her steps faltered and she nearly fell over. Carissa caught her just in time.

"Thank you, Your Grace," Aria murmured, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears.

At first, Aria regretted telling the Hell Monarch's wife about Lisandra's condition. She feared they would use the information to stir up trouble. Now, seeing them burst in to help, she felt nothing but gratitude. She was relieved she had made the right choice.

Under everyone's watchful eyes,

Lisandra stirred awake. As her gaze swept over the group gathered at her bedside, her expression was filled with confusion. She tried to speak, but was overwhelmed by the metallic taste of blood in her mouth.

"Her Highness is awake!" Yuna exclaimed, her voice filled with excitement.

A collective sigh of relief filled the room as everyone looked gratefully at Sebastian and Carissa.

The group approached to offer their thanks.

Even Leroy, who was usually arrogant and proud, bowed respectfully to Sebastian. "Thank you for saving the grand princess, Mr. Dalton."

"It was nothing," Sebastian replied.

Seeing how happy everyone was, he added, "But the danger isn't over yet. Whoever was able to introduce the first threadworm could easily do it. You need to find that person

again

as soon as possible. The

threadworm was introduced through

food."

His words brought a moment of realization to the Westhaven envoys, who exchanged wary glances.

Penny's face was deathly pale, which raised immediate suspicion. Moreover, she was also close to Lisandra and sometimes served her meals, which made the suspicion even greater.

"What happened?" Lisandra's voice was hoarse as she spoke. "Why is everyone here?"

She sounded weak, and the taste of blood still lingered in her mouth. Suddenly, her eyes widened as she seemed to recall something. A sharp pain shot through her head, and she remembered—she had bitten someone. It had been especially vicious.

Aria brought in a cup of water, and Yuna gently helped Lisandra sit up, urging her to drink. After Lisandra finished the water, Yuna quietly relayed everything that had happened. Once she finished, Lisandra's expression remained unreadable. However, her eyes lingered on Penny's face for a brief moment before she thanked Sebastian and Carissa. She attempted to rise, but was hit by a wave of dizziness. As she tried to push herself up, the room seemed to spin.

Yuna quickly supported her, guiding her back down. "Your Highness, please don't try to get up yet. The poison has only just been cleared from your body."

Carissa also spoke up, "Your Highness, there is no need for thanks. Please have a good rest. We'll take our leave now."

Carissa could tell Lisandra had matters to attend to. From the look in her eyes, it was clear that she had figured out who had betrayed her.

Lisandra simply pressed her hand to her temple, the dizziness mingling with a sharp headache.

As Carissa and Sebastian made their way toward the door, Lisandra suddenly spoke, her voice quiet yet firm. "Mr. Dalton, Lady Carissa, may I see the poisonous worms?"

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either.

The poison worms hadn't been taken away. They remained in the incense burner, drawn to the bloodied scent of the medicine. They would stay there and feed off the aroma until they died. However, the poisonous worms that had been expelled wouldn't live much longer "They're in the incense burner," Sebastian replied. "You can take it to Her Highness."

Though small, the poisonous worms were disturbing. Javier hesitated before reaching out, his hand hovering in the air.

He finally asked, "Can these worms... enter the human body again?"

Seeing his reluctance, Winona stepped forward. She lifted the incense burner, carefully removed the lid, and presented it to Lisandra.

At the sight of the worms, Lisandra's stomach turned. She fought the urge to vomit as a wave of nausea surged through her. The sight alone was enough to make her feel faint. Her body flushed with heat and her blood surged with anger. She closed her eyes, forcing herself to regain composure. The effort took much longer than she would like to admit.

Sebastian made no move to offer further assistance. He simply said, "Within an hour, the poisonous worms will die. Once they've been expelled, they won't be able to re-enter the body."

"Thank you," Lisandra said quietly.

Carissa gave a subtle nod, then left with the others.

Leroy's temper flared as he demanded, "So, who's responsible for the poisoning?"

His gaze swept over everyone in the room, each person under his scrutiny. "Will you confess, or should I begin my investigation?"

Lisandra placed a hand on her chest, her breath shallow. With a resigned sigh, she motioned for him to leave. "Uncle Leroy, please go outside with everyone for now. Penny, Yuna, and Yasmine-stay."

"Lisandra, don't be foolish," Leroy protested. "We'll find out who did this. Whoever dared to harm your life must be out of their mind!"

"Please just go for now. I need to speak with them privately," Lisandra said, raising her hand. "Aria, see them out."

Aria stepped forward, guiding the group out of the room. Leroy's gaze lingered on Aria's face, then shifted to Penny. His suspicion of her was palpable. She was, after all, the closest to Lisandra. Her

proximity made her the most likely suspect. "Ask what you need. If you don't get answers, I'll handle the questioning myself," Leroy said before exiting the room with the others.

Once they were alone, Lisandra instructed Aria to light two more lanterns. The flickering flames cast a dim glow on her increasingly pale face. The color that had returned earlier now faded, replaced by a weariness that deepened the shadows under her eyes.

Lisandra fought to keep her

composure as she sat up in bed.

Aria slipped a pillow behind her back

and she exhaled slowly, trying to steady her breath. She suppressed the dizziness and headache that threatened to overwhelm her, forcing herself not to think about the poisonous worms, lest the disgust resurface.

Her gaze was as sharp as a blade as she fixed it on Penny's face. "Penny, why did you do it?"

Yuna and Yasmine exchanged a look. While they had considered the possibility of Penny's involvement, it still seemed impossible. After all, Penny's loyalty to Lisandra had never been in question. Why would she do this?

Yasmine had a fiery temper, and she was furious to discover that Penny had betrayed Lisandra.

"Ms. Durham, what are you up to? Her Highness has treated you so well! Why would you want to kill her?!" she yelled.

Penny's face went ashen and she fell to her knees. Tears streamed down her face as she wept.

"Your Highness, I am guilty, but I

never once intended to kill you! I am willing to die, but I beg you to grant me one thing. No matter what happens during the negotiations, please ensure that Starhaven agrees to the 3,000,000 bushels of grain and lets us take Dominic with us."

Lisandra looked at her coldly. "Take Dominic with us? Didn't I tell you that he is only part of our negotiating strategy? I never intended to take him. I only meant to bring Aurora with us."

"No, you can't do that!" Penny lifted her head, her face streaked with tears. She crawled forward, begging, "Your Highness, you must take Dominic back to Westhaven. You must!"

Upon hearing this, Lisandra felt a cold certainty settle in her chest. Edmund must have begun deploying troops to the border after her departure.

A surge of anger and frustration rose in her chest, her blood boiling as the tightness in her throat increased. She felt the sharp, bitter taste of blood in her mouth and couldn't hold it back any longer. A splash of fresh blood sprayed from her lips. "Your Highness!"

Yuna and Yasmine rushed forward to steady Lisandra. Aria quickly fetched a handkerchief to wipe away the blood. The sight of the red-stained cloth only deepened the worry and anxiety in their eyes.

"You fool!" Yaşmine spun around

and slapped Penny hard across the face, sending the latter sprawling to the side. Her Highness came here struggling with her illness, to prevent war. If you push for war, it will bring internal strife! Will you only be satisfied after you've reduced the world to ruins?!"

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The slap not only struck Penny's face, but also released the pent-up frustration and anger she had buried deep within.

Penny clutched her cheek, her voice thick with sorrow as she cried, "Your Highness, have you forgotten how terribly Prince Arthur died? It will forever be a wound in the hearts of the people of Westhaven! How can we not avenge him? How can we not? He was your brother! How can you be so heartless and disregard the bond between siblings?"

Lisandra clenched her fist, her palm wet with sweat. The light cast a ghostly pallor on her face, and her eyes were filled with a deep, dull despair.



"So, do you all think that the reason I don't want to go to war is because I don't want to avenge him?"

She took a deep breath, her anger flickering in her eyes. Though still weak, she pointed an accusing finger at Penny.

"Penny, others may think that, but I have made my intentions clear to you every step of the way. You know exactly what I am thinking and what I am considering. You should understand me better than anyone, but you're so blinded by your thirst for revenge that you can't see the situation as it is. You claim loyalty to Arthur, but if you truly honor him, think carefully-would Arthur want us to go to war with Starhaven now?"

Penny sobbed, speaking through her tears, "But we can't just ignore it! I know we face internal and external turmoil right now, which is why I pushed for the 3,000,000 bushels of grain and Dominic. Those two things will ensure our victory. Your Highness, we need this victory to appease Prince Arthur's spirit!"

Lisandra looked down at Penny, her heart torn between fury and sorrow. She raised her eyes to meet Yuna and Yasmine's gazes, her voice heavy with a quiet menace.

"What do you two think? Do you agree with her? If so, speak now, and save me from wondering whether you're plotting against me behind my back."

Yasmine and Yuna both knelt immediately, speaking in unison, "Your Highness, we don't agree with her."

Penny turned to Yuna, her eyes filled with disappointment. "Yuna, how could you disagree with me? Have you forgotten how His Highness took care of you? How can you not want to avenge him?"

Yuna's eyes reddened, memories of Arthur flooding her mind and bringing fresh pain to her heart. "I will never forget His Highness' kindness to me. It's precisely because we want to avenge him that we need to bring Aurora back to Westhaven. We will use her blood to honor His Highness' spirit in the afterlife."

Penny's face twisted in fury. "Aurora is just a worthless life! Killing her isn't enough! Westhaven's iron cavalry must conquer Victory Pass and force Starhaven's army to retreat. And that would only release a fraction of the anger in my heart! If we were powerful enough, why not just raze Starhaven to the ground?"

Yasmine suddenly spoke up, "The so-called evidence you presented regarding how Marshal Liam abducted a civilian woman and

committed all kinds of corrupt net

acts did you work together with His Majesty to fabricate it all?"

Lisandra turned to Penny sharply, rage flaring in her eyes.

Penny didn't hesitate to admit it, the malicious glint still visible in her eyes.

"Yes, and he wasn't unjustly accused! Marshal Liam failed to protect Prince Arthur's safety on the battlefield. He allowed His Highness to fall into Aurora's hands and suffer humiliation. Then, he marched to the Southern Frontier with 300,000 troops.

"But instead of helping Sandoria conquer it, he only captured Aurora and her group. He didn't even kill her and simply returned, wasting all those military resources and

veline

supplies. Doesn't it look like a joke? Teltme-was he unjustly accused?!"

Lisandra was so enraged that she spat out another mouthful of blood, nearly collapsing from the force of it.

Struggling to keep herself steady, she seethed, "Take her away! Bring Leroy and Garrick here."

The negotiations had to be cut short. Lisandra had to return to Westhaven-she couldn't let them continue like this.

"Your Highness, please listen to me! His Majesty wasn't wrong, and I wasn't wrong! We need the grain and we need Dominic. Please believe me...!" Penny pleaded desperately.

Lisandra clutched her chest, trying to suppress the overwhelming surge of blood in her body. "Yuna, interrogate her. Who else is she working with? Where did the poisonous worms come from?"

"Understood!" Yuna replied. Then, she turned and barked, "Take her away!"

Two guards rushed in and hauled Penny out.

Penny screamed, crying, "Your Highness, believe me! I never meant to harm you! I'm doing this for Prince Arthur, for Westhaven!"

Lisandra collapsed onto the edge of the bed, coughing up another mouthful of blood. The pain in her head was so intense, her skull might just burst.