

War Song 981

Chapter 981

Penny's actions had forced Lisandra to make a decision. Summoning the rest of the envoys, she draped her outer robe over her shoulders and forced herself to sit upright in a chair. "Negotiations will resume tomorrow afternoon. The terms are up for discussion. There's no need to be so rigid," she announced bluntly.

Leroy's eyes widened. "Discussion? How do you plan to discuss it? Are you saying we should just agree if they demand we pull back our borders?"

"We'll put the border issue on hold for now," replied Lisandra, who had already made up her mind and was resolute, disregarding their objections. "We aim to reach an agreement by tomorrow or the day after, then we'll leave for home immediately." "You can't..."

Lisandra gave her uncle a cold glance. "I'm not asking for your opinion. This is my decision. If you're unhappy, keep it to yourself."

A furious Leroy shot back, "This is pure stubbornness! If we put the border issue aside, how are we supposed to explain it to the king and all the officials? What do we tell the people?"

"I'll explain it. I don't need you to do it," the grand princess said decisively.

Having overseen state affairs for years, Lisandra had a natural air of authority. She narrowed her eyes, her gaze alone carrying a commanding presence.

"Now, go back and draft a new proposal. Try to secure more compensation from Starhaven and take the border issue off the table. We will sign an agreement, and in two years, we'll continue negotiations on this matter. I also hope to resolve the border issue through further talks," she instructed.

Pathetic!

Leroy cursed Penny in his heart, knowing why Lisandra was desperate to return home.

"I disagree. No matter what, the border issue must be settled clearly," he protested.

Lisandra threw the incense burner aside, her voice sharp as a whip, snapping, "Go and draft it now."

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Sebastian had returned with the group to Hell Monarch Estate. In the council hall, the power dynamics had shifted. Now, Sebastian sat at the head of the table, with even Everett relegated to a side seat.

The members of the Pathfinders Guild were sitting up straighter, their arrogance on full display.

Sebastian explained, "The Soulgrasp Threadworms used in the Brightmoor District case and the ones this time are of the same species, though there's a size difference. The worms in the Brightmoor District case were larger and required slow nurturing.

"On the other hand, the threadworms used on Grand Princess Lisandra are smaller but grow rapidly. They would have been fully grown in one or two months. They suck blood, which is what makes them deadly. Also, the disease becomes fatal 12 hours after the symptoms appear."

Furious, Jacob said, "No doubt this

is Prince Yuvan's doing. He wants Grand Princess Lisandra dead. If she dies, Mr. Stellwyn will be the lead negotiator. And as Grand Princess Lisandra's most trusted female official, Ms. Durham would be the one to say that before Her Highness died, she planned to take General Sullivan back to Westhaven."

Rafael furrowed his brow. "And not only that, Grand Princess Lisandra would have died in Starhaven, which would have been extremely detrimental to us."

"That man is truly wicked. He's hoping for war between the two kingdoms, so he can benefit as the opportunist," Violet remarked, seething.

"He missed the best opportunities during the Victory Pass and Southern Frontier battles. Now, it's too late for him to act. Instead, he's only helped the king's reputation grow stronger," said Rafael.

Jacob replied, "He didn't expect

Prince Rafael to be able to retake the Southern Frontier. He thought that when His Highness failed, and the Hell Monarch Army and the Sinclair both worn down, he

Army were could stir up chaos amidst the rising

public anger. Then, he would rally

forces, and no one would dare call

him a traitor or rebel. At the very

least, his follower base would grow."

"Rebels are always rebels, no matter what," Everett added, now part of the conversation rather than only listening and summarizing from the head of the table. "Starhaven's king may not be great, but he's still better than Yuvan."

Violet muttered under her breath, "The king's so paranoid now, though, so I'm not sure..."

She was about to add, 'he's any better', but she realized that wasn't something she should say out loud. She had become much more composed.

"If the king is really so fearful, why not grant the people he's suspicious of a title and fief, then assign them elsewhere? That way, he wouldn't have to keep watching them so closely," she asked instead.

Sebastian spoke up, "Every king in

history has been wary of powerful

officials and noble families, especially when a prince's military achievements are so prominent. Although Prince Rafael is no longer in command, he still has the loyalty of the army, and as King Sigmund's son, he is a bigger threat.

"As for granting titles and assigning the people he's wary of elsewhere, it's impossible at the moment. Keeping them under close watch is already difficult enough. Sending them away would make the king even more uneasy." Although this was common knowledge, hearing it from Sebastian made it more convincing, and it didn't feel as suffocating anymore.

Indeed, those who didn't inspire jealousy were mediocre talents.

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The group unanimously agreed that Westhaven would likely lower its demands to expedite the negotiations. The most probable outcome was that the border issue would either be compromised or set aside entirely.

Jacob spoke up, "Prince Yuvan's repeated schemes have all failed, which shows how difficult his situation is now. His network was probably all under Eleanor's control. Since she's fallen, he's likely running out of options in the capital.

As Jacob had pointed out, Yuvan truly had few paths left to pursue.

Wayne had made several moves, repeatedly using Harvey as a front while concealing another hidden operation. Now, both layers had been completely uprooted, with the loss of more than ten of their suicide soldiers.

They kept a close watch on the situation at Concord Lodge. From the fact that Sebastian had gone there, it was clear the plan had failed. Even when Lisandra fell unconscious, the mother Soulgrasp Threadworm was unable to control the larvae inside her. From there, it was likely understood that the plan was doomed.

Though disappointed, Wayne couldn't help but admire Lisandra. Fighting against the control of the Soulgrasp Threadworms was incredibly difficult. Even the most skilled warriors and determined minds couldn't manage it. As far as he knew, only one person, who was extraordinary in both status and in willpower, could resist the influence of the threadworms.

Faced with such a formidable challenge, Wayne accepted his defeat with grudging respect.

He told Yuvan, "With Grand Princess Lisandra in the picture, Westhaven won't go to war with Starhaven. After King Edmund ascended the throne, he stirred things up and manipulated public opinion. However, all of this will backfire on him. Plus, he's never been truly interested in the throne.

"In his mind, the late crown prince is the most important. The kingdom and the people come second. That's why he was willing to ally with us. But this alliance wasn't based on his ambitions. It's like building a tall tower on unstable ground-it will eventually collapse. When it does, it may pull us down with it. So, we can't place our hopes on King Edmund."

Yuvan pondered for a moment before responding thoughtfully, "Then, Lisandra will definitely not tolerate Edmund. Among all the princes, the one most likely to ascend the throne now is the fourth prince, Emory."

"Indeed," Wayne agreed. "Looking at the strength of the fourth prince's maternal family, he has the highest chance of becoming king. King Edmund's rise to power was thanks to Grand Princess Lisandra and Marshal Liam's support. "But once he ascended, he imprisoned his uncle and started going against his sister's wishes. It's likely that Grand Princess Lisandra will hurry back to deal with him. Prince Emory's faction will use this opportunity to take power." Yuvan rubbed his temples, a deep frown creasing his forehead. "Then, we'll stick to the original plan. Contact the fourth prince and form an alliance with him. Once he takes the throne, he'll need a victorious war to solidify his position."

Wayne sighed heavily. "Your Highness, looking back now, we can't deny that we truly missed the best opportunity. When Starhaven was battling against Westhaven at both Victory Pass and the Southern Frontier, that was our moment of greatest advantage."

Yuvan may have regretted it inside,

but outwardly, he stuck to his convictions, saying, "If we go to war and I raise an army in rebellion, I'll be labeled a traitor for sure. Our only chance is if Victory Pass falls or if the border line is ceded through negotiation. That's the only time we can stir up public anger. Once that happens, we can portray ourselves as the righteous force."

Wayne wanted to argue that sometimes, it wasn't possible to have both reputation and power. Struggling with indecision could lead to losing everything and ending up with nothing to show for it.

But after years of maneuvering, the ship had already set sail. Now, talking of defeat would only weaken their resolve and make success even more elusive.

Did Yuvan not understand the risks?

Of course he did, but who didn't harbor ambition? Once the first step had been taken, it was natural to want to press forward and make everything legitimate. Without that, he would never truly feel secure on the throne.

His voice cold, Yuvan continued, "Dominic and Rafael are our biggest threats right now. If we don't deal with them, we can't take the throne. Even if we do, my hold on the throne will never be stable as long as they're alive." Wayne sighed regretfully. "We never did gain Grand Princess Eleanor's connections, and one mistake led to another. We should never have left the management of the capital entirely in her hands from the start."

"At the time, we thought that since

she was a grand princess, who could possibly suspect her?" Yuvan replied, his frustration evident. "And then there's the marriage alliance with the Spencer family. They never quite understood my intentions, or perhaps they did but were unwilling to follow me."

Wayne remained silent. He had opposed the alliance from the start, but Yuvan had been insistent, believing that once they were married, they would either rise or fall together.

But Molly didn't represent the Spencer family. She wasn't even the direct daughter of the Spencer family's head. If Yuvan had married Violet, that would have been a different matter entirely.

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As dawn broke the next morning. Yuna went to find Carissa and asked her to bring Sebastian to see Lisandra. At the same time, Garrick headed to the Diplomatic Affairs Department to prepare for the afternoon's continuation of the negotiations. Sebastian knew Lisandra would request to see him, so he had gotten up early that day and was now waiting for someone to call on him. When Carissa arrived, his carriage was already ready. Without her needing to speak, Sebastian called for Ivy to bring his medicine

box.

"Concord Lodge, right?" he said.

Carissa smiled. "You already knew?"

"Grand Princess Lisandra's headaches are severe. Without me, she won't be able to handle the upcoming negotiations, let alone return home to deal with pressing matters."

Sebastian was as confident as ever in his medical skills.

Carissa sat in the carriage with him, asking, "What's going on with Grand Princess Lisandra's headaches? Is it just tension?"

"That's part of it. From what I can tell, it's clear she's had this condition for a long time, and it's very severe. The second issue is years of sitting at a desk, which has caused her neck to misalign, restricting blood flow to her head. The diagnosis from Mr. Glover last night was actually correct—there is indeed blood stagnation. The incense helped a little, but it only eased the pain for a short while. Once the effect wears off, the headache comes back just as strong," Sebastian explained.

"Couldn't Mr. Glover see the problem? After years of treatment, how can there be no improvement?"

"Needle treatment can help, and Mr. Glover's efforts have been valuable, but the underlying issue remains unresolved. Plus, her constant overwork means the condition will keep recurring and likely worsen. Eventually, it could even become life-threatening." Sebastian patted the medicine box. "I had Ivy pack enough medicine for a year. If Grand Princess Lisandra trusts me, she can still be saved."

Carissa nodded slightly, her thoughts turning to the current situation between the two kingdoms. If Lisandra couldn't manage things, it would be disastrous for Starhaven.

When they reached Concord Lodge, Sebastian and Ivy went inside, while Carissa waited outside. She planned to accompany Sebastian when he left, and Michael would come in to take over for her. What she thought would be a brief consultation turned into an hour. Sebastian still hadn't come out, while Michael had already arrived and had been waiting for two hours.

Worried something had gone wrong, Carissa went to inquire with the Westhaven guards.

They led her straight inside, saying, "Grand Princess Lisandra has given orders. If you come to ask, we are to bring you in."

This gesture of kindness made Carissa realize that the upcoming negotiations would likely be more manageable. Entering Lisandra's room, she found the grand princess lying down for needle treatment, with over a dozen silver needles inserted into her neck and head.

Sebastian and Javier were both

attending to her. While Javier knew

Venet

how to perform needle treatment, inserting needles in the head and neck required extreme caution. He had been meticulous with his previous treatments, which had caused Lisandra's condition to

fluctuate between better and worse.

Now, Sebastian was personally demonstrating the needle placements to ensure Javier understood the right pressure points, explaining which needles needed to be inserted simultaneously. Meanwhile, Ivy was teaching the maids how to use massage techniques to help alleviate Lisandra's headaches.

Carissa sat quietly to the side and waited. While she trusted Sebastian wouldn't do anything dangerous, it gave her peace of mind to be there watching over the situation.

After about 15 minutes, the needles were finally removed.

Aria helped Lisandra sit up and asked, "Your Highness, how do you feel?"

Lisandra slowly rotated her head, first to the left, then to the right. A smile of relief spread across her face.

"It's not hurting much anymore, though I feel a little dizzy."

They all respected Sebastian deeply, so they spoke in Stellish in his presence.

Sebastian understood and

responded, "The dizziness is normal right after the needles are removed. It will pass soon. Besides needle treatment, you must also take medicine to promote blood

circulation and strengthen yo

constitution. I've prepared

everything. If you trust me, you can take it back with you, but if you're hesitant, that's fine too."

"I trust you," Lisandra replied.

Her headache had now greatly reduced, so how could she not trust him?

She gazed at Sebastian with gratitude. "Your skills are remarkable. Being treated by you during this trip to Starhaven has been one of the greatest rewards of my journey."

Sebastian's expression softened.

"Your Highness, you must take

better care of yourself. In addition to needle treatment and medicine, you should also practice massage to promote circulation. And if possible, try doing some exercises that are beneficial for the muscles and joints."

He paused as he opened his medicine box, then added, "To accomplish great things, you must have a healthy body. Otherwise, long-term stability will be out of reach." Lisandra paused for a moment, then gave both Sebastian and Carissa a meaningful glance.

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Carissa was momentarily stunned. Sebastian's words seemed to carry an underlying message, one that was not immediately clear. When Lisandra's gaze met hers, Carissa calmly looked at the grand princess, her expression unreadable, as though she didn't understand.

Sebastian was observant, and he was always able to read people deeply. His words must have been a reflection of his insight into the grand princess' thoughts. After leaving the medicine, Sebastian made to leave, and Lisandra stood to see him off. She bowed deeply. "Thank you, Mr. Dalton. If you ever come to Westhaven, I will certainly show my gratitude properly."

For some reason, her eyes glistened with unshed tears.

Carissa helped Sebastian while Ivy carried the medicine box, and the three of them left together.

Lisandra sat back down, watching as Javier opened the medicine bottle and checked the contents, though her focus seemed to wander.

A healer didn't just treat the body-they also healed the heart.

She had never spoken her thoughts aloud, but somehow Sebastian had seen through them. He didn't view her desire to achieve great things as a challenge to male authority. To him, it seemed almost natural, as though he believed in equality. That was something she had always strived for.

She was touched, realizing that the path she wanted to take was not one every man would oppose. The acceptance she had longed for, something that had only just begun to take root in her mind, felt like a healing balm. It sank deeply into her heart, offering relief she hadn't known she needed.

Carissa escorted Sebastian back to Arcane Sanctum.

After a long silence in the carriage, Sebastian finally spoke, "Westhaven will be better if it changes."

Carissa understood what he meant, though she couldn't help but feel that Lisandra's path would be incredibly difficult. She silently wished her well in her heart. If Lisandra were to become queen, at least the issues with Starhaven could be settled through peaceful negotiations.

It would be a blessing for both kingdoms.

The negotiations continued in the afternoon.

By the time Rafael received the message, he was already on his way to the Diplomatic Affairs Department. Afterward, he would go to the palace to get Salvador's approval for their compensation plan for Westhaven, and then head straight to the negotiation venue. On the Westhaven side, Leroy and Amos were both absent. It was Lisandra who, along with the remaining few, handled the negotiations.

The first and second terms were no longer up for discussion.

The Westhaven party still insisted on bringing up Dominic, but Starhaven had decided to return Icarus to them instead. With this exchange, both sides were satisfied with the arrangement.

Westhaven proposed providing

3,000,000 bushels of grain, with

Lisandra insisting on that number. However, Rafael's counter-proposal was to provide only 800,000

bushels, not all at once but over." o

years. Considering the recent

disaster in Westhaven, the first year would see 400,000 bushels

delivered, with the remaining to be

given in the autumn of the following year.

They remained at a standstill for a time, but eventually made a concession on both sides, agreeing to a total of 1,000,000 bushels. 600,000 bushels would be given in the first year, and the remaining 400,000 bushels would be delivered according to the original agreement, in the autumn of the following year. Both parties gave their consent.

Then came the border line dispute. The agreement between Aurora and Liam was to be torn up, and the original border demarcation was to be disregarded. The area left unclear would be left undisturbed by both sides for the time being. In a year or two, a peaceful negotiation would determine the final borders.

As for Aurora, Westhaven insisted on taking her back to their kingdom, and there was no room for negotiation on this point. Starhaven didn't press further.

Regarding the two spies Winona had found, Rafael had them sign confessions detailing the extermination of the Sinclair family. Each side received a copy of the confession, and Westhaven acknowledged the matter.

With all these terms settled peacefully, Rafael stood, along with everyone who had participated in the negotiations, to apologize for the deaths of the civilians at Aurora's hands, as well as for the fallen young general. Lisandra watched them rise and bow towards the Westhaven envoys. She turned her face away, a tear slipping down her cheek.

The Westhaven envoys had insisted on one thing-that it not be revealed how the late crown prince, Arthur, had been captured, tortured, and forced to take his own life. It was too cruel a truth for the people of Westhaven to ever know. Instead, the story that would be told was that he had died suddenly from an illness. Once Lisandra returned home, she would "clear up" this matter.

The late crown prince of Westhaven would never be portrayed as having been captured by a woman, humiliated, and harmed. In Lisandra's mind, this was an unalterable fact.

Bringing Arthur up at the negotiating table was only worthwhile if it resulted in grain or the border line agreement-anything else was meaningless. Moreover, the only reason Starhaven had agreed to the 1,000,000 bushels was because of Arthur.

The newly drafted treaty resolved all the issues between the two kingdoms, apart from the border lines. The massacre of the villagers, the extermination of the Sinclair family, and even the treatment of the fallen young general would no longer be brought to the negotiating table.

Once the treaty was signed, it was sent to the palace for Salvador's review. After reading it, the king had no objections and stamped it with his royal seal.

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Lisandra had plans of her own for when she returned home, so she could not afford to back down on the border issue. If she did, all that she had worked for would be in jeopardy, and the support of the people would slip from her grasp.

This outcome was favorable for both kingdoms.

The day after the treaty was signed, the Westhaven envoys entered the palace to bid their farewells. Salvador had intended to host a farewell banquet for them, but Lisandra's determination to return home immediately left him with no choice but to agree to her wishes. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice had already placed Aurora in a prison cart and sent her to Concord Lodge.

When she saw that there was no sign of Dominic, panic surged through her.

"Why is it just me? Where is Dominic? Doesn't he need to take responsibility too?" she shouted loudly.

Lonnie quickly gagged her mouth and passed her over to Leroy.

It was the first time the Westhaven envoys had seen Aurora since entering the capital. The anger in their eyes was so fierce it seemed like it could burn her to the ground.

Aurora struggled in the prison cart, trying to spot Barrett amidst the crowd, but there was no sign of him. Outside the hall, a long procession stretched before her, with the Capital Guard sending the group off. Even Carissa and Rafael were present, but Barrett was nowhere to be found.

She couldn't call out or struggle to free herself, nor could she even lift her head. The cart was uncomfortable to sit in, and standing was impossible. It reminded her of when she had trapped Arthur in an iron cage and taunted him with arrows.

Back then, she had felt a twisted sense of satisfaction. But now, fear gripped her because she knew this was just the beginning.

Carissa had specifically brought Lulu along today. Standing a short distance away from the prison cart, the two of them could clearly see the fear and panic reflected in Aurora's eyes.

Lulu wanted nothing more than to drag her back to Northwatch Estate and tear her apart, but she knew that Aurora now belonged to Westhaven, and she could not take matters into her own hands for vengeance.

The tears in her eyes felt as though they were made of her own family's blood, burning her eyes and scorching her heart.

"My lady, may I go up and slap her?" Lulu asked quietly. "I'm not strong, I won't hurt her. Could you plead with Grand Princess Lisandra for me?"

Carissa knew that if she didn't allow her to slap Aurora, Lulu would never find peace with herself.

She nodded slightly. "I'll speak with Her Highness."

After talking to Carissa, Lisandra lifted the curtain and glanced at Lulu, sighing softly.

"Go ahead," she said.

The cold, impersonal words "slaughtering an entire family" and "massacre of villagers" had been written on the treaty papers, but it was only the survivors who truly understood that those words represented wounds that would never heal.

Carissa took Lulu's hand and led her forward. Panicking, Aurora looked at them as though the prison cart had become her shield. She instinctively shrank back as the Ministry of Justice officials unlocked the cart. She was chained, so even with the cart open, she couldn't escape.

Her eyes burning with fury, Lulu raised her hand and slapped Aurora hard across the face.

"You killed so many people. You're worse than an animal!"

She was quite strong. That slap sent Aurora's head snapping to the side, hitting the iron bars of the prison cart.

Aurora was gagged, so she could only breathe heavily through her nose, her eyes filled with fear and anger. Her words were muffled as she tried to scream, as if trying to curse Lulu for daring to strike her.

Carissa watched as Aurora writhed like a caged beast. She didn't feel any satisfaction or the thrill of revenge-just a deep sadness, knowing that killing that woman wouldn't bring her loved ones back.

Aurora scraped the iron chain

against the cloth binding her mouth,

finally shifting it down to her chin. Then, she took a deep breath and roared loudly, "Carissa Sinclair you're biased and corrupt! Where is Dominic? He's the one behind it all... Mmph!"

Carissa calmly reached over and moved the cloth back into place, then had her tied up more tightly to prevent her from shouting along the way.

Once Aurora was secured, Carissa didn't speak a single word to her. Not even a glance. She simply took Lulu's hand, walked toward Rafael, and stood beside him.

Rafael adjusted her clothes with a gentle, almost imperceptible smile, his eyes filled with affection that he couldn't hide.

Aurora's bloodshot eyes burned with jealousy as she watched them. Carissa had an official status and a husband who loved her-everything Aurora desperately wanted but could never have. Why did Carissa deserve it all?

As the convoy began to move, Aurora still couldn't spot Barrett among the crowd. Her angry, frantic screams turned into pitiful sobs, echoing like a wailing ghost in the wind.

Chapter 986

After the Westhaven envoys left the capital, Salvador swiftly dealt out punishments to Dominic and Barrett.

Dominic's military leadership had been lax, but given his years of hard service defending Victory Pass and the fact that he had been on the brink of death when Barrett and Aurora headed to Fawnrun City, Salvador showed him some mercy. He allowed Dominic to retire from his post and return to Victory Pass to live out his remaining years in peace. Another edict followed, transferring command of Victory Pass to Wyatt, with Wallace as his deputy. Since the border issue had not yet been resolved, Victory Pass could not be left without the Sullivan family's involvement.

With that, Dominic finally emerged from Sullivan Estate and entered the palace to express his gratitude.

His family was still stationed at Victory Pass, and after his retirement, he would return there, though he would no longer be in charge. His accomplishments, despite their weight, would not earn him a noble title, but he held no regrets. He had never sought such things. Barrett also faced punishment, though his role in providing useful information during the Westhaven negotiations earned him some leniency. He was demoted to deputy commander of the Nightsteel Guard and would have his salary docked for three years. In turn, Ian was promoted to the position of commander. With that, Ian became the commander of both of Salvador's personal guard divisions. Showing exceptional clemency, Salvador allowed Rafael and his household to privately deal with the two Westhaven spies. Rafael returned to consult Carissa, asking whether she wished to handle the matter herself or leave it to the Ministry of Justice.

Carissa called for Lulu and asked for her opinion. Aurora was the culprit who caused the massacre of the Sinclair family, but it was the Westhaven spies who had carried out the slaughter.

Lulu had never taken a life before. She knelt before Rafael and Carissa, her teeth clenched in fury. "I want to watch them die with my own eyes, as a tribute to the spirits of the Sinclair family."

A sharp pain shot through Carissa's chest, and her eyes burned with unshed tears.

"Alright," she said quietly. "I'll take you there."

Carissa had once hesitated and was unwilling to personally kill them. She had no desire to even look at them-just the sight of them reminded her of the horrors she had seen when she returned home that day. She had been mad with grief to find her entire family reduced to mutilated corpses.

But she hadn't had time to kill a single spy back then. Now, the two remaining ones, hiding from place to place, had fallen into Winona's hands. It seemed fate had led them to this moment. And so, with Lulu by her side, Carissa would take her revenge.

After dinner, the sky had fully

darkened. As the lights of Hell

Monarch Estate flickered on one by one, Carissa took the sharp dagger Winona handed her, grasped Lulu's hand, and stepped out the door.

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Rafael and Violet accompanied them. He rode on horseback, while the three women sat in a carriage, driven by Travis, who had remarked that he would naturally be coming along as well.

In fact, Kyle and Winona also

wanted to follow them, but Everett stopped them. He told them that it was better to let Carissa's husband and close friends accompany her. Those from her guild only needed to go when she truly needed them.

Feel.ne

During this trip to the capital, Everett had seen how maturely the couple handled matters, and his heart had finally settled. He could now let go knowing they were capable of navigating life on their own. He could return and reassure Adrian, telling him there was no need to worry endlessly anymore? The

troublemaker had changed.

Patrick waited personally at the Ministry of Justice. He knew that someone from Hell Monarch Estate would come for the two spies, and he needed to oversee the handover himself.

But Barrett had inexplicably refused to leave, even though Salvador had pardoned him. He insisted on staying until the next day.

What was that about? Did he think tomorrow was a favorable day? Was he hoping that being released the following day would lead to a smooth career?

When the group arrived, Patrick immediately instructed someone to bring up the two spies. Then, he personally went out to meet them.

"Greetings, Your Highness, Commander Sinclair. You've come so late. I thought you would be arriving tomorrow instead."

"Greetings, Mr. Lloyd!" said Carissa and Violet, along with Travis.

Patrick had addressed Carissa by her title. As a guard unit's commander, Carissa's rank was lower than Patrick's rank of second-rank official, so she had to return the gesture. Patrick nodded, then gestured for them to enter.

His expression grew serious as he said, "Please sit for a moment. They'll be up shortly."

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The group followed Patrick inside, with Carissa holding Lulu's hand the entire way.

The two Westhaven spies were brought in, their clothes torn and bloodstained. Their faces were so swollen that it was impossible to distinguish their features, as though they had been slapped dozens of times. Forced to kneel on the ground, they were struggling to stay upright, their bodies nearly falling forward. Lulu's eyes were red, filled with searing rage. Like Carissa, she had never once forgotten the terrible tragedy of the massacre at Northwatch Estate. Now that the larger situation had been settled, she could finally take revenge for her family and for Melanie.

The pain and fury in her heart surged forth like a tidal wave. She wanted to rush up and beat them senseless, but she couldn't afford to lose her composure in front of Patrick or embarrass Rafael and Carissa.

"When these two spies were brought to the Ministry of Justice, they still had defiant looks on their faces, as if they were ready to die. I didn't order them to be tortured, but some individuals, driven by personal emotions, slapped them a few times. As for the injuries on their bodies, they were already like this when they arrived," Patrick explained.

Rafael had heard from Winona that after they were captured, the men were pummeled before being brought back. He nodded in acknowledgment of Patrick's words, then instructed Travis to take the spies to the Sinclair family's cemetery.

The dim glow of the lanterns barely illuminated the road ahead. Travis tied the spies to the front of the carriage. As he drove the horses, the memory of the Sinclair family's slaughter made him lash out with the horse whip and strike them. When they reached the Sinclair family cemetery, Travis untied the men and kicked them to the ground.

Lulu charged forward, unleashing a flurry of punches and kicks. Her hands swung wildly, landing slap after slap across their faces. However, the fury and pain in her chest remained unsatisfied. No one stopped her. They allowed her to vent her anger, though it pained them to see the usually sweet and innocent Lulu become so unrecognizable in her wrath.

The two spies were beaten to the ground, blood spilling from their mouths. Their already swollen faces now had blood seeping from the wounds, turning them into grotesque masks of agony.

One of the spies pushed himself up with his hands on the ground and roared, "You think only the lives of your people are worth something? What about the lives of Westhaven's people? Why do you have the right to slaughter our citizens without restraint? Why?" The other man was coughing up blood, and he struggled to spit out a few words, "Any true Westhaven man will stand against you ruthless Starhaven beasts!"

Travis kicked him hard. "Then, go seek revenge from Aurora, the one who slaughtered your people, if you're so brave! Why don't you? Is slaughtering the weak and elderly your idea of proving the bravery of Westhaven men?!"

Violet snapped, "It wasn't even General Sullivan's order. You call yourselves spies, but you didn't even bother to check your facts before you started killing innocent people. You're the real ruthless beasts here."

The injured man lifted his head, his

eyes still burning with fury. "Even if it

was a mistake, you're still not innocent! Killing someone is one thing, but the way you humiliated His Highness was unforgivable! You stripped him of his dignity and castrated him! Even if it resulted in our deaths, we needed to avenge him!"

Travis cracked his whip, his fury unleashing as he lashed them again. "The one truly avenging your prince is Grand Princess Lisandra! She took Aurora back to Westhaven to perform a ritual at the prince's grave to honor his spirit. What have you done, except slaughter the weak and helpless? You call yourselves men of blood and honor? Ptui!"

The spy still persisted, adding, "They're all guilty, all of you from Starhaven are nothing but wicked criminals..."

Carissa's eyes suddenly turned cold. With a swift motion, she stepped forward and drove her knife into the man's abdomen, then pulled it out and immediately stabbed the other man. As blood splattered with the withdrawing of the blade, Travis quickly shielded her with his cloak to prevent the blood from staining her.

Carissa didn't want to argue with them about right or wrong. She had no interest in listening to their endless bickering, or allowing their words to disturb the peace of her mother, sisters-in-law, or nephews' spirits. She handed the knife to Lulu, asking, "Do you want to take their lives yourself?"

Lulu didn't take the knife. Tears streamed down her face as she shook her head, hatred burning in her eyes.

"No. I don't want them to die too quickly. I want to watch their blood drain away, slowly, bit by bit."

Chapter 988

Violet had originally thought of making a few more cuts on the bodies of the Westhaven spies. But when she heard Lulu's words, she stopped herself. If they were stabbed more, their blood would flow too quickly and they would die too easily.

Carissa moved to the small shrine nearby. Lighting the candles, she knelt and prayed silently. Her throat tightened, and no words came. However, she knew that her parents, her brothers, and her sisters-in-law, all in the afterlife, could see this moment.

Rafael stepped forward and lit another candle. He knelt beside her, taking her hand in his.

His heart ached as he whispered softly. The killers have been punished. Mother and everyone else will surely find peace in the afterlife now."

Carissa's face was already streaked with tears.

Would they truly find peace?

She didn't know. She only knew they would never return.

The vengeance didn't ease the pain in her heart, but she knew she had to stay strong. Only by living a life of happiness could she truly honor their spirits.

The two Westhaven spies weren't dead yet, but the blood loss had left them drifting in and out of consciousness. They muttered something, but it was in Westic. Carissa and the others couldn't understand, but Rafael knew exactly what they were saying.

It was broken, halting apologies.

They hadn't been blind to their wrongs, just unwilling to admit them. Now, as death loomed, perhaps every scene from their past was replaying in their minds. And these words of apology were the ones they should've spoken here, in front of the graves.

Rafael turned to Carissa and Lulu. "They said they're sorry."

Lulu, who had been holding back her tears, couldn't contain herself any longer. At Rafael's words, she broke down, sobbing uncontrollably, burying her face in Violet's chest.

What good are apologies? What good are they?!"

Lulu's cries were heart-wrenching.

Did one simple apology erase all their sins?

But that single sentence was needed-by Lulu, by Carissa, and by the spirits of their family members. Whether they forgave or not was up to them, but the killers had to apologize.

While Rafael held Carissa, letting her cry in his arms, Violet held Lulu tightly, unable to hold back her own tears. She wasn't the best at comforting, but she gently patted Lulu's back. "Let it out. Go ahead and cry."

With the conclusion of the negotiations and the deaths of the last two Westhaven spies, the massacre of the Sinclair family finally had some semblance of closure.

The bodies of the two spies were discarded in a mass grave. They didn't deserve a proper burial—being a source of food for wild dogs and wolves was the closest thing to redemption they would get.

The next day, Dominic left Sullivan Estate and headed to Hell Monarch Estate. Carissa brought Ryan back from the academy. The dark cloud of worry that had hung over them all had finally passed.

Hearing that Barrett had not been too severely punished and could even return to his position as deputy commander of the Nightsteel Guard, Dominic was silent for a moment before responding.

"His Majesty showed mercy. If too much punishment had been levied against him, your third uncle and many of the military officers at Victory Pass would have been implicated," he said. Carissa understood. It was Wyatt who had allowed Barrett and Aurora to go to Fawnrun City, a decision they had all discussed together. But from the beginning, Salvador had no intention of involving them in the matter.

Cindy didn't want the mood to turn too somber, so she quickly smiled and said, "Let's not dwell on that. Tonight, let's enjoy a family dinner together. In a couple of days, we'll be heading back to Victory Pass."

"You're leaving so soon?" Ryan immediately looked saddened and clung to Dominic's arm. "Can't you stay a little longer? I'll show you around."

Dominic scooped Ryan up, pressing his scruffy cheek against the boy's face and laughing. "When spring comes next year, have your aunt and uncle bring you to Victory Pass. There's so much to do there."

"Really?" Ryan turned to Carissa with bright eyes and eagerly asked, "Aunt Carissa, can we go next year?"

Carissa smiled and nodded. "Yes, we'll take you there next year."

"Yay!" Ryan cheered, his voice bright with excitement.

He was becoming more lively, slowly breaking free from the shadow of his past.

Chapter 989

After dinner, Dominic and Rafael spent a long time talking in the study. Carissa had originally wanted to listen in, but her grandfather told her it was a conversation for men, so it wouldn't be appropriate for her to be there. Reluctantly, she agreed and left, heading off to find

Winona and Kyle.

During the meal that evening, Everett had announced he would be returning to Meadow Ridge. He insisted that the others should return with him, especially Kyle. He had scolded him for staying at Hell Monarch Estate, saying that the place was overcrowded with visitors, disrupting the peace.

In reality, most of the people coming to visit Kyle were well-known scholars and artists of the court. However, Everett had said that the more connected to court someone was, the less they should be involved with them. He didn't want Rafael getting dragged into unnecessary trouble, so he ordered them to leave Hell Monarch Estate at once.

Winona privately said that Everett was being two-faced. When he needed them, he would call them and boss them around. But once the job was done, he acted like they were a burden and couldn't wait to get rid of them.

Winona never spoke ill of others, except when it came to Everett. Even then, she wouldn't dare say it to his face.

"Are you really leaving?" Carissa asked softly, leaning her head against Winona's shoulder. "Can't you stay a little longer?"

"We have to go. Sage Everett's orders are clear," Winona said, affectionately ruffling Carissa's hair. "But we shouldn't stay much longer anyway. Sage Adrian doesn't like us visiting you too often. After all, we're from the martial arts world. Too many of us being in Hell Monarch Estate would cause trouble for you."

"I don't think it's a problem. I like having all of you around me. Let Sage Everett go back on his own," Carissa mumbled.

Winona chuckled. "Don't say that too loudly. If he hears that, you'll be punished.

Carissa raised her head and adjusted her hairpin. "He won't punish me here. He dotes on Raf like there's no tomorrow."

Kyle laughed. "That's true. He's never said a harsh word to you here."

Winona smiled. "It's a good thing. It'll make things easier when we're out and about. We'll just tell him we're going to check on our junior guild member Prince Rafael, or are bringing him something, and Sage Everett won't have any objections."

They all grumbled about their martial uncle, but deep down, they all knew that Everett genuinely cared for the Pathfinders Guild. His vast estate spanned all of Starhaven, and he had a bunch of martial nieces and nephews who never seemed to make things easy for him.

No matter how reluctant they were, the next day, they had no choice but to say their goodbyes.

Dominic and Cindy would stay for another day or two. Dorninic wanted to see Leona and to

find out if that useless daughter of his would come by to pay a visit.

Leona had learned early on that Cindy had been staying at Hell Monarch Estate after arriving in the capital. However, Carissa had been busy and was not home, so Leona hadn't been able to visit.

The next morning, Leona woke up early. She went back to Hartstone Estate to see her mom, asking her to come with her to Hell Monarch Estate.

When Heather saw her daughter, she threw herself into her arms and cried uncontrollably. "Your dad's gone. Why did he leave? He took all the family's money with him. He doesn't want me anymore."

Leona froze in shock. "Gone? What do you mean?"

Heather had been panicking for days, her mind racing with endless fear and worry. The more she speculated, the more terrified she became. Now that she saw her daughter, she completely broke down.

"He's gone! He came back for a day or two, then left again. I didn't dare tell anyone... What on earth did your dad do? Does he not want the title of prince anymore? What is he thinking?"

Leona had once been indecisive like her mom, but after all she had gone through, and with Alana and Leah by her side, she had grown stronger. She instantly realized something was terribly wrong.

With a grave expression, she said, "Mom, just act like you don't know anything. If anyone asks, say Dad told you he's gone off on a journey."

However, Heather was too consumed by her own panic and sorrow to notice anything else.

"But... but he took all the silver, the banknotes-everything! He withdrew all the money from the accounts. He left us with nothing! What are we going to do now?"

Knowing this was serious, Leona immediately grabbed her mother's hand. "Come on. We're going to see Grandpa and Cari."

"No!" Heather quickly pulled her hand away, retreating to the side of the table and shaking her head in a panic. "I can't go! Your grandpa will kill me!"

Chapter 990

Leona frowned. "Grandpa's leaving for Victory Pass tomorrow. He's getting older, and after this, who knows when we'll see him again? He spent his 70th birthday alone at Sullivan Estate. Don't you want to go have a meal with him and wish him a long life?" Heather wiped away her tears. "No, I can't go. And anyway, Carissa should have been the one to celebrate with him on his 70th birthday..."

Leona's anger flared. "Mom, you should know that Cari couldn't see him on his birthday or celebrate it with him. The negotiations hadn't even started then, and His Majesty hadn't made his decision. How could she possibly have done such an inappropriate thing at such an inappropriate time?"

Heather dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief, choking up as she spoke, "Well, it's all over now. A meal now isn't the same as on his actual birthday. I didn't go then, but when he returned to the capital, I did try to visit. Unfortunately, someone was guarding the door and wouldn't let me in. At least I made the effort."

Though Leona had managed to find peace in her heart over the past few days, hearing her mom speak so callously left her speechless with anger.

"Fine." Leona shook her head, disappointment in her eyes. "I thought you were just weak, but I never imagined you'd be so cold. If you don't want to go, I won't force you."

Heather buried her face in her hands, nearly breaking down in tears. "Why is it so important to see him? Why don't you care about me? Your dad doesn't want me anymore. He left the manor empty and took everything with him. He left me with nothing. I have nothing now." Leona had been about to walk away, but seeing her mom cry so painfully, she couldn't help but try one last time to reason with her.

"We can look into Dad's situation separately. It won't stop you from seeing Grandpa. He's leaving tomorrow for Victory Pass. I'm sorry to say this, but if you don't see him now, you may never get the chance again. Besides, Grandpa is your family. Now that you're in trouble, isn't this the perfect time to ask him for help?" she suggested.

"He won't help me," Heather said, wiping away her tears. But the more she tried, the more they flowed. "Your grandfather will only be angry with me for how I treated your aunt and Carrisa, and your third aunt won't look at me kindly either."

Leona sighed softly. "So, you knew all along."

Heather sobbed as she said, "I had no choice. Your dad said the capital was too complicated and the king was too suspicious. He told me not to get involved with anything or anyone. I was supposed to stay out of everything and keep my distance. That was the only way we could stay in the capital and not be sent away to some desolate place."

Leona smiled bitterly. "So, for that reason, you didn't do anything when Aunt Melanie was in trouble, and you didn't care when Cari had problems. Even when I was bullied by Samuel, you didn't speak up. Was that all for a comfortable life in the capital? But have you really found a good life here? It would've been better to just go back to the fief."

"It wasn't that I didn't want to help. Your dad wouldn't allow it," Heather replied, her voice cracking.

Leona didn't want to pursue the past anymore.

With tears in her eyes, she asked quietly, "Will you come with me to see Grandpa?"

Heather shook her head vigorously. "No, I can't go. Tell your grandfather... Tell him I'm ill and bedridden."

"If Grandpa believes you're really too sick to move, do you think he won't come see you? He might be angry, but you're his daughter-his own flesh and blood. Not everyone is as cold as you."

Heather's eyes were filled with

sorrow. "It doesn't matter whether

he believes it or not. Just go, please, go now. When they leave the capital, you should come back and stay with me. I'm afraid, Leona. I don't know what's going to happen."

Leona left, her heart heavy with disappointment.