



734 The Two of Them Held Each Other Tight

Maxwell's remaining allies quickly defected, desperate to distance themselves from him.

But redemption would not come so easily.

Leif VI read aloud a list of names—members of Parliament who had directly conspired with Maxwell.

"Guards," he commanded, "arrest every person on this list."

Royal guards stormed the chamber, seizing the named conspirators where they sat.

Panic swept through the hall. Men fell to their knees, pleading for mercy.

"Your Majesty, forgive us!"

"We were forced! Please, have mercy!"

"Your Majesty, I'm innocent!"

Leif VI's expression did not soften. "Take them all away. The courts will determine who is innocent and who is guilty."

He would not wrong a single good man, nor spare a single traitor. Every name on that list had been verified through years of quiet investigation.

Once the arrests were made, those who had followed Maxwell out of fear rather than loyalty were left trembling, pale with dread. The King did not order their detention—he knew they had been coerced—but the message was clear enough.

Looking across the silent chamber, Leif VI spoke again, his voice steady



and resonant. "Now, there is one more announcement I must make."

The members lifted their heads, waiting.

"I have not only my son Magnus," the King continued slowly, "but I have also found the son and daughter I lost more than twenty years ago. When this session ends, I shall hold a coronation at the palace to welcome my children home."

Gasps filled the chamber. The once-crippled King, who had been confined to a wheelchair for decades, had stood again and reclaimed both his family and his throne.

It was not only a miracle for the man, but for the entire kingdom.

Councilor Yan led the applause. "Your Majesty, this is a day of great fortune for our nation. Congratulations and long life to the King!"

Others followed in unison. "Congratulations, Your Majesty!"

Their voices rose like thunder, echoing through the grand hall.

Leif VI looked over them, relief softening the lines of his face.

When Parliament adjourned, he went directly to the Royal News Bureau to deliver a national address.

He announced that the rebellion led by Maxwell Ravenscroft had been crushed and the traitor apprehended. Footage of Maxwell's arrest in Parliament aired across the country, along with his seditious remarks.

Citizens finally understood the truth: the Queen, Heather Ravenscroft, had conspired with her brother to overthrow the crown. Now she had been deposed, and Maxwell stripped of all rank and held for trial.



News of peace spread quickly through Sanctis and across the nation. Crowds cheered in the streets, waving flags, celebrating the end of the rebellion.

But in his prison cell at the Sanctis Detention Center, Maxwell sat waiting—still expecting his men to rescue him.

Hours passed. No one came.

When the door finally opened, it was not a rescuer who appeared—it was Caitlin.

“Caitlin?” He gripped the metal bars, staring at her.

“It’s over,” she said calmly. “Your allies are finished. Your power is gone.”

“Impossible!” he snapped, but she only nodded to the guards.

A monitor flickered to life, showing him the broadcast: the battle outside the city, his forces surrendering, the royal banners raised again, citizens cheering Magnus and the royal guards as heroes.

Everything he saw confirmed what she said—his reign was over.

Caitlin watched his silence. “You should also know something. Your sister Heather isn’t dead.”

Maxwell’s head shot up. “What?”

“The bodies found in the villa fire weren’t hers,” Caitlin said evenly. “Your sister was already in custody. The fire was a ruse—to make you drop your guard.”

Maxwell’s face twisted. “So that was your trap. All of it your doing.”



He glared at her, hatred burning in his eyes. She met his stare coolly.

"And I know the truth about why you hunted the Shard of Life," she said softly. "Because you can't perform as a man, can you?"

The words hit him like a knife. Maxwell slammed his fists against the bars, shouting, "Shut up! It was your mother who ruined me!"

"My mother?" Caitlin's voice turned to ice. "If you hadn't tried to force yourself on her, you wouldn't be like this. You earned every bit of your misery."

She stepped closer, her voice calm but merciless. "You and Heather will face justice. That's the only ending left for you."

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That evening, the great hall of the Royal Palace glowed with light.

A grand banquet had been prepared to honor those who had restored peace—Sebastian, Zeke, Tyler, and the others who had risked their lives.

Leif VI rose and thanked them in person, praising their courage and loyalty. Then medals of valor were presented to each of them, the applause echoing like thunder.

When the celebration ended and the guests departed, the King felt a quiet contentment. "I want to visit Kelly," he said suddenly.

Caitlin tried to dissuade him. "Father, perhaps tomorrow. You've had a long day."

He shook his head. "You said she still worries about me. I should see her—let her know I'm well."



Caitlin sighed softly. "All right, but wait a moment. I'll ask her first."

She entered the hospital room. Kelly, frail and pale, turned her face toward the window. "I don't want to see him," she murmured.

Caitlin hesitated, looking back toward the doorway where her father waited. "Then... maybe just talk through the curtain? You haven't spoken in decades. Please, Mother."

Kelly didn't answer, but she didn't refuse either. Caitlin took her silence as consent and gently pulled the curtain around the bed.

She returned to the door. "Father, you can go in. She'll hear you."

Leif VI nodded. "Good. Good."

He rose from his wheelchair, leaning on his cane, and walked slowly to the curtain.

A faint tap of the cane broke the silence. He drew a breath, voice trembling. "Kelly..."

Hearing her name spoken in that familiar tone, Kelly froze. Her chest tightened, her eyes burned, and tears welled uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry," Leif VI said, his own voice breaking. "For all the pain you endured, for everything you suffered because of me."

With that simple apology, the dam broke. Kelly began to sob, years of grief and bitterness flooding out.

She remembered the love they once shared, the loneliness of waiting, the despair when he never returned, the heartbreak when she learned he had married another.



She had hated, resented, wept—and then, when she heard of his accident, all her anger had dissolved.

Even through the years apart, she had survived on the memory of his love. Living quietly in his kingdom, knowing he was alive and his children safe, had been enough. She had never imagined seeing him again.

And now he was only a breath away, on the other side of a thin curtain.

Leif VI waited, hearing only her quiet sobs. His heart ached. He explained the truth—the accident, the betrayal, the years he spent trapped in silence. Caitlin had told her before, but he needed to say it himself.

As he spoke, his voice trembled with emotion. Kelly's tears flowed freely. She understood his pain, his regret.

Her own suffering had been emotional; his had been physical, spiritual, complete. Thinking of it made her heart break all over again.

"I didn't know," Leif VI whispered. "I didn't know you bore me two children. You carried the weight of it all alone. You were imprisoned in my own country, and I never knew. I failed you, Kelly. I failed you in every way."

He covered his face, and for the first time in years, the King wept openly.

Kelly's tears matched his. Despite everything, she wanted only to comfort him now.

"It's all right," she said softly through the curtain. "I'm not angry anymore. I forgave you long ago."

Leif VI's shoulders shook. "Kelly... thank you. Thank you for forgiving me. I can die without regret now."



On opposite sides of the curtain, they leaned toward each other, as if closing the space between them.

And when at last they reached out, their hands met through the thin fabric.

They held each other tightly, the world around them fading into stillness —

as if time itself had stopped, and nothing remained but the two of them.