

War Song 131

Chapter 131

As Carissa spoke, she lifted the bowl and drank the soup in one gulp. Her bold gesture made Rafael smile.

"By the way, why did the crown prince of Westhaven appear in Fawnrun City?"

Carissa had always been puzzled about that. She had heard that this prince was highly esteemed in Westhaven, known for his wisdom and virtue.

Why had he been in Fawnrun City? After all, he wasn't a military general,

"There's internal strife within the Westhaven royal family. The crown prince was framed by the second prince and forced to go to the battlefield. Liam knew the crown prince couldn't fight, so he hid him in Fawnrun City, as it was away from the fighting. No one expected he would encounter Aurora," Rafael explained

"The second prince?" Carissa frowned slightly. "With the death of the crown prince of Westhaven, the other princes will vie for the throne. If the second prince becomes the crown prince, it won't be good for Starhaven."

After all, the second prince harbored hostility and malice towards Starhaven.

"Yes, but Liam intends to support the third prince's ascension. The third prince and the crown prince are actual brothers, but the third prince is not yet a marquis. Liam faces many challenges, and the king of Westhaven is already gravely ill and may not last much longer," Rafael added.

Carissa understood. "So, this time, Westhaven wants to regain some dignity, avenge themselves, and then quickly retreat to handle their internal turmoil. They are concealing the crown prince's death, but once it's revealed, they can tell the people of Westhaven that they've avenged the prince."

"That's one reason, but it's more complex than we can fully comprehend. A great nation has its own.

considerations."

Carissa nodded. "You're right."

"Carissa, the Southern Frontier has been reclaimed, thanks to the efforts of your family. Your father and brothers can rest in peace now," said Rafael, looking at her solemnly. With reddened eyes and a voice choked with emotion, she replied, "Yes, you're right."

Rafael gazed deeply at her. "Your father's unfulfilled ambitions have been completed with your help. The gates of Ilyrian City and Simonton City were breached under your command. You fought bravely. In the annals of history, the Sinclair family will undoubtedly be honored with a prominent chapter."

Only now did Carissa understand why Rafael had chosen her to lead the Mystic Army instead of selecting one of the many famous generals. During the war, he had sent a report to the capital to establish her military rank, giving her the official authority to command such a large force. That was the opportunity he had given her. Without the title of general, her command would have lacked legitimacy.

She stood up, bowed deeply, and said, "Marshal, I am deeply grateful for your favor and support. I
you."

have no way to repay you.

Rafael's eyes flickered. "No way to repay? Are you saying you want to repay me?"

Carissa was taken aback. That was just a polite expression. She had given her all in the battles, both in attacking cities and slaying enemies, which should be repayment enough for his support. "Uh... do you have any orders for me, Marshal?"

Rafael's smile widened. "Not now, but who knows, I might need your help in the future, General Sinclair."

Carissa thought Rafael was just speaking casually. After all, as a prince, what help could he need from her?

"Alright. In that case, I'll repay you in the future," she replied politely.

Rafael gave her a meaningful look. "I'll remember that. You may go and rest now."

Carissa stood up. "Yes, sir. I'll take my leave."

Back at the camp, Violet and Cynthia were already fast asleep. Carissa didn't even bother taking off her shoes and collapsed onto her bed.

The moment she lay down, her entire body felt like it was falling apart, exhaustion seeping into every bone. Sleep overcame her instantly, and she slept until the following evening. For those who practiced internal martial arts like them, sleeping was the best way to recover. When she woke up, completely refreshed.

she felt

Everyone else woke up one after another. Without saying much, they automatically went out to help clean up the battlefield and comfort the civilians.

Chapter 132

The triumphant news of reclaiming the Southern Frontier spread back to the capital.

When Salvador read the report, he was moved to tears.

During the morning court session, all the civil and military officials knelt and shouted, "Long live the king!" 1

This monumental news spread like wildfire. First, to the officials' families, then the entire capital, and soon, the entire country.

The nation rejoiced!

A famous storyteller, who had connections everywhere, heard snippets of information from the servants and maids in officials' households and sold these stories.

Thus, everyone knew that the primary credit of reclaiming the Southern Frontier belonged to the Hell Monarch, Rafael. However, it was a female general who had consecutively breached Ilyrlan City and Simonton City. Leading the Mystic Army, she had crushed the Sandorian forces!

The storyteller was adept at creating heroes. His passionate and dramatic retellings depicted this female general as a divine goddess of war.

The battles were also exaggerated as more complex than they were. The female general under the marshal's command was portrayed as brave and strategic, outwitting the enemy commanders despite facing hardships.

The more fantastic the story, the more the people believed it.

In their mundane ordinary lives, the people craved exciting stories about heroes. So, whether in coffeehouses, taverns, on the streets, or at family gatherings, everyone was talking about this female general. However, the female general's true identity remained a mystery.

But who else could it be? Naturally, it had to be Aurora.

She had previously distinguished herself at Victory Pass and was the one who, along with Barrett, led the reinforcements to the battlefield. Among the reinforcements was the Mystic Army. Therefore, the female general leading the Mystic Army to victory was undoubtedly her.

The common people celebrated these rumors as the truth.

The aristocratic families and officials of fifth rank and above didn't take these rumors seriously. They saw it as mere speculation from people who frequented coffeehouses and taverns. Perhaps there was a grain of truth in the stories, but most of it was likely exaggerated or distorted.

Ironically, the people of the Warren family believed the rumors and thought Aurora had indeed achieved great merit.

Since Barrett and Aurora departed for the war, Rebecca had given up eating meat and prayed for their success. Now that they had achieved glory, her joy and excitement significantly improved her health.

She immediately ordered preparations for a grand ceremony at Radiance Temple to thank the gods. The people of the Warren family paraded through the streets, carrying livestock and offerings and celebrating with fireworks. This spectacle further convinced the townspeople that the female general in the stories was indeed Aurora.

Sitting inside a carriage, Rebecca peeked out at the cheering crowd, her vanity fully satisfied by their admiration and celebration.

After the ceremony, she instructed Amelia to organize a tea party. Rebecca wanted to invite the families of court officials to build connections in advance. That way, when Barrett and Aurora returned to court and received official positions, their path would be smooth.

Rebecca believed Barrett and Aurora had once again distinguished themselves, and would soon become new favorites of the court, with many eager to visit and congratulate them. So, she ordered the tea party to be grand and dignified. She even brought out a set of fine white porcelain tea wares she had brought as part of her dowry to entertain the noblewomen.

As for the pastries, the household cooks were not skilled enough, so they bought them from Serene Confections, a renowned pastry shop known for its delicious, albeit expensive, treats. Due to the large number of guests, they spent over three hundred silver coins on pastries alone. Serene Confections' staff personally delivered and arranged the pastries on exquisite plates.

In addition to the pastries, they also bought premium caviar, ensuring each guest had a serving. According to Rebecca's guest list, that alone cost over a thousand silver coins.

Amelia silently lamented. The Warren family's finances were already in deficit, and now they were hosting such an extravagant tea party.

Where would the money come from?

She had no choice but to pawn off the remaining valuable items in the estate. But at this rate, the estate was bound to be emptied sooner or later.

Chapter 133

Rebecca sent invitations to the wives of the two deputy ministers of the Ministry of Defense, as well as to the wife of the Minister of Defense himself. Though she doubted the latter would attend, she was confident that the wives of the deputy ministers would come.

Rebecca planned to ask them about the general situation of the war and how the Ministry of Defense would reward the meritorious.

However, on the day of the tea party, neither of the deputy ministers' wives showed up. Even the wives of slightly higher-ranking officials did not attend. Only the wives of fifth- or sixth-rank officials, and even some of seventh or eighth rank, came with their families. Some of these guests were not even on the invitation list, which made Rebecca both angry and distressed.

She had spent so much money on this tea party to raise her family's profile and create a strong and favorable impression for Barrett and Aurora. When they returned victorious, she hoped Salvador and the Ministry of Defense would consider the public's praise when distributing rewards.

Nowadays, the rumors about the female general had spread everywhere, and the praise was growing louder.

Rebecca had previously felt that Carissa becoming a duke's daughter after the divorce was a bit unfair. But now that Aurora and Barrett had made significant achievements, the Warren family's future seemed promising.

A duke's family with only an orphan girl versus a family with real power-anyone could see which one to favor!

But seeing the tea party filled with lower-ranked officials, Rebecca fumed internally. Claiming to be ill, she refused to entertain them and left Amelia to host the guests.

Rebecca couldn't understand it. With all the public buzz, why couldn't she attract the high-ranking wives?

This farce made Charlotte laugh. How could someone of Rebecca's status expect the wife of a second -rank minister to come for tea and pastries?

Even if Barrett and Aurora had indeed achieved great things, many other people had contributed to the Southern Frontier battle over the years. When it came to rewards, Barrett and Aurora would be further down the list.

If the rumors were true and Aurora had led the troops to capture two cities, that would indeed be a significant achievement. However, the fact that the Minister of Defense's wife and the deputy ministers' wives didn't attend clearly indicated that the female general was not Aurora.

In the middle of the night, Rebecca experienced severe chest pain and called for a doctor. Sebastian, despite selling medicine to her, still refused to see her. So, she had to call another physician.

As the Warren family could no longer afford to keep a family doctor, Amelia attended to Rebecca for most of the night. Exhausted, she eventually left the servants to watch over her mother-in-law and

went to rest.

The following day, when Rebecca saw that Amelia was not there to serve her, she flew into a rage and demanded her daughter-in-law's presence. However, Amelia did not come, claiming she had caught a

cold.

When Charlotte came to visit Rebecca, she found her in a fit of anger and tried to console her.

"You're only hurting yourself by getting angry at everyone. What's the point of this? You know, when Carissa was here, she took such good care of you. If you had a headache or felt dizzy, she'd call Sebastian without you having to say a word. You never appreciated such a good daughter-in-law. Instead, you treated a nobody like a treasure. If you don't cherish your blessings, all you'll get is suffering," said Charlotte.

Rebecca's face turned ashen as she remembered how Carissa had attended to her tirelessly whenever her illness flared up, never complaining. Now, when she asked Amelia to take care of her for just one night, it was too much for her.

She also recalled that before Aurora went to war, she was the same-affectionately calling Rebecca "Mom" but never actually tending to her when needed.

However, in front of her sister-in-law, Rebecca needed to uphold her image.

She retorted coldly, "Since you think so highly of Carissa, why don't you have one of your sons marry into her family and inherit the title? They can live off her fortune." Charlotte remained unbothered. "My sons aren't worthy of Carissa. She deserves better, at least better than Barrett."

"How dare you!" Rebecca clutched her chest, glaring furiously. "You're just here to provoke me!"

Charlotte smiled. "The truth is hard to hear, isn't it? Well, you can say what you want. It doesn't matter.

With that, Charlotte stood up and left.

Chapter 134

Initially, everyone speculated that Aurora was the female general who had led the Mystic Army. However, after Rebecca's tea party, some people began to notice hints that suggested otherwise. The storyteller, known for his knack for suspense, first piqued the interest of his audience before revealing, "At the tea party hosted by Madam Warren at Valor Estate, neither the wives of the Ministry of Defense's two deputy ministers nor any other family members of Ministry of Defense officials were in attendance. What does that imply? I'm afraid it implies that the female general who led the army was likely not General Yates." The coffeehouse patrons were shocked, and the storyteller's words sparked a lively discussion.

If it wasn't Aurora, then who? There was no other female general in the current era.

A few days later, people managed to find out some information and started to talk about how Barrett's ex-wife, who had left him, went to the battlefield.

The people of the capital still vividly remembered the story of Barrett's divorced wife. Wasn't she Carissa Sinclair, the daughter of the late Hector Sinclair, the Duke of Northwatch, who sacrificed himself at the Southern Frontier?

Mentioning Carissa might have elicited curiosity, but speaking of Hector's household evoked deep sympathy and sorrow among the citizens. Some, moved by a strong sense of patriotism, even shed tears.

All the men of Hector's family had perished on the Southern Frontier battlefield, leaving behind widows and orphans. Such a tragedy inevitably tugged at the heartstrings.

As a result, people began to delve into the life of Carissa, the sole survivor of the Duke of Northwatch's family. They discovered that she had been sent to the Pathfinders Guild to learn martial arts at the age of seven,

Then, Aurora had snatched Carissa's husband from her. Given Carissa's martial arts skill and her family's military background, combined with the sacrifice of her father and brothers on the Southern Frontier battlefield, it made sense that she would seek military merit there. It was both a quest for revenge and a way to prove herself superior to Aurora.

The rumors about Carissa's military accomplishments reached the Warren family, causing quite a stir.

Upon hearing them, Rebecca laughed bitterly and mocked, "Carissa, capable of earning military merit on the battlefield? If she had such skills, she would have gone to the front lines long ago. Why would she instead marry into our family and even serve an old woman like me?"

Since Amelia couldn't control the household staff, Rebecca's scornful words naturally spread outside. Some people believed whatever they heard, so they thought Rebecca's words made sense.

If Carissa had those abilities, why would she have lowered herself to serve a sickly mother-in-law? They recalled hearing that Carissa had attended to the older woman so diligently that she even slept in her room to provide constant care.

Others, however, thought more deeply.

They saw this as a testament to the duke's excellent upbringing of his daughter. After marrying, it was only right for Carissa to fulfill her duties and serve her in-laws. Sleeping in the same room as her ailing mother-in-law demonstrated her strong sense of respect and obedience, which was quite admirable.

Previously, the great triumph at Victory Pass, where Aurora and Barrett earned their merits and sought a marriage edict from Salvador, was considered a romantic tale. However, the joy of reclaiming the Southern Frontier overshadowed the triumph at Victory Pass.

In comparison, the recovery of the Southern Frontier was a far more significant achievement.

Upon reflection, Barrett's act of seeking marriage as a reward for his military achievements began to feel distasteful. Without the heroic aura, Barrett became a man who abandoned his wife, and Aurora was seen as a husband-stealer.

How could anyone celebrate them?

As rumors and various speculations spread, the Warren family decided to shut their doors, ignoring the gossip. They remained confident that Aurora and Barrett would earn their merits.

On the third day of April, the court finally announced that the Hell Monarch would lead the reinforcements back to the capital. The Ministry of Defense also released the list of meritorious soldiers from this campaign.

Three female generals were recognized for their contributions, with Carissa, who had captured two cities, receiving the highest honors. The other two were Violet and Cynthia.

Barrett's name appeared on the list but was ranked much lower. He was preceded by veteran generals who had been stationed at the Southern Frontier for years, most of whom were Hector's former subordinates.

Aurora's name was notably absent from the list.

When the Ministry of Defense's announcement reached the Warren family, everyone was dumbfounded. They could hardly believe that Aurora had not been recognized. Despite leading reinforcements to the battlefield during the harsh winter, she wasn't even mentioned for her efforts.

Rebecca was so infuriated that she fainted on the spot.

Chapter 135

In coffeehouses across the capital, storytellers spared no effort in embellishing Carissa's military achievements, portraying her conquest of the cities as a grand tale of heroism. As a result, the common people grew to admire Carissa immensely, completely forgetting the harsh words they had once spoken about her after her divorce.

Heather finally understood why she had been confined to her quarters. When her daughter got married, Carissa had sent people to offer congratulatory gifts, which Heather had declined. At the time, she had complained to those around her, saying that Carissa, being a divorced woman, had no business sending gifts-it was bad luck.

Upon hearing of this, Harvey was furious and slapped her. "She's your niece! If your sister in heaven knew what you did, would she not be upset with you for being so heartless? It's one thing for strangers to show Carissa disdain, but you're her aunt! You're truly..."

Harvey was a leisurely prince with no real power or responsibilities, which was why he remained in the capital. He had never concerned himself with Carissa and Barrett's divorce, nor did he dare to interfere, as any royal edict regarding marriage or divorce was beyond his jurisdiction.

He was unaware of Carissa's attempt to honor his daughter with congratulatory wedding gifts. Had he known, he would have accepted the gifts to avoid offending Carissa, though he might not have given them to his daughter.

"It wasn't that I disliked her, I was afraid you and your family would hold it against her. I acted out of a moment of poor judgment," Heather cried, feeling both anxious and regretful after being slapped. "You didn't even know she went to war, which shows you never bothered to check on her. You claim to have acted out a moment of poor judgment, but it's clearly a lack of compassion," Harvey countered. Heather defended herself, "But we were confined to our quarters!"

"You could have sent someone to check on her. Not everyone in the household was confiner. Harvey's face turned a deep shade of red. "Your sister treated you so well. You and your sister had a close bond that everyone admired. After such a heartless act, will Carissa still acknowledge you as her aunt when she returns?"

Harvey's concern was not genuinely about familial bonds, but rather about maintaining good relations with those in power. Having made significant contributions, Carissa now held a military post with real authority.

Harvey had no interest in making enemies with any officials who wielded power-especially since Carissa's divorce had been granted by the king himself. Plus, Hector had been posthumously elevated to the title of duke, which could be inherited. The Duke of Northwatch's family would surely thrive in the future under the new head of the family.

Heather was shocked to learn that Carissa had made such achievements on the battlefield.

Previously, she had thought that the king's elevation of Hector to a duke was merely a formality to balance out Barrett and Aurora's marriage-that it was more about appearances than real significance.

Now, Heather deeply regretted her actions and wanted to quickly try to make amends.

"Fortunately, Leona doesn't know about this. When Carissa returns in triumph, I'll make sure Leona visits her. They were very close when they were young. Otherwise, Carissa wouldn't have sent Leona wedding gifts when she got married," said Heather.

"Even if you try to make amends, it will never be the same. Moreover, because of this incident, we've been confined to our quarters and couldn't even attend the New Year celebrations in the palace. Clearly, the king holds a grudge now. Just wait and see," Harvey snapped before storming off. T

Shaken, Heather had tears streaming down her face. In all their years of marriage, Harvey had never struck her. Her actions had indeed been a moment of poor judgment. She didn't despise Carissa- they were relatives, so it was obvious there were chenshed familial bonds between them.

Heather had simply wanted to avoid further complications.

"Lara, do you think I was wrong?" Heather asked, wiping her tears as she spoke to the old maid who was applying ointment to her face.

Lara sighed. "My lady, you and your late sister were once very close. When General Warren sought permission to marry General Yates, you, as Lady Sinclair's aunt, should have gone to the Warren family to support her. I advised you, but you didn't listen."

Heather sobbed. "But it was a royal edict. How could I possibly oppose the king? That would be outright defiance."

Lara gently rubbed Heather's face. "You may not have been able to stop the marriage, but if you had shown some support, the Warren family wouldn't have gone so far, as they would have had to show some consideration for your status as a princess consort."

Heather sniffled and ordered a servant to bring some warm water to wash her face.

"I'll go to Northwatch Estate. Even if it's just a formality, at least when Carissa returns, her servants will tell her that I made an effort to visit," said Heather.

Lara knew it was a bit too late to visit now, and it seemed more like an attempt to curry favor. But as the princess consort had always acted this way, there was no stopping her. If she wanted to go, it would be best to let her go.

Chapter 136

The events in the capital were unknown to Carissa, who was far away at the Southern Frontier.

The war was long over, but the troops could not fully withdraw yet. The first reason was the severe cold, which made marching difficult. The second reason was that many areas of the Southern Frontier were in ruins after years of conflict, and the soldiers were helping with the reconstruction.

Since the end of the war, rumors about Aurora's capture and

disgrace had spread throughout the army. No matter how much she denied it, there were many soldiers who had rushed into the wooden h  t and seen her state that day.

It was not a secret that could be hidden.

Aurora had sought out Zeke and the others to testify on her behalf, but what could they say? Having endured brutal beatings and mutilation, they could barely say whether Aurora had been violated

or not.

Besides, Zeke was furious with his cousin and refused to even

speak with her. Meanwhile, the other soldiers who had once been grateful to Aurora for their rewards now harbored hatred towards her after their capture and suffering.

Aurora remained remarkably resilient, undeterred by anyone's judgment. Once her injuries had healed, she returned to her duties with a mental fortitude that was indeed admirable.

Liam had expected that after such an ordeal, she might take her own life. It seemed he had underestimated Aurora's strength. He would have been furious to learn that she hadn't committed suicide-after all, their crown prince had killed himself from disgrace, while Aurora had the audacity to shamelessly live on. 2

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The gossip about her did not cease, sometimes even being voiced in her presence. Initially, Aurora would step forward to defend herself, insisting that she had not been defiled, that she was still pure, and had only been beaten and disfigured. But as time went on, she ceased to explain, exhausted by the futile attempts and Barrett's continued cold treatment.

Instead, she confronted Carissa with a mocking tone, "I heard that you all reached the base of the mountain but didn't come to rescue me. You were hoping I'd die. You're truly cruel Do you think I'll kill myself? I won't. I'll live better than any of you. I you want me dead, it's not going to be that easy."

Carissa looked at her with a small smile. "You're mistaken. It would be quite easy for me to kill you. I could drag you up the mountain in the middle of the night, throw you from the cliff, and let wild dogs devour your remains, leaving nothing but bones."

Aurora's expression shifted at her words.

Carissa continued coldly, "Or perhaps, I could slip some poison into your coffee. I could make you wish for death but be unable to obtain it."

Aurora reached out to strike her. "You would dare?!"

Carissa caught her wrist and shoved her to the ground, then coldly said, "I remember how arrogant you were when you first came to speak with me. Where is that arrogance and confidence now?" Aurora was infuriated and red-faced, but could do nothing against. Carissa.

"You should focus on recovering," Carissa sneered. "Your military punishment still awaits you."

Aurora slowly rose to her feet, her eyes cold and defiant. "Do you think I'm afraid? Carissa, even if you achieve great things, I still

defeated you. I'm Barrett's wife now, not you."

Aurora's pride returned, as if merely mentioning Barrett could bring a pained expression to Carissa's face.

But Carissa merely scoffed and sarcastically said, "Congratulations."

Her dismissive attitude instantly broke Aurora's composure.

"You're jealous; you just refuse to admit it."

"Yes, of course," Carissa said mockingly. "I'm so jealous that you've become Mrs. Warren, that you're now the mistress of Valor Estate, and that you'll be spending sleepless nights attending to that troublesome old woman."

With that, Carissa laughed and walked away.

During this time, Carissa had been working with Violet and the others to help rebuild the Southern Frontier. Although the days were exhausting, she gradually learned to suppress the pain in her heart. Occasionally, she would share a drink with Rafael and the others, discussing the future of the Southern Frontier.

Rafael was no longer the scruffy figure he once was. He now looked quite handsome, and it was no surprise that he was once called the most attractive man in Starhaven-it seemed there was some truth to that claim.

Chapter 137

As spring arrived and the ice and snow melted away, the soldiers stationed in Simonton City prepared to return to the capital. Violet and the others were torn between whether to go back to the capital with them or return to Meadow Ridge.

"Meadow Ridge will always be there, but a triumphant return

happens only once in a lifetime. We should go back and receive the people's praise," Travis said.

They didn't have grand ambitions; their greatest aspiration was to perfect their martial arts skills. They didn't seek to be invincible, only to be able to defeat any opponent they faced.

Suddenly hailed as heroes of the Southern Frontier, they found the new height of their status a bit overwhelming.

With Aurora's injuries nearly healed, it was time for her to face her punishment.

During her time at the Southern Frontier, her relationship with Barrett had been in a peculiar state. Her husband seemed to constantly avoid her, yet would still assist her when necessary.

For instance, when she was to be punished, Barrett pleaded with Rafael on her behalf, only to be ignored. After failing with the marshal, he turned to Carissa, hoping she might intercede on Aurora's behalf.

"I know it's presumptuous," Barrett began, "but we're about to return to the capital. If she endures this punishment now, she won't be able to withstand the hardships of the journey. All mistakes are mine, I have wronged you..."

Carissa cut him off coldly, "If you know it's presumptuous and

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acknowledge your fault, then how do you have the nerve to ask me to intercede for her? And don't you know that my entire family was slaughtered because of her? I'm the one who most wishes for her death. Yet, you come to me to plead on her behalf? Are you sure there's nothing wrong with your brain?"

Her words left Barrett speechless.

He stood there, dumbfounded, staring at the cold-faced woman before him. In his mind, he saw the face he had glimpsed on their wedding night—radiant and vibrant under the candlelight. His heart ached with bitterness.

"I know I was wrong. I've failed you, but I can't fail her as well," he said.

Carissa found the situation laughable.

"If that's the case, why don't you take the punishment for her? It's only natural for a husband to take responsibility for his wife."

Uninterested in witnessing his display of guilt and emotion, Carissa turned and left, heading to Rafael's tent to request an audience. Rafael was engrossed in carving something, which he immediately covered with a silk cloth upon hearing Carissa's request. "Let her in."

Dylan hesitated for a moment before saying, "I just saw General Warren speaking to General Sinclair. I'm afraid she might be here to plead for Aurora."

Rafael glanced at him dismissively. "Do you think General Sinclair would plead for General Yates?"

Dylan shrugged, his youthful face displaying a naivety about love. "Maybe she thinks this is a way to win Barrett back?"

Rafael paused, then beckoned Dylan closer. "Come here."

When Dylan stepped forward, Rafael smiled faintly, continuing to gesture. "Come closer, squat down. I see something on your face."

Dylan touched his face, finding nothing but still crouched down. "It's been a while since I washed my face..."

His smile vanishing, Rafael slapped Dylan hard across the face and said, "It was dirty."

Shocked by the slap, Dylan stared wide-eyed at Rafael. "Did I say something wrong?"

Rafael picked up his carving knife and tapped it lightly on Dylan's head. "Does General Sinclair even think highly of General Warren now? You're speaking nonsense. Let her in." "Yes, sir." Dylan rubbed his head and stood up.

Rafael's eyes narrowed as he issued a warning, "Do not let what you said slip outside. If you do, I'll have your scalp removed."

Dylan gulped nervously. "I understand, sir."

It seemed Rafael hadn't forgotten what he said to Melanie before the campaign. However, things were different now-Carissa had been married, and her purity was questionable.

If Rafael still harbored such thoughts and his mother found out, she would surely be furious.

Moreover, since she was coming to Rafael's tent after Dylan had seen her talking with Barrett for quite some time, Carissa was definitely here to plead for Aurora.

Chapter 138

Carissa entered briskly. After greeting Rafael, she felt a strange

unease.

What was wrong with Dylan? Why was he looking at her with such an odd look on his face?

When Rafael gave Dylan a cold look, the latter chuckled and said, "I'll take my leave, then."

Once outside, Dylan didn't stray far. He hid just beyond the entrance to eavesdrop.

"Have a seat," Rafael told Carissa.

Rafael cast an irritated look at the entrance. It was obvious someone was eavesdropping. Even if Dylan wanted to do so, couldn't he have hidden better?

Aware of Dylan's presence, Carissa sat down and gave Rafael a questioning look, then pointed at the door, wondering why Dylan was still there.

Rafael shook his head with a smile. "Ignore him: What brings you here?"

Carissa straightened and asked earnestly, "Marshal, I know we're preparing to return to the capital. Before that, may I visit the place where my father and brothers fell? I'd like to pray for their souls to accompany us back to the capital."

The remains of her father and brothers had been sent back to the capital after their deaths. However, if their spirits still lingered, they would surely want to witness the Southern Frontier's reclamation with their own eyes.

Rafael nodded slightly. "Of course, but you needn't go. I've already

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been there myself. I cut down a large tree from that place and am carving memorial plaques for them. We'll bring their plaques back with us."

He lifted a silk cloth to reveal the carved plaques arranged beneath. One of them was already finished, bearing the name 'Hector Sinclair'. Carissa's lips quivered as tears welled up in her eyes.

At the Sinclair family's memorial hall, her father and brothers' plaques were also displayed. When she went ba to pay her respects, she could never bring herself to look directly at them, as if doing that could keep them alive in her memory, rather than reducing them to cold, lifeless plaques.

As tears streamed down her face, she pulled out a handkerchief to wipe them away, only to realize it was the one Rafael had given her.

She quickly returned it, her voice choking with emotion as she said, Thank you."

Rafael's gaze lingered on the handkerchief for a moment before he took it back. "It was the least I could do. When I first went into battle, it was your father who led me."

Carissa nodded silently, her emotions overwhelming her.

After a long pause, she said, "Since you've arranged everything, I won't make the trip myself."

It wasn't that she didn't want to go she was simply terrified.

She had learned of her father and brothers' deaths upon returning home from Meadow Ridge. She had seen her mother weep until she was nearly blind, and had seen the widows and orphans in her family. Since then, Carissa had buried her grief deep within herself and was afraid to confront it.

"What are your plans after we return to the capital? Are you thinking

of pursuing a military position, or..."Rafael asked a

he resumed carving Carissa's elder brother's memorial plaque with a deliberate slowness

He casually continued, "Or perhaps, finding someone else to marry?

"My mother didn't want me to follow a military path, Carissa replied.

Rafael looked up. "Your mother hoped you would marry someone and lead a stable life."

"I've followed my mother's wishes and married before," Carissa answered.

There was a meaningful look in Rafael's eyes, but it was subtle and hidden. "If the marriage wasn't satisfactory, it's null and void. You can find someone better."

Carissa's eyes were slightly reddened as she smiled. "It's a fact that I've been married once. How can it be null and void? As for whether it was good or bad, you only know by living it. Marriage is like a high-stakes gamble. I've just lost once, so I have no intention of gambling again."

Rafael's smile was warm and reassuring. "That's a good mindset. Never settle for just anyone. Following your mother's wishes is one thing, but marrying without thought is another. I haven't planned to marry either."

Carissa refrained from commenting on his personal matters but found his words curious. It seemed he hoped she would continue in a military role. The court lacked young, capable generals, and Salvador was troubled by this shortage.

They had managed to take back control of the Southern Frontier. Even though their issues with Westhaven were complicated and not fully resolved, this victory was a relief and allowed Westhaven to get

some revenge.

Chapter 139

The next day, news that Barrett hedisken the punishment next for Aurora spread throughout the ente camp, Sere word's crys rumors about the two of them had grousted widely, and sexxy everyone at the Southern Frontie

en doe

At first, Aurora tried to ignore the gossip, going out her day as if to silence the criticism with indifference. But as the mormors grew louder and the stares more ourous, she could no longer toeet and used her lingering injuries as an exove to withdraw and fide away/

On the other hand, Barrett bore the brunt of its silently. He heard the whispers, but could offer no response of explanation. He knew the issue involved more then just personal scandal-its connected to the Victory Pass battle, the Westhaven civilians slaughtered by Aurora, and...

These were matters that could not be explained away and any attempt to do so would only worsen the situation.

The soldiers, however, were unaware of these complexities. They simply believed that Aurora had failed to follow orders and left the main force, leading to her capture by the enemy. Moreover, during the siege, she had charged in and disrupted the Mystic Army's formation, nearly causing Carissa to fail in breaching the city.

As a result, the soldiers held Aurora in contempt. They viewed her actions as a grab for credit that backfired. With that assumption in mind, who would feel any sympathy for her?

In contrast, Barrett's act of taking the punishment for his wife earned him the respect of his men. Despite this, neither the Hell Monarch Army nor the Southern Frontier veterans held him regard.

On the battlefield, men fought fiercely and spoke of protecting their country and territory, but everyone prioritized their own families first.

However, after achieving military merits, Barrett had used his achievements to request a marriage edict, abandoning a wife who had dutifully served his parents for a year. Any soldier with a sense of honor would despise him for it.

Moreover, many of the Southern Frontier soldiers had once served under Hector, making them naturally inclined to support Carissa.

It was not until the beginning of May that Rafael formulated a defensive plan for the border. After that, he left several generals to guard Simonton City and began leading the Mystic Army and the Hell Monarch Army back to the capital.

As for the troops originally stationed at Victory Pass who had come to help at the Southern Frontier, they were to return to their original

post.

The memorial plaques had been carved, and Rafael had arranged for them to be escorted back to the capital. Upon arrival in the city, he and Carissa would carry the plaques together.

The capital city was very far from the Southern Frontier, so the journey back would take a long time. As the army traveled, citizens along the way welcomed them warmly.

Reclaiming the Southern Frontier was a long-cherished wish of the Starhaven people, and at last, Rafael had succeeded. He was a hero, as were all the soldiers who fought at the Southern Frontier, except for one-Aurora.

The once-renowned female general had caused the deaths of

hundreds of soldiers through her pursuit of personal glory, leading to her and eighteen others being captured and subjected to torture.

This knowledge was not confined to the military. Many Southern

Frontier civilians knew of it as well. Such information had been spread by spies dispatched by Liam. Of course, once Rafael discovered these spies, he sent them back to Westhaven.

After the Southern Frontier was reclaimed, numerous merchants traveled there and learned of the news. Thus, by the time the army began its return to the capital, the information had already spread throughout Starhaven. It was only a matter of time before it reached the capital.

By mid-June, the grand army finally arrived in the capital.

Salvador led the court officials and awaited them at the city gates, which were packed with citizens. They had arranged for dozens of musicians there, playing various instruments.

Rafael got off his horse, holding Hector's memorial plaque, while Carissa held the plaque for her eldest brother. Timothy and the other generals held the plaques for Carissa's other brothers, and they all stood solemnly.

At that moment, everyone from the court officials to the welcoming crowd was in tears.

Before the army entered the city, Salvador ordered for fireworks to be ignited. The crackling of fireworks filled the air, and the colorful sparks indicated that Starhaven would be free of war from now on. Salvador stepped down from the carriage and raised his hand, prompting the drums to start beating. At the same time, over a dozen musicians began to play their trumpets.

As the trumpets played, the drummers, wielding drumsticks adorned with white silk, struck their drums in rhythm with the majestic beat. The violins played a melodious introduction, followed by the trumpets and drums coming together in harmony.

The sounds surged like a mighty army charging into battle, with the

roar of thousands of troops and the clash of weapons. The stirring notes echoed from the city gates all the way to Royal Street.

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The melody stirred every heart, making blood surge and eyes blaze with heat. As the drums' final, heavy beats signaled the end of the performance, silence fell over the crowd.

Carrying Hector's memorial plaque, Rafael lifted it high as if to let Hector enter the city first. With the plaque raised, he stepped forward into the city, followed by the others. Everyne holding a plaque remained silent and solemn.

Once inside the city, they knelt before Salvador.

"I, Rafael Sanford, together with the late Hector Sinclair and our soldiers, have returned victorious. Thanks to your blessings, Your Majesty, as well as the blessings of Starhaven's ancestors, we have fulfilled our mission and reclaimed the Southern Frontier," Rafael loudly declared.

His voice echoed through the city gates, resonating through the capital.

Like an explosion, the crowd erupted into cheers, filled with both joy and tears.

Salvador felt his eyes burn as he personally stepped forward to help Rafael to his feet. Gazing at Hector's plaque with deep emotion, he choked up several times, struggling to find his voice.

"Rise. By my decree, all the armies involved will be rewarded!"

"On behalf of all the soldiers, I thank you for your great favor, Your Majesty!" Rafael replied.

Salvador approached Carissa, who stood tall and proud. Holding her brother's plaque, she kept her gaze lowered, avoiding direct eye contact with the king.

"General Sinclair!" Salvador called out.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Carissa responded loudly.

The long journey had darkened her once-beautiful face, but she still looked striking, her eyes like two shining black pearls.

As Salvador looked at her, he felt a pang of guilt. He had doubted her when she came to the palace seeking help, suspecting she was motivated by personal concerns. But she had proven herself with her strength, showing everyone that she was Hector's daughter, possessing the resolve and pride of the Duke of Northwatch's family.

"The Sinclair family has done well, and so have you!" Salvador said in front of the court officials and citizens. "Together with the Hell Monarch and the generals holding the plaques, you will ride in my carriage for a procession around the city. All other soldiers will follow and receive the citizens' welcome. You are all heroes who reclaimed the Southern Frontier, and Starhaven will forever remember your deeds." Carissa's eyelashes fluttered with emotion. "Understood. Thank you, Your Majesty!"

"I remember the little girl you once were, and you've now grown into a general. I am deeply relieved; I believe your father's spirit in heaven feels reassured as well," Salvador added, his voice filled with admiration.

Carissa bowed in gratitude at the king's words.

Salvador did not join the procession but instead traveled back to the palace in a separate carriage, escorted by the royal guards. He already had a celebratory feast prepared at the palace, which would commence as soon as everyone returned from the parade.

Barrett and Aurora were also part of the procession, but neither of them was granted a place in the king's carriage, nor were they

allowed to ride horses.

This was not due to Barrett's lack of qualification, but because he had taken Aurora's punishment. For at least half of their journey back to the capital, he had been confined to the back of a horse. Though he could dismount and walk with assistance later on, the journey had left him too battered to endure the jolting of the horse, so he had to be supported as he walked.

Accompanied by his servants, Benjamin spotted Barrett among the crowd.

Seeing his brother injured, he hurried over with concern, asking, "Barrett, you're hurt! Is it serious?"

"It's nothing," Barrett said, his gaze conflicted as he looked at his older brother. "You should go back first."

"Alright. You still need to attend the palace banquet, right? I'll return to inform our parents first."

Benjamin also noticed Aurora. She and Barrett were not in the same procession but had fallen behind the army quite a bit. A look of distaste crossed Benjamin's face as he recalled the recent rumors. If they were true, then the Warren family's reputation had been thoroughly tarnished.

Fortunately, Rebecca was still unaware of these rumors, or she would have been furious.

In contrast, Frederick, the head steward of Northwatch Estate, along with two old maids and a few servants, followed the king's carriage. with great enthusiasm. They chased after it with excitement and tears, thrilled that their mistress had returned in glory.

Carissa had returned triumphantly, bringing with her the memorial plaques of Hector and his sons who had fallen at the Southern

Frontier. Though their plaques were also displayed at Northwatch

Estate, this was different.

Their spirits were certainly lingering on these plaques, and had returned to the capital alongside the victors in triumph!