

War Song 151

Chapter 151

Once Kylie had settled into her seat, Carissa and Lulu approached and knelt respectfully.

"Greetings, Your Majesty."

Kylie's gentle voice drifted down from above, "Lady Sinclair, there is no need for such formality. Please rise."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Carissa and Lulu stood, but remained in their place.

Kylie assessed Carissa. She had seen this woman before, and even then, Carissa's beauty had been striking. Now, having returned from the battlefield, her complexion had changed, but she was still undeniably a breathtaking beauty, capable of withstanding the scrutiny of any observer.

Kylie thought about Salvador's instruction to inquire whether Carissa would be willing to enter the palace. The thought made her stomach churn with unease.

A capable and stunning woman like Carissa might become the king's favored concubine if she entered the palace. Though she would never surpass the queen in rank, winning Salvador's heart could render Kylie's position precarious.

Yet, Kylie had always been known for her grace and virtue. As someone in a higher position, she couldn't afford to display any hint of jealousy.

Thus, she merely offered a few words of praise, acknowledging Carissa's contributions to the Southern Frontier, before adding with a hint of significance, "General Warren failed to recognize your worth, Lady Sinclair. And so, a pearl that should have been precious is now being unfairly devalued due to its past."

The remark was quite straightforward, implying that Carissa had been married before and was therefore not as precious as an

untouched maiden.

Carissa caught the underlying message, but was puzzled as to why Kylie said this to her.

Kylie sipped her tea, her sleeve lightly brushing the edge of the cup. As if making a firm decision, she looked up at Carissa and said, " Fortunately, a pearl is always a pearl. Any dust can be easily brushed away. You shouldn't belittle yourself, Lady Sinclair. There will always be someone who appreciates the brilliance of a pearl."

It was clear to Carissa now-Kylie was suggesting a marriage match.

Though this displeased Carissa, she maintained her composure and smiled slightly.

"Thank you for your kind words, Your Majesty. The past is behind us. I am not one to dwell on bygone matters. One must look forward in life. Your comparison of me to a pearl is indeed flattering.

"I have spent my childhood training in Meadow Ridge, and am used to a wild and free lifestyle. Returning to the capital and being

constrained by the norms of the city has felt quite restrictive. Thankfully, I am now back at my family estate. Also, having severed ties with the Warrens, I find myself much more at ease."

In other words, Carissa wasn't interested in marriage-her independence was too valuable.

Carissa hoped her words would dissuade Kylie from acting as a matchmaker.

Kylie merely smiled, clearly dismissing Carissa's comments as mere polite words meant to preserve her image. Recalling Salvador's instructions, Kylie decided to be straightforward. After all, she had already implied that Carissa was a tarnished pearl. If Carissa were

perceptive, she would understand to decline.

Kylie's face brightened with a warm, affectionate smile. "Lady Sinclair, you are candid and graceful, qualities I deeply admire. If you were to enter the palace and become my sister, I believe His Majesty would be greatly pleased."

Carissa's lips parted slightly as she stared at Kylie in surprise.

What did Kylie mean by saying Salvador would be pleased if she became Kylie's sister in the palace? Wasn't this a veiled suggestion for her to become a concubine?

Carissa had just returned from battle with a military title. It was impossible for the current queen to interfere with matters of the previous court.

Moreover, Kylie likely didn't want her to enter the palace. Otherwise, she wouldn't have used the phrase about a pearl being tarnished to embarrass Carissa.

So, was it indeed Salvador who had prompted this questioning session? Why would Salvador have such intentions?

With a shift in her gaze, Carissa smiled and replied, "Your Majesty, if you like me, I would be honored to consider you as my elder sister. I am currently alone in my family, and have long wished for a sister to care for me."

Kylie's expression brightened immediately. Her previous cloud of concern lifted, and she responded with a radiant smile, "If I had a sister like you, who is both valiant and graceful, I would wake up smiling from such a dream."

Carissa rose, and bowed gracefully with a wide smile. "Thank you, Your Majesty, for not finding me lacking. I shall indeed keep this sisterly bond in my heart. I hope, when the time comes to discuss a marriage match, you might lend a discerning eye as my elder sister,

Your Majesty."

"Of course," Kylie said cheerfully. She called to the attendants in the hall, "Carissa's tea has gone cold. Please bring her a fresh cup."

The second cup of tea was high-quality tea leaves. After Carissa thanked her with a smile and took a sip, she settled back to drink slowly, feeling puzzled.

Salvador had no personal motives regarding her. So, there must be another reason he wanted her to enter the palace.

What could it be...?

Chapter 152

As Carissa left Evergreen Palace, she bumped into Rafael.

He looked as though he was still suffering from a hangover, his complexion pale and unwell. He was still dressed in the battle-worn uniform he had worn upon returning to the capital the previous day, stained with blood and dirt.

The familiar scent of sweat from him lingered in the air as he leaned against the red palace gate. His messy hair had been straightened out, and he now wore a gold crown. It seemed out of place with the battered uniform, making his appearance quite peculiar.

He cast a lazy glance her way, and the sunlight shone on his dark eyes, which did little to liven his demeanor.

Carissa stepped forward, and greeted him respectfully. "Your Highness, did you stay overnight in the palace?"

"Yes, I did." Rafael nodded, giving her a cursory look. "You look quite elegant. You resemble a noble lady from the capital."

Carissa smiled. "I am a noble lady from the capital."

He looked taken aback for a moment, then nodded absently. "Why did the queen summon you to the palace?"

Carissa raised an eyebrow. "How did you know it was the queen. who summoned me?"

How did Rafael know?

Rafael rubbed his temples, appearing somewhat distracted. "Oh, just a wild guess. You met the empress dowager last night. I figured you were summoned to pay your respects to the queen." "You guessed correctly. It seems you know some of the inside details." Carissa pondered briefly before meeting his gaze directly.

Has the king mentioned to you that he wishes to take me as a concubine?"

it was more straightforward to ask Rafael directly than to beat around the bush.

Rafael's eyes widened, and he met her gaze. "Did you agree?"

Carissa was both amused and exasperated. "How could I agree? I have always regarded the king as an older brother. How could I possibly become his concubine?"

Rafael's eyes brightened slightly, but before he could respond, she continued, "When I was younger, you and the king frequently visited my home to see my brothers. Naturally, I viewed you both as brothers. Though our statuses have changed, the affection I felt for you two as siblings has never waned in my heart."

Rafael looked momentarily stunned. "Older brothers?"

Hoping that Rafael would relay her sentiments to the king, Carissa nodded. "Yes, I've always regarded both the king and you as older brothers." let go of the

Rafael scrutinized her beautiful face, unwilling matter. "Do you consider the king your brother, or do you see me as a brother as well?"

"Both of you, of course," Carissa replied.

She felt she had made her feelings clear to both Kylie and Rafael, so surely Salvador would understand her intentions.

Then, she said, "I won't trouble you any further. I shall take my leave."

Rafael watched her depart with a complicated expression.

An older brother?

To hell with it-who would want to be her brother?

Rafael already had a sister. There were also many princesses from other royal concubines the previous king had. Though Rafael wasn't close with them, they were still considered his sisters.

He thought about Carissa's words, and turned back toward the palace. Perhaps she was hoping to use his presence to convey her rejection to Salvador directly.

After Salvador finished discussing state affairs, Rafael snuck back into the study.

Seeing Rafael still dressed in the same attire from the previous day, Salvador's patience wore thin. The stench from Rafael's clothes. overpowered the scent of the scented candles in the hall. "Don't you have a change of clothes in your mother's palace? If not, go back to your estate immediately."

Rafael slouched lazily into a seat. "I was just about to leave the palace when I saw Carissa. She said the queen summoned her. Shouldn't you want to hear what she had to say, my dear brother?" Salvador was intrigued by Rafael's smug expression, and asked with interest, "And what did she say?"

Rafael grinned brightly. "She said that she considers both you and me as older brothers, and that it would be inappropriate for a sister to marry her brothers."

Salvador burst into laughter. "So, you and I are both her brothers?"

If so, what was there for Rafael to be so smug about?

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Rafael's smile faltered momentarily.

Yes, Carissa viewed him and Salvador as brothers. But as long as she stayed out of the palace, Rafael could take

his time to develop a relationship with her. He saluted respectfully, and took his leave.

Salvador cast a final glance at Rafael's retreating figure. After a moment, he called out, "Derek!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Derek hurried in through the doors, bowing deeply.

Salvador instructed, "Deliver my edict. If Carissa does not find a suitable match within three months, she will enter the palace as a concubine."

Derek lowered his gaze and replied, "Yes, Your Majesty."

"Also, inform Rafael of my edict, but do not add any extra commentary," Salvador added.

Derek responded, "Understood, Your Majesty. I will attend to it immediately."

"Go on then," Salvador calmly said as he lowered his gaze.

No sooner had Derek left than a report came that Kylie had arrived.

Having a good idea of why she was here, Salvador said, "Let her in."

Kylie entered with her attendant, Lydia, who carried a tray with a bowl of soup on it.

After a respectful bow, Kylie said gently, "I heard you had a bit too much to drink yesterday, so I personally made some soup for you today."

Salvador nodded slightly. "Thank you, Kylie. Please serve it."

Kylie carefully placed the tray on the table, and lifted the lid of the bowl. A fragrant steam wafted out. She ladled the soup into a small glass bowl. "Your Majesty, please enjoy the soup."

Salvador looked at the glass bowl, which was only slightly larger than a cup. Kylie had always favored these delicate items. He picked up the bowl without a spoon, and drank it all in one go.

Setting the bowl down, he asked, "What did Carissa say?"

Kylie signaled to Lydia to remove the bowl and tray, then seated herself beside Salvador. In a gentle tone, she replied, "I spoke with her, and she was quite surprised. She politely declined, but expressed that she would be willing to accept me as a godsister."

Salvador nodded slightly. "I see. Thank you for letting me know."

Kylie observed Salvador carefully. Though he showed no sign of displeasure, his gaze held a peculiar intensity, revealing that he was indeed concerned.

After a pause, she ventured, "I believe Carissa's suggestion is quite good. Since I have no younger sister from my own family, perhaps we could have my father adopt Carissa as his goddaughter..."

Salvador looked up, his eyes as clear and piercing as ever. "What's this? Just because you have no younger sister in your family, you want to adopt one? There are many women in the world. Why not choose someone else?"

Hearing this, Kylie realized he had not given up on the idea of taking Carissa as a concubine, and smiled gently. "I proposed this because I have a genuine affection for her. If you disapprove, then please disregard my suggestion, Your Majesty."

Salvador did not respond. He merely lowered his head, and continued reading through the documents.

After waiting for a while and hearing no further comments from him, Kylie stood up. "I shall not delay your work any longer, Your Majesty. I will take my leave."

"Very well, you may go," Salvador replied, not even lifting his head.

Kylie bowed and exited, her eyes betraying her disappointment.

Salvador's demeanor towards her was always so detached. In public, they maintained an air of mutual respect, but in private, he seemed to show no interest in her. He was often impatient, and unwilling even to look at her when they spoke.

In the matters of the harem, she held the reins, and Salvador did not intervene. Even if disputes arose among the concubines, whether they were excessive or malicious, he would not get involved.

Since marrying him, the only real task he had given her was to ask Carissa if she was willing to join the palace. It was clear Carissa held a special place in his heart. He genuinely cared for her.

Despite the many beautiful women in his harem, his heart remained unmoved. Yet he placed such importance on a woman who had left her previous marriage, valuing her to the point where even she, as queen, was rebuffed when suggesting Carissa as an adopted sister.

Kylie's mood soured further. Her own chances of conceiving were slim, and while she had a legitimate son, Salvador's concubines also had children.

With her family backing her, her position remained unshakable, but how much did it matter if Salvador did not favor her? Would he see her in a new light if she fulfilled his wish and brought Carissa into the palace?

But if Carissa joined the harem and became his favored concubine, Kylie would be left in a most awkward position.

The thought of this only deepened her frustration.

Chapter 154

Just as Carissa reached Northwatch Estate, Derek came personally to deliver Salvador's edict.

Carissa was stunned. If she couldn't find a suitable husband in three months, she would have to enter the palace?

She quickly asked Derek to stay, and dismissed everyone else. "Mr. Walker, can you tell me what exactly His Majesty means?"

If Salvador was determined to have her enter the palace, there was no need to give her three months to find a suit. With the edict out, no one would dare to marry her. It seemed like another form of coercion, leaving her with no option but to enter the palace.

However, if he had used his authority and still granted these three months...

There was something odd about this edict.

Derek pondered momentarily, and said, "Perhaps His Majesty thinks that if someone dares to propose to you within these three months and challenge his will, he would believe that person truly cares for you." "But why is the king so concerned with my marriage?"

"Didn't you say it yourself? Since you consider His Majesty as an older brother, it's only natural for him to plan a marriage for his sister," Derek replied.

Carissa was frustrated by these twisted explanations.

"In that case, why marry me directly if he fails to find a suitable match for me?"

Derek sighed. There were things he didn't know how to explain and couldn't express. Salvador's mind was as inscrutable as ever.

Seeing Derek's sigh, Carissa felt that the matter was not so simple. And she couldn't grasp any clear answers. Her relationship with Salvador had been unclear from her youth.

After she returned from Meadow Ridge, she discovered her father and brothers had died in battle. When she followed her mother into the palace, Salvador had always been kind to her, maintaining the same attitude as in her youth.

Why was he now insisting on marrying her after her return from the battlefield? And why choose her, a divorced woman, instead of selecting a new concubine through the court's usual methods?

Moreover, if Salvador had any genuine interest in her, he could have had her enter the palace back when her mother was arranging a marriage for her.

Why did he only issue this edict after her divorce and a stint on the battlefield?

The edict itself was peculiar. Instead of directly summoning her to the palace, he had first sent the queen to test the waters and then given her three months to find a suitor.

Salvador seemed to be pressuring her into marriage, as though her remaining single was somehow inconvenient for him.

After Derek left, Violet and the others finally woke up. After washing their faces, they devoured the meal set before them as if they hadn't eaten in days.

Bun slumped into a chair, his hair in disarray, clearly having made no effort to tidy up. Rubbing his stomach, he said in a tired voice, "I slept for a long time and dreamed for a long time too. In my dreams, I was either fighting on the battlefield or returning triumphantly to the capital. In short, it was exhausting."

Violet added with a gloomy expression, "I felt the same way. In my

dreams, there was nothing but bloodshed and the clash of blades. While I was on the battlefield, killing was like harvesting chives there wasn't any real emotional impact. But now, reflecting on the number of people I've killed, I feel so distressed. Being a warrior is no easy task. I don't think I'll go back to the battlefield again."

Travis and Cynthia nodded in agreement, clearly sharing the same

sentiment.

Carissa suggested, "Think of it this way: if yo hadn't killed them, they would have killed our soldiers, Is it better for them to die or for our soldiers to die? And besides, they invaded the Southern Frontier and have killed many of our soldiers. They oppressed the Southern Frontier's people for years. To show them mercy would be like turning the knife on our own people,"

Violet nodded, "That's true."

Though they understood the reasoning, they were still young and had only recently begun to fully grasp the brutality of battlefield slaughter. The horror was starting to dawn on them. "Cari, we need to return to Meadow Ridge," Cynthia said.

Despite their significant achievements, the depth of their

involvement in the slaughter weighed heavily on them. To resolve their inner conflict and uncertainty, they needed to return and explain everything to their masters.

Chapter 155

Carissa didn't mention Salvador's strange edict to her friends. Instead, she simply thanked them for their help in the Southern Frontier.

"The Sandorian soldiers killed my father and brothers. My trip to the Southern Frontier was primarily for revenge. You've helped me achieve that, and I will remember this kindness." Hearing this, everyone felt a lot better.

Indeed, Carissa's father and brothers had been killed by the Sandorian soldiers. According to the martial world's code, a life for a life was a matter of principle. They had merely assisted Carissa in avenging her family, and need not dwell on anything beyond that.

Putting aside her own troubles, Carissa said, "Now that everyone's well-rested and well-fed, how about we go out and shop? Also, please help me bring some items back to my master."

"That sounds good," Violet replied. "But we don't have any money. The king hasn't given us our reward yet."

Travis looked at Carissa blankly. "Do you think the king might have forgotten?"

Carissa smiled. "He certainly hasn't forgotten. The king promised to reward the army personally. Since we've achieved military merits, the rewards will definitely be generous."

"I hope we get a hundred gold coins! That would cover our annual rent for ten years," Travis said with a grin.

In the Lunar Guild, Travis was the only male member. Though the guild was based in Meadow Ridge, the land was owned by the Pathfinders Guild. Every year, the Lunar Guild had to pay rent to them. However, the Lunar Guild had little business, and Travis's

master was quite traditional, so the apprentices focused solely on martial arts and weren't allowed to engage in trade.

And I want to buy some makeup for the girls in the guild. They always dress so plainly, and their clothes are patched up repeatedly. If I bring back some fine silk, my master surely won't scold me for going to the battlefield... Oh, and need to buy some hairpins and accessories..."

Violet interrupted, "Your master won't blame you for going to the battlefield, but if you dare to bring those things back, a good thrashing would be the least of your worries. He might just chop off all ten of your fingers."

Everyone laughed. It was indeed a real possibility.

Before they could leave, Dylan arrived and informed them that it was time to collect their rewards.

Violet and the others indeed received a hundred gold coins each. Carissa, having achieved merit by breaking through the city wall, was awarded one thousand gold coins and promoted to the rank of fourth-ranked general. Though she held the rank, no official position was assigned to her.

Travis was overjoyed with his gold coins. He clutched the gold to his chest, and nibbled at it piece by piece. Seeing this, Violet gave him her own gold coins as well.

"You can have it all. I don't need it."

Travis's eyes widened in disbelief. "But it's gold! Why don't you want it?"

"I obviously don't need it. I'm not interested in it," Violet replied nonchalantly. She had never lacked money in her life-what she lacked was affection.

Travis grabbed the bag. "Is there really someone who doesn't value

gold? Wat how thy does your family have?"

ngat much but enough to support the Inferno Guild," Violet said Indifferently

Travis's eyes widened even more "Dood heavens! Your family supports the interno Guld? No wonder you seem to live so comfortably. Despite not engaging in any business or escort missions, you always have a bountiful supply of meat and vegetables. So it's all funded by your family?"

During their time in Meadow Ridge although they had spent a lot of time together, they had little knowledge of each other's

backgrounds. They usually discussed martial arts or amusing stories from their respective guilds.

"Aren't we supposed to be out shopping? Let's go," Violet said. She clearly didn't want to delve into family matters.

The group set off happily. They first exchanged some gold for silver and copper coins at the money exchange. Then they went to the most bustling street, exploring various shops. They bought anything suitable without hesitation.

Barrett also received a hundred gold coins. As the general who led the reinforcements to the Southern Frontier, he deserved the reward for his hardships, even if he didn't directly contribute to the achievements.

He had eliminated many enemies on the battlefield and had played a crucial role in assisting Carissa with the siege, making his

contributions significant.

However, he had failed to properly manage his troops in Aurora's unit, which nearly caused the siege to fail. Aurora's unit was also annihilated, with over a dozen of their men captured.

That was a lapse in his command, and he had faced punishment in

place of Aurora. Thus, he didn't receive any promotion and only

received the gold coins.

Chapter 156

Rebecca was furious, and her face twisted into an ugly expression.

Though a hundred gold coins were a substantial amount, their journey to the battlefield wasn't driven by the prospect of rewards.

Knowing that Barrett had been on the verge of promotion but was demoted due to taking the fall for Aurora, Rebecca was particularly upset. Adding to her frustration was the fact that Aurora's failed command during the siege had resulted in both reward and punishment, leaving Barrett with only a hundred gold coins.

The news nearly gave her a stroke.

Her health, already fragile, deteriorated further from repeated bouts of anger, leading her to faint during the night.

She had to call for a doctor, who administered acupuncture to revive her. But now, with the need to buy medicine again, she had already exhausted her funds. The money for the tea party had been borrowed, and with only a hundred gold coins received, there was barely enough to cover debts, let alone purchase much-needed medicine.

Barrett and Aurora risked their lives on the battlefield, but they ended up in this state.

Rebecca's feelings towards Aurora had transformed from initial admiration to intense disgust. Seeing that Aurora wasn't even at her bedside when she regained consciousness only fueled her anger. "What kind of disaster have you brought into our family? Not only did your spouse fail to gain military merit, but she also didn't carry out the most basic familial duties!" she roared.

"Mom, the physician said you mustn't get worked up," Barrett said, standing by her bedside with his head lowered in concern.

Serena, who had stayed up by their mother's side, asked anxiously, "Barrett, is it true that Aurora was defiled?"

She had heard numerous rumors recently, and the other noble girls she mingled with spoke disparagingly of her sister-in-law.

Serena was furious. Just as she was on the brink of an engagement, a scandal involving Aurora broke out.

It was embarrassing!

Barrett frowned. "She is your sister-in-law. You shouldn't talk about her so disrespectfully."

"I refuse to acknowledge such a dirty person as my sister-in-law!" Serena pouted and, seeing Rebecca had regained consciousness, plopped down at the edge of the bed.

"Mom, now that Barrett has received his reward, it's time to buy me some summer clothes. It's already June, and I still haven't had my summer garments made. I'm still wearing those that Carissa made for me last year. People are making fun of me!" she whined.

"Buying clothes and spending money-that's all you think about!" Benjamin snapped. "Now that Amelia is in charge of the household, we're already struggling financially. The reward Barrett received needs to go towards Mom's medicine and household expenses."

Serena was the youngest child, and she had always been pampered and spoiled. Her parents and brothers doted on her, and even her elder brother had never scolded her.

Hearing Benjamin criticize her for wanting new clothes was deeply upsetting. She began to cry, feeling unjustly treated.

"It was Barrett's foolish decision to marry this woman! Carissa was so much better! When she was in the house, she managed everything perfectly. The clothes and jewelry I wore were always the

latest styles in the capital. How long has it been since I've had any new jewelry? Last year, I didn't even get new clothes! I had to wear old ones for the New Year. Has our family really fallen to such desperate straits?" she bawled.

She wiped her tears, unable to control her emotions due to how upset she was.

"When Barrett married Aurora, how much dowry did she bring with her? She didn't have a single coin! Her dowry was so meager, even commoners would disdain it. Yet, with the king's edict, she demanded everything and didn't even look at herself in the mirror- she's so ugly! I don't know what Barrett saw in her that he sent Carissa away for her!"

By now, Amelia could no longer hold back her frustration.

"Your attitude towards Aurora wasn't like this before. You were so eager to have her enter the family, and even spoke harshly to Carissa! Have you forgotten what you said, or is it that you can't forget the clothes and jewelry Carissa provided you with?" she snapped.

Feeling guilty, Serena's face flushed with anger.

Despite that, she jumped and shouted, "But wasn't it Aurora who deceived us? I relied on her to help Barrett achieve merit, but she didn't help at all! Instead, she caused trouble for him and was captured. She even got defiled-"

Before Serena could finish her sentence, someone stormed into the room. She grabbed Serena's collar and slapped her face twice, leaving her ears ringing.

For a long time, Serena stared in shock at Aurora, who stood before her with a fierce glare.

Aurora's face was dark with fury.

"If you dare speak such nonsense again, I'll tear your mouth apart!" she threatened.

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Serena was terrified by Aurora's fierce gaze. She stumbled

backward and fell onto the edge of the bed, tears streaming down her face.

"Mom, she hit me!" she cried.

Seeing her beloved daughter being struck, Rebecca could barely contain her anger. "Barrett, you need to keep your wife in check!"

Barrett stood before Aurora, his face drawn with fatigue and inner turmoil. "How could you hit her? She spoke out of turn, but you could have reprimanded her instead."

Aurora's expression was a mix of disappointment and bitterness. "So what if I hit her? She's been spreading lies about me! Why aren't you criticizing her?"

"I wasn't the one who said those things! It's what everyone else is saying! If you have the guts, go deal with them!" Serena sobbed, her eyes burning with resentment. "You're too scared to confront outsiders, so you're just taking your frustration out on me! Do you think you're so great for doing that?"

Aurora's voice was sharp and unyielding.

"What others say is their business, not mine. But what about you? I'm your sister-in-law! In this house, with your father remaining uninvolved, your eldest brother idle, and our sister-in-law weak, the entire household is in disarray! Your mother is constantly ill, and can't even afford medicine! And here you are, shouting about

wanting new jewelry and clothes and blaming me! With my military achievements and official position, do you think it's your place to criticize me?"

Aurora's words offended everyone present.

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sealy Tained trou e shock She could only point her

at area,

able to utter a single word her face was a stark

and enraged red

Without hesitation, Barrett slapped Aurora across the face and roared, "Shut up!

Aurora held her face in disbelief, staring at Batt. "You hit me!"

Barrett looked at his own hand, then at the room full of his family members. The weight of the recent criticisms and insults fueled his fury Without hesitation, he struck Aurora again, this time on the other side of her face

"Get out!" he snarled.

Aurora was completely enraged. Grabbing a nearby four-legged stool, she hurled it at Barrett's head. "I'll fight you!"

Seeing the stool coming, Barrett instinctively ducked aside. Unfortunately, the stool crashed right on Jonathan's head instead.

"Dad!"

Both Benjamin and Amelia cried out in alarm as Jonathan's head was splattered with blood. He collapsed to the ground with a resounding thud.

Everyone was stunned, but they quickly snapped out of their shock and rushed to help him.

Benjamin pressed Jonathan's head to staunch the bleeding, and

shouted, "Get the medicine to stop the bleeding! Call a physician!"

Servants hurried to fetch the medicine, while someone ran out to summon a physician.

Like a furious lion, Barrett glared at Aurora and roared, "Get out! Get out of here right now!"

Aurora was stunned by her own actions, and she stood there

helplessly. In her furious haste, she hadn't meant to injure her father-in-law. Seeing Barrett's murderous glare, she was both terrified and upset, and fled the scene in panic.

Rebecca clutched her chest, her face pale. "Go, get your second aunt and tell her to find Carissa!"

Previously, Rebecca had harbored some reservations about bringing Carissa back, mindful of her pride. But now, she was desperate for Carissa's return and was willing to pay any price.

Amidst the chaos, the physician arrived with his medical kit. While the bleeding had been controlled, the wound was significant and Jonathan had lost a lot of blood. Despite several attempts to treat him, he remained unconscious.

The physician informed Barrett that the situation was severe, and that the blow had possibly affected Jonathan's brain. The physician suggested that only Sebastian could ensure a complete recovery. The Warrens turned pale at the mention of Sebastian.

How could they possibly summon Sebastian now?

Previously, it had taken Amelia kneeling at the entrance of the physician's office to soften his heart and persuade him to sell them the medicine for Rebecca's condition.

However, Sebastian had declared he would not make any more house calls!

Chapter 158

"How absurd!"

Charlotte slammed her fist on the table. Her face, illuminated by the dim light of the courtyard, reflected her fury.

Benjamin and Amelia, chastised by her outburst, lowered their heads. and remained silent, too afraid to speak.

"How dare you ask me to go to Northwatch Estate?! How can I show my face there? Am I to tell them that Barrett regrets his decision because he married a venomous woman who beat her father-in-law? "A household in disarray, and now, she's expected to come back and clean up the mess, use her dowry to pay for her mother-in-law's medical expenses, and provide seasonal clothes for her younger sister- in-law?"

"Shame on you for even suggesting it! When you wanted Barrett to divorce her, did you show any compassion? You even tried to claim her dowry! If it weren't for the king granting the divorce edict, wouldn't you have also claimed her estate and shops?"

"If you have the nerve, go ahead and ask her! I won't! Even if my face were as thick as a city wall, it wouldn't be used as a stepping stone for you!"

"Since you're so shameless, why don't you go and seek Lady Avis? She was the one who mediated their marriage! You didn't dare to ask her for help when seeking a divorce. Now that you want reconciliation, shouldn't you be asking her? Or are you afraid that Lady Avis will throw you out?

"Or do you think you can bully Lady Avis because she's ill and cannot take charge? You dare to trample on her? Don't complain that my words are harsh! The disgraceful actions you've committed have tarnished the reputation of the Warren family! The first branch of the

Family has squandered all the merit accumulated by our ancestors!"

After delivering this tirade, Charlotte summoned servants to drive Benjamin and Amelia out, unwilling to hear any more excuses from them. She was determined not to catch a heart disease from their bickering. The Warren family's assets had been squandered over the years, to the point even she couldn't afford Snowdrop Pills.

Benjamin and Amelia left Charlotte's presence feeling utterly defeated. They exchanged glances with pale faces.

Amelia hesitated for a long moment before suggesting, "Honey, it seems Mother is being unreasonable. Carissa certainly won't want to come back. Why should we mediate for Barrett's side of the family?" Benjamin scolded her sharply, "How can you say such divisive things? In the Warren family, we rise and fall together. When Barrett achieved merit, we too gained some respect. Whether Carissa returns or not is another matter, but as a family, we must speak with one voice."

Amelia was inherently timid, so she fell silent under her husband's reprimand, not daring to argue further.

In truth, she harbored deep resentment towards Barrett's side of the family. She thought that with Barrett becoming a general, the family would achieve great prestige. However, despite his military achievements marking a promising beginning, he chose to marry Aurora and cast aside Carissa.

Since then, the family's fortunes had declined. Rebecca couldn't even afford medicine, and although Amelia had knelt at the

physician's office to gain a reputation for being a dutiful daughter-in-law, she had been subjected to harsh criticism and felt deeply distressed.

And when Aurora had caused such a commotion, she had called

Amelia incompetent and weak.

it Aurora could do it, why didn't she

Well, Aurora did act. However, she only managed to nearly kill her father in law with her actions!

Strangely, no one thought to investigate this matter further. The sole focus was on bringing Carissa back, as if her return would solve all the problems the Warren family was facing.

Amelia knew she shouldn't think this way, but she couldn't help but agree with Charlotte's words. The Warrens seemed to take Carissa for granted, as if she could be summoned or dismissed at will and was treated like a mere object.

Benjamin went back to consult with his mother.

Rebecca sighed. "Your aunt has always been unreliable, and she isn't to be counted on. But right now, she's the only one who can speak on our behalf with Carissa."

She pondered for a moment.

"It seems Lady Avis is no longer a viable option. I've heard Prince Harvey and his wife have been placed under house arrest, though I'm not sure what offense they committed against the king.

"Carissa's recent success has brought her into the limelight. Since Lady Heather is Melanie's sister and Melanie had always been kind to her, perhaps we should test her willingness to help. If she agrees to speak on our behalf, we'd have a good chance."

"Agreed. We'll go and ask Lady Heather," Benjamin said.

Just then, Barrett entered the room. His expression was stern as he said, "None of you are to approach Carissa!"

Chapter 159

No matter how much the others protested, Barrett remained resolute, his face expressionless.

"No one from our family is allowed to approach Carissa,"

Seeing his stubbornness, Rebecca sighed. "It's not that I want to seek her out, but our family needs a way out. Look at Aurora's behavior! Forget how she has disgraced our family and drawn unwanted attention to us-she's cruel and malicious, and she even harmed your father!

"If your father had been slightly weaker, he might have died at her hands! And where is she now? After injuring someone, she retreated to her maternal home. Fine! Let her hide there! It would be best if she never returned!"

"It would be good if you could unilaterally divorce her, but it was your who sought the king's permission to marry her."

Rebecca suddenly paused, looking sharply at Barrett. "If she has attacked your father and disrespected your mother, could we report this to the king and request a divorce?"

Barrett's frustration was palpable. "Stop making a scene! I'd rather the king forget about me for a few years and remember me only later. At this critical juncture, seeking a divorce would only end my career." Rebecca was stunned. "A few years? If the king neglects you for that long, what future do you have? Military careers depend on youth! How could things be so dire? This is just a matter of not managing Aurora properly. You've received your due rewards, and were able to attend the celebration in the palace. That indicates the king still wants to use you."

Barrett sat in silence, exhausted, not wanting to speak. Since

returning from the battlefield, he hadn't had a single peaceful night's sleep or a decent meal. He couldn't tell his family that during the Victory Pass battle, Aurora had slaughtered villagers and humiliated Westhaven's crown prince in every possible way.

These were secrets he kept buried deep, never to be revealed.

Seeing her son in such a state, Rebecca felt a mix of panic and anger. It was all Aurora's fault. She had brought disgrace on their wedding day, and now, tarnished their achievements on the

Southern Frontier.

Rebecca sighed deeply. "How could you have chosen her? She's nowhere near Carissa's level."

Barrett pursed his lips, and remained silent. He was filled with regret -he wished he could undo his choices.

Two military achievements should have been enough to promote him and secure his position as a rising military star.

The first time, he had used it to marry Aurora.

The second time he tried to achieve something, Aurora's actions had dragged him down.

Perhaps he would never see another opportunity like this again in his life. Even if another war came, it wouldn't be about reclaiming territory; it would likely involve suppressing bandits. How many such campaigns would it take before he had another chance at promotion?

His life seemed doomed by a fleeting moment of infatuation.

Now, all he wished for was for his family to remain free of trouble, to fade from everyone's view over the next few years so people would eventually forget everything.

That was why Barrett repeatedly instructed everyone not to seek out Carissa. His ties with her were severed; it was best for both of them. to remain apart. Rebecca was deeply disheartened, feeling it was unfair that her outstanding son was paired with someone like Aurora. »

Carissa and the others had spent the whole day out, returning to Northwatch Estate with numerous bags and packages.

Travis, ignoring advice, insisted on buying some cosmetics. Violet then set up a bet on whether he would face thirty lashes or be put in confinement for a month. Everyone predicted he would face the lashes, but Carissa placed ten silver coins on confinement.

After all, he was a war hero. His master would surely give the court some consideration. It wouldn't be appropriate to simply beat Travis up on a whim. The next day, after a brief visit to the military camp and saying their farewells, they departed.

The deputy minister of the Ministry of Defense felt it was a pity. Such young and valiant generals would have been a tremendous asset to the court.

What a shame!

Once they left, Carissa put away her bright smile and summoned Frederick and two senior maids to the study for a discussion.

It was related to the king's edict. Within three months, she needed to find a suitable marriage match, or she would be summoned to the palace.

Chapter 160

Frederick, having managed the outer household for many years and being well-acquainted with the intricacies of court life, quickly

assessed the situation.

"My lady, one thing is certain: the king likely does

actually want

you to enter the palace. Otherwise, he could have simply issued an edict making you a concubine. You wouldn't have had any choice but to comply."

"I know that," Carissa replied, a hint of frustration lacing her voice." But he's given me three months to find a suitor, almost as if he's pressuring me into marriage. What does my single status have to do with him? I've reviewed the royal edict concerning my father's

posthumous title multiple times. While other details are

insignificant, what stands out is that if I marry, my husband could inherit a title. Does he want someone to inherit my father's title through marriage?"

Frederick considered this, and said, "I recall the edict mentioning the possibility of selecting suitable relatives from collateral branches to be trained, with the potential for them to inherit titles in the future. "Could it be that the king does not wish for members of the Sinclair family to inherit the title? Does he have a specific candidate in mind? If he expects you to marry within three months, could it be that he has already chosen a suitor for you?"

Carissa pondered this, her fingers absently turning the string of rosary beads her mother had left her, trying to calm her thoughts.

"If your speculation is correct, then the king must have a designated candidate for the title," Carissa muttered.

Her brows furrowed in displeasure, feeling the situation was increasingly frustrating. It felt like being thrust into another arranged

marriage with a stranger and managing the affairs of a large family.

"If there is already a pre-designated candidate to inherit the title, does the person have to marry into the family? And the children. should take the Sinclair family name, right? Men can be unreliable, and if he gains a title and takes concubines, there's a risk that he might favor those children over the legitimate ones, which could be a tremendous loss for us," Lily asked.

A man who would take on his wife's family name?

If it were a matter of bringing a single individual into the family, that would be manageable. After all, a man who married into his wife's family wouldn't come with a whole household.

As for the issue of concubines, the reason Melanie had chosen Barrett in the past was precisely because he had promised not to take any concubines.

However, in the capital, among the prominent families, which man didn't take concubines? Even ordinary people, who lacked the means to afford concubines, might seek companionship in brothels.

Carissa had no expectations for marriage and little resistance to it. It was her mother's dying wish for her to marry, have children, and live a stable life.

So, when Rafael asked about her plans, she mentioned that her mother didn't want her to follow a military path.

Whether this was a true reflection of Carissa's feelings or not, it didn't really matter. She once had ambitions, fiery dreams, and pursuits-but now, she had none. Life felt as stagnant as still water, and it didn't bother her.

Although she had achieved fame for her role in recapturing the Southern Frontier, that joy was no longer something she could share. with her family.

Had Salvador not issued this edict, she would have selected someone from her clan, trained them properly, and ensured the continuation of the Duke of Northwatch's line. Instead, complications had arisen.

Carissa didn't want to have children, because she couldn't ensure the safety of her loved ones. The pain of losing them was something she had endured too many times. She was unwilling to experience it again.

But with Salvador demanding she find a suitor, someone else would inherit her father's title if she didn't bear children. This dukedom, which now seemed to be a burden to her, was a mark of the court's recognition of her father's sacrifices. It was a title he had gained in exchange for his life.

Carissa decided not to dwell on it further. "Let's not overthink this. Since the edict has been issued, the person will eventually reveal themselves. We'll decide what to do when the time comes." Everyone was deeply concerned. If Carissa were to marry, it would naturally require careful consideration.

Anyone willing to marry into the Sinclair family and take on the family name might not be an ideal candidate.

Carissa had returned after achieving great merit. How could Salvador treat her so unfairly?

Everyone felt sympathetic towards her, but found themselves powerless to help.

Carissa couldn't understand why Salvador had issued such an edict.

