

War Song 1511

Chapter 1511

Carissa noticed that the nobles and officials of Orivenia seemed unaware of Nerathia's intention to intervene in the negotiations.

Their faces betrayed confusion, but after a moment, they revealed expressions of joy and confidence. It seemed they also believed that Nerathia's involvement would provide Orivenia with solid backing.

Seeing this, Carissa felt a slight sense of reassurance. If that were really the case, Lisandra would have informed them beforehand. Or at least, she would have let the negotiating officials know.

But why hadn't she?

It seemed there was only one explanation. Lisandra was also hoping for mutual concessions. Few at court supported her, so she had brought in Faelan from Nerathia—someone whom everyone would trust.

This made sense of the conversation from the previous night, when Lisandra had invited Carissa and Violet to the palace. The remarks about unmet wishes were clear now. The example of the women taking part in the civil service examinations was just that, an example.

What Lisandra had truly wanted to say was that many decisions were difficult to implement.

After thinking this through, Carissa felt more optimistic.

Following the palace banquet, the Nerathia delegation took their leave. Aside from their meal, they hadn't voiced many opinions, engaging in only light conversation. As they departed, the Starhaven envoys also rose to bid their farewells. Everyone had to prepare, for as per Liam's schedule, the negotiations would begin the day after tomorrow.

Back at their residence in the palace, Davis gathered everyone for a discussion. It was essentially the same discussion as before. If they were to make further concessions, they would need to review the map closely.

However, Salvador had already set a limit on how far they could yield. Any further compromise would make it difficult for them to explain upon their return, and it would stain their legacy.

So, no one spoke first. They simply stared at the map, each of them silently weighing the situation in their minds.

The Nerathia delegation had taken up residence at an inn in the capital, as per their request. Liam had secured the entire building for them, and at any time, they could simply give a command for food or late-night snacks to be provided.

Now, spread out on the table before them was a map, one that differed from the maps of the two other kingdoms. This one had been drawn by their own hands, and was far more accurate than either of the others.

Faelan pointed to a mountain range, tapping it lightly with his finger. "This mountain range here divides the two kingdoms' border cities. It's the very area of

their dispute. Orivenia claims it as theirs, as does Starhaven.

"I've reviewed the old maps of Starhaven, and this territory was indeed part of their land, though Orivenia took over it later and has governed it for many years. Now, Starhaven wants to reclaim it through negotiation, but Orivenia will never agree to that. Yet, for Starhaven to simply give up... that won't happen either."

"Does that mean it's impossible to resolve?" Elysia asked.

Faelan chuckled. "Not necessarily. The fact that both sides are willing to sit down and talk means they're open to concessions. I suspect they're considering dividing the

mountain range, but the key will

where they draw the new boundary line And beyond the border dispute, there are many shared interests between the two kingdoms. If they open up border trade, it would benefit both parties."

Elysia nodded thoughtfully. "I see. So, as you said before, when negotiating, it's not enough to focus on one issue. One must consider the bigger picture and the broader benefits."

Faelan gently tapped the map again, letting out a soft sigh. "Sandoria, Orivenia, and Starhaven have fought for decades. Continuing the conflict will only lead to more suffering for the people. The situation is unstable, and for us in Nerathia, who are striving to develop border trade, it's becoming increasingly difficult. It's time to end the bloodshed."

They were here to mediate, but they had their own interests to protect as well. Nerathia was a powerful kingdom and strategically positioned, but to ensure its merchants could travel and trade safely between kingdoms, securing peace was essential.

The negotiations would take place in Griffin Hall, the main hall of the Orivenian palace. A long table had been set, with chairs arranged on either side. Once the negotiators from both kingdoms took their seats, Faelan entered and settled into his place in the center.

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The position Faelan took at the table represented Nerathia's stance in the negotiations.

They were neutral!

Carissa couldn't help but marvel once more at the power of a strong kingdom.

The initial stages of the talks were tedious, with the same points being repeated over and over. The translators were busy, their voices echoing with historical debates. This was inevitable, as conceding too early would only lead to further compromises.

As such, the first round of negotiations yielded no agreement. It was simply a test of boundaries.

The second round began the following day. Again, they emphasized the same points.

But after the second repetition, Faelan spoke up, saying, "There is no point in prolonging this. The dispute over the border has lasted for decades. It will not be resolved in a day. Let us set the border issue aside for now. What I wish to know is whether both sides are committed to establishing peace and mutual non-aggression between your kingdoms."

The answer was unanimous. Both parties expressed their desire for a peaceful resolution and hoped to avoid further conflict.

Faelan then presented a stack of papers. On them were detailed lists of goods from both kingdoms—grain, livestock, silk, textiles, handcrafted items, tea, furs, porcelain, paper, and herbs and spices unique to their lands, as well as larger commodities such as rock salt, iron ore, and emerald.

Both sides picked up the lists, their initial tense expressions gradually easing.

When there were significant mutual benefits, some issues could be negotiated, and those that couldn't could always be set aside for now.

With years of war having drained their treasuries, both kingdoms needed to recover. Based on Nerathia's own experience, they knew that focusing solely on agriculture while neglecting commerce was outdated. A balance of both was the true path to prosperity. After all, taxes on commerce were steep.

With Faelan's list in hand, both kingdoms agreed to temporarily halt the border discussions and return to their respective courts for further deliberations.

In truth, it was clear to everyone that this was a strategic distraction. Yet, they understood its purpose. Nerathia, with its thriving maritime trade, also sought to secure access to both kingdoms' goods.

This was Faelan's open maneuver, but all involved willingly stepped into it. Everyone stood to gain, and both kingdoms desperately needed what was being offered. The continued trade interests between the two kingdoms made it possible to resolve many of the issues with ease.

When negotiations resumed the following day, the topics had shifted.

Faelan spoke first, saying, "Disputes between neighboring kingdoms are inevitable, especially over border lines. Every kingdom faces the same challenge. But if this issue keeps dragging both of you into war, the losses far outweigh the gains."

Both sides nodded in agreement, recognizing the truth in his words.

From that moment, the tone of the negotiations changed. Gone were the endless repetitions of the past, and the discussions shifted to more substantive matters, focusing on where each side could make concessions.

There were still disagreements, and the debates remained intense, but the hostility was gone. Neither side was stubbornly refusing to budge anymore. With Faelan mediating, a consensus was reached by the fifth day of talks.

The mountain range near the border would be split in half, with Everridge Mountain as the dividing line. Each side would establish its own border gate. Since trade was to follow each kingdom would also be responsible for maintaining roads on their side to accommodate caravans.

The agreement would last for twenty years, after which the border issue would be revisited.

With the border treaty signed, the two sides eagerly began discussing trade. But these talks were still only discussions-nothing could be finalized yet. Decisions

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goods could be traded and which

were restricted were beyond the

authority of Carissa, Kendrick, or Davis.

However, Orivenia was able to provide a list of goods and their prices, which they could take back to Starhaven.

Meanwhile, Orivenia's officials, both

civil and military, had mostly set aside their hostility toward those from Starhaven. Their respect for Lisandra had also grown significantly after seeing how this

profit. And the ones who would benefit first were the nobility and ministers, who all had ways to carve out a share for themselves.

agreement would bring realne

In the following days, Liam took the Starhaven delegation on a tour, showing them various workshops, medicinal herb markets, emerald mines, and livestock farms.

Chapter 1513

After two days of touring, Liam finally spoke to Carissa.

"Your country has a Miracle Healer named Sebastian Dalton, right? He's been making a medicine called Snowdrop Pills. Snow Blossom is a key ingredient, but your kingdom has only a limited supply. It grows at the Southern Frontier, but only high atop the snowy mountains. It's difficult to gather and incredibly scarce.

"However, in our kingdom, Snow Blossoms are not so rare. It's found on many high peaks. The Snow Blossom that Healer Dalton uses now is bought secretly from Orivenia's herbal merchants at a steep price. It's so expensive that every Snowdrop Pill he sells is at a loss."

Carissa knew that Snowdrop Pills were rare because some of the ingredients were hard to find, but Sebastian had never specifically mentioned which ones.

However, if he was buying an ingredient from Orivenia, it made sense why he needed to keep it a secret. Previously, there was no trade between Orivenia and Starhaven, especially when it came to medicinal items. So, it was only natural for him to be more cautious.

Liam and Lisandra were clearly aligned on this matter, and their investigation was so thorough that they must have already planned to facilitate trade between both sides. They even invited Faelan all the way from Nerathia to make these plans a reality.

Snowdrop Pills were a life-saving medicine. If the ingredients were no longer scarce, the pills could benefit the common people, which would be a tremendous boon.

Recalling their visit to the herbal market, Carissa asked, "Why didn't I see any Snow Blossoms in the market?"

Liam smiled. "That's only normal. Though the Snow Blossom isn't rare in Orivenia, it's still considered precious. It's difficult to harvest, as one must climb treacherous mountains to gather it.

"Moreover, because of its potent properties-particularly its ability to strengthen the heart and relieve pain—it is never sold in the open markets. If you don't believe me, I can have a basket sent to you right now. You can take it back to Starhaven and have Healer Dalton examine it himself."

Without waiting for an answer, he immediately gave orders for someone to fetch a basket of Snow Blossoms.

It wasn't long before a full basket was brought over. The flowers were dried, each stalk nearly as long as a forearm, with the stems and leaves still attached. Its color was a dull brownish-yellow, the petals shriveled and tightly wrapped around dark brown stamens. The dried flowers didn't look very appealing, which was a bit of a letdown, given how nice its name sounded.

After a moment of observation, Davis asked, "Isn't this just the Snow Lily?"

Liam nodded with a smile. "Yes, it's also called Snow Lily or Skysnow Lily. There are several varieties, but this one is the most suitable for medicinal use."

At the mention of Skysnow Lily, Carissa's face lit up with recognition. "Ah, so it's a kind of Snow Lily. I've heard of how rare Skysnow Lily is, but is it really that scarce in Starhaven?"

Davis explained, "The Southern

Frontier's snowy mountains do have Snow Lilies but the flowers only bloom once every few years. The people of Sandoria know its value,

so when they occupied the Southern Frontier, they would harvest the Snow Lilies for medicinal use or take it back to their homeland to sell.

"However, their methods were crude. They destroyed the very places where the Snow Lilies grow, which has made the flower even rarer. Even if it can be found now, it's only in scattered patches and growing on steep cliffs. That makes it nearly impossible to harvest."

"Such a shame," Carissa murmured, feeling regretful.

So, Starhaven once had an abundance of the flower, but it was now almost wiped out entirely.

"Perhaps in a few years, it will grow back," Davis said.

He then motioned for Carissa to step closer and lowered his voice, adding, "His Majesty requires Snowdrop Pills on a regular basis. This basket should be enough for him."

Carissa wasn't certain how much Snow Lily was needed to make Snowdrop Pills, but she understood that this basket wasn't an insignificant amount of the essential ingredient.

Heart disease was a cruel affliction,

and such a remedy would be a true blessing for the common people if it could be made more widely available. She was certain Sebastian would gladly provide it, as he often offered free consultations and medicine to those in need, driven by the compassion of his healer's heart.

Once Carissa and Davis had finished

their conversation, Liam continued, "We've compiled a list of valuable medicinal herbs that Orivenia produces. You can take it back and show Healer Dalton. He'll know

which ones are most prized. Of course, Orivenia has more to offer than just herbs. I trust you've seen that over the past few days."

Carissa understood their intentions clearly. Liam was eager to establish trade between the two kingdoms, and he made no effort to conceal his desire.

Carissa, in turn, hoped for the same. She thanked him with a smile for the basket of Snow Blossoms.

"I truly hope that our two kingdoms can develop in peace and friendship," she said.

Starhaven and Nerathia's envoy delegations were both preparing to depart soon. But before that, the Nerathian party arranged for a meeting with Carissa and Violet.

The two women visited their quarters at the inn, where Faelan and Elysia were waiting in a private room on the second floor. Carissa and Violet entered and greeted them with courtesy.

"Your Highness and Your Grace, thank you for your hard work. We are truly grateful for your long journey to help with the peace talks between Starhaven and Orivenia. If there is ever an opportunity, I would be honored to invite you both to Starhaven," said Carissa.

Chapter 1514

"This journey was not only for the sake of Orivenia and Starhaven, but also for Nerathia. No need for thanks; relations between kingdoms are always driven by mutual interests. It is only through personal friendship that true sincerity arises," Faelan replied.

Carissa nodded thoughtfully, but curiosity got the better of her. "Might I ask if you know my mentor, Adrian Russell?"

Faelan chuckled. "I do. He has been to Nerathia and even stayed at my training grounds for a time. My guard commander, Shadow, is quite close with your mentor. They would often drink together."

"Ah, I see," Carissa mused, thinking back to the shadowy figures she had seen.

She wondered which of them was the esteemed Shadow. It would be a great pity if she couldn't meet him.

As if reading her mind, Faelan chuckled. "In three or five years, we'll visit Starhaven. When the time comes, I'll introduce you to Shadow."

Carissa was about to express her thanks, but Violet interjected, "Why wait three or five years? Couldn't you come sooner? We're all looking forward to you and Lady Elysia visiting."

Faelan smiled enigmatically, his expression holding a deeper meaning. "Now is not the time."

Since he wasn't offering any more information, it wouldn't be right to press the issue.

Meanwhile, Elysia was sitting quietly to the side. Though she hadn't said anything the entire time, she had been eating the snacks in front of her with great concentration, savoring them as though they were a rare delicacy. In reality, they were nothing more than candied fruits and dried meats.

Carissa noticed that beneath the table, Faelan and Elysia's hands were clasped together, a quiet display of affection. At first, she had thought they might discuss more diplomatic matters, but after a few casual words, they simply bid her and Violet farewell.

Just before they left, Elysia said, "Commander Sinclair, Ms. Spencer, we shall see you in Starhaven in four years."

Carissa quickly nodded in acknowledgment. "Of course. We will await your visit with Prince Faelan, Your Grace."

After their departure, the door to the private room closed behind them. Carissa and Violet descended the stairs, both feeling perplexed.

Faelan had said they would meet in three or five years, while Elysia had specifically mentioned four years. What was the significance of these years?

It didn't feel like a casual remark. If it had been mere pleasantries, they could have simply said, "We'll meet again when the time comes."

But one spoke of three or five years, while the other said four, giving the impression that something significant might occur during those years.

Carissa remembered what Sebastian had said that he would do his best to prolong Salvador's life for another three years. Could it be related to that?

She quickly dismissed the thought as absurd.

How could people from Nerathia possibly know of such matters? Even many court officials were unaware with only Jeremiah and the six department heads privy to that secret. If someone from Nerathia did know, then one would have to question whether someone in court had ties to them.

"What are they plotting?" Violet wondered, her thoughts turning more conspiratorial.

Having witnessed the wars between Sandoria and Orivenia, her first thought was of invasion and pillaging.

"I don't know." Carissa shook her head, pausing to think. "But I'm certain they're trying to hint at something. Could it have to do with His Majesty's condition?"

Violet's eyes widened. "Do they know?"

"It's unlikely. I'm just speculating," Carissa replied, her voice thoughtful.

"If you're right... Do they know about the king's lifespan? Are they that powerful?" Violet murmured to herself.

Carissa recalled the ease of the Nerathians movements through Victory Pass and the depth of their martial art's prowess, but predicting the life of a ruler... How skilled would one have to be to accomplish that?

Still, it wasn't entirely impossible.

She remembered Adrian's words about Nerathia having many gifted individuals. If they were merely making a rough estimate, it wouldn't

be too difficult, especially with a window of three, four, or five years.

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Yet, the certainty in Elysia's voice when she spoke of four years stood out. That was a very definitive statement.

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Before their return journey, Lisandra invited them to the palace. While her words were diplomatic, speaking of the hopeful future between their two kingdoms, Carissa could sense they came from the heart.

Lisandra truly wished for the people to live better lives.

Chapter 1515

The journey home began in early September. The heat of summer had passed, replaced by a cool breeze.

Liam personally escorted the delegation, accompanying them all the way to Fawnrun City.

The return journey was uneventful-no more attempts on their lives, and everything proceeded smoothly. Once they crossed the rolling mountains, they entered Starhaven's territory.

They hadn't notified Dominic in advance, so Carissa didn't expect anyone to be there to greet them. But as soon as they crossed into Starhaven, they saw Barrett leading the Sullivan Army, waiting for them.

Relief was clear on Barrett's face when he saw they had returned safely. He rode forward, then dismounted and greeted Kendrick, Davis, and the others.

"Your Highness, Mr. Lloyd, esteemed lords, Grand General Sullivan sent me to wait here. I will escort you back to Victory Pass."

Davis raised an eyebrow. "How did Grand General Sullivan know we were returning today?"

"He didn't know, but he ordered us to wait here every day just in case," Barrett replied.

"Ah, I see." Davis nodded, impressed by Dominic's caution.

Kendrick, who had been feeling unwell throughout the journey, lifted the curtain of the carriage. Upon seeing that they had reached Starhaven's territory, he seemed to regain some strength.

"Let's set off," he said.

"Right away!" Barrett responded, quickly mounting his horse and leading the way.

Violet noticed how skillful he was even with one hand. It was clear he had trained hard.

She took the reins herself and spoke to Carissa, saying, "He's not entirely bad, you know. Your mother wasn't wrong about him. She just couldn't account for the deceit in people's hearts."

Carissa knew Violet wasn't praising Barrett. Her friend was still upset that he had let Melanie down. Now, she was just trying to find a way to make everyone feel better.

Carissa said nothing. No matter Barrett's character, Melanie had only wanted the best for her daughter back then.

That time in Melanie's life had been the darkest. She had only acted on instinct, striving to secure her daughter's future. She must have considered countless possibilities, but one could never predict the true nature of people, especially when malice was deliberately hidden.

As the group continued on their way, walking on Starhaven's land, a deep sense of safety settled in everyone's hearts.

Upon returning to Stormwatch Keep, Dominic and the others personally came out to greet them. Knowing that everyone was tired and hungry, he quickly arranged for a meal ensuring they were well-fed and had a chance to rest before catching up.

After eating, Carissa bathed and changed, then headed straight to find her grandfather and uncles, not wasting even a moment.

Dominic listened to her story, clapping his hands with a smile. "Good! From now on, Victory Pass will no longer be a desolate, barren border town, but a thriving hub for trade between the two kingdoms. The people here have suffered for so many years. Now, they finally have a chance at a better life."

As for the division of borders between the two kingdoms, he had no objections, seeing it as temporary. For now, the priority was improving the lives of the people.

If the war continued endlessly, the cost would eventually be passed down to the common folk-increased taxes and heavier military duties, with the blood and sweat of the people paying the price.

Hearing that Faelan had been present to mediate the peace talks, and that the men who had dined at Spring Pavilion were part of his delegation, Dominic chuckled.

"In hindsight, they're the only ones who could move about freely within Starhaven's borders. Pity I never got the chance to meet them in person."

Carissa smiled gently. "If it's meant to be, we'll meet them someday. There's no need to feel regret, Grandpa."

She refrained from mentioning the three- to five-year timeline, as she didn't want to add to her grandfather's speculation. After all, no one really knew what it meant.

With Kendrick needing some time to rest in Victory Pass, Davis wrote a report and dispatched it swiftly the capital.

Though Carissa missed Rafael, she was content to stay in Victory Pass for a few more days. An opportunity like this was rare, after all. With official business completed, Carissa felt lighter at heart. She and Violet spent their days enjoying the sights of Victory Pass, taking in the views of the borderland.

They also visited the orphanage. Shayla mentioned that before they left Victory Pass for Orivenia, someone had delivered a batch of books, intended for the children to read when they grew older.

"I asked the bookseller about it, and he said a man in black clothing had bought them, instructing him to send them here," Shayla recounted.

Carissa's thoughts turned to Faelan and his men.

Could it have been them who sent the books? Had they still been in Victory Pass at that time? But after their meal at Spring Pavilion, they had dispatched people

all over the city in search of them, and there had been no trace.

The question lingered in her mind, but there was no way to confirm it. Even if she wanted to, she would have to wait the three to five years they had mentioned.

Chapter 1516

After resting at Victory Pass for five days, Kendrick finally recovered. Now that he was well, it was time to set off for the capital.

Though Carissa was reluctant to part with her family, she could only say a tearful farewell. She bowed deeply to Dominic, nearly causing tears to spill from his own eyes.

Davis, who held the utmost respect for Dominic, was the most emotional. While Carissa silently wept, Davis openly wept. He knew this was likely the last time he would ever see the venerable old general, who had served Starhaven in Victory Pass for decades.

Dominic was already in the twilight years of his life, and he looked much frailer than the last time they had met. Even though Salvador had granted him leave to return to the capital, the long, grueling journey would likely be too much for him to bear, and the Sullivan family might not permit him to make the trip.

Dominic spoke with Davis for a while, and the latter's sobs grew louder.

Cindy had never asked about the details of Heather's situation. But now, at the moment of parting, she pulled Carissa aside and inquired about it.

Hearing that she was in prison but that Leona had been helping her, making sure her days weren't too hard, Cindy let out a small sigh. If a crown prince was appointed and a general amnesty was granted, Heather might even be released.

"Well, that's good. Though your grandfather never speaks of it, I know he still worries. There aren't many parents who are truly cruel-hearted. Your grandfather's not cruel, but Heather-well, her treatment of Leona was harsh. It's a wonder Leona still looks after her."

"Don't worry, Aunt Cindy. Leona is doing well and living freely now, and she'll only get better from here on out," Carissa reassured her.

"Indeed, she will," Cindy said, her gaze lingering on her niece as tears welled up in her eyes. "After this farewell, I don't know when we'll see each other again."

Carissa's voice caught in her throat as she replied, "I'll come back. I'll visit whenever I can."

Cindy wiped away her tears with her fingers, regaining control of her emotions, and managed to force a smile. "Good. That's good."

As Carissa turned her head, she saw Barrett standing among the farewell group, staring blankly in her direction. As soon as their eyes met, he quickly lowered his gaze, looking slightly flustered. Carissa averted her eyes, preparing to leave.

The hooves of the horses kicked up dust, the wind carrying it in swirling gusts. Before they realized it, the weather had turned cooler.

As the group left Victory Pass,

Carissa remained lost in thought, her spirits low. The joy of reunion had been great, but the pain of parting was just as deep. The sand from the wind often stung her eyes, causing tears to fall. Violet rode alongside her, saying nothing, but offering silent companionship.

The journey back was slower than when they first arrived. Though everyone was eager to return, Kendrick still recovering from the several assassination attempts and injuries, was visibly broken. As soon as they set off, he fell ill again.

Traveling turned into a slow trek, with good food, good rest, and comfortable lodging along the way. He said he couldn't endure even the slightest hardship now. Otherwise, he might not make it back alive.

"Besides, after all I've done, who else deserves to take credit for the success of this mission if not me?" he said.

He had already suffered enough.

People complained about him being spoiled, but there was nothing they could do. He really was sick, especially at night when he would start running a fever. It wasn't high, but was enough to wear him out.

Even Violet couldn't argue with him. She saw firsthand how his once healthy, round face had grown gaunt, his complexion pale and waxen. He seemed to have lost all trace of color.

Davis, seeing that the pace was unsustainable, consulted with Dorian to find out what was truly ailing Kendrick and how best to treat him.

Dorian sighed. "It's likely the stress from the repeated attacks while traveling through Orivenia that's affecting him. The constant threat of death, the emotional strain-it's all taking a toll. The fatigue from the journey hasn't helped either. He's not used to such hardship. In Orivenia, he kept his guard up, but now that he's finally allowing himself to relax, the exhaustion has taken root."

Davis sighed in response. "There's nothing to be done then. We'll have to continue at this pace. We can't afford for him to really die."

Meanwhile, in the capital, there were those anxiously awaiting their return.

Rafael and Salvador, both growing impatient, had received the official report. However, they knew that only when the travelers returned could they get the full details of what had transpired.

Chapter 1517

On the fifteenth of October, the envoy delegation finally returned to the capital.

The Mystic Army dispersed on the spot, while Davis, Alden, and the other officials made their way to the palace to report to the king. Kendrick, who had been weak and unable to stand on his own, seemed to find strength now. He insisted that he accompany them to the palace as well.

As for Carissa, Rafael had been waiting at the city gates for her. Every day, he had someone stationed there. Sometimes, during his midday breaks, he would go himself. Today, he finally caught sight of her.

While Davis and the others were reporting at the palace, Carissa went to see Helen with Rafael. Seeing her daughter-in-law's fatigue, Helen urged her to hurry and bathe and change. With that, the couple returned to Orchid Hall.

When Carissa emerged in fresh clothes after her bath, her lips were oddly swollen. Joy stared at her, surprised. Without thinking, she glanced at Rafael. It seemed that when Carissa was bathing, Rafael had insisted on attending to her personally, though he clearly hadn't done a good job.

Inside the study, Jacob and Kyle were already waiting. Carissa shared the details of her trip to Orivenia-the attempted assassinations, Lisandra's predicament, and the cryptic warning from Faelan regarding the three-to-five-year timeline.

Rafael listened, clearly shaken. Orivenia was in such turmoil; his wife had been fortunate to escape unharmed.

Regarding Faelan's ability to move freely in and out of Victory Pass and the ominous statement about those three to five years, Kyle suggested they could write to Adrian. Their mentor was likely familiar with Faelan's group and might have an insight into what the statement really meant.

Once Carissa finished explaining, Rafael insisted that she rest and not talk any longer. He had intended to take the afternoon off, but just as he was about to do so, a messenger arrived from the palace, summoning him.

Carissa decided to go with him. After being gone for three months, she should pay a visit to Victoria. Plus, Sebastian was in the palace, and she wanted to bring the Snow Blossoms to him.

Once they were in the carriage and had spent some time together, Carissa finally asked about the three princes' education.

"Prince Connor has indeed made progress. He's been working much harder than before," Rafael replied, looking pleased.

"Does that mean the crown prince position is his for the taking?" Carissa asked.

"That seems likely. His Majesty is quite pleased with him. He's invited the prince to meals a few times," Rafael said.

Carissa thought this was for the best. So long as Connor worked hard, he would be the rightful heir, and there would be no contention over the crown.

Once inside the palace, Rafael headed to the royal study, while Carissa went to see Victoria. When the queen dowager saw her, noticing the dark redness of her sunburned skin she was deeply concerned. Yet, she kept her worries to herself, offering only praise instead.

If this was the path Carissa had chosen, then she, like any man, should endure the hardships that came with it.

Although Carissa had eaten at

home, Victoria insisted on feeding her a bowl of royal jelly soup before allowing her to seek out Sebastian. She had brought only one Snow Blossom with her, but when Sebastian laid eyes on it, his face lit up with intense joy.

"You brought this from Orivenia? You bought it there?" he asked, eagerly taking the flower and inhaling its familiar fragrance.

"It was a gift from Mr. Stellwyn. He sent a whole basket, but I only brought one to show you," Carissa explained, pleased to see his reaction.

It was clear the Snow Blossom was indeed a key ingredient for Snowdrop Pills.

Sebastian's smile widened at the mention of the basket. "In that case, His Majesty need not be so sparing with his doses anymore."

Carissa then explained the arrangement for trade between the two kingdoms, assuring him that acquiring Snow Blossoms wouldn't be as difficult in the future.

Sebastian chuckled bitterly, shaking his head. "Even Mr. Stellwyn knows that I've been buying Snow

Blossoms from Orivenia to make Snowdrop Pills. You see, we used to have an abundance of that herb."

"Only at the Southern Frontier, right?" Carissa asked.

"There have been other mountains where it was found, but the growth wasn't good and the quality was poor," Sebastian said, carefully wrapping the Snow Blossom in a piece of brocade cloth.

"Only the Southern Frontier and Orivenia produce the right quality. In the end, I had no choice but to buy from Orivenia."

He looked at Carissa, his tone turning serious as he added, "With so many Snow Blossoms, I can use stronger doses. Perhaps His Majesty will last an extra year or two."

Carissa immediately asked, "Does that mean five years?"

"It's not certain yet," Sebastian replied, his voice heavy. "We need to adjust the treatment and observe the effects before we can say for sure."

Chapter 1518

With Salvador having summoned the court officials to the royal study, the

discussions continued late into the night. It was only when Sebastian stepped in to interrupt, informing them that the hour had grown late, that the session came to a close.

"Has it really gotten this late? Let's call it a night, then. The palace gates will be locked soon," said Salvador, stretching his arms with a smile.

Despite the late hour, the king appeared to be in high spirits, especially with the color back in his face. He hardly resembled a man suffering from illness.

Carissa waited for Rafael to finish his meeting before leaving the palace with him. Exhausted, she leaned against his shoulder and drifted into a deep, drowsy sleep.

When the carriage arrived at the estate, Rafael lifted her into his arms. Carissa, half-conscious, recognized the motion but was too tired to protest. She simply let him carry her inside, finding comfort in his strong embrace.

Over the past three months, she had only been able to sleep soundly at Victory Pass. Everywhere else, she remained on high alert. But now, back in the safety of her home, she felt herself relax completely and drift off into a deep slumber.

Yet, something felt a little off-she couldn't shake the sensation of hot hands moving over her.

Her eyes were closed, and her voice was hoarse from sleep as she murmured, "Did you forget what Sebastian said?"

A warm voice whispered in her ear, "Sebastian said it's fine now."

Carissa opened her eyes and met Rafael's burning gaze. "Really?" "Absolutely."

The words had barely left his lips before they were pressed against hers.

The fire was ignited, flames of desire sweeping through them, raising the temperature of the room. They were lost in each other, the long absence making their reunion feel all the more intense.

In the coming month, Starhaven

would establish the Maritime Trade Office, which would handle trade between Starhaven and the other kingdoms. The Commercial Affairs Office would now fully cooperate with the Maritime Trade Office, organizing a list of goods for export and preparing envoys to travel to Orivenia to finalize trade

agreements.

During this time, Sebastian made adjustments to Salvador's medication. At first, the king struggled with the changes and felt unwell for a few days. But with the help of the Snowdrop Pills, his condition soon stabilized. After five days of treatment, he began to adapt, and the effects were promising.

Salvador knew his illness was incurable, but extending his life for a while longer made him happy enough. His thoughts were consumed by state affairs. If not for Sebastian keeping a close eye on him, he might have stayed up late every night, unwilling to rest.

In these past few months, he had visited the harem on occasion. Yet, each time, it was merely to sit, share a meal, and engage in light conversation. Sebastian had been firm in his warnings. During this early stage of his treatment, before his condition had fully stabilized, Salvador was strictly forbidden from any intimate relations.

The reason for Sebastian's

sternness lay in what had happened back in August. After the king had visited Jeanette's palace and slept with her, the effects of his

medication had been dimin

for

several days, leaving him weak and drained. Having learned the hard way, Salvador now obediently listened to Sebastian's instructions.

But this time, there was good news-Jeanette was pregnant.

In mid-October, the royal physicians confirmed she was slightly over three months pregnant, which perfectly matched the timing of Salvador's August visit.

Both the queen dowager and the king were delighted. It had been a long while since any concubine in the harem had been with child. Salvador, in particular, was overjoyed. He saw Jeanette's pregnancy as a sign that his health was improving. His spirits lifted, his optimism returned, and he felt stronger than ever.

He ordered Dorian to ensure Jeanette's health during her pregnancy and elevated her status, granting her the rank of second-class concubine.

Grace and Sylvia, who oversaw the harem, were also pleased with the news. They sent Jeanette plenty of nourishing supplements to support her pregnancy, as well as exempted her from the daily rites of the harem. Soon, gifts from every palace flooded into Jeanette's residence, making her the center of attention.

Whenever Salvador had a free moment, he would visit her, or go to Sylvia's palace to see Cecil.

He would also occasionally summon Connor and Caden, but both of them were weighed down by their studies, so he refrained from disturbing them too much.

Cecil was still young and wasn't quite old enough to learn much. He had been in poor health, but had now recovered. At this age, children were full of energy, so Cecil's lively and adorable nature provided Salvador with a welcome break from the heavy demands of court affairs.

It wasn't long before rumors began to circulate in the palace that Salvador had a special fondness for Cecil.

After all, Sylvia was in charge of the harem and had moved to a new residence. Also, apart from visiting Jeanette, the king would also visit Cecil frequently. It was clear that his affection for the young boy was undeniable.

Chapter 1519

Many in the harem were speculating about Salvador's health. Even though

Jeanette was pregnant, Sebastian's continued presence in the palace suggested the king needed more than rest and care.

Because of this, Salvador's clear favoritism was starting to unsettle some people.

Kylie, in particular, was uneasy. She knew some details about the king's condition, and though Sebastian was now in the palace, she wasn't sure how effective the treatment would be. But she couldn't shake the feeling that Salvador was nearing his limits.

Jeanette's pregnancy didn't concern her much. The baby's gender remained unknown, and even if it was a son, the queen knew it wouldn't change her own standing.

However, Salvador's obvious favoritism toward Cecil left Kylie feeling threatened.

When he offered her a choice previously, she had chosen to keep her position as queen for the sake of survival. But after some time, she realized that Salvador wouldn't give up on Connor so easily, especially given how diligently the eldest prince had been applying himself in his studies. She had even learned that the king was quite pleased with the boy's progress.

Caden and Cecil were threats in their own ways, but the queen didn't believe Salvador favored Caden as much. Over the past few months, she hadn't seen much of him. Word had it that the second prince had become somewhat lazy, no longer as driven as he once was.

Kylie always thought that Grace was insignificant, as she didn't have the kind of powerful family connections that could secure her future.

However, Sylvia was a different story. Her father was the Minister of Justice, a high-ranking official like Rafael. Whether in official or private matters, their interactions would likely be frequent. Plus, Sylvia's mother, Gladys, supported Carissa's interests by donating a significant amount of money to Skye Embroidery. So, it was possible they had already formed an alliance.

"Your Majesty, Prince Rafael praised Prince Connor again today," Lydia said as she entered, her face beaming with excitement.

Kylie's expression remained unchanged as she asked, "Who did His Majesty summon for dinner tonight?"

Lydia's smile faltered for a moment. "The king summoned Prince Cecil for dinner."

Her patience finally snapping, the queen slammed her cup onto the table. "Prince Cecil again!"

"There's no need to worry too much, Your Majesty. Prince Cecil is still very young," said Lydia, trying to soothe her.

Kylie's gaze grew colder, her voice

laced with sharpness as she said, "Young now, yes, but he'll grow. Soon, it'll be winter, and then he'll

four. Lady Sylvia is truly pained

Instead of bearing her own son, she

raises an adopted one as if he were her own, lavishing all her attention on him and paving his way. She doesn't fear the consequences of raising an ungrateful child."

Kylie couldn't understand Sylvia's reasoning. At such a young age, why not compete for the king's favor and bear a son of her own? No matter how clever Cecil might be, he wasn't biologically hers.
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If Sylvia were pregnant, Kylie wouldn't have cared whether it was a boy or a girl. After all, with Salvadoron medication, there was no guarantee the child would be intelligent. Besides, an infant could never compete with older children.

"If things continue like this, I can't allow Prince Cecil to remain," Kylie murmured ominously.

Lydia froze for a moment, her hand still hovering over the broken shards she had been picking up. When she finally looked up, the queen's darkened gaze met hers.

"At least for now, Sylvia's life cannot be too peaceful. If the harem doesn't stir, how will I have a chance?" Kylie said, her voice low but resolute.

Lydia hastily gathered the pieces, her hesitation clear as she protested, "Your Majesty, with Prince Connor performing well, there's no need for any further action."

"He is performing well, but is still somewhat ordinary," the queen replied, her face clouded with lingering anxiety.

Now, Connor was smart and capable, but had no connection to Kylie. Worse still, he resented her, his own mother. She had to make him understand that all her efforts had been for him alone.

"The entire court is full of talented men. Even if Prince Connor doesn't understand politics and scheming, he will surely become a wise ruler one day," said Lydia, trying to ease the queen.

Kylie's brow furrowed in frustration. "What do you know? Is our position secure now?"

Seeing her anger, Lydia decided to hold back her comforting words, not wanting to provoke her further.

Chapter 1520

Jeanette's pregnancy had been stable at first, with Dorian assuring her there were no major concerns. But for some unknown reason, after the beginning of winter, things started to falter. She had even experienced spotting twice.

Dorian did everything he could to stabilize the pregnancy and managed to keep it steady, but Jeanette was ordered to stay in bed and not get up.

The sudden change in her condition had drawn the full attention of the royal physicians. After checking her diet and everything the palace provided, nothing unusual was found. The best guess was that the king's prolonged use of medication was affecting the stability of the pregnancy.

Salvador was deeply anxious about the baby. Ever since Jeanette was confined to her bed, he had visited her almost every other day, sometimes staying to share a meal. Because of this, he hadn't been able to visit Sylvia or call Cecil to the royal study.

As Grace was in charge of the harem, she also made time to visit Jeanette, often bringing Caden along. These visits led to several shared meals with the king.

When Jeanette was previously a lower-ranked concubine, she had tried to find support in the palace. She had secretly tried to please both Sylvia and Grace, shifting her alliances depending on who seemed more favorable.

However, Sylvia had always been proud, as well as somewhat angry that Jeanette had once received Salvador's favor, so she didn't treat her very well. On the other hand, Grace had been different. Known for her kindness and fairness, she had always been willing to look after those with lower ranks, so Jeanette found herself drawn to her.

Now, however, Jeanette felt conflicted.

When Salvador came to visit her, Grace frequently came by with Caden. She clearly had an agenda. Jeanette couldn't help but think that perhaps Sylvia's aloofness wasn't so bad after all. Sylvia, with her pride, would never stoop to such tactics.

As Jeanette didn't have support in the palace, she could only keep her complaints in her heart. After all, Grace held control of the harem, so it would be unwise to offend her.

But after it happened several times, Jeanette couldn't help herself. When Grace wasn't around, she would act a bit spoiled, gently telling Salvador that she wanted to be alone with him. She truly believed the king held affection for her. After all, she had been his favored concubine ever since she entered the palace. Even when he was unwell, he still found time to visit her.

How else would there be a child in her womb?

But when she coquettishly complained to the king, hoping for his sympathy, he gave no response, as though he hadn't even heard her.

Feeling a bit disappointed, she added, "Lady Grace is very kind to me. But now that I'm pregnant, I'm afraid I won't be able to properly receive her if she visits too often. The thought fills my heart with unease."

This time, Salvador finally gave a slight nod.

Jeanette's heart surged with joy at his response, but before she could fully bask in her triumph, he said, "Your health is the priority. Let Grace visit more often to care for you and I

will come to see you when I have the time."

As the words struck her with a sudden chill, she quickly corrected herself, saying, "No, it's not that I'm afraid of being a burden. It's just that I worry. A As I'm confined to bed rest, I

might not be able to observe proper manners. I truly look forward to both Your Majesty and Lady Grace

coming to visit me."

Salvador gave her a cold glance. "Sometimes, you should think before you speak.

It's not good if people misunderstand your words."

Jeanette's face drained of color. Though the king's tone hadn't been harsh, she felt as though she had made a mistake. She took the medicine to keep her pregnancy stable from her maid, Calista, and nervously drank it.

Once Salvador left, she immediately turned to Calista, asking, "Do you think His Majesty was upset just now?"

Calista lowered her head and replied, "There is no need to worry, Lady Jeanette. His Majesty was merely offering a reminder. His expression showed no signs of displeasure."

Jeanette recalled Salvador's expression. Indeed, there had been no visible sign of anger, so she felt somewhat reassured.

She hesitated before asking, "Mr. Walker was outside just now... Do you think he will speak to Lady Grace about this?"

Salvador had told her to be careful with her words to avoid misunderstandings, but the only person who could misunderstand was Grace. However, the only ones in the room had been Salvador and Calista, and neither would speak of it

So, the only way Grace would find out was if Derek overheard and passed it on to

her.

"It's unlikely Mr. Walker heard anything. Don't trouble your mind, Lady Jeanette.

You should lay down and rest," said Calista, helping her settle back down.