

Her Graceful War Song

#Chapter 1631 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1631

Samuel no longer dared to show his face. On the other hand, Mr. Claude began appearing before me rather often.

Several times, he brought his servant and stopped by the shop set up to sell the embroidery made by the ladies at our workshop. Over the past few years, we had built up a fine list of noble ladies and officials' wives as regular customers. I would occasionally visit to play hostess.

Truth be told, the embroidery had no trouble selling. After all, in the entire capital, few could rival Ms. Moore's needlework. It was only when dealing with wealthy clients that the prices were higher.

Now that the court permitted women to register as heads of their own households, many of the ladies were eager to earn enough money to purchase a small house of their own and live comfortably.

As I held the title of duchess and was cousin to the regent's princess consort, the ladies of noble families were more than willing to befriend me.

At first, Mr. Claude only passed by the shop with his servant, casting a glance inside as he walked on. But when it became a regular occurrence, he began stepping inside to make purchases.

Besides clothing and robes, the shop also sold smaller embroidered goods like fans, handkerchiefs, folding screens, and other such objects. Most were made for women.

He never bought clothes-only folding fans.

In truth, folding fans were rare. We mostly made round fans, stitched from fine materials and embroidered with birds, flowers, and all manner of creatures. Some were even double-sided, with designs so lifelike they seemed ready to fly off the silk.

Folding fans were trickier-harder to make as silk brocade didn't fold as easily as paper. Still, we created a few now and then, simply for their delicate beauty when opened.

Mr. Claude was quite taken with them. Every time he visited, he would purchase one.

One day, I happened to be there, though not in the front hall. I was in the back room, going over the accounts, when I overheard him speaking with the shop assistant.

"Do you have anything made by the duchess today?" he asked.

"There's a round fan, but it's rather plain. We were planning to sell it at a lower price," the shop assistant replied.

"Truly? Show it to me at once," he insisted, sounding delighted.

A moment passed before he spoke again, full of praise.

"How can you call this plain? It's exquisitely done! I never imagined Her Grace's needlework was this fine. It's far better than the rest. You mustn't sell it cheaply; it ought to be priced higher. I'll take it, but don't let Her Grace know I bought it. Just tell her a certain customer was quite fond of it."

I felt rather embarrassed. My embroidery wasn't bad, but compared to the work of

the other ladies, it fell far short.

At such an awkward moment, I dared not step out.

I only heard him ask, "Her Grace didn't come in today, did she?"

The oblivious shop assistant cheerfully replied, "She did. She's in the back room."

There was only a wooden screen separating the so-called back room and the front hall. From where I stood, I heard the sound of a coin pouch falling to the floor, followed by a long silence. After that came the clink of money being placed on the table and the hurried thump of footsteps as someone dashed out the door.

The shop assistant stood stunned for a moment before muttering, "Why's he running off? No one's going to take the fan from him."

I, too, sat in the back in a bit of a daze.

I thought of Mrs. Murray and how she had persistently tried to arrange a match between Mr. Claude and I. Strangely, though I had always felt calm about such matters, a faint ripple stirred in my heart.

I had thought it was merely Mrs. Murray being overly enthusiastic. Surely Mr. Claude wished to marry a younger lady, someone who could bear children to carry on the family line, or perhaps someone to add charm to his home and be a gentle companion.

But looking at things now... Could it be that he truly had feelings for me?

Of course, just because someone

fancied me didn't mean I would

return the sentiment. Over the years, there had been no lack of gentlemen trying to win my favor. But once refused, they rarely made more than one or two further attempts before giving up. However, Mr. Claude seemed different.

His face rose to mind before I could stop it. Perhaps because I had seen him so often of late, his features appeared especially clear in my thoughts.

He was strikingly handsome, refined in manner, and carried himself with quiet confidence. A true scholar, yet not weak; a man of both learning and steadiness. As a scholar from the Academy of Wisdom, his future was bright indeed.

But then, if he wished to marry, why not choose someone more suitable?

Cari told me not to belittle myself, but the truth was plain enough. I was a divorced woman. The only things I could truly offer were my title as duchess and my ties to the regent's princess consort.

I couldn't be blamed for thinking too much of it, for at court, many who lacked a strong footing often relied on powerful families to secure their place. Whether Mr. Claude was such a man, I couldn't say for certain. But I couldn't dismiss the possibility either.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1632 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1632

That brief ripple in my heart did not last. Life went on, steady and orderly, just as it always had.

Some people were like a bit of sunlight in one's life. They brought a touch of warmth, but then the sun set, and they were gone.

It wasn't until several months later that Cari came to see me. She said Samuel had made a report to the Royal Citadel, claiming someone had been following him. After looking into it, the officials discovered Mr. Claude had sent men to keep watch on him.

Naturally, Cari went to speak with Mr. Claude, who admitted it. He said he was worried Samuel might cause me trouble again and only sent men to keep an eye on him for my sake.

But from that conversation, Cari also learned a few other things.

It turned out that before becoming the top scholar, Mr. Claude had once brought his mother to the capital, as he intended to sit for one of the previous rounds of the examinations. His mother had already been unwell, but her final wish was to see her son succeed. With no other choice, he brought her with him on the journey.

However, the long trip worsened her condition, and she collapsed at the inn where they were staying. The innkeeper, afraid she might die there and cause trouble, turned them both out into the street.

Mr. Claude carried his mother from one lodging to another, but no one would take them in. For two days, they slept outdoors. It was autumn then, and the weather had turned chilly. The cold only worsened her illness. He finally took her to a medical establishment, but the physician, seeing how grave her condition was, refused to treat her.

As it happened, I was passing by with my maid when I saw him kneeling and begging for help. I sent my maid to ask what was going on. Upon learning the situation, I arranged for them to stay in a small house I often lent out to travelers who had nowhere else to go. I also sent someone to fetch Ivy from Arcane Sanctum.

Of course, in the end, his mother couldn't be saved, and he missed that year's autumn examination. However, he always remembered the kindness I showed to him and his mother.

When Cari told me all this, it took me a moment to recall it. I had indeed done such a thing, but I had done so many acts of charity over the years that it was hard to keep track. That house was often used to shelter strangers who were stranded or in need. At the time, I had simply thought him a dutiful son and wanted to help.

Mr. Claude saw me as a benefactor, but truly, all I did was give a few orders. To be treated with such gratitude felt undeserved.

"If he wishes to repay kindness, let him donate some money and help Ms. Stark with her soup kitchen. No need to offer himself in marriage," I said with a smile.

Cari tapped me lightly on the nose. "Silly girl. He must truly like you if he wishes to marry you. If he couldn't tell the difference between gratitude and affection, do you think my husband would trust him so much? And just look, he's had men watching Samuel all this while, afraid that scoundrel might trouble you again. That alone tells you his

feelings aren't just about paying a

debt."

He wanted to marry me because he liked me? I blinked, taken aback. The thought felt strange.

I had always believed I was

someone whom no one could truly love. The men who came to propose to me were drawn by the fact that I was a duchess and the cousin of the regent's princess consort. None had ever said they wished to marry me simply because they liked me.

Still dazed, I asked, "How do you know he isn't lying?"

"When a man truly likes someone, it shows in his eyes," Cari said. "Of course, I could be wrong. He could still turn out to be another Samuel. People can pretend, and sometimes it takes a while before the truth comes out."

"That's true," I said softly.

"But that's not what you need to worry about right now," she added. "First, ask yourself if you like him. If you do, then it's worth wondering whether he's being sincere."

"I don't dislike him," I admitted. "But I wouldn't say I like him. And marriage...

that's not something I've even considered."

"In that case, don't trouble yourself over it. No need to let it weigh on your heart,"

my cousin replied with a gentle smile.

"It doesn't," I replied with a smile of my own.

But that night, I realized I hadn't been honest with her.

I dreamed of him coming to my door to ask for my hand. It wasn't the first time Mr. Claude had appeared in my dreams. I suppose... deep down, longed for someone to love me, to stay by my side. It was just that I

had always lacked the courage to reach for it.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1633 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1633

I didn't expect Mr. Claude to once again ask Mrs. Murray to act as a matchmaker. And this time, he came with her in person. The gifts he brought with him covered an entire table. They weren't especially rare or costly, yet it was clear he had taken great care in choosing them.

I knew his salary wasn't high, and I'd heard he had sold off his family's home and shop just to afford a modest house in the capital.

"Your Grace, I tried to talk him out of it many times, but he insisted. So, I've come with him, just once more. Here, speak with him yourself. If you truly have no intention of accepting, tell him so plainly. Be firm, so he will give up for good," said Mrs. Murray.

I thought it best to speak plainly too. Perhaps then his face would stop appearing in my thoughts from time to time.

With that, Mrs. Murray excused herself, saying she would stroll through the garden. She left us in the drawing room, alone save for the maids waiting quietly just outside the doors. I caught the looks on their faces—hopeful, almost giddy.

I won't speak of the others, but Hazel had served me for many years. She followed me to the Earl of Gracehold's household, and later left with me when I built my own residence. She simply didn't want me to spend the rest of my life alone, often saying not all men were heartless or unkind.

Before I could speak, Mr. Claude beat me to it in a voice so quick and nervous it almost startled me.

"Your Grace, may I speak first?" he blurted out.

Looking at him, I noticed his face was flushed, with even the tips of his ears

having turned red. His skin was fair to begin with, and seeing him like this stirred a strange feeling in my chest.

"Go ahead, Mr. Claude," I said, lowering my gaze and steadying myself.

I felt his eyes fall upon my face, but I didn't meet his gaze. I simply lifted my teacup and pretended to drink, listening as he began.

"Your Grace, my wish to marry you is not out of gratitude for the help you gave my mother, nor for the shelter you offered us. I... I like you."

At that, I looked at him quickly. His cheeks were now fully flushed, like the evening sky tinged with the red of sunset. I felt heat rise in my own face as well—I was likely no better off than he.

"I had meant to give up," he went on. "I didn't want to trouble you any further, nor cause harm to your good name. But the other day, when Lady Carissa said I couldn't tell the difference between gratitude and affection—that I sought marriage out of misplaced debt—I realized she was mistaken."

He paused, then continued, "I can tell the difference. Gratitude ought to be repaid, yes, but it is your kindness, your gentle spirit, that truly moved me. Or perhaps it isn't even that. I cannot say it clearly. I only know..."

He drew a deep breath, as though it took all the courage he had to say his next words. Even his voice trembled slightly.

"I only know that when I am not busy with official duties, whether my eyes are open or shut, it is you I see, Your Grace. My thoughts are filled with nothing else."

That confession struck something in

me-like still waters suddenly stirred. I lifted my head to look at him. His eyes burned with such intensity that I couldn't meet them for long. I quickly dropped my gaze and took a hasty sip of tea, only to choke and cough a few times.

Seeing me so flustered, he looked troubled and immediately said, "I've been too forward. Forgive me, Your Grace."

I truly was the sort of person who could be easily swayed. It had been so with Samuel-love at first sight. And now, hearing Mr. Claude speak so earnestly, it happened once more.

Then, I heard myself say, "If you are sincere in wishing to marry me, then go ahead and have our horoscopes matched."

said it, even I thought

The moments

I was mad. But when I saw his face light up with such unguarded joy-he very nearly leapt into the air-I

thought, well then, what harm.). ne

there in going a bit mad once or twice in a lifetime?

Things weren't as they had been in years past. Even the worst outcome, I could now endure.

"Y-Your Grace... I... I'll go at once. Right away!" he stammered, turning and rushing away.

But after taking just a few steps, he suddenly darted back, looking at me with bright eyes. "May I ask what your horoscope is, Your Grace?"

The maids outside burst into soft laughter.

I looked at him, with that foolishly earnest look on his face-so different from his usual calm and refined manner. But somehow, it made him seem more real.

I thought to myself that surely a person couldn't be unlucky forever. One day,

something good must come along, right? And this time, I was willing to take the gamble.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1634 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1634

At Hell Monarch Estate, the spring rains of March and the Spring Remembrance Festival season had come one after another, leaving everything damp and

soaked.

"Clarence, how is Aunt Carissa doing?" Ryan asked, concern heavy in his voice as he helped his friend out the door.

Clarence was dressed in a plain blue coat, his hair already grey with age.

He let out a soft sigh. "Aunt Carissa is already eighty-eight this year. She really shouldn't have gone out to visit the graves. The rain and chill have gone straight to her lungs."

Ryan sighed. "I tried to stop her; we all did. But she wouldn't listen. Her memory's not what it used to be. Over these past two years, she forgets many day-to-day things, but somehow remembers the past so clearly. If we didn't let her go to pay her respects, she would've thrown a terrible fit."

Clarence walked out of Orchid Hall and made his way to the side room to write a prescription.

"Aunt Carissa has never recovered from the grief of losing her whole family; she'll carry that pain for the rest of her life. Uncle Rafael is watching over her now, though his own health isn't what it once was. He ought not to tire himself," he said.

"Elise and the children are there with her," Ryan replied as he unfolded the prescription slip and began pulling out an ink pot for Clarence. "But Uncle Rafael insists on caring for her himself. They've been devoted to one another all their lives. At a time like this, he won't leave her side for a moment. Every day, he tells her who he is, not allowing her to forget him. Thank the heavens she never has."

Carissa no longer remembered many people. Sometimes, she couldn't recall her own daughter and grandchildren. Even her nephews' names had faded from her mind. But she never forgot her husband.

This year, when the Spring Remembrance Festival came, she insisted on going to the ancestral graves, just as she had always done. She remembered the date as she always did, and said it must be observed. Though her health wasn't strong and the spring rains hadn't let up, none of their persuasion could stop her.

In the end, she returned soaked through and fell ill soon after.

Clarence wrote a prescription, and she took the medicine for two days. Her condition slowly improved, but she still had a persistent cough.

As soon as she seemed better, Rafael began sending people away. He wouldn't allow too many visitors, as seeing too many faces wore her out. Every day, she spent what strength she had trying to recognize each person, leaving her exhausted.

At last, the dreary rains passed and the warm sunshine returned. The whole household seemed to breathe easier under its golden light.

The old couple walked two slow rounds around the garden, hand in hand, before taking a seat beneath the locust tree. The maids served their tea and quietly withdrew.

Rafael held his wife's hand as they sat side by side.

"Carissa, do you still remember who I am?" he asked gently, repeating the same question he asked several times a day.

A soft breeze stirred the silver

strands of Carissa's hair. She had

styled it in a simple knot that morning, but finding it too much trouble, she had undone it herself and tied it back into a loose ponytail. After their short walk, a few locks had already slipped free.

She had been a great beauty in her youth, her features striking and well-formed. Even now, in old age, she carried herself with grace and elegance. Tucking her hair behind her ears, she leaned back lazily in the lounge chair, tugging her cloak tighter about her shoulders.

Only then did she speak, slowly and clearly: "How could I not know? You're my guild junior."

Rafael looked at her, the affection in his eyes no different from when he was young.

"Yes," he said softly. "I'm your guild junior and husband. You must never forget. Even if we live to a hundred, you must still remember."

"Alright!" she answered, then raised her head and gave him a teasing look. "You want to live to a hundred?"

Rafael smiled and corrected her gently: "No, I want us to live to a hundred. And if we could live to a thousand, let's try for that too. As long as we're together."

"Sure!" Carissa said, leaning over and rested her head against his chest. "I'm feeling a bit sleepy."

"Then, rest a while. Let's try the Dreaming Butterfly incense the Nerathian envoy gave us."

Years ago, the envoys from Nerathia had brought them a gift of rare

incense called Dreaming Butterfly They said it would bring sweet

never used it, Rafael and Carissa had even forgotten where it was kept. It was only a few days ago that Lulu had come across it when she sent someone to tidy the storage chests.

dreams if lit before bed flyet

Clarence said that Carissa's heart had never truly healed. That the tragedy—the night her whole family was massacred—still haunted her like a nightmare. And he had been right.

Rafael and Carissa had shared a bed for decades, and he had lost count of the times she woke in the night, trembling and crying out, "Mom, run!"

She would be soaked in sweat and tears, her whole body shaking from the memory. Even after her memory had started to fade, those dreams never left her. If this incense could help, Rafael would have someone ride to Nerathia at once and bring back more.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1635 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1635

Rafael took out the box of incense, broke the seal, and opened it, only to find a single incense bead inside, no larger than a peanut.

"Only one?" he murmured in surprise.

The box had seemed rather large, so he had expected it to hold several. But no, there was just one. He looked at the bottom of the case, where a few characters were faintly inscribed. Though the words were a bit blurry, his eyes were still sharp enough to make them out.

[Dreams of the Butterfly.]

Dreams of the Butterfly... Dreaming Butterfly? The name sounded rather mysterious.

Perhaps it truly could bring beautiful dreams, as the envoy had claimed.

On the lid of the box, there were several more lines, carved in tiny seal script, each letter no bigger than an ant. Rafael squinted, but couldn't make out what they said. He didn't trouble himself too much about it. After all, Nerathia and Starhaven had long been on friendly terms. It would hardly be something harmful.

Aside from the lines of script, there was also a strange pattern. At first glance, it looked like a simple ring, but it wasn't. It was made up of countless smaller circles, each one nestled within the next, forming one great spiral.

Circle within circle, going deeper and deeper. Rafael couldn't say how many there were.

When the incense was finally lit, Carissa was already asleep.

Laying beside her, Rafael couldn't smell anything at all. Perhaps the incense had sat too long and lost its strength. But that was all right; he felt at peace simply staying by her side. Seeing her sleep soundly was enough to make his heart content.

Outside, the afternoon sun was warm and golden. The trees stretched their leafy arms wide, and little birds flitted here and there, chirping busily. It was a lovely, lively scene.

The gentle breeze stirred the clouds in the sky, sending them rolling and shifting like waves. They moved so swiftly, one could hardly tell what shape they had taken. And if someone were to look up just then, they might not even notice that the clouds at the edge were already scattering, vanishing without a trace.

Carissa woke from her nap with her head still a little dazed. She turned to look beside her, but the bed was empty.

"Raf?" she called softly.

At once, footsteps sounded. The curtain was drawn back, and a young girl's face appeared.

"You're awake, my lady!" the girl said cheerfully.

Carissa stared at her, confused for a moment.

These past two years, her memory had often failed her. Sometimes, she was clear-headed, while at other times, she wasn't. On her better days, she could recognise most people. At her worst, she remembered only Rafael.

Carissa could sometimes recognise Lulu too, though not always. But Lulu now had a face full of wrinkles, snow-white hair, and a stooped back. So, how was it that she now looked like a girl of fifteen or sixteen?

Lulu reached out and pulled back Carissa's covers. "My lady, why are you just staring? Get up quickly! Madam Melanie is waiting for you. The people from Valor Estate have come today to propose. Madam Melanie said you should go see them. If all is well, the match will be settled."

"What did you say?" Carissa asked, completely stunned.

She felt like she was clear-headed now, so why was Lulu acting strangely?

"It's General Barrett Warren from Valor Estate, the same man who came before. Madam Melanie thinks he is suitable. Didn't you say you wanted to meet him before deciding? Madam Melanie said... Oh, my lady, please slow down. Don't run!"

Set

But Carissa ran swiftly out, her mind confused but her heart beating wildly. She couldn't tell if she was clear-headed or still foggy. She knew only one thing: her mother was still alive, and the Sinclair family had not been wiped out.

"Aunt Carissa, why are you running so fast?"

Carissa stopped when she heard a young voice call out, only to see Ryan and Jareth Sinclair coming

toward her. Jareth was her oldomet

brother's son who had died in that terrible tragedy that almost wiped out their family. In Carissa's old memories, his face was already faint.

She suddenly threw her arms around him, tears streaming down her cheeks. Jareth was now almost as tall as Carissa. Being held like that left him a little stunned, but he dared not move.

He wrapped his arms around her and said in a choked voice, "Aunt Carissa, were you thinking about Grandfather and Dad again?"

Carissa let go and blinked through her tears. The two faces before her were blurry, but gentle hands wiped her tears away softly, comforting her, telling her not

to cry.

Hearing their voices made everything feel more real. Carissa didn't care whether this was a dream or reality. She took their hands and hurried toward the main hall, desperate to see her mother.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1636 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1636

In the main hall, Melanie sat quietly in her chair. An old maid stood beside her, and on either side sat the younger ladies of the Sinclair family. The matchmaker and Barrett were seated at the far left.

Barrett's cheeks were flushed, and he gathered his courage to say, "Madam Sinclair, please rest assured. I swear on my life that I will take no other wives, nor will I ever fail Lady Sinclair."

Before Melanie could reply, hurried footsteps echoed nearby. Her eyes were now too weak to see clearly, so she could only make out a blurred figure. The person rushed forward and threw themselves into her arms, their voice choked with sobs.

"Mom!"

A sharp pain touched Melanie's heart. She ignored Barrett and the matchmaker, reaching out to stroke the girl's hair.

"Another bad dream?" she asked.

Carissa had been kept in the dark about her father's and brothers' deaths, only learning of it after returning from Meadow Ridge. The grief had caused her to faint several times, and even now, she had not yet recovered from the sorrow.

Carissa knelt on the floor, holding her mother tight. Even if it was just a dream, she wouldn't let go.

"My dear, please stop crying," Yvette said gently as she came forward. "We have guests."

Carissa lifted her head and looked at Yvette, her second sister-in-law, so full of life. Her other sisters-in-law were also present. They gazed at her with sorrow in their eyes, yet with such gentle warmth.

Tears fell freely as she whispered, "Everyone is here. It's so good... you're all here."

"Silly child." Melanie smiled, pulling her up by the hand. "You're here to discuss your marriage. How could your sisters-in-law not be present to advise you? Come now, don't be rude. Stand up."

Carissa rose but didn't let go of her mother's hand. Her eyes still carried sorrow as they moved over every face in the room.

Barrett saw her expression and stood awkwardly to bow. "I am Barrett Warren. It is an honor to meet you, Lady Sinclair."

Carissa turned to look at the young man and was momentarily taken aback.

In her memories, her mother and sisters-in-law remained unchanged as they had passed away young. But Barrett had died when he was in his fifties.

The last time Carissa had seen him was a year before his death. His health had been poor, and he needed support to walk. The harsh winds of Victory Pass had lined his face with wrinkles and whitened his hair, making him look far older than his years.

Carissa wasn't quite sure if she was truly living again or still trapped in a dream. But whatever the case, she wouldn't marry Barrett.

Her cheeks still wet with tears, she curtsied politely and said, "General Warren, please take your leave. I have no plans to marry yet."

Barrett looked shocked and lost, glancing helplessly at the matchmaker, whom Carissa didn't let speak.

"Lily, see the guests out," she instructed firmly.

"Madam Sinclair, we agreed on this marriage. What has changed?" the matchmaker asked, looking at Melanie, who was just as surprised.

"Cari?" Melanie called out, confused.

Hadn't Carissa already agreed previously? She had only said that if Barrett came to see her, the match could be settled.

"See them out!" Carissa ordered.

She was, after all, the regent's princess consort who had held power for many years. What had just passed was a moment of weakness. Now that she had to take control of

the situation, she was more

decisive.

Lily already thought Barrett was not worthy of their lady. Hearing Carissa's order, she immediately began to usher the guests to the door.

However, Barrett, who wasn't ready to give up, said, "Lady Sinclair, do you think my mother's absence means a lack of sincerity? She is bedridden, that is why..."

"General Warren, I will not marry you," Carissa said clearly. "Please leave."

Barrett tried to speak again, but the matchmaker heard the finality in her tone and knew there was no hope. So, she nodded and pulled Barrett away.

Once outside, the matchmaker sighed. "Haven't you figured it out yet? She simply doesn't fancy you. So many suitors come to Northwatch Estate every day, and you are hardly the one she needs. I

think you were only a plaything to

her."

Barrett looked back with disappointment, unwilling to accept it but helpless all the same.

After a long pause, he muttered, "If I was only a plaything, why did she make me swear I'd never take another wife? She just made a fool of me."

He walked away dejectedly.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1637 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1637

Inside Northwatch Estate, Carissa held her mother's hand tightly and wouldn't let go. Even as Melanie scolded her daughter for being stubborn, she only smiled and cried without saying a word in reply.

Seeing her behavior, Melanie grew worried.

"Are you ill?" she asked, touching Carissa's forehead.

She turned to one of the servants and instructed, "Go quickly and fetch Sebastian."

Carissa's sisters-in-law gathered around, each one speaking with concern.

The servant soon brought Sebastian. When Carissa saw him, she couldn't help but cry again. She still remembered how deeply saddened she had been when the physician passed away, and how she had taken care of his funeral herself.

Now, she knew she wasn't in a dream. She had truly come back to life-back to a time before she married Barrett. Thinking about the many things she could change this time made her laugh and cry all at once.

Melanie and the other ladies thought Carissa might have lost her mind.

After examining her, Sebastian said, "Perhaps she hasn't accepted the fact that the Marquis of Northwatch and his sons have passed away, so her mind is confused for now. Since she doesn't want to marry, I think it's best to follow her wishes and not force her. This will prevent her condition from getting worse."

Melanie held Carissa close, tears rolling down her cheeks. The older woman knew her health was poor; she couldn't say how much longer she had to live. She only wished to find Carissa a good match soon, so she might rest assured knowing that her daughter would be taken care of.

But with Carissa's condition, it would be wrong to marry her off hastily. Besides, the girl herself kept saying she wouldn't marry, so Melanie agreed.

During the time Carissa spent "recovering", she lived as if in a sweet dream. She stayed by her mother's side every day, looked after her nephews and nieces, and talked with her sisters-in-law. Only then did she feel happiness.

Though her father and brothers were gone, they had died bravely for their kingdom. However, the fall of the Sinclair family was different. If Carissa had not gotten married and left home all those years ago, her family might not have been annihilated.

That pain and regret had never left her heart. This time, she decided that no matter what, she would stay by their side and avoid the disaster that had once come to pass.

She planned to form a group of strong bodyguards. Finding bodyguards was easy enough, but finding ones skilled in fighting was not. Still, she could write to Adrian and ask him to help find some. In the martial arts world, some guilds that fell on hard times were willing to sell their skills to noble families, as long as the price was right.

After about a month, the team of bodyguards was put together. Anyone who came with a letter from Adrian had already been carefully chosen. Their character and

skills were all checked and approved before they were sent here.

The last to arrive was Travis. He didn't even carry a weapon, just a simple stick at his waist.

Carissa stared at him for a long while. So, this was what Travis looked like when he was young. Though he had served at Hell Monarch Estate all his life, from his youth to old age, she had long forgotten what he looked like when he was young.

Travis touched his cheek and chuckled. "Is my face dirty?"

"No." Carissa snapped out of her thoughts, then smiled and looked him over. "It's just your clothes don't fit anymore."

The Lunar Guild had lived through hard times, and the clothes of the apprentices were always patched, and mended. The set Travis wore now was no different, covered in patches. Back on the mountain, his garments had been clean. But after days of travel, it was only natural that dust had settled on them.

"My mentor says I've grown too fast and plans to make me new clothes next year," Travis said with a happy smile, his eyes full of eager hope for the new set.

"I'll ask Lily to make you a few sets," Carissa offered with a smile.

Travis snorted. "A few sets? That would cost too much money. One set is enough. I even brought a spare."

In the past life, Travis was always frugal, careful with clothes and food. Violet said he grew stingier as he got older.

"But wait... If I wear patched clothes, won't I embarrass you and the marquis' family? Then, make me two sets," he said after a moment of thought.

Carissa took his arm and led him to the small garden. "You won't be guarding the estate. You'll come with me to Victory Pass."

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1638 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1638

Yes, Carissa had to go to Victory Pass. She had to stop Aurora from slaughtering the villagers and murdering Arthur, the crown prince of Orivenia-now still known as Westhaven.

Carissa had to do this for her kingdom and her family.

After Arthur killed himself because he couldn't stand the humiliation he had suffered, Westhaven's spies hidden in Starhaven's capital retaliated by annihilating Carissa's entire family.

Though she had formed a bodyguard team to keep her loved ones safe and avoid further trouble, she had to strike at the source to truly prevent the tragedy.

The border skirmishes between the two kingdoms were likely to escalate into war. This conflict had been carefully plotted by Leroy's faction within Westhaven, and Carissa couldn't change their decisions. But since war was inevitable, she would find a way to alter its course.

Back in her previous life, her seventh uncle had died defending the city. If she could change things this time, perhaps she might save him. And perhaps her third uncle wouldn't lose his arm rescuing Barrett.

So, after making proper arrangements at home, she would set off for Victory Pass, supposedly to visit her grandfather.

By now, both kingdoms were testing each other along the border. War could break out at any moment. However, Victory Pass was far from ready. Part of its forces had even been moved to the Southern Frontier.

This was because neither Starhaven nor Westhaven had fought a true war in years. Their conflicts had been brief, consisting of nothing more than scattered raids. The campaign to reclaim the Southern Frontier had become urgent, demanding swift and decisive action.

As long as Westhaven didn't send reinforcements, the battle to take back the Southern Frontier would go smoothly under Rafael's command.

Once matters at Victory Pass were dealt with, Westhaven wouldn't send 300,000 soldiers to assist Sandoria at the Southern Frontier. That meant the Starhaven forces at the Southern Frontier wouldn't have to worry about being overwhelmed by additional enemies.

Travis didn't ask why Carissa wanted to go to Victory Pass. So long as there was food and a place to sleep, he was content to follow.

Meanwhile, Carissa remained busy managing affairs at the estate, unaware that the rumors spreading through the city were growing worse by the day.

People said that the Marquis of Northwatch's family was using Carissa's engagement as a farce, and that they had no true intention of making a match. They only wished to see how much influence their family still held.

At a garden party hosted by Grand Princess Eleanor, many made light of it. They laughed, saying that those who had gone to ask for Carrisa's hand in marriage were fools.

Ordinarily, when two families considered a match, it would not be spoken of until an agreement had been made. Most people didn't even know who had gone to Northwatch Estate with a marriage proposal.

The only one known to have done so was Barrett, and that was only because his mother, Rebecca, had flown into a rage when she found out her son would not be securing a marriage match with the marquis' household.

Rebecca had cursed the Marquis of Northwatch's family most fiercely, calling them blind fools who looked down on others. As the Warren family didn't manage its servants well, the tale spread quickly.

So, when people laughed, it was Barrett who was the subject of ridicule.

In truth, he was not the only one who had gone to Northwatch Estate with a marriage proposal. Though others from noble families had gone too they said nothing and even joined in the mockery. But in their hearts, they resented the Marquis of

Northwatch's family for the slight.

Some mocked with bitter words: "That young lady from the Sinclair family? I hear she was sent off to learn swordplay when she was still a child. She's nothing but a rough and common sort.

The Warren family may not be what it once was, but their ancestors were great generals. And she dares to turn up her nose at them?

"Let us see who will marry her now. If one of them earns glory in battle and she comes to regret it... Well, that will be her own doing."

The Sinclair family was now a family of widows, the elderly, and the weak. What were a few idle words? They wouldn't trouble themselves over such things.

Still, Carissa's second sister-in-law, Yvette, wouldn't allow those rumors to reach the ears of her mother-in-law. She was afraid it would cause Melanie to worry about her daughter's reputation.

It was during this time that Carissa spoke to her sisters-in-law, saying she wished

to visit her grandfather at Victory Pass, and asking for their help in persuading Melanie.

"If it's only to avoid gossip, there's no need. But if you truly long to see

Grandfather and the others, then I see no harm in going," Yvette said gently.

"I care nothing for what outsiders

say. But my father and brothers died on the battlefield. If Grandpa and Grandma have heard of it, they must be grieving terribly. They're not young anymore—I must go and see them with my own eyes before I can be at ease," Carissa replied.

Her heart aching upon hearing that, Yvette relented, softly saying, "Then, go. I shall speak to Mother for you."

Melanie hesitated only a moment before agreeing. For one, she missed her parents too. And besides, Sebastian had said Carissa's spirits were poor of late. Perhaps leaving the capital and spending time away would help her recover.

Melanie reasoned that a trip to and from Victory Pass might take no more than a year, perhaps less. There would be time enough to arrange a marriage upon Carissa's return.

Her Graceful War Song #Chapter 1639 - Read Her Graceful War Song Chapter 1639

Before leaving for Victory Pass, Carissa wanted to visit Victoria. She had long hoped for the chance to enter the palace to see the queen dowager, and perhaps catch a glimpse of Helen, or even Salvador.

In their past life, Victoria and Helen had passed on after living long lives. Even so, their deaths still grieved Carissa deeply. She had mourned for quite some time and thought it was a farewell for eternity.

Never had she imagined she would get to see them again.

As an unmarried young lady, Carissa could not enter the palace alone. Proper etiquette required her mother to accompany her and present a formal request for an audience. Once Victoria granted it, they were permitted to visit.

Since the loss of her husband and sons, Melanie had not stepped beyond the gates of Northwatch Estate. Now, Carissa hoped a short outing might lift her mother's spirits. Additionally, a meeting with Victoria might offer some comfort and possibly aid in her recovery.

Melanie didn't want to go at first. But her daughter pleaded again and again, and at last, she relented. Due to her poor eyesight, she struggled to walk well. Carissa supported her the entire way until they arrived at Serenity Palace.

Once there, Keith came out to greet them. When he saw Melanie, his eyes grew misty.

He tucked one hand behind his back and bowed slightly. "Madam Sinclair, I hope you've been well?"

"Thank you for asking, Mr. Finley. All is well," Melanie replied with a gentle smile.

Keith nodded, now smiling warmly. "Her Majesty has been expecting you. This way, please."

Inside Serenity Palace, Carissa immediately saw Victoria seated upright in her chair. She leaned forward slightly, and her eyes were rimmed with red. Sitting next to her was Helen. At Victoria's signal, she stood and came forward to gently help Melanie, who had begun to curtsy.

"I'm so pleased you chose to come," Victoria said, her eyes bright with unshed tears as she looked at the now-seated Melanie.

"I've worried you, Your Majesty. The fault is mine," Melanie said, trying to smile.

But perhaps because she had known Victoria since they were young women, she could never quite hide her feelings in front of her. Melanie's smile trembled and her voice shook.

Victoria sighed heavily and turned to look at Carissa, only to find the latter staring at her with wide and red-rimmed eyes. She was still so young, and had already lost her father and brothers.

Victoria's heart softened at once. "It is good that you've returned, my dear. Stay close to your mother and keep her company."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Carissa replied, lowering her gaze. But even as she blinked, tears slipped quietly down her cheek.

Victoria saw it and assumed she was grieving her father and brothers again. Her own eyes grew dim with sorrow once more.

Helen sat at the side, offering a few words of comfort when the moment called for it. She was never one for soothing others, not because she lacked feeling, but simply because she wasn't good with words. Still, awkward as her phrases were, it was clear that they came from the heart.

After some time spent in quiet talk, Victoria turned to Melanie and asked, "I had heard you were arranging a match for Carissa, but then there was no more word of it. What happened?"

Victoria had clearly caught wind of

the rumors about how the Marquis of Northwatch's family was merely toying with suitors, showing off its influence with no intention of settling a match. But she had never believed such talk. She thought there must be more to the matter,

and so she asked directly.

Melanie sighed softly. "I had thought that while my health still held, I ought to see her settled. I even had someone in mind whom I believed suitable, but she wouldn't agree. She grew so distressed that she fell ill from it. How could I proceed then? I thought it best that she recover before we speak of it again."

"That was foolish," said Victoria with a sharp glance. "I know well what's in your heart. But your duty now is to care for yourself, and to hold up the household with your

daughters-in-law and grandchildren. That is what matters most. If you let your thoughts wander too often to dark places, how will your body ever heal?"

Victoria knew Melanie well. The latter feared that if her health failed and she passed on, her daughter would be left to mourn for three years. By that time, Carissa might be thought too old to marry. But such sorrowful thinking only worsened the illness.

Melanie also wanted, while she still lived, to be a support for her daughter, so that her future in-laws would not dare to mistreat her.

Victoria held Melanie's hand and gently urged her to place her thoughts on the future. She should think about her grandchildren's upbringing and education, and not dwell on what had already come to pass.

Of late, Melanie had shut herself off from the world. She hardly heard what anyone said, for grief had taken over her heart. But Victoria's words, though much the same as others, seemed to reach her more deeply.

Seeing her mother listen to the queen dowager, Carissa felt certain that the visit hadn't been in vain.

Chapter 1640

As Carissa and Melanie were leaving, Victoria sent Keith to escort them out of Serenity Palace.

Carissa took the opportunity to slip him a letter. "Would you be so kind as to pass

this along to Her Majesty?"

Keith blinked in surprise. "Why did you not hand it to Her Majesty herself just now,

Lady Sinclair?"

Supporting her mother gently, Carissa replied, "It's merely a note of thanks. I'm

not good with words, so I thought it best to write it down."

Keith chuckled. "I see. Very well. I shall see it delivered."

That very afternoon, Carissa set out for Victory Pass, taking Travis and Lulu along

with her. Before departing, she also sent letters to Violet, Bun, and Cynthia, asking them to travel to Victory Pass as well. They all had to arrive before the city's defenses were tested by war.

As for the letter to Victoria, it held no words of gratitude at all.

Instead, Carissa wrote to inform the queen dowager that Winona, who had long

wandered abroad, had returned with troubling news. Westhaven's factions were

tearing themselves apart, and were likely to seize upon the conflict between the

two kingdoms to further their schemes.

Though Victoria typically refrained from meddling in affairs of the kingdom, this

matter was far from trivial. If she believed it, she would surely speak to the king.

Salvador respected and trusted Victoria deeply, and he would dispatch carrier pigeons to his spies stationed in Westhaven without delay to investigate.

If reinforcements could be sent to Victory Pass sooner than in Carissa's previous

life, then the battle need not be so desperate. Fewer soldiers would have to give

their lives.

When Carissa and her companions finally arrived at Victory Pass, tensions between the two kingdoms had already begun to flare, though no full assault had

yet been launched.

The Sullivan family was naturally glad to see her, but when they thought of Carissa's father and brothers' sacrifice, they couldn't help feeling sad. They asked

about how things were at home, and while they were told everything was fine, no

one truly believed it could be.

Carissa wept more than once, partly when speaking of her late father and brothers, but also when she saw with her own eyes that her third and seventh uncles were alive and well. And her grandparents were also still in good health.

During the family dinner that evening, she excused herself and asked to meet privately with her grandfather in his study, saying she had urgent matters to discuss. She also invited several of her uncles to join them.

At first, they thought perhaps something had gone wrong in the capital. But when

Carissa revealed that Westhaven's inner strife might soon ignite a full-scale war

between the two kingdoms, the room fell utterly silent.

They looked from one to another, speechless and grave. No one spoke a word.

Carissa thought they didn't believe

her and hurriedly said, "I speak the

truth. In Westhaven, the Stellwyn

brothers are at odds. General Leroy

seeks to seize command of the

army. He has allies at court, and

plans to trick the crown prince into going to the front lines, thereby placing him in danger. Once General Liam goes in search of him, General Leroy will launch an attack on Victory Pass."

Her grandfather and uncles looked at one another, yet still no one spoke.

"It's true, everyone. Please, believe me," Carissa urged, growing more anxious.

At last, Wade stroked his chin and broke the silence, saying, "We do believe you,

Cari. Your guild senior has always brought sound intelligence. We didn't speak

because our scouts have sent back some odd reports over the past few days, and

we were already uneasy. Now that you've said this, it begins to make sense."

Wyatt nodded. "Indeed. The scouts reported that Westhaven has been moving grain to Fawnrun City, which we all found strange. Westhaven's supplies are typically stored in Brightmere City, near the western mountains. That's where most of

their soldiers are stationed. Why
send rations to Fawnrun? We
couldn't make sense of it until now."

Dominic was deep in thought a little
longer, then looked at Carissa and
asked, "You mean to say that
General Liam will be lured away, and
General Leroy will take temporary
command, then strike against
Victory Pass. But if that is so, then
all this movement of troops and
grain...General Liam doesn't know of
it? How many men do they mean to
gather?"

For as it stood, Westhaven's current border forces were far too few to launch
a full

assault. And yet, they must be calling in reinforcements if they truly meant to
attack. But how could such a major shift in troops be hidden from Liam?

"He likely knows nothing of it. He may believe it's only routine supply or small
reinforcements. General Leroy must be hiding it from him, likely with help from
his

allies at court. As for how many men... the report didn't say exactly, but it
won't be

less than 200,000 soldiers," Carissa answered quickly.

Dominic's expression changed. "200,000? Then, we must make preparations at

once, or we'll be caught off guard when their army reaches our gates."

He dared not imagine what kind of chaos that would bring.