

## HER GRACEFUL WAR SONG

### War 2

Barrett sighed in frustration. "Why put yourself through this? There was a royal edict for this marriage. Even when Aurora moves in, you'll be in separate wings. She won't compete with you for control of the household. She doesn't care about those things."

"Do you really think I'm attached to managing this household?" Carissa countered.

Running this mansion was no easy task. Just the monthly medicine for Barrett's mother cost dozens of silver coins. Then, there was food, clothing, and social obligations—all these things required money. This household was practically a hollow shell. Over the past year, Carissa had used much of her dowry to keep things running.

And this was her reward.

"Enough, I won't argue with you. I just needed to inform you. Whether you agree or not changes nothing," said Barrett, his patience wearing thin.

As Carissa watched him leave in a huff, she felt even more bitter.

"My lady, my lord was too much!" said Lulu, Carissa's maid, wiping her tears away.

"Don't call him that!" Carissa gave her a stern look. "We never consummated the marriage. He's not your lord. Go fetch my dowry list."

"Why the dowry list?" Lulu asked, puzzled.

Carissa tapped her on the forehead. "Silly girl, why would we stay in this house any longer?"

Lulu held her forehead and gasped. "But your mother arranged this marriage, and your father wanted you to marry and have children."

Tears finally welled up in Carissa's eyes at the mention of her parents. Her father had stayed loyal to her mother, never taking a concubine. They had six sons and one daughter. All her brothers followed her father to the battlefield. Three years ago, none returned from the Southern Frontier.

Though she was a girl, Carissa came from a family of warriors and started training as a child. At the age of seven, she was sent to study under a master, where she also learned military strategy. When she returned home at fifteen, she learned her father and brothers had died a year earlier.

Her mother, who had gone blind from crying too much, held Carissa close and said, "You must live like the noble girls in the kingdom. Find a good husband, marry, have children, and lead a peaceful life. You're the only child I have left."

Carissa felt like someone had gouged her heart out. The pain she felt was so intense she couldn't even bring herself to cry.

Determined to please her mother, she spent a year mastering the traditional values and duties expected of a noblewoman. She also learned accounting and how to manage a household.

Not only was Carissa the Marquis of Northwatch's daughter, but she was also known for her beauty. So, suitors flooded their doorstep. Her mother had chosen Barrett because he had sworn he would never take another wife if he married Carissa.

But six months ago, tragedy struck.

All the residents of Northwatch Estate were massacred. No one was spared, not even the children or servants. Each victim suffered numerous knife wounds, and their bodies were brutally dismembered. Carissa's youngest nephew had been only two and a half years old, born after the death of her third brother.

The local authorities and garrison unit captured a few of the assailants. After further investigation, they were discovered to be spies from an enemy kingdom, Westhaven.

The war at the front line was raging, yet these spies didn't hesitate to reveal themselves just to annihilate her family. The manner of the massacre suggested it was more of a personal vengeance than anything else.

When Carissa received the news, she rushed home, only to find her grandmother's and mother's gruesomely dismembered bodies.

Blood stained every corner of the residence, and the dead were left in agonizing states.

Now, Carissa was the lone survivor of the marquis' family. The idea of restoring her family's former glory seemed impossible—at least to outsiders. They saw her merely as a delicate, fragile woman. However, Aurora was different. She had earned military merits for her contribution to the war and became the first female general in history. Even the queen dowager had high praise for her.

With Aurora supporting Barrett, his future would be more secure. That was the reason the Warren family readily agreed to the marriage.