

War Song 241

Chapter 241

Ryan did indeed wake up in the middle of the night. Although he had sined a few times earlier, he had only been half-conscious and had dowlly closed his eyes again when he saw Carissa

Late at night, the room was brightly lit. While Ryan was asleep, Carissa had used hot water to wash his face. Though his small face was painfully thin, he still bore a striking resemblance to his father, then When Ryan woke up, he cried again but managed to stile at Carises through his tears. Due to how thin he was, his dimples were more pronounced

Carisse helped him bethe, immersing the boy in the tub and carefully mesting his hair, She gently applied olive oil to untangle the matted strands before rinsing them dean,

After his beth, Ryab was dressed in new clothes bought for a seven-year-old. The clothes were slightly oversized, but at least he looked neat and tidy. When the food was served from the kitchen, his eyes it up instinctively, he grabbed a piece of meat and stuffed it into his mouth, then hurriedly ducked under the table

It was a reflexive action. After hiding for a moment, he cautiously sat back up in the chair, his eyes brimming with tears as he looked at his aunt.

Carisse tumed to the side to wipe away her own tears before turning back with a smile. "Eat slowly, I will keep you company

When Rafael tried to enter the room, Ryan immediately became wary and set down his utensils, Seeing how frightened of men the boy was, the prince took a step back

"You two enjoy your meal, I'll eat outside,"

"Thank you, Your Highness," Carissa stood and walked over to Rafael Her eyes were filled with sincerity and gratitude. "I'll never forget this kindness."

"There's no need for such formalities. We are about to get married. Stay with him. I've arranged for some writing materials to be brought later. I know Ryan started studying when he was three, so he knows how to read and write."

Carissa nodded, "Alright, I'll ask him about it after we finish eating."

Once Rafael left, the wariness in Ryan's eyes disappeared. He snuggled close to Carissa and began to eat ravenously,

Carissa looked at his thin face and body. Ryan seemed to have barely grown taller over the past two years. She could only imagine the suffering he had endured,

"Eat slowly, don't choke," she said gently.

Ryan slowed down his eating, but to Carissa, it looked like he was still devouring his food with desperation. The meal was finished in no time; he polished off several dishes and a whole loaf of bread. Afterward, Carissa cleared the table and set out the writing materials. She grasped his thin, fragile wrist.

"I remember you can read and write. Even if you haven't written in the past two years, you should still remember the things you learned. Could you tell me how you escaped and how you ended up in this state?" she asked, her tears falling slowly into the ink pot.

After giving her nephew a bath, Carissa had seen the extent of his injuries-large and small, old and new. His body was covered in wounds, to the point there was almost no unblemished flesh left. Also, his left leg was crippled. The physician had examined it and found that the bone had healed crookedly after being broken. To fix it properly, the bone would need to be rebroken and set again.

Ryan wiped his aunt's tears away with his thin, bony hands, then shook his head. He had a pitiable and heart-wrenching expression on his face. His eyes were deep-set, his cheeks sunken, and his body stick-thin. To Carissa, he seemed like a mere wisp of a person. It pained her greatly to see him like this.

If she had known Ryan was still alive, she would have searched for him across the land, to spare him from such suffering.

Once they settled down again, Ryan began to write. Perhaps due to not writing for a long time, in combination with poor nutrition and abuse, his fingers were somewhat deformed. Seeing him struggle to hold the quill firmly, Carissa held his hand to steady it.

After a long while, Ryan slowly started to write, each stroke a tremendous effort. Writing was a laborious task for him, as he lacked strength.

After what seemed like an age, he managed to write a simple sentence: [Went out to buy candied apples.]

Chapter 242

The words were so crooked and difficult to decipher that Carissa had to spend a long time making sense of them.

When she finally figured them out, she looked up at Ryan with swollen eyes, tears streaming down her face once more. The words felt like daggers piercing her heart, causing her to curl up slightly in pain.

In the days before the massacre, she had returned to Northwatch Estate and discussed the Victory Pass battle with Melanie, who was worried about Dominic. She feared her father might meet the same fate as her husband and sons. Carissa had tried to comfort her, but her own anxiety about her grandfather and her concern for her mother was palpable.

Outside Melanie's courtyard, Carissa had bumped into Ryan. He had lifted his small face and asked his aunt if she was unhappy.

Carissa had smiled and ruffled his hair, saying, "I'm a little bit unhappy, but I'll cheer up soon. Don't worry, Ryan."

At the time, she had been preoccupied with her own worries and had given a somewhat dismissive answer. Perhaps Ryan sensed her unhappiness and thought buying her candied apples would lift her spirits. During the year and more Carissa had spent waiting to marry after returning from Meadow Ridge, she had primarily spent her time playing with the children, trying to bring them joy and alleviate their fear of losing their fathers. As a result, her nephews and nieces were very close to her.

Ryan had been five years old then, old enough to understand the gravity of the situation. He saw his grandmother and mother crying all the time, and knew his father was dead. Being smart and sensitive, he had become very dependent on Carissa and was especially close to her.

Ryan continued to write laboriously. After a while, his wrist was clearly exhausted, so Carissa suggested he take a break. But he stubbornly clenched his fist and continued to write.

Through painstakingly slow writing, the truth of how he had escaped was finally being revealed.

That day, he had slipped out at noon. Afraid of being caught, he had asked his attendant, Sunny, to wear his clothes and hide in the house to fool his mother. Ryan had then crawled through a dog hole to leave the estate and buy candied apples.

Back then, Sunny had only recently been brought into Northwatch Estate. Yvette had planned to make him Ryan's study companion, a detail Carissa was unaware of.

Ryan had just bought the candied apples with the intention of taking them to Valor Estate for Carissa when he was struck on the head midway. When he woke up, he found himself locked in a dark room with several other children.

They had been captured by human traffickers.

The other children were frightened by threats and dared not resist, but Ryan had fought back and been brutally beaten.

These children had three possible fates: becoming beggars, being trained as thieves, or, for girls, being sold to brothels. That day, Ryan's leg had been broken, condemning him to a life as a beggar.

The traffickers had given a drug to all except the girls to render them mute. Some of the older children, who were literate, had their fingers smashed to prevent them from writing or reading, as beggars would earn more sympathy and money if they appeared more pitiable.

Since Ryan had been wearing a servant's outfit and was only five years old, the traffickers hadn't considered that he might know how to read, so they hadn't smashed his fingers.

Over the past two years, as Ryan moved from place to place, he eventually learned of his family's massacre after being held by the traffickers for over half a year. At the time, many people were saying that the Duke of Northwatch's family had been completely wiped out.

He had believed that this meant Carissa was also dead.

The past two years had been incredibly harsh for Ryan. He had tried to escape countless times, only to be caught and brutally beaten each time. Whenever he begged for food, someone would always be watching him. Most of the time, he couldn't escape due to his injured leg, and getting caught meant a severe beating.

Over time, he grew fearful of trying to run away. He began to feel despair and numbness inside. Additionally, the traffickers had given them medication that needed to be taken every few days-missing a dose caused severe discomfort, making it impossible to leave.

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Chapter 243

After he finished writing, Ryan was exhausted, Carissa urged him to rest and watched as he fell asleep, unable to bring herself to leave his side. She was terrified that if she stepped away, the fragile dreamlike peace she felt would shatter, and Ryan would be gone when she returned to reality.

Her heart ached to see the child suffer so much. Watching him limp painfully as he walked felt like a thousand needles piercing her heart.

Rafael had already begun arranging their return to the capital. Ryan needed to see Sebastian for treatment as soon as possible, no time could be wasted. At seven years old, Ryan was still as small as he had been at five, and it was unclear what other poisons he might have been exposed to. It was difficult for any of them to feel at ease until Ryan was examined thoroughly.

Rafael had also instructed the Eldorian governor to submit an urgent report to the king on his behalf, detailing the situation. The preservation of even a small part of the Duke of Northwatch's family bloodline would surely bring joy to the king and the

entire court

There was also the matter of the Klein family, Ryan would be a form of salvation for them as well.

The massacre of the Duke of Northwatch's family was not just a matter of everyone being killed-it had been a scene of utter brutality, with each person suffering multiple wounds. The fact that the

body presumed to be Ryan had its head severed, as well as its face and body mutilated to the point of being unrecognizable, was chilling to recall

Upon hearing the news of the massacre back then, the Klein family's matriarch, Ingrid, had fainted on the spot. The elderly woman had raised Yvette since childhood and had been particularly close to her. Meanwhile, the Klein family's patriarch was so grief-stricken he had fallen from the stone steps due to dizziness and passed away the next day.

Under such a grim shadow, the Klein family had scarcely participated in any activities over the past two years, avoiding public events and ceremonies in the capital.

Two days later, Rafael and Carissa set off for the capital by carriage.

With Lightning pulling the cartage, Rafael took on the role of coachman, while Carissa stayed in the carriage with Ryan.

Carissa took out the starcake Lily had packed and gave it to Ryan. As he ate, tears streamed down his face and he gestured with his hands, wanting to say how delicious it was. Understanding his intentions, Carissa's heart ached.

"From now on, if you want something to eat, just let the kitchen know. They will make it for you," she said,

Ryan's eyes brightened for a moment but then quickly dimmed,

Returning home was bittersweet-though the house remained, his family was gone. As far as he knew, his aunt was married and now lived in Valor Estate, which meant she couldn't be with him all the time. So, throughout the journey, Ryan clung to Carissa. Even at night, when they stayed at inns, he insisted on sleeping in the same room as her.

Though Carissa had brought some medicines with her, she only dared to give her nephew the ones meant for restoring strength and vitality. She was afraid to administer anything else, unsure of his current condition or what poisons he might have been exposed to. She feared that using the wrong medicine might worsen his

condition.

Back when she just returned from Meadow Ridge, Ryan still spoke in a childlike voice. By the time she married Barrett, he had begun to act like a little adult. His grandmother had told him that he was to grow up to be a man of the Duke of Northwatch's family, and that he would be responsible for protecting his aunt and his siblings. That had led him to adopt a serious tone, trying to appear mature,

His attempts to act like an adult were particularly amusing. Thinking back on how he used to mimic seriousness made Carissa smile through her tears.

During the journey, Rafael spoke very little to Carissa, as Ryan resisted everyone and didn't allow the prince to approach her. Despite knowing Rafael had saved him, he remained fearful and wary. Carissa tried to explain that Rafael was a good person, but Ryan wouldn't listen. At night, in an inn, he wrote down his reasons for distrusting the prince.

Since Rafael was a tall, intimidating man, he could use a whip to beat people or kick them. Men like him could also pick others up by their collars and throw them into a water tank, holding their heads down until they almost drowned before pulling them

out.

Carissa read each word carefully, learning more about the horrors Ryan had endured

over the past two years. Her heart felt like it was being torn apart.

Chapter 244

Once the boy had fallen into a deep sleep, Carissa went to find Rafael and showed him the note Ryan had written.

The prince's expression was complex as he read the note. Did he resemble those thugs who had beaten Ryan? Perhaps so. After years on the battlefield, he had developed a certain harshness.

Rafael sighed deeply. "We'll take it slow. I'll try to be more gentle and smile at him more often."

Ryan needed healing, both physically and emotionally.

"You've worked hard throughout this journey," Carissa said.

Her gratitude towards Rafael was beyond mere words. However, there was something she needed to clarify.

She removed a hairpin from her hair and used it to adjust the wick of a lantern. The small flame flickered, casting a warm light over her gaunt face and pale lips.

She spoke softly, "Given Ryan's condition, he'll need me for at least two or three more years. If our marriage is to proceed, I'll need to bring him to your estate with me. I can't leave him alone at Northwatch Estate."

Rafael's handsome face remained calm, his dark eyes reflecting the lantern's light

with a reassuring gleam.

"Our marriage will proceed as planned. I agree that Ryan shouldn't be left alone at Northwatch Estate. He'll need to be with us, to be cared for, detoxified of the drug, and have his leg treated. Once he's better, he can continue his studies or go for martial arts training. Or if he doesn't want to do either, that's also fine. We can still take care of him. Regardless of what he chooses, I'll treat him as my own child." His words eased Carissa's worries. Considering everything that had happened, she realized that Rafael was genuinely dedicated to her. Even if their marriage lacked romance, they could at least maintain mutual respect.

However, she needed to find a way for Ryan to lower his defenses and accept Rafael. Otherwise, how would they coexist under the same roof in the future? *

As a prince of royal blood, Rafael might tolerate Ryan's initial hostility once, twice, or even three times. But if it persisted, he would inevitably feel disheartened, especially

with Helen also residing in the estate with them.

Ideally, Carissa wouldn't marry at this time, but the king's edict was unavoidable. Now more than ever, she refused to enter the palace as the king's concubine-not only would she be unable to care for Ryan, but even seeing him would be a challenge.

Seeing her deep in thought, Rafael said, "For now, you don't need to worry about anything else. Just focus on Ryan. Don't worry about how the people in my estate will treat him. As long as I'm here, no one will bully him."

"Thank you, Your Highness," replied Carissa, feeling touched.

Rafael smiled. "You don't need to keep thanking me. Aren't you tired of saying that all the time? I know I am. Just get some rest. We'll need to set out early tomorrow." "Alright, I'll head back now. I wouldn't want Ryan to wake up in the middle of the night and be anxious if he doesn't see me." Carissa stood, gave a slight bow, then left. Rafael didn't sleep. Sitting cross-legged on the bed, he pondered how to dispel Ryan's wariness of him.

Over the past few days, Ryan had been genuinely frightened of him. Whenever they got out of the carriage, the boy would first hide behind Carissa, not daring to even peek at Rafael. If the prince took a step closer, Ryan would tense up all over.

Rafael glanced at the paper on the table, his expression hardening. These traffickers, no matter how far they fled, would be hunted down. Rafael would avenge Ryan and the other children they had harmed. The next day, the prince began to be much more amiable towards Ryan, even smiling occasionally. However, for some unknown reason, the child seemed even more fearful when Rafael smiled. After two days of this approach proving ineffective, Rafael changed his strategy. Instead of trying to befriend Ryan directly, he focused on being kind to Carissa.

He showed concern for her, made considerate gestures, and was attentive to her needs. At first, Carissa was taken aback by his sudden gentleness and didn't know how to respond. But she quickly realized the purpose behind his behavior and began to reciprocate his kindness and warmth.

Since Ryan was most attached to his aunt, treating her well would hopefully put the child at ease. However, after two days of this new approach, not only had Ryan's wariness of Rafael not diminished, but it seemed to have increased.

It was truly puzzling!

Chapter 245

, he would understand more than she might expect if she explained things to him.

Moreover, he had heard about the massacre of their family from common people. While he knew of the tragedy, the details remained unclear to him.

Though he was only seven years old, there were some truths he needed to face.

"The ones who wiped out our family were spies from Westhaven. I didn't know you had snuck out that day, so I thought you also died in the massacre. Now, you're the only male heir of the Duke of Northwatch's family. You carry the hopes and legacy of your grandfather, uncles, father, and all the others. You must be as fearless and steadfast as they were."

As Carissa spoke, she placed her hand gently on Ryan's shoulder, observing the tears streaming from his eyes.

She continued solemnly, "As for me, I've divorced Barrett. We're no longer husband and wife, and from now on, we're strangers."

Ryan wiped his tears away in shock, his eyes wide with disbelief.

I'll explain the reasons behind all this later. What you need to know now is that Prince Rafael is my betrothed, and we will marry by the end of the year. If you're wondering why I'm marrying him, it all begins with the Southern Frontier conflict..."

Carissa spoke with partial truths, veiling some aspects and fabricating others.

The parts Carissa revealed were that the culprits behind the massacre were spies from Westhaven. It was a truth that could not be hidden from Ryan. He would inevitably learn it upon their return to the capital. What she concealed was about the events that took place at Victory Pass-Ryan was not ready for that information yet.

And the fabricated part was the notion that she and Rafael had developed feelings for each other on the battlefield, which was why they decided to marry.

Carissa's eyes softened with genuine warmth as she spoke, as if truly discussing someone she cherished.

"Like your grandfather and father, His Highness is a general who fought on the battlefield to defend our kingdom. He's incredibly capable. What your grandfather once achieved, he has also

accomplished. He truly reclaimed our territory at the Southern Frontier. He's a hero, and he found you for me. I am very grateful to him, and... I have feelings for him."

When Carissa mentioned having feelings for Rafael, her mind briefly flashed to the prince's cold, noble face. Her heart skipped a beat and her breathing became uneven.

She had intended to deceive Ryan into thinking she was marrying someone she loved, and that doing so would bring happiness. However, after uttering those words, she discovered an undefined, inexplicable emotion toward Rafael.

This was a new feeling for her-one she had never experienced with anyone before.

Ryan looked at his aunt, then pointed outside and back at her, as if asking whether Rafael liked her.

Carissa's cheeks flushed. Since she was in the midst of deception, she decided to continue it fully and whispered, "He does like me too."

Though Ryan's eyes were still wet with tears, a smile began to emerge on his face.

In the next room, Rafael sat cross-legged on the bed, listening intently to every word

from the adjoining room. He listened with seriousness, his attention remaining focused and earnest even as time passed.

When Carissa said she had feelings for him, Rafael understood it was a lie meant to comfort Ryan.

It was a beautiful lie.

Rafael slowly pulled the blanket over himself, covering every inch from head to toe. As his stern expression faded, a radiant smile blossomed in the darkness under the blanket, repeatedly shining through. Carissa said she had feelings for him.

The kind lie was meant for Ryan, not for Rafael, so what the latter heard was not a lie.

The next day, Rafael appeared refreshed, though there were dark circles under his eyes.

Carissa found it strange how he managed to look so lively despite obviously not having slept well. Aside from the dark circles, his face and eyes actually had a radiant quality.

After talking with Ryan the night before, Ryan was now less fearful and wary of Rafael. Occasionally, he would lift the curtain to sneak a look at Rafael's back.

Was Rafael like his grandfather, Hector? If so, he must be really impressive-he only fought enemies and never harmed ordinary people.

So there was no need to be afraid of him.

Ryan kept reassuring himself this way, all the way through their journey. Gradually, Rafael became as familiar and trusted in Ryan's eyes as his grandfather or father. Moreover, Rafael would soon become his future uncle by marriage, a close relative.

By the time they arrived in Greenbrook County, Ryan had even started signaling Rafael and was bold enough to let Rafael hold his hand while buying pastries.

Carissa was very pleased to see this change.

But the transformation didn't stop there. Ryan seemed to trust Rafael as much as he trusted her. During meals, he would actively sit next to Rafael. When serving food, even though his fingers didn't exert much strength, he still tried hard to serve Rafael.

At night, Ryan wrote to Carissa, saying he would treat his future uncle well. By doing so, Ryan hoped that his future uncle would also treat his aunt well.

He was a warm and considerate child-always had been.

A smile gradually appeared on his face, and the shadows in his eyes had mostly dissipated. However, whenever he saw beggars on the road, he still looked at them with sympathy.

The beggars were not kidnapped children, but genuine beggars.

Ryan would give them buns whenever he could.

Carissa wanted to give the beggars some silver coins in accordance with D heart, but Ryan waved her off. He signaled the

their stomachs, while giving silver coins would lead to them being confiscated by their backers. He also explained that having once received silver coins, they would be beaten if they failed to obtain any in the future, as that was what happened to him.

Even though the beggars were different from those he had encountered before, Ryan still felt compelled to empathize with them.

Carissa was deeply moved, but smiled as she ruffled his hair. "Alright, we'll do as you say, Ryan."

In the capital, while the cabinet officials were processing petitions, they discovered one from the governor of Eldoria. It was sealed with wax, and the outside was labeled that Rafael had written this letter for the king's personal attention.

The cabinet passed the petition to the prime minister, Jeremiah.

Upon receiving it, Jeremiah said, "I will go to His Majesty."

In the study, Salvador opened the letter. After reading it, he slapped it down on his desk loudly. His face was flushed with excitement as he repeatedly exclaimed, " Great! That's great! That's wonderful!" Seeing this, Jeremiah asked, "Your Majesty, what is it that has made you so overjoyed?"

Salvador ordered that the letter be shown, to Jeremiah. After reading it, Jeremiah's expression brightened with delight.

"This is truly wonderful! Your Majesty, the Duke of Northwatch's family still has a surviving bloodline! I'm sure this has consoled the duke's spirit in heaven!"

Jeremiah was overwhelmed with emotion, his excitement almost causing him to falter. Having recently recovered from an illness, he was nearly overcome by his current exhilaration and almost stumbled. "Sit down!" Salvador noticed his condition, and quickly called for attendants to help him to a seat. "Support him and help him sit."

Jeremiah thanked Salvador and sat down, his tears flowing freely.

Despite the loss of composure, Jeremiah said, "So many matters have caused the duke's family to suffer in silence. I often feel remorse for not being able to speak up for them. I am sure Your Majesty feels the same. Now that the duke's family still has

descendants, it is truly a blessing from heaven and Your Majesty's great fortune."

Salvador nodded. Amid his excitement, Jeremiah's words stirred his memories, taking him back to his youth when he frequently visited Northwatch Estate and formed friendships with several of Hector's sons. During his time as crown prince and when he assisted in the administration of the government, he received a lot of valuable advice from Hector, which prevented many mistakes.

Since the Duke of Northwatch's family's complete annihilation, Salvador had often reflected on those past moments. Though the past could not be relived, the bond remained in his heart.

The survival of the Duke of Northwatch's bloodline brought him unparalleled joy.

"I remember Ryan. When he was one year old, Melanie brought him to meet me. That child was so charming and lively, resembling his father. He had a lovely smile and a pair of dimples. He was truly endearing."

Salvador sighed as he recalled the letter.

"It's a pity that that child has suffered so much."

Chapter 247

Jeremiah wiped away his tears. "It's good that he's alive. That's the most important part."

Then, he stood and bowed deeply. "I've lost my composure, Your Majesty. Please excuse me."

"I was also close to losing my composure, Jeremiah. Who wouldn't be moved by

such news?" Salvador said with a broad smile.

He then recalled something, and quickly ordered, "Derek, go to the Klein family's residence or look for the Marquis of Highcrest at the Royal Citadel. Inform him of this matter so he and his family can share in the joy."

Derek, who had been dabbing at his eyes, immediately replied, "Understood, Your Majesty. I'll go right away."

With a heart full of genuine happiness, Derek left. The survival of the Duke of Northwatch's family brought him true joy. Melanie had treated him with kindness, and he was more eager than anyone to see her family prosper.

As Jeremiah watched Derek leave, he was filled with a myriad of thoughts. Despite having a pile of official duties awaiting him, he was reluctant to return to his office so

soon.

"Your Majesty, the Victory Pass battle remains a disgrace for our kingdom. This matter has been kept secret, and Westhaven is unwilling to disclose it. However, with Westhaven's crown prince dead and the struggle for succession beginning, factions within Westhaven might seek to revive this issue to gain public support. Should we not prepare a countermeasure?"

Salvador pondered for a moment before responding, "This issue is like a sword hanging over our heads. We know little about Westhaven's situation, and can't control the outcome. As for our response, haven't we already made arrangements?"

"For now, we won't deal with Aurora. We'll pretend the court is unaware of her actions in this matter. If the matter comes to light, we'll arrest Aurora and send her to Westhaven for them to handle. That would at least be a form of resolution."

Otherwise, why would Salvador spare Aurora's life? He had long desired to see her suffer a thousand deaths!

Jeremiah considered this, and saw no better option.

This is the only course of action for now. After all, Marshal Liam has already taken personal revenge. The soldiers led by Aurora at the Southern Frontier battlefield were those who committed atrocities at Victory Pass against Westhaven's crown prince, and we've dealt with the survivors.

If Marshal Liam's revenge ends here, everything will be manageable. I only fear that he might lose control and expose what happened in Fawnrun. In that case, our only option would be to send Aurora to Westhaven."

Salvador remembered the marriage he had arranged in the past, and his frustration flared up.

"Barrett is now serving in the Capital Guards. He's a capable person, and he had no knowledge of the Fawnrun incident at first. However, he's been blind to many things. I'll leave him in the Capital Guards for a few years to see if he can endure it. If he can, I might transfer him back to the military. If it weren't for the lack of outstanding young generals these days, I wouldn't tolerate him at all."

"Your Majesty is indeed farsighted." Jeremiah lamented, "If General Warren hadn't sought marriage through military achievements, and if he were still the duke's family's son-in-law, his future would be boundless. At the very least, the duke's family's army would follow him. The current outcome is a result of his own actions, and he has no one to blame but himself."

Salvador nodded. "That's true, but I had arranged the marriage between him and Aurora. I recall that I granted him the status of a secondary wife, which is akin to a concubine. I've heard that the Warren family's matriarch was also restless. Sometimes, she would resent Carissa and other times, she hoped to mend her broken relationship.

"Barrett might be harboring similar thoughts. Though Aurora is his second wife, she's still considered to be a concubine. The Warren family needs a clear-headed mistress.

still have hopes of nurturing Barrett, so I don't want these internal matters to undermine my efforts."

Jeremiah couldn't help but be curious. "Your Majesty, although young generals are scarce, General Warren isn't the only option. Why are you so determined to cultivate

'Barrett's fault lies in his fickleness and ingratitude. Apart from his personal flaws, he has made no significant mistakes on the battlefield-only achievements. What I need are capable generals. If he can learn from his mistakes and improve, there will come

a day when he stands out. When that happens, it will add one more capable general

to our ranks."

Jeremiah understood Salvador's urgent need for capable young generals, which had reached the point of keeping him awake at night. He knew the reason-Salvador feared that Rafeel would one day become arrogant and harbor greater ambitions, which would damage their brotherly bonds and destroy the peace of the kingdom.

Jeremiah dared not suggest that Salvador was overly concerned. Sometimes, when a person was fixated on something, others' advice only deepened that fixation. As the current prime minister, Jeremiah couldn't afford to say anything in Rafael's defense

Salvador then instructed, "Find someone suitable for Barrett-someone who can manage him and maintain order in the household."

Chapter 248

Jeremiah felt a multitude of emotions as he took on the task of searching for a wife for Barrett.

He remembered how Barrett and Aurora's marriage was once celebrated with great fanfare, full of glory and anticipation. Many in the court had high hopes for them. Even the common people sang praises of their love, feeling sympathy and admiration for Aurora, who, despite her remarkable achievements, was willing to accept the status of a secondary wife,

Barrett was also praised. Even though he was deeply in love with Aurora, he didn't forget his rightful wife and managed to secure Aurora's position as a secondary wife. The victory at Victory Pass had clouded everyone's judgment, leading to wild celebrations and a loss of reason.

However, as the excitement faded, people began to see the dirt hidden beneath the beautiful facade of their stories. It eventually came to light that Barrett's primary wife was even more outstanding than Aurora. People started to recall the Duke of Northwatch's family's great contributions and the tragedy that had befallen them.

Yet, Carissa never received fair treatment in public opinion. She was surrounded by various controversies. For instance, when accusations of her being negligent toward her parents arose, people seemed to forget her significant contributions at the Southern Frontier battlefield. They buzzed around her like flies, only for the Astrology Department's minister to clarify the situation later.

Back then, Aurora was able to remain in the military. In contrast, Carissa held a nominal position as the deputy commander of the Mystic Army, which didn't require her to actively serve.

It was clear Salvador had no intention of granting Carissa an actual command position.

Jeremiah understood that Salvador had many considerations, but among them was a genuine regard for the Duke of Northwatch, which was enough for him. Carissa had originally been what remained of the Duke of Northwatch's family, but now that Ryan had been found, the Duke of Northwatch's title had a successor. However, the family members were still sparse, and Salvador was reluctant to risk further lives from the Sinclair family.

With this intention, other matters could be left aside, as if they did not exist.

Derek arrived at the Klein family's residence, Highcrest Estate, but didn't announce the news immediately, as Anthony was not yet back at the residence. Instead, he simply said he would wait for Anthony's return.

This caused some alarm among the Klein family members.

Derek smiled and reassured them, "There's no need to worry. It's good news, but we must wait for the Marquis of Highcrest to return to discuss it. By the way, does the residence have a physician?" Anthony's wife, Sophia, replied, "We do have a physician in the residence. The matriarch has been ill for a long time and can't be without a doctor."

Derek instructed Sophia, "In that case, Madam Klein should take a Heartshield Pill."

Sophia and her mother-in-law, Diana, were alarmed by this suggestion. With the men still on duty and away from the residence, it was left to the female members of the household to make decisions, which wasn't ideal given the circumstances.

Diana was Yvette's mother, and she had been in poor health since the deaths of her son-in-law and daughter. The news made her heart race, and she felt she might need a Heartshield Pill herself. Sophia first sent for the household physician and then dispatched someone to call the men of the house back. Derek was someone who rarely came without important reasons, so the gravity of the situation was clear,

Sophia was torn between her anxiety and anticipation. Though it was good news, the need for a physician hinted at something serious, leaving her both worried and hopeful.

Derek refrained from explaining immediately. Given Ingrid's fragile health, he feared that the excitement of the good news might trigger a heart attack. He wanted to ensure that the male members of the Klein family were present before revealing the details.

Initially planning to visit the Royal Citadel, he reconsidered due to the number of people there. Discussing the matter in such a crowded place, especially with Ryan still not back in the capital, could complicate things.

As for whether the Klein family should share the news with outsiders, that was their concern.

In less than an hour, the men of the Klein family returned to the residence in a hurry, with Anthony being the last to arrive.

The eldest man of the Klein family was Anthony's father. His name was Edward Klein, who was known for his calm demeanor and held a position at the National Academy, and he was visibly anxious. "Mr. Walker, please tell us, is there an edict from the king?"

Seeing that most of the Klein family members had returned, at least those from the main branch, Derek said, "His Majesty received a word from Prince Rafael in Eldoria. There is some good news, so His Majesty sent me to convey this news to everyone here first."

Chapter 249

The members of the Klein family were puzzled.

What good news could the Hell Monarch possibly have to share with the Klein family?

Seeing the confusion in their eyes, Derek continued, "Prince Rafael discovered a child beggar in Greenbrook County, who bears a striking resemblance to the late General Sinclair's second son. His Highness called him by name, and to his surprise, the child beggar responded="

Anthony found this absurd, and interrupted Derek, "Mr. Walker, so His Highness saw someone who resembles Ryan and reported it to His Majesty. What is the significance of this? Just because someone looks like Ryan doesn't mean it's him. What's the point of reporting this to His Majesty?"

Anthony was not only perplexed, but also angry. The loss of Yvette and Ryan was a deep wound for the Klein family, especially for the Klein family matriarch, who could not bear to hear such news.

What kind of good news was it to report seeing someone who merely resembled Ryan? It caused everyone in the family to rush home. To hear it was for this absurd news made Anthony irate with Rafael. Derek raised a hand to calm them. "Please, don't be anxious. If it were just a resemblance, His Highness wouldn't have traveled from Greenbrook County to Eldoria, Lady Sinclair went to Eldoria several days ago. It has now been confirmed that the child beggar is indeed Ryan Sinclair, the son of the late General Sinclair's second son. They should be arriving in the capital in a few days."

His words sent shivers down everyone's spines.

Anthony's face darkened as he vehemently denied, "It's impossible, absolutely Impossible! Ryan's dead. I held him myself... stitched his body together! Mr. Walker, you can't say this. We don't believe it. I don't know if Lady Sinclair knows it's true or not, and claim that the child beggar is Ryan, I know she hopes that someone from her family survived, but that's impossible!"

Diana had already started to cry. Her daughter and grandson had been dead for two years why would such a disturbance occur now?

Was Carissa out of her mind?

Derek saw their reactions, and said, "His Ma

Tapos sat

Whether you believe it or not, you will find out the truth when Prince Rafael and Lady Sinclair return to the capital." With that, he left.

The members of the Klein family exchanged glances, their faces reflecting a shared sense of absurdity.

Diana cried for a while before choking out, "Please don't report this Mother. She won't be able to bear it!"

Sophia replied, "Fortunately, we haven't informed her yet. However, the physician has already given her the Heartshield Pill."

A profound sadness settled over everyone again, their mood darkening as a cloud of sorrow enveloped them.

Edward sighed heavily, sitting in a chair and staring blankly at the courtyard outside. His thoughts drifted to his understanding daughter and his lively, intelligent grandson. His heart ached as if it were being torn apart.

Who wouldn't wish for it to be true? But how could it be?

He had seen the bodies of his daughter and grandson with his own eyes. The death of his grandson was particularly tragic. Though his face was unrecognizable, the bell-shaped gold bracelet on his wrist was not. Ingrid had specifically commissioned it for Ryan's fourth birthday.

So, there could be no mistake.

Derek's visit had drained the light from everyone's eyes, as if the events of that day were being forced upon them once more, stirring a deep discomfort that they didn't know how to dispel.

Anthony pondered momentarily, then sent a servant to Northwatch Estate to inquire whether Carissa had gone out.

When the servant returned, he reported that Carissa had left on the Starlight Harvest Festival and had gone alone.

"She left on the day of the festival itself. She must have been very anxious," Sophia said, looking at her husband.

"She..." Anthony wanted to voice some complaints about Carissa, but remembered their previous meeting. He knew she had never truly let go, and was suffering greatly.

Chapter 250

But how could it be true?

They were destined to be disappointed.

Everyone in the Klein family felt a deep sadness, but also sympathized with Carissa. If she had set out with high hopes, she would surely be heartbroken upon arrival.

Wait, Derek had mentioned that they would be arriving in the capital soon.

Could it be that she really brought that child beggar back, thinking him to be Ryan?

What kind of mistake was this? Just when Anthony thought her to be prudent, she had done something so reckless?!

Carissa had left the capital on Starlight Harvest Festival. By the time she reached the capital, it was already the seventh of September.

The crisp autumn air made for a pleasant day.

The city guards were astonished to see that the carriage was being driven by the Hell Monarch himself. The prince was acting as a coachman? Who was inside the carriage?

As a prince's carriage entering the capital didn't require inspection, it was allowed through immediately and went straight to Northwatch Estate.

Upon arriving at Northwatch Estate, Rafael turned to Carissa and Ryan. "I won't be coming in. Settle yourselves first, and I'll visit again in a couple of days."

It was clear they would be visiting the Klein family the next day, so Rafael wouldn't come tomorrow.

Carissa was about to express her thanks, but remembered that he had said he was tired of hearing it. Instead, she said, "You've worked hard, Your Highness. Please go and rest."

"Very well, then."

Rafael looked at Ryan and smiled, waving at him. "I'll send some good food for tomorrow."

Though Ryan was reserved, he was pleased and offered a smile in return. you

Seeing Ryan's smile, Rafael thought to himself that it had indeed been a hard journey.

After Rafael left, Carissa took Ryan by the hand and led him into Northwatch Estate.

Lily and Holly saw Ryan, and burst into tears

Even Frederick wiped his tears as he ran over, choked with emotion. "You're back, you're back-thank goodness you're back!"

He looked at Ryan, and his tears fell again.

The child was so thin and pitiable. How much had he suffered?

He turned and instructed the servants to prepare food, drinks, and hot water.

Lily and Holly had originally served in the household, and after Carissa married into the Warren family, they had followed her. Thus, Ryan had a vivid impression of both of them, as well as of Lulu. "Lord Ryan!"

Their voices were choked with emotion.

Ryan looked at them, then glanced at the other servants, and took in the stone steps. of the main hall and the surroundings.

No one else appeared.

He knew about the massacre of his family-that everyone, including his grandmother and mother were gone. However, knowing and seeing were different things. With the residence appearing so desolate, it left him with a stark sense of difference.

He allowed Carissa to lead him into the main hall.

He anxiously looked around, tears never ceasing from his eyes. He hoped someone might rush out from somewhere, embracing him and crying like his aunt had done in the small house in Eldoria.

He was seven years old this year. He had been reckless and naive when he left home. But after spending the past two years in the streets and with fake beggars, he had witnessed too many horrors. He understood the cruelty of the world, and was more mature than most children his age.

He knew no one would come out to embrace him now. That day, he had secretly sneaked out through a dog hole to buy candied apples for his aunt, hiding the fact. from his sick mother.

After that, he never saw them again.

He cried silently, knowing he shouldn't make Carissa sad.

He tried his best to hold it back-he really did-but the tears kept flowing and were unstoppable!

His cries inevitably caused Lily and the others to join in, with Lulu being the most heartbroken. If not for propriety, Lulu would have rushed forward to embrace the young master of the family she served. Seeing everyone in tears, Carissa's own eyes grew red. She had been crying for many days, and now, all that remained were feelings of joy and relief.

Let everyone cry to their heart's content.

She wouldn't stop them.

As for Ryan, he might not yet be able to accept that there were no longer any family members in the household. Not just his grandmother and mother, but even the servants who had once served him were gone.