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Carissa nodded thoughtfully, then asked, "So, may I ask, in which aspect of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, or trustworthiness does society find him lacking?" T "It's because your second marriage has harmed him," Samuel replied.

"My second marriage has nothing to do with him. My remarriage is my own affair," Carissa responded. Her voice was calm and steady, showing none of the shame Samuel expected.

"Let me ask you this: does the law forbid a second marriage after a divorce, or is it merely a social custom? Are there not others in society who have remarried? Does benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, or trustworthiness dictate that a woman cannot marry again? And another question: if a woman is abandoned, must she then retreat to a life of solitude, living out her days in misery to satisfy society's expectations?"

Samuel sneered, "You twist words to make them pleasing, but true virtue is rare!"

Unable to counter Carissa's reasoning, he chose to dismiss her with contempt.

Carissa's smile widened. "My concern is that you lack virtue, fail to study properly, are unmoved by righteousness, and can't correct your faults."

Samuel's face flushed with anger and embarrassment. "How dare you! I intended to offer my goodwill, yet you insult me with the words of a sage! If this is how it's going to be with your family, it's better for us to just stay away!"

With that, he abruptly stood up and said, "We're leaving!"

Leona quickly got to her feet, her eyes brimming with tears as she looked apologetically at Carissa. Her voice choked as she said, "Cari, we'll leave now. I'll come back to see you in a few days." Carissa sighed softly, almost inaudibly. "Yes, you should go."

Leona gave a hurried curtsy and then rushed after Samuel, calling out, "Dear, wait for me!"

Lily watched them leave, and sighed. "It seems Lady Leona might not visit again."

Carissa murmured in agreement. "I never expected Samuel to be so rigid at such a young age."

"Some people read so much that they lose all common sense. You shouldn't take it to heart, my lady," Lily replied.

Carissa sipped her coffee, her brows furrowing slightly.

"Whether I care or not doesn't really matter. But I can't understand why Leona, a duchess in her own right, would be so submissive to Samuel without even a hint of her own will."

Though they sometimes referred to Leona as a princess as she was a prince's daughter, the official title she had been given was a duchess.

"She's head over heels in love. What else could it be?" Lily said, seeing through the situation.

"Men like Lady Leona's husband, with their bright futures and charm, are like a woman's dream-something many long for. Lady Leona probably feels that marrying him fulfills a widely shared romantic

ideal among many women, so she cherishes it all the more."

Carissa remained silent, her delicate brows furrowing even deeper.

Could loving someone really make a person so humble?

She thought of Rafael, who was admired by many noble ladies in the capital. Dozens, if not a hundred, wanted to marry him and become the Hell Monarch's consort.

Would he become just as arrogant and self-important after marriage?

And as for herself, she seemed to have developed feelings for him. Could she truly remain indifferent?

"Mr. Langley didn't wait long to take two concubines after marrying Lady Leona," Lily remarked casually." And Lady Leona endured it."

"Ultimately, Lady Leona is a duchess-how could he dare take concubines so soon after their marriage?" Carissa asked.

"He works as an editor in the Academy of Wisdom. I heard that his superiors gifted him the concubines, and he couldn't refuse."

During Carissa's time on the battlefield, Lily had gathered quite a bit of gossip from the noble households. "The duchess couldn't exactly send the women away, or she'd be labeled as jealous. Besides, they're just lowly concubines. If she doesn't like them, she can sell them off or give them away."

"Is that how you see it?" Carissa asked, raising her head.

Lily smiled bitterly. "Does it matter what I think? This is how they see it, how they do things. It's tough being a woman in this world. Back then, when the late madam chose to marry you off to General Warren anyone else, it was because he promised not to take concubines." instead of the pri...well, instead of

Carissa looked at her closely. "Instead of who?"

Carissa had caught Lily's slip of the tongue.

Lily laughed, trying to cover up her mistake. "Who else? I meant instead of others. I misspoke. Back then, so many suitors came knocking that they practically wore down the threshold. The late madam chose General Warren among them because he vowed not to take concubines."

Carissa felt that Lily was clearly hiding something.

But she couldn't remember all the suitors from back then, and she had no desire to dredge up old memories. Whether or not the Prince family was among them, it was all in the past.

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However, Carissa suddenly recalled that the Prince family had indeed come to propose marriage.

It was Oliver's younger cousin, but Melanie hadn't been impressed.

Forget the past. It was better to move on.

She and Rafael were set to marry in two months. What had happened in the past was as if it had died yesterday, and what lay ahead was as if it was born today. They would bid farewell to the past, and look forward to a new beginning.

The weather was getting colder, and the orchids in the courtyard had begun to bud. It was expected that they would bloom in a few days, but this year, they bloomed early. Frederick said it was an auspicious sign.

Ryan could now get out of bed, but he could only walk a few steps before needing to return and lie down again.

The Duke of Northwatch's household was also busily preparing for the wedding. The bridal gown had been in production since the engagement day, entrusted to the embroiderers of Enchanted Boutique.

In the capital, many prominent families would visit Enchanted Boutique for their daughters' wedding garments. Not only were their embroidery skills renowned for their quality and speed, but the embroiderers' skills were also famous throughout the kingdom. Many wealthy merchants and nobles from outside the capital would spend lavishly to order their bridal gowns from Enchanted Boutique.

Lily, who had gone to Enchanted Boutique to check on the progress, returned with a strange expression. It was as though she had something to say but found it somewhat bad luck to do so. Noticing this, Carissa asked, "Is there a problem with the bridal gown?"

Today, Carissa wore a high-collared cloak and had taken Ryan to view the orchids. After that, she carried him on her back when they returned. Although Ryan wanted to walk, Carissa followed Sebastian's instructions and limited his movement to only two or three short walks a day to keep his blood circulating and avoid stagnation in his feet.

Lily watched Ryan take his medicinal meal, then cleaned up the plates and said, "My lady, it's nothing serious. I just happened to run into someone from the Prince family."

"Someone from the Prince family?"

Carissa immediately remembered the comment Lily had almost made earlier. She said, "Yes, I recall that the Prince family did come to propose marriage, but let's not discuss those matters now." Having settled Ryan, she went out with Lily.

The sky was overcast, and the wind was strong. Carissa tightened her cloak, and watched as Lily handed the plates to Joy before heading to the storeroom. Today, they had planned to organize the newly purchased dowry items.

Lily's voice was carried away by the chilly wind. "It's not because of the past. It's just that the Prince family has asked Enchanted Boutique to make the bridal gown. I happened to ask, and found out that the

third daughter of the Prince family is to marry General Warren."

Carissa paused for a moment. "Barrett's marrying again? Isn't Aurora his wife? Has she been divorced or something?"

"Aurora is his secondary wife, a concubine. The one he is marrying now will be his primary wife."

"So, the Prince family's third daughter... That's the Earl of Silverstone's family, right?"

"Yes, that's right!"

Carissa recalled this individual. Her name was Viola Prince, and she had also gone through a divorce.

However, Viola's situation was somewhat unusual.

Years ago, Viola had married Timothy's eleventh younger brother. That young general had been full of ambition, but just a year after her marriage, he had died in battle. The Farrell family, being virtuous, didn't want to delay Viola's life, so Timothy's father wrote a divorce letter, returned all her dowry, and personally sent her back to her family.

It was said that Viola had been unwilling to return, claiming she wanted to remain in the Farrell family to mourn her late husband. Yet, she later agreed to take the divorce letter and return to her family. Considering her age, Viola was twenty-six, three years older than Barrett.

"How did this marriage come about? Did Aurora agree to it? Did Barrett agree?" Carissa was curious, though she knew she shouldn't be prying into the affairs of others.

"I'm not entirely sure. I only heard that the prime minister's wife acted as the matchmaker," Lily replied.

Carissa was even more puzzled.

The prime minister's wife was known for staying out of such matters, and rarely acted as a matchmaker. Why would she agree to facilitate a match between the third daughter and Barrett?

The Warren family was generally avoided by young women. Who could compete with the rightful wife, Aurora? Moreover, the chaotic affairs within the household made it undesirable for others to get involved. However, since this match enabled the Warren family to connect with the Earl of Silverstone's family, Rebecca was probably delighted.

It remained to be seen whether there were any hidden motives behind this marriage.

Carissa chose not to dwell on it. After all, it was no longer her concern. She regarded it as mere curiosity, and let it pass.

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However, two days later, an invitation arrived. The Earl of Silverstone family's matriarch, Evelyn Turner, was coming to visit the next day with Viola.

When Lily reported this, she said, "Perhaps we should just avoid seeing them. We don't know what they want. If they're here to inquire about the Warren family, they should have done so long ago, not after the wedding has been arranged and the bridal gown is already in preparation."

Carissa agreed that it might be best not to meet them, and asked, "How was the invitation worded?"

Lily replied, "It says they're coming to congratulate us on our young lord's return, but that's just an excuse. Lord Ryan has been back for a while now. Why didn't they visit sooner?"

Carissa thought for a while, and said, "You should respond by saying that Ryan is still recovering from his injuries, and is not in a condition to receive guests. Once he has fully recovered, I will take him to visit them."

Lily nodded in agreement, and went to deliver the message.

Carissa indeed found it inappropriate to meet them. It was clear that they were interested in the Warren family, a matter she had no say in. It was best to avoid the visit.

After the response was sent, two more days passed, and the first snowfall of the winter began to fall. The snow was light, just enough to cover the yard with a thin layer of white frost before it stopped. Carissa continued to take Ryan to the orchid garden. The orchids had started to bloom, with delicate pink and deep purple petals dusted with a layer of frost, creating a beautiful scene.

Ryan was very happy. Although his cheeks were flushed red from the cold, his face was full of joyful smiles.

He placed his hand on his throat, and tried to speak to Carissa. Despite several attempts, he couldn't make any sound. His small face grew redder with frustration. beside him, and said gently, "It's alright. Take your time. There's no

Carissa knelt

need to rush."

Ryan nodded, though his eyes showed some disappointment. He had been able to make sounds before, but he couldn't for the past few days, which made him anxious.

However, his disappointed expression quickly transformed into a smile. His cold little hands patted his aunt's cheek gently. He smiled widely and shook his head vigorously, trying to show her that he didn't mind and wasn't upset.

Carissa took his hands, and said, "Sebastian said you will get better. The medicine you've been taking recently is quite strong, and has driven the toxins into the veins of your neck. Once you've coughed up some black blood, you'll be able to speak again. There's no need to rush, okay?"

Ryan nodded emphatically, though he was truly anxious. After all, the twenty-fourth day of December was the day his aunt was to marry the prince. He wanted to get better and say many, many words of blessing to his aunt!

Furthermore, there would surely be many guests on that day. He didn't want to be laughed at for being mute. Even if people didn't mock him openly, they might still do so in their hearts.

After enjoying the orchids for a while, they headed back just in time for Rowan to come for a bandage change.

Carissa asked, "Rowan, how is Ryan's leg? Is it healing properly now?"

"Yes, the bone has healed well. It won't grow crooked. Once it's completely healed, he'll be able to walk smoothly. Just give it a bit more time. There's no need to rush," Rowan replied as he applied a medicinal poultice and wrapped it with bandages. The splint was no longer necessary.

"Thank you for your hard work," Carissa said

Rowan laughed. "Please don't be so polite, my lady. If you're too polite, we might feel embarrassed to charge for our services."

Carissa chuckled softly. "That won't do. Sebastian's medicine is expensive, and he has come personally several times. You, too have been coming almost every other day. I would feel uncomfortable if we don't pay for the consultation and medicine."

After finishing the bandaging, Rowan stood up and looked at Carissa. "I was just joking. My mentor said that payment is necessary, but we only charge one silver coin. Any more is not needed. My mentor was so pleased to see Lord Ryan recovering that he hasn't slept for three days and nights."

Carissa, naturally, couldn't give just one silver coin. Sebastian's dedication and care deeply moved her.

In the evening, Rafael came to visit Ryan. His words of comfort were more effective than those of Rowan or Carissa.

Rafael's reassurance was simple and direct: A true man must learn the way of patience and endurance."

Upon hearing this, Ryan immediately felt at ease, accepting the treatment calmly and obediently.

Rafael spent half an hour with him, practicing writing. Ryan's handwriting had improved significantly. The flexibility of his fingers had increased, and his progress was gratifying.

Clearly, Ryan was quite talkative. While Rafael accompanied him, he asked numerous questions, all trivial and conversational in nature.

Rafael patiently answered every question, no matter how inconsequential.

After a while, Carissa instructed the staff to prepare dinner and invited Rafael to stay for the evening meal.

Rafael now occasionally dined at Northwatch Estate. Lily had figured out his food preferences-he wasn't particularly fond of sweets but could tolerate them, and he wasn't keen on spicy food, though he always insisted on enduring it for Carissa's sake.

His appetite was substantial-he could consume six plates of rice in one meal, with no particular preference for meat or vegetables. In other words, he wasn't picky. about food.

Initially, his large appetite went unnoticed. The first time he dined at Northwatch Estate, he ate only one plate of rice and refused to take more, no matter what was said.

On the second visit, he reluctantly had half a plate more.

By the third time, he praised the flavor of the beef stew and ended up eating three plates of rice.

Now, he was up to eating six plates of rice in a meal. The entire household was speculating whether six plates was his limit, or if it was just enough to make him half- full. They wondered if he would eventually eat seven or eight plates.

It wasn't until Dylan, who had come with Rafael, mentioned that the prince practiced martial arts for an hour in the morning and another hour in the evening. That was a total of two hours daily, and he was also with his duties at the Supreme Court. After that, everyone understood Rafael's large appetite.

After all, who wouldn't need to eat more after a day of such strenuous work?

Even Carissa, when practicing martial arts, could easily consume three plates in one meal.

After dinner, Carissa watched as Ryan took his medicine. The liquid was as black as ink, and Ryan swallowed it in one go under his aunt's watchful eye.

Carissa smiled and put a candied fruit in Ryan's mouth, saying, "You're becoming more and more obedient, Ryan."

Ryan settled down to sleep obediently. Sebastian had said that the best medicine was sleep-getting enough rest would allow the medicine to work at its fullest potential.

Carissa didn't disturb him any further, and went out to chat with Rafael.

Rafael had just finished speaking with Frederick, and learned that the people from the Earl of Silverstone's family had sent an invitation. So, he began discussing Barrett's marriage to the third daughter of the Prince family.

"The decision to find Barrett a primary wife was His Majesty's idea," Rafael said, standing with his hands clasped behind his back.

It was already dark, and the estate's lanterns cast a glow over Rafael's face, revealing his uncertain expression.

"Was it the king who instructed the prime minister to do so?" Carissa asked, surprised. "Why? Barrett and Aurora were married with His Majesty's edict. Why now look for another wife for Barrett? I remember Aurora was given the status of rightful wife at the time."

"Regardless of how she entered the Warren family, the edict did grant Aurora the position of Barrett's rightful wife. However, His Majesty isn't willing to let her have an easy time."

Carissa nodded, understanding that Salvador still held onto grievances from the Victory Pass battle. He couldn't express it openly, and it must have been uncomfortable for him.

"Why specifically choose the Prince family's third daughter?" Carissa inquired.

"This third daughter is the widow of the late General Farell, though she has been divorced. When the prime minister provided the list, His Majesty selected her. The reason behind this is not difficult to discern Carissa was momentarily taken aback.

Rafael continued, "His Majesty is finding ways to vent the frustrations on your behalf, though that's not his main objective. His primary goal is still to use Barrett. Oliver now commands the Hell Monarch Army. While Oliver may not be exceptionally capable, he holds considerable influence within the army. This marriage alliance would benefit Barrett."

Carissa's eyes narrowed. "Understandably, His Majesty wants to use Barrett, but there's really no need to vent the frustrations on my behalf. If His Majesty has chosen the Prince family's third daughter, she must marry, whether she wants to or not.

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Salvador's desire to settle the score on Carissa's behalf by arranging for Barrett to marry a woman who had been divorced after just a year seemed rather pointed.

Ironically, Carissa had also been married to Barrett for only a year before their separation.

It was possible Viola might not agree to this match. But since it was the king's edict, it left her with little choice.

The visit from Evelyn and Viola might have been an attempt to gauge what kind of person Barrett was. Salvador's actions made Carissa feel that she might be dragging

Viola into this situation.

This wasn't settling a score for Carissa, but creating an enemy for her.

It seemed necessary for Carissa to meet Viola, at least to clear the air and prevent any hostility towards the Duke of Northwatch's family. It didn't matter much for Carissa's own sake, but she wanted to avoid creating lingering resentment toward the Duke of Northwatch's household, as Ryan would eventually take charge of it.

Rafael noticed the concern etched on her brow, and said, "The visit from the matriarch of the Earl of Silverstone's family is probably to inquire about your divorce from Barrett. This matter might have caused quite a stir outside, but they're reasonable people. They know that rumors might not always be true. As you were personally involved, they'll need to hear from you to get a clear understanding."

Rafael was well-informed about the affairs of Carissa's household. Each time he

visited, he would first check in with Frederick, who would keep him updated.

Rafael was treated as if he were the lord of the household.

Frederick knew that Carissa was wise, but there were only a few capable people in Northwatch Estate. There was no need to hire much more staff, and those who were recently hired couldn't be fully trusted yet. Thus, many matters required Rafael's intervention and guidance.

This was also one of the reasons Rafael frequently visited.

After speaking with Carissa for a while, he prepared to leave. He had a stack of documents awaiting his attention. As a new official at the Supreme Court, the cumbersome paperwork made his eyes ache daily.

Moreover, he needed to familiarize himself thoroughly with commercial laws. As the Minister of Justice, he had to master the era's laws-failing to do so would undermine his position.

As usual, Carissa saw him off at the door. They had a certain understanding, but now, Carissa's thoughts were more complex. Each time she bid him farewell, she instinctively kept her distance.

Carissa knew she had to manage her own feelings. She was set to spend her life with Rafael, but she needed to ensure that her heart stayed under control and didn't truly fall for him.

Though Rafael had promised not to take concubines, such promises weren't always under his control. Even Samuel, who was a man of high status, had received concubines from his superiors. It wasn't unimaginable for Salvador and Helen to arrange a few more for Rafael to secure his lineage.

As a member of the royal family, ensuring the continuation of the bloodline was crucial. Royal relatives would also keep an eye on Rafael's offspring. If there were fewer than expected, trouble might be directed at her, the consort.

She had never seen a royal member who had only one official wife. Even those who managed to keep it to a single were rare. Many had more than ten.

While she could harbor feelings of gratitude, she could not afford to let her heart become too involved.

The heart, however, was difficult to control. The mind might say not to fall for him, but the heart didn't always listen.

The next day, Carissa sent an invitation to Silverstone Estate requesting that Evelyn and Viola visit Northwatch Estate.

The invitation was written for the following day, but Evelyn and Viola arrived in less than two hours after receiving the invitation.

Carissa had dressed casually that day, but upon hearing of their arrival, she quickly had Lulu help her change. Dressed in a moonlight-white gown and draped in a lake-blue cloak, she wore a cloud-patterned hairpin in her updo. On her wrist was a bracelet that Margaret had previously returned to her, adding a touch of understated elegance to her simple attire.

Upon entering the main hall, she saw that Lily had already seated the guests and was serving refreshments. Two maids stood by Evelyn and Viola's side.

When Carissa arrived, both the mother and Greetings, Lady Sinclair."

Carissa returned the greeting with a smile.

"Good day, Madam Prince, Ms. Prince. Pleas

When Carissa arrived, both the mother and daughter stood up and greeted her," Greetings, Lady Sinclair."

Carissa returned the greeting with a smile.

"Good day, Madam Prince, Ms. Prince. Please, make' yourselves comfortable."

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The elderly woman wore a stone-blue brocade coat with cloud patterns, and held a small metal hot water bottle. She appeared to be in her fifties, with streaks of gray in her hair, which was neatly styled in an immaculate updo. Her demeanor exuded a sense of authority and respect.

In contrast, her daughter was dressed simply. Beneath a white fur coat, she wore an apricot-yellow gown. In her twenties, she was quite beautiful, but her face carried a faint, melancholic air. Without the touch of color in her dress, her overall demeanor might have seemed even more aged than her mother's.

After inviting them to sit, Carissa explained, "A few days ago, Ryan was undergoing treatment when you sent the invitation, Madam Prince. I was unable to meet with you then and was worried about being impolite, so I asked someone to decline on our behalf. Now that he is much better, I wanted to invite you both to the residence and express my gratitude for your concern for Ryan."

Evelyn inquired, "How is the young lord now?"

"He is much improved. Thank you for keeping him in your thoughts," Carissa replied.

Evelyn smiled, and said, "I know your family has everything it needs, but we've recently acquired a rare herbal tonic and thought it would benefit the young lord's health."

As she spoke, one of the maids brought forward a brocade box and bowed to

Carissa.

"I hope you will accept it."

Carissa responded, "How can I accept such a precious gift? I am already deeply- grateful for your visit to see Ryan. I cannot possibly accept such an expensive medicine."

"Please, accept it as a small token from the Earl of Silverstone's family," Evelyn insisted, with a hint of both resignation and joy.

"Though our two families seldom interacted in the past, we have always respected the Duke of Northwatch. Hearing that the young lord is still among us brings us great happiness. If you do not accept it, it will seem as if you are looking down upon our family."

Seeing Evelyn's earnestness, Carissa stopped refusing. She thanked Evelyn, and instructed Lily to accept the tonic.

Evelyn seemed inclined to say more, but Viola, evidently impatient, directly asked. Carissa, "Lady Sinclair, could you tell us why you parted ways with Barrett? Is there an issue with his character or conduct?" Evelyn's expression darkened. "Viola, don't be rude."

Viola stood up, and gave a slight bow but remained stubborn. "I know I am being presumptuous, but I still ask Lady Sinclair to speak frankly."

"Oh, Viola? Does your name also mean 'yew? How interesting," Carissa responded with a smile, trying to deflect the pressing tone of the question.

"My name actually takes after the violet flower, which symbolizes modesty and faithfulness, similar to the symbolic nature of the yew tree. You mentioned 'also'. Who else in your family has the name that means 'yew?" Viola said.

Carissa smiled. "Oh, that's not quite the same, then. I was talking about my late sister-in-law. Her name was Yvette, and it meant 'yew'."

At the mention of Carissa's deceased sister-in-law, Viola's attitude softened considerably.

She said quietly, "I see."

She sighed lightly and sat back down.

Seeing that Viola was no longer as agitated, Carissa continued, "Earlier, you asked about my separation from Barrett. The reason is simply that he wishes to take another wife, which I couldn't accept." "A man taking a concubine is a common matter," Viola said, clearly skeptical. "Did you really leave him over this?"

"That's right," Carissa affirmed.

Viola's eyes showed confusion. "Why? It's just another wife. A second wife is, at most, a favored concubine. It shouldn't threaten your position as the primary wife." Carissa thought differently.

How could it not have threatened her position? Barrett had made it clear that his heart was only for Aurora.

However, Carissa couldn't express that to Viola. The situation then was very different now.

Instead, Carissa said, "When he married me, he promised not to take any concubines. He broke the promise he made to my mother."

"I see," Viola considered this for a moment. "Breaking a promise is indeed wrong, but to divorce over this alone seems a bit hasty. After all, a div

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After finishing her statement, Viola smiled again. "But it might be for the best that you're separated. Now, marrying the Hell Monarch and becoming a princess consort is certainly better than being a general's wife, isn't it?"

Carissa didn't appreciate the ambiguous tone in Viola's words.

"Fate cannot be controlled by human will. When I divorced, I never considered marrying the Hell Monarch," she said flatly.

Evelyn's face darkened as she reproached her daughter. "Viola, how can you speak like that?"

"Forgive me. I speak bluntly by nature. I hope you won't take offense, Lady Sinclair."

Viola's smile faded as she continued, "In that case, how do you view Barrett's character? Since you've divorced him, he must be quite lacking in your eyes."

Carissa found the question amusing. "Since you've already made such a statement, why ask me?"

Evelyn shot Viola a sharp look, then turned to Carissa with an apologetic tone. "Please don't mind her, Lady Sinclair. She's used to speaking freely after being on her own for years. We came not only to visit Lord Ryan, but also to learn from you about Barrett's character. At the very least, we'd like to know your opinion of him."

"If you truly want to understand what kind of person he is, asking me isn't the best approach. As Ms. Prince mentioned, since I've divorced him, it's clear that I couldn't tolerate him. How could he be considered a good person in my eyes?" Carissa said.

Seeing the change in expressions on both mother and daughter's faces, Carissa took a sip of her coffee and continued, "However, my grievances with him are personal. From the moment of our divorce, we became strangers, and those grievances faded away. I don't really know Barrett well. He went off to war on our wedding night, and by the time he returned, he was preparing to marry another woman. So, until our divorce, it's fair to say that I knew him as little as a stranger."

Evelyn nodded in understanding. "In that case, you both were indeed practically strangers."

"I truly came to know him on the battlefield of the Southern Frontier," Carissa added.

Viola's attitude changed to one of respect. "Oh, I almost forgot. You also made.

contributions on the Southern Frontier battlefield, Lady Sinclair.

"Speaking from the perspective of a fellow warrior, he is a capable soldier. He follows orders, doesn't compete for credit, and is brave and strategic. As for his personal virtues, since I don't know him well, I can't provide an answer. You may inquire elsewhere if you wish to know more," Carissa said..

Viola seemed quite satisfied with Carissa's responses.

However, Evelyn asked another question, "I've heard that before your divorce, he wanted to annul your marriage and that his mother also tried to scheme to keep your dowry. Is that true?"

Carissa felt a sense of relief. Finally, they were asking about this directly.

She nodded. "Yes, that's true. The Warren family wanted Barrett to annul our marriage, and tried to keep my dowry."

The mother and daughter exchanged glances, and fell silent. Some matters were negotiable, but scheming to keep a woman's dowry was indeed shameless.

Viola wouldn't give up, and asked, "Was it Barrett or his mother who schemed to keep your dowry?"

From this question, Carissa could tell that Viola had a favorable impression of Barrett. She likely admired military men, perhaps because her late husband was one. Or perhaps it was because the marriage had already been arranged with no room for negotiation, and she hoped Barrett was a good match.

Carissa replied, "I don't know the specifics of who was behind it. Barrett did say he didn't want my dowry, but whether that was truly his sentiment, I can't say."

As Carissa expected, Evelyn and Viola's expressions brightened slightly after hearing this.

Evelyn seemed to be a sensible person. How could she not know about the embarrassing incidents Rebecca caused in the social circles of the capital?

Carissa sipped her coffee slowly. She had been honest and straightforward. Regardless of how this marriage came to be, as long as they understood it, that was enough.

The mother and daughter had no further questions. After some idle chatter, Evelyn stood to take her leave.

She gave Carissa a deep look, and said, "Many things are indeed beyond our control. However, we are very grateful for your honesty today. Originally..."

She paused, and waved her hand dismissively. "Never mind, life must go on. Take care, Lady Sinclair."

Carissa could tell there was more to her words. They couldn't make decisions about this marriage, so they had initially harbored some resentment toward Carissa. But now that she was willing to meet and explain, they decided to let it go.

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After seeing off Evelyn and Viola, Carissa sat in the living room for a while, lost in thought.

What was Barrett's attitude towards this marriage? Wasn't he only in love with Aurora?

Carissa remembered how Aurora had once come to her with such haughty disdain.

How would Aurora feel now, knowing that a new lady of the house had appeared so soon? Would she think that her earlier arrogance was utterly laughable?

Although Viola wasn't the easiest person to deal with, she was from the Earl of Silverston's family, making her the most suitable choice for managing the household. Moreover, Rebecca would likely be very pleased with this daughter-in-law.

Even though it was Viola's second marriage, the substantial dowry and the capable family background were qualities that Rebecca appreciated. She had always favored a daughter-in-law from a strong family. Aurora had said she would not engage in disputes with women, but would she still contest this new arrangement? Would she become the very person she despised

most?

Carissa was curious, but had no intention of investigating further.

However, although Carissa did not seek information, someone from the Warren family visited- specifically, Barrett's second aunt, Charlotte.

Charlotte had visited once before when Ryan had returned. At that time, she had avoided discussing matters related to the Warren family. It seemed she had chosen. to spare Carissa from such unpleasant topics on a joyful occasion.

This time, Charlotte came to add to Carissa's trousseau. The items were neither numerous nor particularly luxurious, but they were heartfelt.

Charlotte had made a set of clothes for Ryan, including shoes and socks.

For Carissa, Charlotte had prepared a quilt. She had personally embroidered the cover, and it was filled with intricate floral patterns symbolizing a lifetime of happiness. She also prepared a day dress, a nightgown, and a pair of satin embroidered shoes for Carissa.

Among the gifts was a pair of gold bracelets with stag and dove motifs, symbolizing

blessing's for both marriages and the lives of children. While these were ordinary designs bought from outside, they were substantial and clearly cost a considerable

amount.

The second branch of the Warren family had been suffering from the misfortunes of the main branch, so they didn't have many valuable items to offer. The weight of these bracelets, along with the sentiment behind them, spoke volumes.

Carissa knew Charlotte's branch of the family was struggling financially, and could hardly afford to give such an expensive gift. She immediately tried to decline, saying, "I appreciate the clothes and the quilt, but I can't accept the gold bracelets. They're too valuable.

Charlotte glared at her. "If you refuse them, it will be seen as disrespect. I know that these gifts might seem insignificant to you, but they represent my heartfelt intentions. You must accept them." Given her insistence, Carissa couldn't refuse.

She expressed her gratitude sincerely, saying, "Thank you for your efforts, and for personally making clothes for Ryan and me. The gifts are very precious, and I like them very much."

Charlotte sighed. "Even if you didn't like them, I have nothing else to offer. Luckily, I bought these bracelets in advance. Otherwise, that money would have had to be scraped together for Barrett's wedding. Realizing she had spoken out of turn, Charlotte quickly added in annoyance, "Look at me, rambling on about things I shouldn't be mentioning."

Charlotte's offhand comment about Barrett's wedding was particularly irksome to herself, as his wedding date coincided with Carrisa's.

Carissa smiled gently, "It's alright. I don't mind. I'll take it as an interesting anecdote from someone else's life."

Seeing that Carissa wasn't bothered, Charlotte couldn't help but vent a bit more, "It's always like this. Whenever a wedding is involved, it feels like the entire family is scraped clean. The most infuriating part is that their wedding date is on the same day as yours."

Carissa was surprised. "On the same day? Are they in such a hurry?"

She and Rafael had been preparing for their wedding for several months, with the support of the Royal Management and Protocol Departments.

How long had it been since Barrett's wedding plans were finalized? They couldn't possibly get the bridal gown made in time like this, right?

It had only been a short while ago that Lily told her the Prince family had ordered a bridal gown from Enchanted Boutique.

Charlotte said with a hint of frustration, "Rebecca was the one who rushed to set the date on the same day as yours. She probably wanted to show that while you could marry a prince after a divorce, her son could also marry a daughter from an earl's family."

Carissa understood that her former mother-in-law had always been competitive. However, such disputes seemed pointless, serving only to provide fodder for gossip.

Still, Carissa had no right to comment on their choice of date-it was their business, not hers.

Lily brought in a bowl of royal jelly soup that Charlotte was fond of, and said with a smile, "Madam Charlotte, you're in for a treat! It's been quite a while since we prepared this soup, and you happen to be here just as we made it today."

Lily's comment wasn't entirely truthful. In fact, they had been making royal jelly soup every day to help with Ryan's throat as part of his treatment. The Klein family had sent some, the steward of the Hell Monarch Estate had contributed a few jars, and Frederick had also bought some.

Charlotte looked at Lily with a smile.

"I'm quite a food enthusiast, and couldn't resist coming when I heard there was something delicious. I've been coughing lately, and I thought a bowl of royal jelly soup would cure it. I'm sure I'll stop coughing tonight."

Carissa asked in concern, "You're still coughing? The last time you came to see Ryan, I noticed you coughing too."

"With the constant gloom and arguments all day, it's no wonder I can't get better," Charlotte said, stirring the soup in her bowl with a spoon, her face showing both worry and disgust.

"Barrett either doesn't come home, or when he does, Aurora argues with him and even gets physical. Barrett really can endure he doesn't retaliate or respond to her insults. Aurora behaves like a shrew, and he just lets her be."

Charlotte suddenly looked up at Carissa, and added, "If Aurora comes to find you, you mustn't see her. She's completely lost her mind."

Carissa shook her head. "Why would she come to find me? That's impossible."

"Impossible? During their arguments, she said she would come to see you."

"Why would she want to see me?" Carissa was bewildered. "I'm no longer involved with them."

"Who knows what she's thinking? She must have insects crawling around in her head," Charlotte said with a cough.

After drinking the royal jelly, she continued, "Their constant bickering has disturbed the whole household. I've heard her mention twice that she wants to drag Barrett to see y

you and clear things up."

"What needs to be cleared up?" Carissa asked, confused. "Everything that needed to be said was said at the time of the divorce. Anything further would just be mutual insults. It's unnecessary."

Charlotte sneered. "So it turns out when Barrett was going to divorce you, he said he wouldn't take your dowry, but Aurora demanded that he withhold part of it. Barrett refused, and Aurora said that if the dowry had been withheld from the beginning, life at Valor Estate wouldn't be so hard now, and he wouldn't have to marry a second-hand woman, making him look like someone selling himself."

Carissa was utterly shocked. "So, the plan to withhold my dowry wasn't just Rebecca's idea? Aurora was involved as well?"

"Rebecca's wishes weren't conveyed by Barrett. From their arguments, Barrett misunderstood her intentions. She wanted to withhold the dowry, but Barrett thought he had convinced her not to take it. It's all quite a mess," Charlotte said, her disdain clear. "Their shouting and bickering will surely spread. Amelia can't control the servants' mouths. In a few days, the whole capital will probably know." Carissa was still trying to process the information. "So, does this mean Aurora wants to come and take some of my dowry from me?"

"I don't think that's the case. The king granted you a divorce through an edict, so they can't keep your dowry either way. Who knows why she wants to drag Barrett to see you? With her crazy behavior, she might do anything. It's for the best that you refuse to see her if she comes."

After a pause, Charlotte added with frustration, "But given her current state, if you refuse to meet her, she'll just make a fuss outside, which would be very troublesome."

Carissa hadn't expected Barrett and Aurora's quarrel to involve her.

What concern was it to her? If it wasn't about taking her dowry, then what was about? Were they here to demand justice?

Carissa hadn't even demanded any from them!

Chapter 280

As Charlotte was about to leave, Carissa asked Lily to bring her a jar of royal jelly.

Charlotte had a persistent cough that flared up in cold weather. In the past, Carissa had frequently sent her jars of royal jelly.

Charlotte initially declined, but Carissa used Charlotte's own words to counter, "If you refuse, it's as if you're rejecting my goodwill. In that case, I can't accept your gifts either." Saying this, she signaled Lily to return the gold bracelets.

"Oh, fine." Charlotte quickly took the royal jelly. "I keep taking your things-I've lost all sense of shame."

"You stood by me during my hardest times, and I remember that in my heart," Carissa said, taking Charlotte's arm and walking her to the door.

When the Duke of Northwatch's family was annihilated, though the first branch of the Warren family offered condolences, it was merely in words. Only Charlotte truly stayed by Carissa's side. Charlotte knew Carissa had trouble eating and sleeping, so she made some calming tea for Carissa. Most of the calming remedies Sebastian prescribed were ones Charlotte prepared herself.

Hearing this, Charlotte almost shed tears. She quickly wiped her nose and turned her head, saying, "I treated you as my own daughter. As long as you don't mind this old, impoverished woman, you can call me 'Aunt' from now on."

After all, calling her "aunt" seemed inappropriate after Carissa was divorced and no longer part of the Warren family. "How fortunate," Carissa replied with a smile, "I just happen to need an aunt. How does Aunt Charlotte sound?"

"Sounds perfect," Charlotte said with a smile, though it was tinged with a hint of sadness.

After Charlotte had been sent off, Carissa returned to help Lily move the items back to the dowry storage room. The clothes were folded and placed in trunks, which would later be moved. As for Ryan's clothing, she held it carefully to deliver it to him later.

Carissa gently touched the stitching on the garments, noticing the meticulous care Charlotte had taken. The stitches were fine, and the embroidery was exquisite, without any flaws.

"Lily, sometimes when you give your heart sincerely, you do receive sincerity in return,

Carissa said wistfully.

"Of course. In this world, there are so many people. It's unlikely that all of them are ungrateful. In fact, ungrateful people are quite rare," Lily replied.

Lily frowned as she recalled Charlotte's words. "If Aurora dares to come, we should have someone throw her out. How dare she have the audacity to come and find you? I've never seen someone so shameless."

Carissa said, "Please don't mention this to His Highness."

"Understood. This matter definitely cannot be spoken of. His Highness has a strong aversion to the Warren family," Lily said.

Carissa clutched the clothing. "Let's not worry about them. We need to see Ryan and have him try on the new clothes."

"There's no way the young lord can wear all of these new clothes. There are too many, and the Klein family has sent over quite a few as well."

"Let him wear a new outfit every day to make up for those two years he missed out on. Everyone's trying to make up for the tragic period in his life."

Ryan was delighted to hear about the new clothes. Children always loved new garments.

Once dressed, the clothes fit him perfectly. The bamboo green brocade was lined with a thin layer of cotton, making it suitable for spring and autumn. However, with winter approaching, he would need something warmer, like fur or thick cotton clothing.

He stood on tiptoe and twirled around, then glanced at himself in the bronze mirror, nodding vigorously, indicating his approval.

"It looks really good, doesn't it? Do you like it?" Carissa praised him, noting how well the color suited his skin.

After being cared for over these months, his complexion had improved, and his skin had become much fairer.

Ryan nodded, and twirled again on his tiptoes.

He then uttered two words, his voice raspy but clear, "Like...it!"

Carissa froze, then immediately embraced Ryan. "Ryan, you spoke!"

Ryan was stunned. Had he really spoken? He had just said something!

His mouth fell open in shock. "Ah...ah..."

His face was instantly filled with joy. He hugged Carissa tightly, burying his face in her embrace as he tried to control his racing heart.

He spoke again, "Au...Aunt!"

Tears welled up in Carissa's eyes.

Finally, she heard him call her "Aunt" again.