

War Song 321

Chapter 321

Aurora seemed to know the answer in her heart, but she remained unsettled and unwilling to accept it.

"When you loved me, was it just a momentary infatuation?" she asked.

Barrett remained unable to answer. He didn't know.

His feelings for Aurora were genuine at the time, but whether they were merely a passing fancy, he couldn't clearly say.

Because after marrying Aurora and divorcing Carissa, he felt a pang of regret. He remembered telling Solomon that he hoped Carissa wouldn't regret her decision, but in truth, he knew that he himself had begun to regret it.

Didn't he love Aurora then? He certainly did.

But couldn't a man's heart hold space for two women?

How many men take multiple wives and concubines? Carissa couldn't accept it, and perhaps he was angered by his own broken promises. In any case, with Melanie now dead, he no longer needed to answer to the Duke of Northwatch's family for his promises.

Maybe he had thought he had Carissa under control. After all, she was an orphan with no family to rely on.

But who knew she was so skilled in martial arts, even surpassing him and Aurora in many respects?

He couldn't even imagine Carissa single-handedly charging into battle, displaying such bravery and earning countless merits. During the siege of Simonton City, he had witnessed her courage and decisiveness firsthand. Amidst a rain of arrows and countless dangers, she remained calm and composed. Even if her calmness was an act, it was enough to intimidate the enemy.

And it had intimidated him as well.

Seeing that he had not answered, Aurora understood clearly and smiled bitterly.

"Retribution. Everything that happened is retribution. But we both wronged Carissa, so why haven't you faced any consequences? You're remarrying, and to the daughter from an earl's family at that. You'll join the Prince family, and from now on, your official career will face no more obstacles."

Barrett disliked hearing such words, and his patience wore thin.

"What consequences are you talking about in matters of love and relationships? I let Carissa down, but I haven't harmed her in any way.

"If you want to speak of retribution, don't you know what caused yours? Don't you remember what happened in Fawnrun City? Do you not know the connection between Fawnrun City and the destruction of the Duke of Northwatch's family? Dare you speak of retribution so lightly and not fear that true retribution might come for you?"

"I have already faced retribution," Aurora said bitterly. "The soldiers under my command have died, and those who survived are wounded. Now I have been dismissed from the military and can only remain in the corner of this estate, subject to the control of your legitimate wife."

She suddenly lifted her head, her gaze sharp and cold.

"But Barrett, let me tell you this-I despise the scheming of ladies in the inner household more than anything. I won't provoke her, but if she dares to provoke me, I will make sure she regrets it!" Hearing her words, Barrett already anticipated a tumultuous future in the inner household.

"You are you, and she is she. Just stick to your own duties. What's this talk about provoking each other?"

"I've said my piece," Aurora declared. "After all, you and I are bound by the king's edict. This life will likely see us tied together. If you cannot manage her, don't blame me for being ruthless." Barrett looked at the resentment in her eyes, and felt a surge of irritation.

"Do as you please," he said, his voice cold.

With that, he stood up and left.

Aurora watched his retreating figure, lifting her chin and holding back her tears with all her might, determined not to let a single drop fall.

She couldn't cry, couldn't be distressed, couldn't let anyone see her as weak, especially not Carissa. She had gone to Grace Mansion earlier, and all the furniture had been replaced. It was necessary, as Carissa had taken most of the belongings when she left.

It was clear that a significant amount of money had been spent.

Hadn't the Warren family always said they didn't have money? She wondered how much money had been spent on bridal gifts, and how many more silver coins would be needed for the wedding banquet. Eventually, her tears slid down her cheeks. The satisfaction she once felt when provoking Carissa now seemed like a distant memory.

Her pride had turned to dust, and she felt utterly defeated.

She had lost.

Chapter 322

Silverstone Estate was bustling with activity. Thanks to Oliver's commanding position in the Hell Monarch Army, the estate was alive with excitement. Although the wedding was scheduled for the following day, the festivities had already begun with a grand banquet today.

When Viola received the divorce letter and left the Farrell family, they felt a sense of obligation toward their daughter-in-law. In addition to returning the dowry, they provided her with a substantial amount of silver coins. They even gave her Thomas's military pension, and purchased land for her.

Being from a military background, the Farrell family felt that Viola shouldn't spend her life in hardship. At that time, Viola had insisted she would never remarry. The Farrells worried that without money or land, her life could be very difficult. Hence, they gave her a considerable amount.

The wedding gown from Enchanted Boutique, which usually required a six-month advance booking, was secured for her with additional silver coins, ensuring she wore the most prestigious gown from the boutique.

Her dowry was re-packed into new chests and included numerous items, totaling sixty-eight loads. Viola had learned that Carissa's dowry for marrying Rafael was only sixty-four loads. She intended to surpass Carissa in every way.

Carissa had divorced Barrett and left the Warren family. How she lived in glory after marrying into the royal family was her own business, but on the day of the wedding, Viola must outshine Carissa. Otherwise, how could Viola hold her head high when entering the Warren family?

She had heard that Kyle had also left the capital. Only the Sinclair family members had come to Northwatch Estate, and it was unclear whether they had not invited others or if the guests simply hadn't turned up.

Regardless of the reason, Carissa's wedding to the Hell Monarch was indeed somewhat lacking in grandeur compared to hers. Viola was determined to make her own wedding more impressive than Carissa's. The Hell Monarch, being a royal, would not personally fetch his bride. However, Barrett would come to personally welcome her, which was another way to overshadow Carissa.

Viola was not interested in competing with Carissa, but given Carissa's past prominence, she, as the new wife, could not afford to be outshone.

Moreover, Viola believed in what Serena had said. Evelyn was always muddled and insisted otherwise, but she was old, preoccupied with managing household affairs, and out of touch with romantic matters. If Carissa hadn't liked Barrett, she wouldn't have married him in the first place. She wouldn't have waited for him for an entire year, managed the household, taken care of his parents, or even used her own dowry to treat her mother-in-law's illness.

A woman who loved someone didn't easily let go. When Thomas died, Viola was heartbroken for a long time, only slowly recovering after returning to her parental home.

Now, Viola was embarking on a new marriage. Despite the scandal that had once surrounded the Warren family and the existence of a rightful wife bestowed by the king through an edict, she was still moved by Barrett's impressive demeanor when she met him.

Her brother had also said that this marriage couldn't be refused. If Oliver wanted to maintain control over the army, he couldn't go against the prime minister's goodwill.

But this was not merely the prime minister's goodwill. The king was promoting Barrett, a young general. Rafael, being a prince, was a potential threat with too much power, which was why he had lost his military command and was marrying Carissa, a once-divorced woman.

Though Viola herself was also once divorced, her situation was different. Her previous husband had died in battle, and her in-laws had granted her a divorce out of sympathy.

Before Carissa received her divorce edict, she was to be cast aside. Carissa likely understood this well, which was why she sought the divorce so she could leave the Warren family with some dignity. Viola knew she could never truly compete with Carissa, but she had to outshine Carissa on her wedding day. This would help her establish her position in the Warren family.

She didn't intend to step on Carissa's toes deliberately. It was just that, having listened to Serena's words and recalling Carissa's calm demeanor on that day, she felt that Carissa was deliberately concealing her true feelings.

Such scheming was truly detestable. If Viola didn't tear down Carissa's facade, it would only serve to embolden her further.

Chapter 323

On the twenty-fourth day of December, a snowstorm had swept through the morning. The sky was overcast, and the biting wind cut through like a blade.

Lily gazed at the gloomy sky, and prayed, "Today, our mistress is getting married. Heaven has already been unkind to the Sinclair family and to our mistress. Could you please grant us a clear day? I will pray diligently to the Lord every day."

Early this morning, Carissa was awakened and taken by the staff from Elegance Atelier. They were there to cleanse her face, ensuring it was properly cared for so that her makeup would look its best. The staff applied some sort of paste to her face, instructing her to lie still and not speak. Feeling overwhelmed and having barely slept the night before, Carissa soon fell into a deep sleep while lying down on a chaise lounge.

It was only last night that she had fully resigned herself to the fact that her master, Violet, and the others wouldn't be coming. Although she understood it was her own doing that caused their absence, it still pained her.

After a while, the paste was washed off by Sally, a staff member from Elegance Atelier. The process was thorough, requiring no effort on her part. However, Carissa woke up and remained lying still as they worked.

Three women from Elegance Atelier, all around thirty years old, attended to her. Their skin was as fair as snow, indicating their proficiency in skincare.

The excitement of Carissa's attendants was evident, especially Lulu, who had brought Ryan along to witness the transformation of his aunt into a beautiful bride.

Ryan was understanding and perceptive. He held Carissa's hand, and spoke more fluently than before. "Don't be afraid. I'm from your natal family. Even though you're getting married, you still have family with you."

Carissa felt she was failing miserably at controlling her emotions, and even Ryan could tell she was unhappy.

She grasped Ryan's hand in return. "Of course, I have family. I'm very happy today. Do you like the prince? We'll be moving to his estate soon. Have you changed into your new clothes for today? Go and change into them so that your aunt can see."

"Okay!" Ryan said cheerfully.

Lulu smiled, and took him downstairs to change into his new clothes. The lively presence of the child brightened Carissa's mood significantly.

The women from Elegance Atelier were seasoned, and had rarely seen someone as both kind and authoritative as Carissa. Even less common was a bride with such stunning beauty.

When Sally noticed the hint of sadness fading from Carissa's face, she smiled and said, "Today is a day of great joy for you, my lady. No matter what worries you might have, set them aside for today. Focus only on being happy and looking forward to the future. Nothing else matters right now. Your life will only get better."

Carissa understood that this was a roundabout way of comforting her. Seeing that there were no close relatives around, Sally likely felt a pang of sympathy. Carissa wouldn't disregard their kindness-in a world often so cold, such goodwill should be cherished.

So, Carissa responded with a smile, "With your blessings, I'm sure my life will continue to improve."

"Indeed," Sally agreed. "The Hell Monarch is brave and resolute. You are indeed fortunate, and His Highness is also fortunate to have you as his wife."

Those who had seen much of the world spoke with great consideration.

Carissa herself found it almost surreal-marrying into royalty was something she had never imagined.

"Did you have a local fortune teller prepare your hair last night?" Sally asked as she applied a layer of powder to Carissa's face, preparing it for makeup. "We had one of the elders from the Sinclair family do it," Carissa replied.

"The Sinclair family is indeed fortunate," Sally said as she shifted her seat closer. "Bear with me. There might be a slight discomfort."

"Alright!" Carissa closed her eyes and let the staff member expertly work on her face. The discomfort was indeed minimal, barely noticeable.

"My lady, you have such fair and smooth skin, so it doesn't require much effort," Sally commented while deftly threading Carissa's face. Sally's skill was impressive, and she spoke clearly despite working on her task.

Chapter 324

Before long, Ryan returned in his new clothes.

Over the past few months, he had grown taller. The outfit, which had been custom-made, fit him perfectly. The white silk satin was embroidered with rabbits, and the outfit featured a small cape made of leather with a black exterior and blue lining. The hood of the cape, when draped over his back, gave him the appearance of a young hero. His hair was tied up with a blue silk ribbon, making him look both adorable and festive.

"Let me see," Carissa said, holding his hand and inspecting him from top to bottom. His freshly powdered face was still flushed and warm, but he wore a beaming smile. "Gosh! Is this our boy, Ryan? I almost didn't recognize you. You look truly wonderful."

Ryan blushed slightly. "Those are just things to say to little kids, Aunt Carissa. I'm not a little kid anymore."

"Of course you are," Carissa said with affection. "In my eyes, you will always be a little kid."

She hugged him, feeling the warmth of family.

Sally smiled, and added, "Lord Ryan, you look so handsome. When you grow up, you'll surely be a brave and formidable man-a true hero."

Ryan loved being called a hero, and he immediately offered a piece of candy he had been saving to Sally. "Here's some candy, miss. Thank you for all your hard work."

Sally took the candy with a smile. "Thank you, Lord Ryan. This candy is very sweet."

Lulu took Ryan's hand. "Alright, let's go play. We'll come back to see your aunt once she's finished dressing."

The dowry would be carried out at three in the afternoon, and forty-five minutes after that, the bride would depart. So, it was about time to get dressed in the wedding gown and apply makeup.

The wedding would take place at dusk, around five in the evening. Since it was winter, they should reach Hell Monarch Estate by then and begin the ceremony. Although it wasn't a rushed affair, preparations had to be made early due to the snowy weather.

Perhaps Lily's prayers had worked, for by noon, the snow had stopped. The sky began to clear, and the bright sunlight reflected off the snow, creating a dazzling sight.

After midday, Carissa was fully dressed in her wedding gown and wore her phoenix crown.

The skilled staff at Elegance Atelier had indeed done an excellent job. Carissa's skin, naturally fair, had taken on a healthy rosy hue after some time. This vibrant complexion required only minimal makeup. Her beauty mole was subtly enhanced at the corner of her eye, and a delicate rose was painted at the center of her brow-its petals vivid and full of life. The rose and the beauty mole added a touch of allure to her pure and stunning face. Her eyes, naturally slightly upturned, already held an air of charm without needing much enhancement.

As Carissa changed into her wedding attire and had her makeup done, the ladies from the Sinclair family gathered to observe. They were in awe of Carissa under the deft hands of Elegance Atelier's staff, and they couldn't help but tease and joke.

"To be called the most beautiful woman in the capital is truly not an exaggeration."

"How can Carissa be so beautiful? When her veil is lifted tonight, her appearance might just steal the Hell Monarch's heart!"

"Isn't that the truth? A girl this beautiful-whoever marries her is truly blessed."

"They're indeed fortunate. They will surely have a wonderful marriage and lifelong happiness."

Carissa gazed at her reflection in the mirror, and was stunned. She knew she was attractive, but she had never prided herself on her looks. Beauty was merely a superficial attribute-it wasn't something she had earned through effort, so there was little reason to be proud.

Yet today, seeing herself dressed in a wedding gown and wearing the phoenix crown, she felt as though she didn't recognize herself.

Was this...the image of a fairy?

How had they managed to transform her into someone both ethereal and enchanting?

Carissa took a deep breath, and sighed, "There's a reason Elegance Atelier charges such a high price. It's well worth it."

Sally chuckled softly. "Your words are the greatest praise we could receive."

Chapter 325

Lily invited the staff from Elegance Atelier outside for a meal. The banquet had already been set up, and people needed to eat in advance as the bride would need to set out in the evening.

After the meal, the staff from Elegance Atelier wouldn't leave immediately. One of them would accompany the procession to Hell Monarch Estate.

After partaking in the nuptial wine, the bride and groom would need to offer wine to their elders as a show of respect. Given the numerous guests at Hell Monarch Estate and the constant movement for the traditional ceremonies, it was crucial to have someone on hand to ensure the bride's makeup remained intact.

When it was three in the afternoon, it was time for the dowry to be sent out.

The sound of drums filled the air as the Sinclair family's younger members personally carried out the dowry. With sixty-four loads of valuables and treasures, including one precious painting by Kyle, it was a sight to behold.

Silverstone Estate and Northwatch Estate were only two streets apart, and the Earl of Silverstone's family were also dispatching their dowry at the same hour.

Viola was already dressed in her wedding attire, and she awaited the moment when Barrett and his entourage would come to collect her after the dowry had departed. She had sent someone to check whether Carissa's dowry had also been dispatched and to confirm if it matched the sixty-four loads.

Her maid, Yvonne, counted and confirmed that indeed there were sixty-four loads. Viola couldn't help but smile.

"Hmph, even the esteemed duke's daughter has a dowry less impressive than mine."

She hadn't anticipated the value of Carissa's dowry, thinking it would merely consist of the usual items.

Just as Viola was feeling a sense of pride, the loud sound of drums sounded through the air as someone announced, "The Spencer family from Ebonflow has added to General Sinclair's

trousseau-fifty bolts of brocade, three sets of gold and emerald headpieces, a pair of crystal figurines, and eighteen pairs of stag and dove motive bangles."

Viola was startled.

Who was making such a commotion? Could this be a joke?

Before she could send someone to investigate, another loud announcement echoed, "The Emerald Guild has added to General Sinclair's trousseau-two obsidian blades, one spear, a gold and emerald knife, and a box of gold and silver jewelry."

The voice was clearly amplified by inner force, as it was even louder and more resonant than the drums.

The noble families in the area rushed out to see.

Indeed, there were people carrying large chests following behind the procession.

The first batch, held carefully with both hands, contained items that were clearly extremely valuable.

The second batch consisted mostly of weapons, which were also held with both hands and tied with white and gold silk ribbons. This batch seemed to belong to individuals from the martial world.

"From the Crystal Bloom Guild to Lady Sinclair to add to her trousseau, a moonstone figurine of the Lord, two rosewood partition screens, ten bolts of luxurious brocade..."

When Carissa heard these announcements, she shivered in disbelief.

She suddenly ordered, "Quick, go see if Violet, Bun, Rod, and Cynthia are here... Lulu? Where's Lulu?"

Lulu had already dashed out, running after the dowry procession as she sobbed.

Didn't they say they wouldn't come? Why did they only show up when the dowry procession was leaving? It caused Carissa unnecessary distress!

Just as Lulu was about to catch up, the sound of drums rang out again.

"From the Lunar Guild to Lady Sinclair to add to her trousseau-a top-class martial arts expert as a bodyguard, eighteen jars of rose wine, and ten bolts of silk..."

Carissa almost cried upon hearing this. The Lunar Guild was the guild Travis was in. It was known for its poverty and all-female members, and was notorious for struggling even with rent.

They had sent a martial arts expert, who was most likely Travis. Regardless, she adored rose wine. They had also provided ten bolts of silk-enough to make the Lunar Guild go without proper food for two months!

"From the Inferno Guild to add to Lady Sinclair's trousseau, one jar of Mystic Pearls, three natural emerald ornaments, one harp, ten classical string scores, eighteen rubies, eighteen sapphires, and ten sets of woven bedding..."

Carissa's eyes reddened. The Inferno Guild was Violet's faction. Was it not enough that the Spencer family added to the dowry? Now, the Inferno Guild had to add as well?

The onlookers were stunned by the extravagant dowries, especially from the Inferno Guild. The gifts were not ordinary items, but treasures that were priceless and hard to find!

Chapter 326

After the Inferno Guild, the next announcement came from the capital's physician's office, Arcane Sanctum. They had sent various precious medicinal herbs, including a century-old rare herb and snow lily. Following Arcane Sanctum was the Tideborn Guild, which also sent rare treasures. Among them, Mystic Pearls were the most prized. They seemed determined to outdo the Inferno Guild, delivering three jars of Mystic Pearls, along with a variety of gemstones. Their offerings filled three entire boxes.

Viola grew colder, and trembled with each announcement. The more she heard, the more her body shook.

Carissa also felt her body shiver more with every announcement. She could hardly hear the list of gifts, only the names of the guilds. Many of these guilds were unfamiliar to her.

Why would they add to her trousseau? It must have been her master who informed them.

Finally, after hearing announcements from six or seven more guilds, Carissa recognized the voice of her fifth guild senior.

"The goddaughter of the Pathfinders Guild's leader is getting married. The guild has sent a dowry of one hundred and eight chests, ten shops in the capital, two estates in Meadow Ridge, and ten thousand gold coins."

The sound reverberated through the long street, likely audible for ten streets around.

The Pathfinders Guild? Carissa was indeed an apprentice of the Pathfinders Guild, but was she more than just an apprentice?

The sheer weight of the dowry items left everyone stunned.

Viola had also hired the Elegance Atelier's maids for her makeup, and had a slightly heavier application due to a few freckles on her fair skin. Nevertheless, the blush was well-applied, giving her a more natural look.

However, upon hearing the deafening shouts reverberating through several streets, her made-up face turned ghastly pale.

What? The Pathfinders Guild sent what? One hundred and eight chests of items? Ten shops in the capital? Two estates? And ten thousand gold coins?

This was impossible! Ten thousand gold coins was an unimaginable weight! How could it be carried? It had to be a mistake.

"Yvonne, go outside and see!" Viola shouted in disbelief.

Inside Northwatch Estate, Carissa covered her mouth with one hand, tears streaming uncontrollably down her face.

Oh, this wasn't what she expected from her master.

What kind of surprise was this? After days of shock, they chose to show up at the last moment to celebrate her joyful day. Was it to make her cry and ruin her makeup?

Lulu, who had been running alongside the dowry procession, turned anxiously when she heard the commotion from behind.

Lulu recognized the members of the Pathfinders Guild carrying the chests. She hurried back, spotting several familiar faces among the crowd.

Gasping, she ran back and shouted, "My lady! So many people have come! Your master, the other guild instructors, your guild seniors, and guild juniors-they've all come! There are so many of them!" Clutching her wedding gown, Carissa dashed out of the room. The moment she saw her master, tears began to stream down her face.

She stood in front of the main hall door, stamping her feet repeatedly and spinning around in frustration. Her heavy crown was askew, and she wiped her tears vigorously. As people came in one by one, she couldn't see them clearly anymore.

A tall figure approached her, a mix of affection and helplessness in his gaze. "You never shed a tear, even when you fought with others to the point of getting injured. Why are you crying so easily now? Don't go telling everyone you're Adrian Russell's apprentice in that state, okay?"

Adrian's rough, calloused hand gently brushed her face, wiping away her tears. With a sad smile, he added, "Enough now, don't cry. Your makeup is too beautiful to ruin with tears. Was this beauty mark just for show? Why has it faded?"

Carissa sobbed uncontrollably. "Sage Adrian, you all lied to me! You said you wouldn't come, and now you're here. You've made me lose sleep for nights, and now, you show up just as I'm about to leave!" She wiped her tears repeatedly, gradually managing to distinguish the faces of those who had arrived.

Her master, Everett, and her fellow guild members...

The head of the Inferno Guild, accompanied by his apprentices, also arrived. Violet was making faces at her, and even though Violet's eyes were red, she still managed to smile.

There were members from the Crystal Bloom Guild, Lunar Guild, and Emerald Guild, as well as the eldest sons of prominent Ebonflow families and many other guilds Carissa didn't recognize.

Cynthia and Bun were also there, standing behind their own masters. They smiled at her, their own eyes misted with tears.

Chapter 327

With the dowry already dispatched, it would be less than half an hour before Carissa was to be married.

Rafael had previously promised to personally come for the bride, so Carissa's tear-streaked makeup would once again need to be attended to by the staff from Elegance Atelier.

Yet Carissa couldn't stop crying. She pounded on Adrian's chest, then struck Kyle's arm, and finally clung to Winona.

"Winona, I thought all of you wouldn't come. I was so distressed. I thought all of you didn't want me anymore."

Winona's smile was tinged with sadness as she gently wiped Carissa's tears. Her eyes betrayed the weariness and sorrow she felt.

Oh, the younger woman she saw as a younger sister had endured so much suffering and hardship.

She felt her heart ache. After wiping Carissa's tears, she said gently, "Let's stop those tears, okay? Today's supposed to be the happiest day of your life, so you need to look the most beautiful. How can you be crying?"

Winona was tall and graceful, and she appeared like a refined young lady at first glance. Few knew of her remarkable Lightfoot Skill, or how adept she was at hiding and disguising herself.

She was the top scout in the martial world and, in addition to being the second apprentice of the Pathfinders Guild, she was also the head of Skywing Spire. Although she had entrusted the day-to-day management of Skywing Spire to her deputy, she had come personally as a representative of Skywing Spire to add items to Carissa's trousseau.

The staff of the Elegance Atelier were seasoned professionals, but the sudden influx of martial world figures, all dressed in fine clothes and not the usual shabby attire of the wandering heroes, surprised them. To those who didn't know better, it might have seemed like a gathering of noble families.

Sally had intended to help Carissa with her makeup, but she could only stand by and wait until Carissa had finished her emotional farewells and stopped crying before she could attend to her.

Carissa had just managed to dry her tears when she noticed Everett standing next to Kyle.

Feeling another wave of grievance, she said, "Sage Everett, I'm not crying out of sadness. I'm just so happy that I can't stop the tears. Please don't punish me."

Everett Watson glanced at her with a faint smile. "I'll let it pass this time. But if you cry again, I'll poke your eyes."

Everett was in charge of enforcing the Pathfinders Guild's rules, and he was a figure everyone feared. Even Adrian, upon encountering him, would ingratiate himself with flattering words to avoid any missteps that might lead to a reprimand from his guild junior.

Once a rule was broken, there was no room for leniency.

After being punished once, Adrian deeply regretted appointing Everett as the enforcer of the guild's regulations. He regretted it day and night, realizing that while it was easy to summon a demon, sending them away was much harder.

Everett's first and most severe rule was that no one, not even himself, could leave the guild without his permission. Any violators were to be punished without exception.

Carissa covered her eyes, as if fearing that Everett might indeed punish her with his sternness. But when she peeked through her fingers, she was astonished to see him dressed in luxurious brocade garments.

The sight abruptly stilled her urge to cry uncontrollably, and she asked in surprise, "Sage Everett, why are you wearing brocade today? I thought you disliked such luxurious clothing?"

Everett, who viewed wealth as insignificant, typically wore plain cloth and straw sandals. Even in the coldest winters, he would only add an extra layer of clothing, relying on his profound inner force to endure the cold. He had little interest in mingling with the powerful or noble, so Carissa had never imagined that Rafael would be his apprentice before this.

Everett snorted, and waved his hand dismissively. "I feel like I'm covered in thorns. If it weren't for your grand wedding, would I wear such attire?"

Though Everett was proud and aloof, he still cared about appearances. He gave Carissa a stern look, making it clear that if she dared to bring up the topic again, whether it was her wedding or not, he would sew her mouth shut.

Not daring to speak further, Carissa glanced around but didn't see Travis. Though she previously assumed he was the martial arts expert sent by the Lunar Guild, she couldn't be sure.

She choked up and asked, "Where's Travis? Didn't he come?"

Violet chuckled. "He's part of the contribution sent by the Lunar Guild. Naturally, he's being brought to Hell Monarch Estate along with your dowry." Carissa turned to look at the head of the Lunar Guild. Despite her usual stern demeanor, she appeared unusually kind-hearted today.

Carissa felt a pang of sadness. The Lunar Guild had only one male apprentice, and yet he had been part of the contribution added to her trousseau.

Chapter 328

Frederick wiped his eyes as he approached Carissa. "My lady, the bridal carriage will soon arrive. Please hurry and touch up your makeup." Now that her master and fellow guild members were here, Carissa felt a pang of reluctance as the time drew near for her to marry.

She hesitated, and asked, "Could we delay by two hours?"

"That's not possible, my lady. You must complete the ceremony within the allocated time."

Winona took her hand gently. "Come, let's get your makeup sorted out. It's a joyful day, so why are you crying and fussing? That's inappropriate. We've come to see you off, and we'll accompany you to Hell Monarch Estate. We have seats reserved there for the wedding banquet."

Carissa blinked, her eyes misty. "So, Prince Rafael knows all of you are coming?"

"He does, but he didn't know that you were unaware."

Well, if that was the case, Rafael hadn't withheld the information from her.

With her mood steadied, Carissa stood and bowed in thanks to the heads of the various guilds and their apprentices who had come to offer their blessings to her.

"There's no need for thanks. Hurry up and get ready." Adrian waved dismissively.

Why the need for such gratitude? This was just him calling in a favor.

Carissa sighed inwardly, thinking that her master was indeed quite impolite.

As she was getting ready, there was a commotion outside. The sound of drums filled the air as someone hurriedly reported, "The prince's wedding procession has arrived! The prince himself is here to welcome the bride!"

Everett, who was sensitive to such loud announcements, could hardly tolerate the noise.

"What's the big deal about it? Isn't it customary for him to come and pick up his bride? Why all the shouting? If he dares not show up, I'll have his ears cut off."

Faced with Everett's sharp gaze, the gatekeeper fell silent and retreated obediently.

Viola had thought that her greatest advantage now was that Barrett would personally escort her to Valor Estate, whereas Rafael was a prince and was not required to do so.

But upon hearing the news that Rafael had arrived with his wedding entourage, Viola stood there in stunned disbelief.

Why did Rafael treat Carissa so well? Even after a divorce, Carissa couldn't forget her previous husband-why did she deserve this?

But if Carissa was skilled at disguising her emotions, Rafael would undoubtedly be unaware of it.

As Viola was lost in thought, she heard someone announce from the outside that Barrett had arrived to escort her. She gathered herself as her attendants placed the white bridal veil over her head. After Carissa bid farewell to her parents and siblings in the sanctuary hall, she stepped out of the estate.

The two brides left almost simultaneously, but their entourages and their own states of mind were completely different.

Carissa's head was covered by the white veil. She could only see the hem of her gown and the white satin shoes that peeked out as she moved. Her hand was held by Winona. Winona's long, slender fingers provided a reassuring grip.

In front of them, the matchmaker spoke many blessings. Carissa couldn't see anyone, and could only vaguely sense that she had arrived at the estate's entrance. There was a sense of the pressure of a crowd at the gate, suggesting that many people had come.

"Child, it's time to enter the carriage. Be good from now on," Adrian said softly as he approached her. It was a sentiment laden with a father figure's bittersweet emotion and expectations.

Be good.

As long as Carissa behaved and didn't cause trouble, it would be less worrisome for him. He wouldn't have to keep waiving the rent of others for her.

Oh, this mischievous girl was getting married again.

When Carissa first married, Adrian hadn't attended. He had sent a letter to Melanie, expressing his displeasure at Carissa's marriage to Barrett, who had a falling family with unimpressive martial skills.

Adrian had been unsatisfied with the match.

Melanie had replied, saying the marriage was confirmed. Ultimately, Adrian was Carissa's martial arts master rather than her father, and he couldn't prevent it.

After consulting with his guild junior Everett, Everett had said coldly, "Not attending is the greatest protest. If the Warren family is trustworthy for a lifetime, you can send additional dowries later. If not, keep it for yourself. There's always the possibility of a second marriage."

Adrian's guild junior's words were both sharp and prophetic-there was indeed a possibility of a second marriage.

This time, since Carissa didn't have her parents, it was only natural that her guild members attended.

But how could she not face any punishment?

Instead of returning to the guild and seeking help when she encountered difficulties, she tried to handle everything on her own.

If she were truly capable of handling things by herself, she shouldn't have gone around seeking sympathy from others when she was punished by her guild senior in the Pathfinders Guild. She should have just endured it on her own.

Chapter 329

Carissa instinctively reached for Adrian's hand, only to see a different hand extended toward her.

The hand was broad and long, with a palm covered in calluses, fingers slender and nails neatly trimmed. Most importantly, just above the palm, she could see a white sleeve embroidered with griffin patterns. The griffin pattern was allowed to be used on a prince's wedding garment or even normal ceremonial robes, but the sky griffin pattern was not.

It was Rafael, her husband-to-be.

Regaining her composure, Carissa placed her hand in his. He, too, seemed unfamiliar with holding hands. He first enveloped her hand with his palm, then awkwardly turned it a few times to find a proper fit before finally interlocking their fingers.

Carissa's heart raced wildly, pounding so loudly it felt as though it might burst through her eardrums. But if it were possible, she would have heard Rafael's heartbeat quickening in tandem with hers, a sensation so intense it bordered on dizziness.

Rafael led her towards the carriage. It seemed there were murmurs that this was improper; typically, it was the matchmaker who led the bride to the carriage. But to hell with tradition.

Carissa was his bride, and also his princess consort.

He would lead her himself.

They would walk side by side toward the future he had always dreamed of.

Of course, they couldn't truly walk side by side, given the height difference, but who cared?

Rafael moved as if walking on clouds, this scene more dreamlike than any dream.

He had once been heartbroken and desolate, but who could have predicted that fate would treat him so well? He was so blessed.

Everett had given him a stern look earlier, implying his lack of decorum-no greeting or formalities observed.

But who cared about that now? If there were any punishment, so be it; a few lashes wouldn't hurt.

In Rafael's eyes, there was only Carissa-his bride and also his princess consort.

There were many people around them, but none mattered except for her.

He tried to steady his breath, fearing he might faint.

As they approached the carriage, he wanted to simply lift her into his arms for the rest of the way. However, he couldn't.

Despite his formidable strength, his body felt soft and unsteady at this moment. He felt as though he was stumbling with every step. Where was his self-control?

Gone!

Fortunately, the matchmaker was perceptive. She supported Carissa, and stabilized their pace until they finally arrived at the carriage.

At that moment, Carissa was dying to lift the veil and catch a glimpse of Rafael in his wedding attire. Her hands were almost under the veil when Winona gently tapped her back.

Well, with her master and fellow guild members present, she had been a bit careless, forgetting the etiquette her mother had taught her.

Once seated in the carriage, the curtains fell. At that instant, the sound of drums erupted, startling her so much that she jumped in her seat.

It was embarrassing, though fortunately no one saw.

Her heart, however, was pounding furiously.

But she wasn't afraid. Her master and fellow guild members, including Ryan, were all following the procession behind her. Her family was with her!

It was a pity she couldn't see how Rafael struggled to mount his horse, almost unable to climb onto the horse's back.

Laughter erupted from the crowd, and Rafael's face was as red as a tomato. Summoning his inner force, he performed a dashing leap onto the horse's back. Alright, he managed...

To land on the other side of the horse.

He was thoroughly embarrassed today.

The royal princes and nobles who accompanied the procession laughed so hard, they doubled over.

Everett's face darkened; he entertained thoughts of expelling Rafael from the guild, though he grudgingly decided to give him another chance.

Dylan understood that Rafael was simply too excited and practically on cloud nine, which caused his loss of composure. So, he stepped forward to help Rafael onto the horse.

Once on the horse, Rafael's cold, murderous glare swept over the laughing faces in the crowd. Where his gaze fell, the smiles instantly froze.

Fortunately, the sound of drums created a festive, lively atmosphere as they cleared the way.

In Carissa's procession, her attendants, along with Lily and Ryan, were following along. Holly and Frederick remained at Northwatch Estate to manage its affairs-land, estates, and shops. Someone had to oversee these matters to safeguard Ryan's inheritance.

Holly would train people to ensure that the household would be trustworthy when Ryan returned to assume his title.

Moreover, the daily offerings at the sanctuary hall needed to be attended by familiar faces.

Chapter 330

The two wedding processions collided head-on.

Barrett looked at Rafael, and Rafael looked back at Barrett.

Their gazes met, and Rafael felt nothing but gratitude. He was thankful Barrett had abandoned Carissa. However, gratitude was one thing-the fact that Barrett had previously wronged Carissa was another matter.

Barrett's eyes were filled with a complex mix of emotions. Once, he had been just as passionate and proud while bringing Carissa into his home. Back then, he had felt like the happiest man in the world. Yet, fate was cruel.

Now, Carissa was the Hell Monarch's princess consort, while Barrett had married and divorced different women, never truly finding fulfillment.

Because of that, Barrett's complex gaze was filled with traces of envy, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, discomfort, and heartache. At this moment, he seemed to fully realize that he and Carissa could never go back-there really was no connection between them anymore.

It was this clear realization that led Barrett to say this as they passed each other:

"Congratulations, Your Highness, on marrying my discarded ex-wife."

He knew how irrational he sounded. He understood the gravity of his words, and the possible wrath of the Hell Monarch.

Despite that, there was no immediate consequence.

Rafael merely smiled at him, reined in his horse, and replied softly, "Thank you for being blind. It allowed me to marry the one I truly love."

Barrett was taken aback, watching as Rafael led his procession away in high spirits.

What had Rafael meant by that? The one he truly loved? Wasn't Rafael's marriage to Carissa a matter of necessity?

After Rafael and his procession had moved away, his smile faded.

Dammit, Barrett was asking for trouble.

Dylan, who was leading the horses, had overheard the exchange and asked quietly, "Shall we deal with him?"

"Tomorrow!" Rafael uttered firmly.

Today was a day of celebration. There would be no bloodshed.

Most importantly, Everett was present. Rafael definitely didn't want to experience the older man's punishment on his wedding night just because of some minor infraction of the rules and family customs. After a pause, Rafael added, "A group beating."

Dylan was about to nod in agreement when Everett's chilling voice came from behind, "Quiet down. Is your involvement necessary?"

Rafael immediately straightened his back, facing forward with his eyes fixed ahead.

Sometimes, Everett's voice could be truly frightening. On this joyous day, couldn't the older man use a less intimidating tone?

With the accompanying drums playing the entire way, the bridal carriage arrived at Hell Monarch Estate. The journey didn't take too long, as the residences of the powerful and wealthy were usually not too far apart.

At this moment, the sun still hung low in the sky, slowly descending and dyeing the clouds at the horizon with a magnificent tapestry-like brilliance. It had snowed in the morning, but by noon, the skies had cleared. Now, the setting sun seemed to be gilding the world with a layer of gold leaf. Rather than feeling like dusk or twilight, there was a sense of majestic and grand beauty.

The sunset revealed a grand and majestic beauty, even among the densely packed residences of the capital city.

The carriage came to a halt in front of Hell Monarch Estate. Carissa was effectively blindfolded by the white veil. She could only see the sway of her wedding gown and the movement of people around her. She wanted to move forward, but the matchmaker and Winona held her back. After another round of deafening drum music, Winona and the matchmaker finally guided her inside.

The ground was covered with a red carpet. Carissa couldn't keep her head lowered for long, or her phoenix crown would slip. She could only keep her neck straight and occasionally glance at her feet to avoid tripping over the threshold.

Didn't someone carry her in the last time? Why did she have to walk this time?

She didn't know that this was Adrian's intention. Now that she was married, she would be required to handle many things on her own.

If she couldn't even cross this threshold by herself, how could she reassure others in the future?

Adrian also had another point of view: didn't Carissa want to do everything on her own?

Fine. Go ahead and walk on her own.

Walk through the stone steps and step over the threshold on her own!