

## War Song 401

### Chapter 401

Yuvan was also furious..

"It wouldn't have mattered when she died. I would have kept it a secret and only revealed it after the New Year. But now, with Carissa stirring things up, the queen dowager and the king both know. How can I possibly stay in the capital any longer?"

Eleanor gritted her teeth, but had no choice but to urge him to be patient.

"Let it go for now. Don't provoke them. They've just returned after a significant victory, and have garnered respect both in court and among the common folk. They're formidable now, so it's best to avoid them. Stay low-key and quickly gather troops,

"As for your marriage alliance with the Spencer family, you need to expedite it. Violet once fought on the Southern Frontier battlefield. If you can marry her and bring her under your control, recruiting soldiers will be much easier. Besides, with the Spencer family as your support and the Inferno Guild assisting, given time, your great cause will surely succeed."

Yuvan frowned and shook his head. "The head of the Spencer family seems mostly to be stalling. Violet is a beloved daughter, and I doubt they're happy to marry her off as a concubine. Moreover, she knows about how that foolish woman was staying at Verdant Monastery. I'm afraid she won't agree."

"If you can't marry Violet, then marry another daughter from the Spencer family. I refuse to believe they don't want to wash away the disgrace brought by that runaway aunt of theirs. Remember, focus on weapons and armor. Also, the Spencer family has a horse ranch on the northern plains," Eleanor said.

If they were to raise an army, provisions and soldiers were essential.

"For now, you must play the fool. Don't draw the king's mention. Even if you marry a daughter of the Spencer family, it will appear as though you're only after wealth. A useless prince should indulge in wine, women, wealth, and vices in equal measure. I will first sow suspicion in the king's mind about Rafael. As for the Prince family, they currently command the Hell Monarch Army..."

Eleanor paused.

"The king seems inclined to elevate the Prince family and support. Barrett. We can start with Barrett's wife to bring the Prince family to our side."

In Sunspire Hall, Rafael led his family of five to greet the queen. dowager, the king, the queen, and the concubines of the harem.

Upon seeing Carissa and Ryan, Victoria immediately began to inquire about them, particularly focusing on Ryan. She held his hand with a firm grip, and asked him if he was now able to write smoothly. Ryan's voice was clear as he replied, "Your Majesty, my uncle teaches me every day, and I practice diligently day and night. My wrist is much stronger now, and writing is no longer a problem."

"That's good to hear." Victoria

beamed as she patted his shoulder."

You must not disappoint your

uncle's expectations. Continue to

study hard, and once your writing is perfected, you can go to the academy."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I will take your advice to heart," Ryan answered respectfully.

Victoria then pulled Ryan into a warm embrace, and whispered with a smile, "Tell me, does Helen give you a hard time? Does she ever roll her eyes at you?"

She knew her younger sister well-if she didn't like someone, she would roll her eyes all the way to the sky.

"Victoria!" Helen, who had been listening, was not pleased. "How could I possibly treat Ryan poorly? He's so clever and delightful. I can't help but adore him."

"Really?" Victoria smiled, looking at

Helen with some satisfaction." It's great that you can care for him, but if I find out that you're treating him badly or being harsh, I won't forgive you."

Helen rolled her eyes. "If you don't believe me, you can ask Kiera."

Kiera said in a clear and bright voice, "Mother, it's true. Mom loves Ryan very much, and so do I."

Victoria chuckled and said, "I was

just teasing Helen. It's been so long since she left the palace, and

hadn't seen her roll those eyes of

hers. It bothered me. But now that I've seen it, I feel better."

With those words, both Salvador and Kylie joined in the laughter. Only Helen remained sulky.

What was the fuss about?

Did they really think she would mistreat a child?

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One by one, the members of the royal family and their relatives who were in the capital began arriving at the palace.

Harvey and Heather, along with several of the grand princesses, arrived together. The grand princesses came with their spouses and children, creating a bustling crowd that immediately filled the hall with lively chatter.

Next to arrive were the two high princesses who had recently descended from their elevated positions of grand princesses, Meredith and Henrietta. Both were the king's sisters. Meredith, the elder, was born to the queen dowager and was Salvador's elder sister. Henrietta was the daughter of Josephine, and was Salvador's younger sister.

Meredith was married to Levi Wright, the second son of the

Oversight Department's minister, Irvin Wright. Levi was an optimistic and easy-going man, holding a nominal position in the Protocol Department.

The Wright family was Natalie's maternal family, known for its scholarly traditions. However, Irvin, known for his strong-willed and stubborn nature, was someone who even dared to defy the king.

Despite having her royal residence, Meredith still observed the traditional custom of paying her respects at the Wright family's residence on the first and fifteenth of each month. This was a sign of respect for her role as a daughter-in-law, and Irwin wouldn't allow her to act differently, despite her royal status.

Nevertheless, Meredith and her husband lived harmoniously. Also, the queen dowager had raised her well, and Meredith didn't act arrogantly toward the Wright family. As a result, the Wright family spoke highly of her.

of Defense,

e helped

Henrietta married Vance, the nephew of the Minister Davis. Vance didn't settle for a simple post. Instead, he managed the estates and shops for Henrietta, proving to be a skilled

businessman.

Carissa glanced around, but did not spot Leona.

Though Leona was part of the royal family, she was naturally spending New Year's Eve with her husband's family. Carissa was not fond of Leona's husband and suspected that Leona might have endured considerable hardship due to the man's rigid and outdated beliefs.

As she was lost in thought, Victoria said to Heather, "Leona hasn't come to greet me for some time."

Heather smiled and replied, "Your Majesty, Leona is expecting a child and is currently resting at home to ensure a healthy pregnancy."

"Really? That's wonderful," Victoria said with a beaming smile. "I was actually planning to send a royal physician to check on her. It's been quite a while since she moved into her new home, and there hadn't been any news. I didn't expect that you'd bring such good news during on New Year's Eve."

Heather looked relieved. "Yes, she's expecting, so I'm at ease. Moreover, the Earl of Gracehold's family, upon learning of her pregnancy, specially provided many items for her and even increased the number of attendants. They've shown great consideration."

However, Henrietta remarked coolly, "Indeed, they've been considerate. Not only did they provide extra items and attendants, but they also added two concubines."

Heather's expression faltered momentarily, but she quick

recovered with a smile. "Concubines are just trinkets, are... they? No.

need to make a fuss about it."

Henrietta scoffed. "Why should items and maids be worth.

mentioning but not concubines? Why is it acceptable to discuss adding concubines to the household?"

Meredith's face darkened. "How can a man take a concubine when

his wife is pregnant? What kind of family does such a thing? If there aren't enough attendants, he could have simply promoted the maids that followed Leona when she married into his family. To bring in concubines at this time-isn't he worried about how this might affect

Leona and the child?"

In the capital's noble circles, taking concubines was rare. But if someone did take a concubine, it was done with discretion. Leona

had not been married long, and she was pregnant-how could her husband justify taking concubines now? Besides, didn't he already have two low-ranking concubines before taking in his current two concubines?

At this moment, introducing more concubines would only be an embarrassment!

Meredith continued, "It's already

disgraceful to take concubines at such a time. It also hurts Leona's feelings. How can you, as Leona's mother, not feel distressed for your daughter, but instead defend your son-in-law? It's truly disheartening."

As the king's elder sister and the queen dowager's own daughter, Meredith was known for her stern demeanor. Her words left Heather

speechless, and she could only awkwardly retreat.

Uninterested, Harvey dismissed the matter. To him, taking

XXXX was so big deal-what Bhan didn't have concubines?

Canase observed the reactions of Harvey and Heather, and felt a deep chill. Her heart ached for Leona.

Now would Leona get through this New Year?

## Chapter 403

Before the meal began, the women gathered in one area to chat, while Salvador and his uncles and brothers conversed together.

Meredith sat beside Carissa and said, "When you married Rafael, I was unwell and couldn't attend in person. I only sent a gift, so I must apologize for not being there. Please accept my apologies, my dear sister-in-law."

Carissa understood that Meredith was not one to look down on others-she was simply expressing her concern.

Carissa smiled and replied, "There's no need for you to apologize. I should be the one thanking you for the generous gift. Is your health any better now?"

"I still have a cough and have had a high fever for several days. At the time of your marriage to Rafael, I was truly bedridden," Meredith said, coughing a few times.

Her maid quickly brought her a cup of honeyed lemon tea, which she sipped, helping to alleviate her discomfort, though her face remained flushed from coughing.

"Please take care of yourself, Meredith," Carissa said with concern.

Meredith nodded. "Thank you for your concern, Carissa."

Henrietta, who had attended the wedding banquet, chuckled from the side. "You should have seen how nervous Rafael was that night.. He wouldn't even allow them to carry out the First Light Revelry in the newlywed suite, as he was afraid of disturbing the bride. His devotion was truly enviable."

Meredith shot her a look and said, "Isn't your husband good to you?"

"I've heard that he wakes up early every day to help you with your makeup. It's become a well-known story in the capital."

Henrietta's face turned red. "Meredith!"

Carissa laughed and sipped her coffee. The harmonious

atmosphere was genuinely pleasant. She made an effort to ignore any troubling thoughts. During the New Year, showing even a hint of worry in the palace was considered taboo.

Fortunately, she had learned how to suppress her emotions.

They were discussing Leona's husband, Samuel, the proud scholar who had taken two concubines. One of them was the head

courtesan at Fragrant Parlor, renowned for her beauty, and her redemption cost an astonishing thirty thousand silver coins..

The other concubine was the daughter of a merchant from the Wagner family. It was said that Samuel took her as a concubine because of her substantial dowry, which was also thirty thousand silver coins, provided by the Wagner family.

Everyone was in an uproar.

In these prestigious families with centuries of history, there had never been a precedent for marrying a courtesan from a brothel. Even if one had a liking for such a woman, she would only be given a house outside and kept as a mistress. To actually marry a merchant's daughter, with the primary aim of securing the courtesan with the former's dowry, was unheard of.

Someone suddenly laughed.

"I never expected that scholar to be so infatuated! He used one concubine's dowry to buy another concubine. He's truly deserving of his title of a scholar, as he's clever indeed. No one else would think

of such a perfect solution-raising the merchant's status while marrying his beloved courtesan. But what about our Leona? She's nothing but a pitiful person, unprotected by her pots and unloved by her husband'

The speaker was Helen.

She had never previously had issues



with Heather, mainly because

Harvey was a minor prince with no skills or capabilities. Both he and his wife were utterly ineffectual. Defeating someone like him provided no sense of achievement.

chemover.

However, after learning that Heather had refused Carissa's gifts to add to Leona's trousseau, Helen took an immediate dislike to Heather and viewed her as an adversary.

Her scornful remarks left no room for Heather to preserve any dignity. Anger and embarrassment flashed across Heather's face.

She dared not offend Helen. Besides

being the queen dowager's younger sister, Helen had a son who had returned with military honors. On top of that, Helen herself had a sharp tongue. If they argued, Helen might utter even more unpleasant words.

Heather knew she was in the wrong, but was powerless to change the situation.

Leona was pregnant, and her husband was taking concubines-what could she, as a mother, do to interfere in her daughter's household matters? Moreover, Harvey had stated that taking concubines was normal for men. If Leona couldn't tolerate it, she would be accused of jealousy. After Helen finished speaking, she gave Carissa a significant look. It was as if to say that there were things Carissa couldn't say herself.

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Helen's words drew scornful glances from everyone present towards Heather.

Heather felt a mix of grievance and shame. She looked at Carissa, hoping the latter might say something on her behalf. Yet Carissa's expression remained indifferent, her eyes betraying no emotion. Heather had no choice but to give up.

However, Heather silently resented Carissa.

How could she not speak up for her own aunt? How would she face Melanie in the afterlife after acting this way?

Everyone continued chatting for a while before Eleanor finally returned. After the customary exchanges of greetings, everyone resumed their seats.

As if the tension between them had never existed, Carissa greeted Eleanor with a respectful nod. Eleanor was even better at masking her feelings, and she gave Carissa a warm, attentive glance. Victoria inquired about Ruth, and Eleanor replied, "Mom's health has improved somewhat, but she won't be joining us for the New Year's Eve celebration tonight. With the cold weather, she needs to avoid worsening her condition."

"Of course. I'll have the royal physician pay extra attention to her. Don't worry too much," Victoria reassured.

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Eleanor said.

As it was nearly time for the feast, the palace servants came to escort them. Everyone stood and followed Victoria to the dining hall.

In public, the king and queen displayed their harmonious affection, though everyone knew Salvador's current favorite was a concubine named Sylvia. Tonight, Sylvia could only watch as the king and queen showcased their love.

Consequently, Sylvia observed how Salvador's gaze frequently wandered toward Rafael and Carissa. The Hell Monarch and his wife were indeed affectionate. While seated, Rafael would pick out dishes for his wife and place the ones she disliked into his own bowl.

Sylvia noticed Salvador's gaze towards them was particularly complex, though it quickly returned to its usual demeanor.

Recalling the rumors she had heard, Sylvia remembered that Salvador had originally intended to bring Carissa into the palace as a concubine.

Sylvia's gaze towards Carissa

carried a hint of cold, deep-seated jealousy. Fortunately, Carissa was

already the Hell Monarch's princess consort. Despite Salvador's

admiration for Carissa's e

righteousness would prevent him from coveting his brother's wife.

his

She had to admit that the beauty of the once-divorced woman was truly breathtaking. Even though Sylvia was a woman, once one's eyes were drawn to Carissa, it was hard to look away. If that was the case for women, how could men not be moved?

It was surprising Rafael was also so easily enchanted by a woman. With his status, he could have married any noblewoman he wished. To choose a woman who was once divorced was truly laughable.

In her heart, Sylvia held a deep disdain for Carissa, and this disdain extended to Rafael as well.

Yuvan remained silent throughout, his gaze sweeping over each face, trying to discern the undercurrents beneath their polished exteriors. Eleanor was similarly observant.

They hadn't missed Sylvia's expression, and Eleanor knew that some matters needed to be addressed by the king's confidante to be truly effective.

After the dinner, everyone bid their farewells and returned to their respective homes.

Carissa held Ryan's hand, and performed a respectful curtsy to Victoria and Kylie. "I will take my leave."

Salvador's gaze lingered on her face as he smiled. "Carissa, you should spend more time in the palace to accompany the queen dowager. She often thinks of you."

"Of course, Your Majesty. I'll keep your words in mind," Carissa replied.

Salvador gave a slight nod, his gaze still fixed on her, making Carissa hesitate to look up.

It was Kylie who finally spoke up, "You should head back now. Ryan looks tired."

"Yes, I will take my leave." Still holding Ryan's hand, Carissa turned and left.

Sylvie made a dismissive sound and looked at Salvador, who was still watching Carissa's retreating figure, his gaze lingering for a long time. There was an emotion in his eyes that she had never seen before—it was the same warmth that had been present when Rafael had looked at Carissa.

being infatuated with Carissa's beauty?

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Hayden had been granted the title of duke, and lived a relatively comfortable life in his fief.

It wasn't that he desired to return alone to the capital to spend his old age in solitude. He had hoped to have his descendants around him. However, as he grew older, he longed for a return to his roots. It was also partly to show the king that with his presence in the capital, it ensured his children and grandchildren would remain loyal.

Hayden wasn't concerned about his own family, but he had noticed some troubling signs. He feared that ambitious individuals might try to win over the various local princes and dukes. That was why he anxiously returned to the capital and retired, to keep a closer watch on things.

Tonight, he had taken Rafael aside. Hayden wanted to pretend he was drunk to speak his mind—whether as a warning or a hint, it was the most he could do.

Before parting, he patted Rafael on the shoulder. "I must say, I quite like your wife. Bring her to visit me sometimes."

Rafael smiled and replied, "Of course, I will."

"Good. I'll be on my way!" Hayden stroked his beard and laughed heartily as he left, walking steadily and showing no signs of drunkenness.

As Rafael turned, he saw Carissa approaching with Ryan. He went to meet them and, out of habit, took her hand.

"Are you cold?"

"Not at all. I've had a few drinks, so I'm feeling quite warm," Carissa replied. She had only had a few small cups during the toasts.

She added, "Mother has had quite a bit to drink. She decided to stay in the palace tonight to keep the queen dowager company, and Kiera is staying with her."

"Let her be," Rafael said, holding Carissa's hand while she held onto Ryan. They left the palace and made their way home.

Hell Monarch Estate was lively that night, with Violet and Travis as guests. Since it was New Year's Eve, they planned to enjoy a good meal.

Jacob had prepared several large baskets of coins, ready to reward anyone who offered their blessings when they all gathered to ring in the New Year. Whoever spoke well would receive a generous handful. For each basket of coins, there would be a basket of compliments to match.

As Rafael and Carissa settled into their home, servants streamed in, offering well-wishes and compliments as they went about their duties.

Jacob was busy by the hearth, brewing coffee and roasting sweet potatoes. The aroma of the sweet potatoes filled the entire mansion.

When he deemed the servants' greetings satisfactory, he would give a nod and say, "Go to Lady Carissa and collect your reward."

Carissa grabbed a handful of copper coins to distribute. Seeing this, Ryan found it particularly amusing and declared that he wanted to be in charge of grabbing the coins.

His declaration drew everyone's

attention to his small hands. It was

clear that Carissa's hands, while not large, were long and slender, capable of scooping up quite a bit. Ryan's tiny hands, by contrast, could barely manage two handfuls

compared to one from Carissa.

Faced with protests, Ryan was soon reassigned. The task of handing out the rewards had to fall to Carissa.

Jacob exchanged a smile with Rafael. It was delightful to see Carissa receiving blessings, with no time to dwell on unhappy thoughts. Tonight was meant to be lively and joyful.

Violet also came over to help, so the servants were divided into two teams. As generous as ever, they weren't sparing with the rewards. While distributing coins, Violet laughed so hard she almost fell over. She playfully punched Travis, who stood in front of her.

"Rod, don't you have any shame? You've come three times, and each time you say the same thing! Can't you think of something else?" Travis scratched his head. "This is already the best I could come up with."

"If you can't think of anything else,

then just copy what others say. You've been repeating the same blessings about success and happiness over and over-it's really lacking in depth," Violet scolded.

Travis replied, "What do you know? Success and happiness are what people want. Blessings should be simple and straightforward. Being overly precise with words only confuses everyone, even the gods."

"Do you think the gods are as ignorant as you?" Violet laughed. "I'm tired of hearing the same thing over here. Go over to Cari's side."

"But I've said the blessings already. You need to give me the coins before I go to Cari," Travis said, holding out his hand. "Give them to me." Violet called him shameless, but still handed him a handful of coins.

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The night was filled with lively festivities that lasted until past midnight, after which everyone retired to their rooms to sleep.

Ryan was exhausted beyond measure, but he held on as much as he could. At the end of the night, Travis carried him back to their room.

Rafael held Carissa close in the warmth of their bed, hoping to warm not just her body but her heart as well. He expected her to say something, but she remained silent, quietly lying in his embrace with even breaths. He couldn't tell if she had fallen asleep.

However, Carissa was not asleep. She couldn't sleep, and she didn't want to move or speak. Some things, she believed, had to be endured silently. She would grit her teeth through the pain. Time would eventually cover the wounds, sealing away the hurt.

That was her usual way of coping.

What was different now was that she had someone who truly cared for her.

Rafael felt a pang of sadness in his heart, mostly from the pain he felt for her. She would smile at him when she was happy, but she never cried in front of him when she was sad. She always hid her darker, sorrowful side and only presented him with calm, rationality, and smiles.

He had never heard her say she was in love with him, except once to Ryan, but he knew that was a lie meant to placate Ryan.

At that time, Rafael had taken it seriously, and naturally, he was deceiving himself.

He somewhat blamed his older brother After returning from the

Southern Frontier, Rafael had hoped to cultivate feelings with Carissa and then propose grandly. However, with the edict from Salvador, their marriage had become something necessity.

At least, Carissa knew he had once wished to marry her, which proved to her that his feelings were genuine.

Carissa had barely fallen asleep by dawn. Since Helen was staying in the palace, Carissa didn't have to wake up early to greet Helen.

However, she was soon awoken by the sound of fireworks. After lying in bed in a daze for a while, she decided to get up and change.

Lulu came to help her with her hair, and said, "His Highness went to the main courtyard early this morning to receive guests. Some officials have come for a visit."

"Were any ladies accompanying them?" Carissa asked.

As the mistress of Hell Monarch Estate, it was her duty to entertain any visiting ladies.

"No. According to Ms. Spencer, they're just a few military officers." Lulu replied.

"Has Vivi gotten up too?" Carissa touched her pale cheek. "Apply some makeup for me. If guests arrive later and see me like this. I might scare them."

Just don't see them, then." After knowing Carissa was up, Violet swaggered into her bedroom. Isk, tsk! What kind of new bride sleeps in this late? I guess it's because you're spoiled by the

marshal

Carissa threw one of the small makeup boxes at her. How de

Violet raised her foot, caught the box, and kicked it back. "It's New Year's Day today. No need to speak so rudely."



Carissa caught the makeup box with

one hand and smiled as she handed it to Lulu. Lulu had been caught in their back-and-forth and looked rather confused, but fortunately, the makeup didn't fall to the floor or get spiffed.

After Lulu had finished helping Carissa with her hair, Violet pouted playfully. "Lulu, dear, step outside for a bit. I need to have a chat with your young mistress." Lulu laughed and replied, "Ms. Spencer, you should just speak

bluntly. Why the need to pout and twist your body like that? People might think you're having a fit."

Carissa chuckled softly.

Violet struck a pose. "You don't understand. This is called being charming."

After Lulu tidied up, she brushed her hair behind her ears and winked. "This is charming. See?"

With that, she left with a smile.

Violet moved a chair over and sat beside Carissa, examining themselves in the mirror. "Ugh, she outshone me. So frustrating."

Violet continued casually, "Claire

wrote back. My grandfather didn't

promise me to Yuvan, but my cousin was willing. She spent an Sentire night kneeling in the cold at my grandfather's house before he

finally agreed to it."

Carissa frowned. "Does your cousin not know his character?"

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Carissa responded with a thoughtful hum

"If an ordinary women thought that way, I'd understand. But the Spencer family is a prestigious family from Ebonflow with a century long unbroken lineage, though their marriage matters are complicated because of your aunt's elopement. Still, you're from a prominent family yourself. Why ding to someone with a higher status? Wouldn't marrying into a lower status family so you'd hold more authority in the marriage be a more comfortable life?

That's why I say she's foolish," Violet said, fastening the Mystic Pearl earrings on Carissa. Yuvan's interest in the Spencer family isn't as simple as it seems. He's already left the capital this morning I wonder how he'll handle your aunts funeral."

Have people been sent to keep watch?" Carissa asked.

"They have," Violet said, pinching Carissa's cheek. "Smile a little. You haven't smiled much these days. If had descendants, I'd want them to smile every day even after I'm gone."

Carlota swatted her hand away. "You don't even have a husband. Where would your descendants come from?"

Finding a good man is like looking for a needle in a haystack, Violet said, though her tone was listless. She had no interest in marriage at

Carlota might have married well, but the royal family was full of ridiculous troubles that she wouldn't have it easy with

As for Violet. Well, no man could match her, and she was quite content with that

The New Year passed in a blur of hosting and being hosted. Soon, it was the fifteenth day of January, the Starfall Fes There were

many celebrations and festivals, and Rafael planned to take Carissa to see the fireworks later in the evening.

However, by noon, freezing rain began to fall..

Snow would have been easier to manage, but freezing rain was a disaster.

The fireworks would have to be canceled. Instead, they needed to focus on disaster relief.

Although Rafael was the head of the Supreme Court, he was also the commander of the Capital Guard and was extremely busy. He even had to send someone back to tell Carissa to stay put and not wander around.

The weather was bone-chillingly cold, with water freezing into ice.

In the backyard, the freezing rain had toppled several trees Helen had previously moved. There was a willow tree near the

southeastern corner of the wall, which had also collapsed halfway, bringing down part of the wall with it.

The estate was also abuzz with activity. Fortunately, Jacob managed things with great efficiency, overseeing the orderly clearing of fallen branches and broken bricks. Repairs would have to wait until the weather improved.

The long-awaited fireworks were

canceled, and with the added burden of the freezing rain disaster it was obvious the public was frustrated. Moreover, disasters often attracted looters. With everything in such disarray, many families had their belongings stolen and complained to the authorities.

Ryan's uncle, Anthony, was overwhelmed. He had to personnel from the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Court to handle the flood of cases. However, there were many who took advantage of the situation, claiming losses they hadn't really suffered. Sorting out the truth from the false reports was quite

challenging.

The freezing rain continued for two days, and it took more than a month for all the official departments to get things under control. However, the damage extended beyond the capital.

The freezing rain had affected areas all the way to Valken, with many homes crushed under the weight. The government had to spend money to provide disaster relief, offering temporary shelter to those who had lost their homes and preventing them from freezing to death.

Yet, the lack of clothing and food was another severe problem.

Among the nobility, there was an elderly woman revered as a saint. She was the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family, the Clayton family. Her name was Mary Grayson, and she was ninety-three years old this year, though she remained quite healthy. Usually reclusive, the scale of the disaster

caused by the freezing rain

compelled her to act. She sent her

grandchildren and great-

grandchildren to assess the damage and, upon hearing the reports,

couldn't sleep.

The next day, accompanied by several of her granddaughters-in-law, Mary visited noble families to gather donations for the disaster victims. She had a high standing, and she had walked instead of sitting in a carriage in such cold weather.

With her actions, who could refuse her request for aid?

The extent of the donation varied, but the gesture itself held significant value. When she arrived at Heil Monarch Estate, Carissa personally went out to greet her. She welcomed Mary warmly, and offered hot lemon tea and stew to ensure the latter comfort.

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Mary was already quite exhausted. Upon receiving the hot drink and food at the estate, she heartily drank two large bowls of stew and

even asked if she could have another bowl.

Carissa placed a stack of banknotes, amounting to ten thousand silver coins, along with the stew on the table. Mary's eyes widened in shock; she looked up at Carissa, visibly trembling with awe and emotion. She had spent two days raising only seven hundred silver coins.

As Mary struggled to find words in her astonishment, Helen. interjected from the side, "Bring me the box for storing the banknotes. Give her twenty thousand silver coins."

As Carissa's mother-in-law, it was only right to support her daughter-in-law, and to do so generously.

Mary stood up in excitement, her tears nearly spilling over.

"Please, don't be so overwhelmed. Sit down, Madam Clayton," Carissa said, concerned that the old woman's emotional response. might lead to a health issue.

Mary's granddaughters-in-law couldn't help but be moved to tears as well.

One of them, unable to hold back, said, "When we went to the

Warren family today, we didn't intend to ask them for a donation. We knew they had their own difficulties with successive marriages. But Grandmother was exhausted and thirsty, so we hoped to get a bowl of

stew.

"To our surprise, as soon as we knocked on the door, Madam Auroral

came out and asked why was our grande other, at her age, out begging? it was disgracefull But how com Grandmother have even » Copper com in her pocket? She ahead,nated most of her own private funder Silence Mary scolded sharply.

Despite her reclusive nature, Mary knew well about the past between the Warren family and the Hell Monarch's princess consort. Such matters were not to be brought up at this moment.

The granddaughter-in-law, chastised, quickly apologized, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring it up. Seeing how Lady Helen and Lady Carissa 25 generously donated made me emotional. I hope you will forgive my indiscretion, Lady Carissa."

Flustered and at a loss for words, Mary's granddaughter in law desperately wished to clarify that she had no ill intentions and was only airing her grandmother in law's grievances.

Realizing that Mary's granddaughter in law was talking about her daughter in law's old adversary, Helen became enraged.

Before Helen could finish her words, Carissa interjected, "Madam Clayton, you're performing an act of kindness. Kind deeds often invite criticism. It is this endurance of hardship and criticism that earned you the title of 'saint'. Please don't let this bother you."

Helen changed her tune, saying, "Well, not everyone will understand your true intentions. There will always be those who assume the worst of others. We should focus on doing our part and not be concerned with the opinions of such people."

Helen had become quite adept at navigating conversations like this.

Mary smiled gratefully.

"Lady Helen, Lady Carissa, you're both quite right. It's from the bottom of my heart that I say this: once you undertake a good deed, you should not worry about criticism. If you fear criticism, then you should refrain from doing good. Previously, I used some of my private funds to send over a batch of cotton clothing, but it was only a small contribution. With these funds now, we can do so much more."

"Your kindness will surely bring you more blessings and a long life," Carissa responded warmly.

"That is not what I seek. I only wish to act with a clear conscience," Mary said, smiling and waving her hand.

After Helen's donation was

prepared, Mary stood up to leave.

Before that, she turned and formally addressed Helen and Carissa, 'I will send a donation list to the authorities. Whether they will publicize or commend the contributions, I do not know. But I will always remember your kindness, Lady Helen, Lady Carissa.'

After they left, Helen expressed her confusion, "Is Aurora out of her mind? How could she dare to insult the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family? She's a revered and respected figure."

Violet replied, "Perhaps she had just

quarreled with someone at the residence and was in a fit of anger. Seeing Madam Clayton's arrival and knowing she was there for

donations, Aurora lashed out. She's known to be a little crazy now. Let's not worry about her. We should focus on doing good ourselves. I'd donate some money too if I had more on hand."

#### Chapter 409

Speaking of which, it had indeed been a while since anyone had paid attention to the affairs of the Warren family

With Barrett having two wives now, they would surely be able to attend to Rebecca properly

Helen remarked, "Yes, that's true After people argue, they often say hurtful things No matter who comes, they'll just keep insulting, and they use the most vicious words "

As Helen spoke, she shrunk back slightly, clearly feeling a bit guilty

Violet smiled and said, "It sounds like there's a story behind this

Helen smiled wryly. "Back when I had a quarrel with Dakota and lost, the late king came to console me. I was so upset that I almost caused a major disaster by directing my anger at him. Fortunately, my sister came to the rescue, or I would have likely ended up in at secluded residence far from the main palace, weaving spider webs.

Carissa and Violet exchanged amused glances. Helen did sometimes speak without regard for the occasion.

Victoria did indeed dote on Helen, and only now that Helen was a mother-in-law did the former offer criticism. Helen had stayed in the palace with Victoria for several days during the New Year. It must have been because Victoria had given her lessons on how to be a proper mother-in-law.

in any case, since returning from the palace, Helen had been event kinder to Carissa than before.

A few days later, news that Aurora had called Mary an "old beggar" spread

Despite the rapid recovery of the capital from the frost rain disaster, many disaster-stricken citizens had received cotton clothing and food from Mary. Moreover, Mary had been doing good deeds for decades, and even the late king had granted her a medal. recognizing their family as a house of accumulated virtue,

Had a common person insulted Mary, the outrage would not have been so intense.

However, it was Aurora from the notoriously disreputable Warren family who had done the insulting, which sparked public anger.

In no time, people were throwing rotten vegetables and stinking eggs at Valor Estate's walls. Some even went so far as to pour foul-smelling liquids in front of their gates in the dead of night, and it wasn't just one bucket.

This led to complaints from the other residences in the same alley. Valor Estate stood at the beginning of the alley, and at the end of the alley was a wall. Therefore, to leave or enter their homes, people had to pass by the Warren family

residence.



Some people, unable to distinguish the right door, ended up throwing their refuse at the neighboring two houses instead. This escalated into a confrontation between the Warren family and the neighboring homes.

The confrontation quickly escalated, with people from the neighboring homes proving no match for Aurora. As a result, three people ended up with fractures and one with a broken leg.

The domestic issues also affected Barrett's performance in his

duties, leading to repeated mistakes and resulting in several reprimands from Michael, who reported directly to Rafael.

The Oversight Department responsible for overseeing and inspecting government officials was overwhelmed with the Warren family's affairs. For several days, the department off

continuously submitted reports about Barrett, his father, Jonathan, and his elder brother, Benjamin.

Salvador had initially intended to promote Barrett, so he was disheartened by the scandal.

He remarked to Derek, "I supposed the saying that one can't fix a

lost cause is true."

Salvador was deeply frustrated, because Barrett and Aurora were a match he had arranged. The Warren family dared not ask Barrett to divorce Aurora, and the king couldn't easily force one either.

Salvador summoned Michael, and

asked him about Barrett's

performance, Michael spoke frankly,

saying that, Barrett used to be

diligent, but had made many mistakes after the family issues arose. Salvador instructed Michael to deliver a message to Barrett, urging him to get Aurora to apologize to Mary and resolve the matter.

Then, Salvador issued an edict praising Mary and posted a list detailing her years of charitable deeds. Alongside the edict and the list, the Royal Citadel also posted a list of donors and the purposes of their contributions.

The public learned that the Hell Monarch's household had donated thirty thousand silver coins. Before this, the Royal Citadel had never disclosed donation sums, reflecting their preference for discreet philanthropy.

The comparison between Carissa and Aurora once again became a hot topic in the capital.

One had donated thirty thousand silver coins, while the other had insulted Mary as a beggar, showing no generosity at all.

Carissa received widespread praise from the public.

#### Chapter 410

However, there were always a few people who criticized Carissa, claiming that as the Hell Monarch's princess consort and the legitimate daughter of the Duke of Northwatch's family, she was wealthy and could easily afford the donation of several tens of thousands of silver coins.

So, how could thirty thousand silver coins be a significant amount for her?

In contrast, they claimed that the Warren family was poor and that Rebecca, who had long been ill, couldn't be expected to donate money.

This explanation was promptly rebutted.

"Do you have a misunderstanding about what constitutes being poor? When Barrett married Aurora, the dowry was reportedly between ten and twenty thousand silver coins. And what about the dowry of the Prince family's daughter? Did you not see the amount?"

"You say they're poor, but what spills from their fingers could feed you for a year."

"Even if they're poor, not donating is one thing, but why insult the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family by calling her an old beggar? She's over ninety years old, and walked in the freezing cold to ask for donations for the disaster victims. What wrong has she done to be called an old beggar?"

"And sure, the Hell Monarch's household has money, but what about you? I'm sure you have at least ten silver coins, right? If asked to donate one silver coin, would you be willing? Probably not."

"With their actions, they showed they have the vision and generosity. Do other noble families in the capital not have money? Why did only the Hell Monarch's household donate thirty thousand silver coins?" The commotion among the common people inevitably reached the people in Hell Monarch Estate.

Carissa had someone check the donation list and confirmed that the Hell Monarch's household had indeed donated the most.

She was somewhat distressed. This made it seem like the Hell Monarch's household was trying to show off. Besides, Mary said she would give the list to the authorities, and whether they were recognized for the donation was up to the authorities.

Carissa wondered why the list was being posted this time.

The previous donations hadn't been made public before, so why now?

Her intention in donating the money was genuinely to help the disaster victims, not to seek attention.

Carissa was troubled, but Helen was delighted. She specifically sent someone to check, and found that Kendrick's family had only donated three hundred silver coins.

She laughed heartily. "Three hundred silver coins? How could they have the nerve to offer so little? I will be going to the palace in a few days and will ask Dakota about this." Kendrick was Dakota's son, and had married a lady from the wealthy Quinton family.

Carissa's lips twitched. "Mother, we're doing a charitable act. If we start comparing ourselves to others, it changes the nature of the act. It's better not to discuss it."

Helen felt a pang of regret.

Opportunities to poke fun at the Dakota were rare. However, she

recalled Victoria's instructions to not

stone

listen to her daughter-in-law.

Carissa's words were sound, so she reluctantly nodded in agreement.

"Alright, I won't mention it."

Carissa glanced at her.

Was Helen even more obedient than Ryan?

Before marrying into the royal family, Carissa had anticipated that Helen would be difficult to deal. But in just a few days, their relationship had sweetened remarkably. Each morning, instead of waiting for Carissa to come and greet her, Helen would come to her directly, insisting on sharing breakfast.

It was an unusual reversal of roles.

Most notably, Helen had moved her residence to Luminous Hall, which was next to Orchid Hall, and had

even had orchids planted there. She seemed determined to become closer to her daughter-in-law.

Carissa chose to ignore all the fuss and bother. Now that the disaster situation was gradually calming down, she decided to consult Kiera about her thoughts on Logan.

As soon as Kiera heard her sister-in-law mention marriage, her face turned a deep shade of red. She fidgeted with her handkerchief, looking bashful.

"Which son from the Quinton family are you referring to, Carissa?"

Carissa crossed her arms. "Logan from the Quinton family living on Willow Street."

Kiera was momentarily taken aback.

Willow Street? What? Wasn't the Quinton family's residence located on Stone Street, which was two streets away from Hell Monarch Estate? Carissa chuckled. "Still playing coy, are we?"

Kiera realized her sister-in-law was teasing her, and blushed furiously. She turned and ran away, exclaiming, "Carissa, you're so mean!"

She dashed outside for a moment, then came running back with a sparkle in her eyes. "As for Logan, I... I like him."

With that, Kiera let out a few more excited squeals before running off again, clearly embarrassed.