

War Song 441

Chapter 441

"Mom!" Serena's eyes were brimming with excitement. "I said Lady Jessica will take me there. She said that at the birthday banquet, she'll help me become one of the Hell Monarch's concubines." Rebecca's eyes, which had been as dead as a tomb, suddenly sparkled with life.

She struggled to sit up and asked, "Are you serious?"

"Of course. Lady Jessica told me in person, and Grand Princess Eleanor was there too."

Rebecca's heart leaped with excitement, as though her blood was rushing freely again, and her breathing quickened.

"If this works out, Grand Princess Eleanor and Lady Jessica will be our great benefactors." Rebecca paused, frowning. "Why would they help you like this? Are they plotting something? Don't be too happy just yet. Let me think about it."

Serena stomped her foot in frustration. "Mom, no matter what their intentions are, all that matters is that I can marry into the royal family. Even if I have to be a concubine beneath Carissa, I don't care. I'm younger than her, and she's just a once-divorced woman who remarried. How can she be better than me?"

She sat down again. "Besides, Grand Princess Eleanor has always liked matchmaking. Perhaps she's dissatisfied with Carissa and wants to send me to annoy her. Even if Grand Princess Eleanor has some scheme, I'll do my best to help her as long as I can become the Hell Monarch's concubine. After all, I'll just be a concubine. It's not like I can achieve much."

Rebecca thought her daughter's words made sense. However, she still remembered the events at Eleanor's birthday banquet and had a lingering feeling that things were not so simple.

"Mom, Barrett has now become a ninth-rank official. Dad and Benjamin have no hope of promotion, and Aurora has always been against you. Viola is backed by the Earl of Silverstone's family, but aside from offering some dowry to support our family, she doesn't have much to offer us."

Rebecca thought about it. Serena was right.

Could they rely on Bryan? He couldn't even pass the first level of the national examination.

At this rate, how could they restore the glory of the Warren family?

Rebecca was wary of Eleanor and Jessica's intentions, but if Serena could become the Hell Monarch's concubine, the benefits would outweigh any potential costs. At least Serena's position would be secured. That was a priority.

"Have you asked them what the plan is?" Rebecca asked with a sigh.

Serena relayed everything Jessica had told her. After listening, Rebecca pondered for a while. Although the plan seemed quite ordinary, it was indeed effective.

If Rafael embraced Serena in front

of many quests, he would have to take responsibility for her, both out of respect and for the sake of his reputation. If he didn't, it would tarnish his name.

Rebecca's only concern was that even if Rafael married Serena, he might feel that she was scheming against him, which could result in him not favoring her. If that happened, Serena's position as a concubine might end up being more symbolic than substantive.

But then Rebecca thought, so what if that happened?

The Hell Monarch was incredibly influential. He controlled the Mystic Army and served as Chief Judge in the Supreme Court. Once Serena became his concubine, whether she was favored or not in their private quarters would remain a mystery to outsiders.

Her status would make it easier for Jonathan, Benjamin, and Bryan to build connections and have more opportunities for promotion.

With that in mind, Rebecca nodded slowly. "Then, go ahead and act according to the situation."

Suddenly, she remembered something and added, "Carissa has a good relationship with that old hag from the second branch of our family. I wonder if she will be invited this time. Go and ask." "Mom, Lady Jessica said I can't disclose this matter to anyone. She even forbade me to tell you in case someone around you leaks it."

"I obviously won't tell her. I just want to know if Carissa invited her."

"Should I ask?"

"Have your eldest sister-in-law ask. You don't need to go. Just ask her gently and say you want to know."

Rebecca slowly lay back down, finding it difficult to talk for long without getting breathless. She still needed to take Snowdrop Pills.

Serena went to find Amelia, who indeed went to Charlotte and inquired.

Charlotte looked at her and asked, "Who sent you to ask this?"

"Serena," Amelia answered honestly.

Charlotte smiled. "So, it was your mother-in-law who wanted to know. Tell her that I was invited."

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Taken aback, Amelia asked, "Were you really invited? Or is it a lie? After all, you're also from our family. Why would she invite you?"

"Why wouldn't she? Not everyone from our family is heartless," Charlotte said with great pleasure and satisfaction. "Go back and tell Serena so that she'll tell Rebecca. Let her stew over it a bit." Amelia smiled wryly. "Aunt Charlotte, are you and my mother-in-law truly at such odds?"

Charlotte sneered. "Who's at odds with her? I just can't stand her greed, ruthlessness, and ingratitude. Amelia, let me tell you something you might not want to hear-you're foolish. You can't even tell who's good to you and who's not."

"How could I not tell? Aunt Charlotte, you know my own family is not supportive, my husband doesn't care much for me, and my mother-in-law looks down on me. What can I do?" Amelia replied.

"You may not be able to do much, but don't aid their schemes," Charlotte said firmly. "Your mother-in-law, Viola, Aurora, and your youngest sister-in-law are all terrible people. They all want to make things difficult for Carissa. Just don't help them."

"Of course, I won't," Amelia quickly assured.

"Amelia, sometimes pretending to be deaf and dumb can be quite useful," Charlotte said with a meaningful look.

Amelia was somewhat slow on the uptake, so it took a while for her to understand.

Finally, she said, "Recently, I've been feeling unwell. I need to rest for a while."

Charlotte smiled. "Go ahead, then. Call a physician to check on you. Let them cause their own troubles, and don't worry about anything else."

Amelia understood, thanked her, and took her leave.

Charlotte looked at the invitation. She hadn't planned to attend. She knew Carissa valued sentiment, but her presence would be inappropriate. At Helen's birthday banquet, her appearance would inevitably represent the Warren family. She didn't want to associate Carissa with the Warren family any further. Not in the slightest.

So, she decided to send a gift in advance but would not attend the event herself.

After speaking to Charlotte, Amelia went to inform Serena that Charlotte hadn't mentioned whether she had received an invitation. As she spoke, she suddenly felt faint and collapsed onto Serena, who instinctively supported her.

"Amelia, what's wrong?"

"Dizzy..." she managed to utter, her voice weak.

A physician was called to check on her. Amelia's body was inherently cold, and with the seasons changing from winter to spring, the fluctuations in temperature made her prone to illness.

Having examined her, the physician said, "Madam Amelia, you should really take care of your health. If your constitution isn't well maintained, having children will be difficult."

After the physician left, Amelia

grasped Viola's hand, tears in her

eyes. "Viola, my health is failing me won't be able to help you in the future. You'll have to take on more of the responsibilities around the house, both inside and out.

Viola had never thought much of Amelia, and had only ever found her useful for a few things in the past. Despite being somewhat inept, at least there was someone to use. Now that Amelia was ill and required treatment, it would inevitably lead to more expenses.

However, as a dutiful daughter-in-law, it was not

appropriate to say anything negative about the sick elder sister-in-law. Instead, Viola had to offer some words of comfort. To demonstrate her own virtue and compassion, she also arranged for some nourishing medicinal herbs to be delivered to Amelia's room.

Once she left her sister-in-law's quarters, Viola went to Rebecca's room to assist with her medication. She overheard Rebecca and Serena discussing Helen's birthday banquet, which would be held at Hell Monarch Estate.

"Carissa probably didn't invite Aunt Charlotte."

Rebecca snorted. "That woman thinks she's on good terms with Carissa, but Carissa didn't even invite her. It only makes her look foolish and delusional."

"Yes, she's just a joke," Serena agreed.

Viola felt a mix of emotions.

Carissa was in charge of organizing the banquet for Helen, and it was going to be an extravagant affair. On that night, Carissa would be the center of attention as the esteemed hostess and mistress of Hell Monarch Estate.

As a woman who had also remarried, Viola instinctively compared herself to Carissa.

Though Carissa came from a prestigious family, she was now without support. In contrast, despite Viola's own background of coming from a lesser family, she had a powerful brother who commanded significant respect and influence.

Why, then, was there such a stark difference between her and Carissa?

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Viola was constantly preoccupied with the affairs of both the estate and the family, and she had to dip into her own funds to make up the shortfall. Every day, she was so exhausted that it felt as though her back might break the moment she lay down.

Meanwhile, Carissa seemed to live a carefree and happy life, so Viola couldn't help but feel a pang of resentment.

While lost in these thoughts, she overheard Serena say, "I heard that Lady Helen publicly stated she didn't like Carissa in the past. Considering their strained relationship, it's possible Lady Helen will impose some rules on Carissa at the birthday banquet. With Carissa's current temperament, she might make a scene."

Viola remembered Carissa's haughty and arrogant words from that day while she sat in her carriage. She really wanted to see Helen making things difficult for Carissa.

But without an invitation, how could she possibly attend Helen's birthday banquet?

Then, she suddenly thought of her own family. With her brother now in charge of the Hell Monarch Army and the banquet being held at Hell Monarch Estate, surely they would send an invitation to the Earl of Silverstone's family?

With that in mind, Viola excused herself after helping to administer Rebecca's medication, claiming she needed to visit her own family because her mother was unwell. Upon returning home and asking her mother, she confirmed that they had indeed received an invitation.

Viola immediately said, "Mom, take me with you on that day."

Evelyn was taken aback. "You already married into the Warren family. It wouldn't be proper for me to bring you along."

"Who cares if it's proper or not? It's just a birthday banquet. Just say that I'm accompanying you because my sister-in-law's health isn't great," Viola insisted.

"What would you go for?" Evelyn asked.

She looked at her daughter, feeling that since Viola's marriage, her temperament had become increasingly impatient.

"It's nothing special. I just want to chat with the other ladies," Viola said, shaking her mother's arm. "Mom, you know, ever since I married into the Warren family, the family's fortunes have declined.

"Now that my husband has even been demoted to a ninth-rank official, who would invite me to their banquet if it weren't for my natal family's influence? I need to get to know more noble ladies to plan for my husband's future."

She continued, "Moreover, I heard

they invited the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family. You also know that Aurora has offended her. Although she has already apologized and settled the matter, there's no guarantee that

matriarch doesn't hold a grudge. As Barrett's primary wife, it's up to me to apologize. I'm sure the Marquis of Jadehill's family will show some respect for my brother and accept it."

Not knowing about the recent friction between her daughter and Carissa, Evelyn considered Viola's words reasonable.

She said, "Since you want to go,

there's no need to stop your sister-in-law. She should visit the Hell Monarch's princess consort as well. After all, even though your brother commands the troops, those soldiers have followed the Hell Monarch through thick and thin. Until now, the name of their unit is

still the Hell Monarch Army."

Hearing her mother's agreement, Viola sighed with relief and smiled. "Yes, my sister-in-law should go too."

Evelyn added, "It's good for you to go. After all, we previously asked Lady Carissa about your husband, and she informed us of many things. We should thank her in person."

"You're right, Mom," Viola responded distractedly.

"Why do you look so pale?" Evelyn closely examined her daughter's face and frowned. "Haven't you been resting well? How are they treating you over there?"

Viola immediately perked up. "They treat me very well. My mother-in-law is understanding, my husband respects me, and my father-in-law and elder brother-in-law are also kind. Only my younger sister-in-law is a bit arrogant, but she hasn't caused me any trouble."

"And what about your sister wife, Aurora?" the old lady asked.

"We usually keep to ourselves. But there was that incident of her offending the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family, after which people started throwing dung at our estate. We had a few words over it, but it was all settled amicably in the end," Viola replied.

Evelyn sighed. "Recently, there have been rumors in the capital that she was captured and defiled. I don't know if it's true, but if it is, it would be a huge embarrassment for the Warren family." "Where there's smoke, there's fire. In any case, my husband doesn't care for her. Since he married me, he has rarely visited her and almost never stays overnight," said Viola.

Evelyn nodded, somewhat comforted. "That's good. It's a good thing that your husband is considerate of you. You should also work hard and give their family an heir as soon as possible."

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How could Viola not wish to conceive an heir soon? Yet, she had her own silent struggles.

It seemed that Barrett was not very enthusiastic about intimacy, and even when he did engage, he appeared somewhat lacking in strength. It was puzzling. He was a capital guard and in good health. How could this be?

Viola ensured her husband's diet was nourishing, and even considered consulting a physician for him, but refrained for fear it might embarrass him. She felt an indescribable discontent. Though her life seemed smooth, there was an underlying frustration that she couldn't pinpoint.

Just then, her sister-in-law, Zoey, the current mistress of the Prince family's household, arrived to deliver medicinal food to Evelyn. She was surprised to hear that Viola also wanted to attend Helen's banquet. "If Viola wants to go, let her. After all, she is acquainted with Lady Carissa. Even though the Warren family has not received an invitation, it's fine for her to join us," Evelyn said. Zoey furrowed her brow. "Mother, Viola is still a member of the Warren family, and Lady Carissa was once married to Viola's current husband. It would be awkward if she went." "Zoey, don't worry. Lady Carissa and I won't be uncomfortable. We've spoken privately before, and she has always been very kind to me," Viola reassured.

"Have you spoken since you both got remarried?" Zoey asked.

Viola hesitated but managed to say, "Yes, a while ago, we met on the street. I dismounted to greet her, and she spoke to me courteously."

Zoey thought for a moment but shook her head. "Meeting privately is one thing, but with so many guests at the banquet, your presence might make Lady Carissa uncomfortable."

Viola smiled. "Zoey, please don't worry. Lady Carissa isn't petty. She has even invited me to her home before."

Zoey looked at her younger sister-in-law, feeling that her words might not fully capture the situation. Considering Viola and Carissa's relationship, they would typically avoid each other in public to steer clear of any unwanted gossip.

Evelyn's expression grew stern. "Enough. If she wants to go, let her. Now that Barrett has been demoted, Viola must think about his future."

Hearing her mother-in-law's decision, Zoey had no further objections.

"We'll do as you say, Mother."

However, even after Zoey left the room, her brows remained furrowed.

Her maid, Mia, asked, "Madam Zoey, is it because you don't want Madam Viola to go?"

"Why would she want to go? Is she trying to make things difficult for everyone?" Zoey shook her head. "But Mother has always been indulgent towards her. Whatever she has asked for over the years, Mother has never opposed. If I stop her now, Mother might hold a grudge against me."

Zoey thought further, adding, "Besides, the Farrell family's men were once under the command of the Duke of Northwatch, and later, followed the Hell Monarch. I heard that General Timothy has returned to the capital, so the Farrell family will definitely be on the guest list. Didn't she consider that? How will she face the Farrell family when the time comes?"

"But didn't the Farrell family issue her a divorce letter? They must have hoped she would remarry, not spend her life mourning for her former husband. The Farrell family is kind-hearted. They probably wish to see her remarried," Mia replied.

"But she married Barrett, who betrayed the Hell Monarch's princess consort. The Farrell family were all followers of the Duke of Northwatch back then," Zoey protested.

Zoey hadn't forgotten that her

younger sister-in-law had once

compared her dowry with that of the

Hell Monarch's princess consort.

Viola had been quite pleased with herself, thinking her dowry would surpass Carissa's, only to be dismayed when many valuable

items were added to Carissa's trousseau just before the wedding. Viola had even cursed in frustration over it.

Zoey didn't believe Viola could have a calm conversation with Carissa. Even if Carissa was kind, it was likely out of respect for the Prince family rather than genuine warmth.

"On the day of the birthday banquet, keep a close watch on her," Zoey instructed. "My husband has just taken up command. We can't afford any criticism because of her."

"I understand, Madam Zoey. You can rest assured," Mia replied.

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Carissa had indeed extended an invitation to the Farrell family. They were a distinguished family of military tradition, and Timothy was still serving in the Hell Monarch Army.

Due to an old illness, the family's elder general had been bedridden for the past two or three years. Currently, the matriarch of the Farrell family was Timothy's wife, Opal. The other branches of the family, having lost the people of the younger generations, tended to keep a low profile and rarely made public appearances.

A family of military officers bore a unique pain that others might not understand.

With her husband still serving in the military and her children unmarried, Opal had to make public appearances to plan for the marriages and futures of her children.

Her eldest son was also a soldier but had been injured in battle, which prevented him from settling down. Meanwhile, having passed the national examination, her second son was pursuing a scholarly career and needed to continue his studies.

There was also a daughter, Nina Farrell, who was thirteen this year. Though there was no immediate rush, some families made marriage arrangements for girls as young as twelve or thirteen, and she had yet to find a suitor.

This time, when the Farrell family received the invitation to Helen's birthday banquet, Opal decided to take her aunt-in-law, Alice, out for a change of scenery. She had heard that no one from the

Warren family had been invited, so she felt it was safe to bring Alice, who was the mother of Thomas Farrell, along.

Alice had been melancholic for years, grieving over the loss of Thomas. However, she needed to think about her other children and could not remain in her sorrow forever. After some persuasion, she agreed to attend the banquet.

Opal prepared a gift for her aunt-in-law. When the time came, they would set off together for Hell Monarch Estate to celebrate Helen's birthday. She would also bring her siblings to broaden their horizons. March passed quickly, with the verdant growth of spring giving way to the blossoming April.

Soon, Helen's birthday arrived. In the lead-up to the event, the people of Hell Monarch Estate had been busy for half a month.

The garden was adorned with flowers. In addition to those Helen had chosen, Carissa had added many more. The bougainvillea on the walls had also bloomed, resembling clusters of purple-red clouds, creating a beautiful scene.

Three theater troupes had been hired well in advance, and they would take turns to perform from morning until night.

The pastries that would be served to the guests were made by the household's dedicated pastry chefs, and they were not at all inferior to those from the famous bakery, Fortune Bakehouse.

The banquet featured a total of eighteen dishes, including a variety of mountain delicacies and seafood, but also some unique homemade favorites. There were even vegetarian options prepared for guests who didn't eat meat.

For example, the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family and some members of the Farrell family all preferred to avoid meat. Several of the older Sinclair family members also followed a vegetarian diet, hoping that their prayers for their family's men would ensure their invincibility on the battlefield.

In reality, the hope was more about wishing for their safe return from battle. Unfortunately, the Sinclair family's pillar, the Duke of Northwatch's family, now consisted only of Carissa and Ryan. Despite this, the Sinclair family members continued to eat vegetarian food. One reason was out of

habit, as they could no longer tolerate even the slightest bit of meat. The other reason was a hope for the souls of the departed to attain rebirth more quickly.

Carissa was dressed in a soft pink-colored dress with a peach-colored outer cloak. The cloak was made from cloud satin and was light and airy, giving her an ethereal, almost celestial appearance.

Her makeup was subtle, and her hair was styled in a sophisticated bun. A Mystic Pearl headpiece sat on her head, which added a touch of elegance and grace without overshadowing her natural beauty. Rafael, on the other hand, wore a dark brocade robe cinched with a leather belt, from which hung an emerald pendant on his left side. His attire was both striking and dignified, blending handsomeness with a sense of authority.

Helen had dressed elaborately for

the occasion. Her hair was adorned with a lavish array of jewels and pearls, and her luxurious brocade outfit was embroidered with large peonies in gold and silver thread. Over her attire, she wore a silk shawl, which was made of a lighter and more refined material than cloud satin, offering a subtle but undeniable air of luxury and refinement.

Helen had entered the palace at the age of sixteen, gave birth to Rafael at seventeen, and this year, turned forty-two. She always insisted she still looked young, and dressed like this, she really did. Her complexion was fair and smooth, with only faint lines at the corners of her eyes and a few white hairs, which had been removed.

Around her neck, she wore a

dazzling and eye-catching red coral necklace, of which each bead was

round and fiery red. Her hair was

adorned with rubies, as were heret

earrings, and she wore two haikins that dangled with jeweled tassels. The pin on the left had a large Mystic Pearl that looked just like the ones from Carissa's dowry set in it.

It wasn't just a coincidence-every piece of jewelry Helen wore today had been custom-made by Carissa, gifted to her as a birthday present.

Soon, the guests began to arrive one after another.

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The weather today was truly perfect. The sun was just right, and the sunlight filtering through the branches made everything warm and pleasant.

Helen sat gracefully in the main hall, receiving the guests' congratulations. Luke, accompanied by his staff, collected the gifts and recorded them meticulously. Each gift needed to be noted down, and its value assessed, so that an appropriate return gift could be prepared for future occasions.

The ladies were adorned in delicate makeup and draped in jewels that shimmered with an air of opulence, exuding a wealth that was beyond words. Helen's smile had become somewhat rigid from the sheer number of well-wishers. She glanced over at Carissa and saw that the latter remained composed, her smile as natural as if it had sprung from her heart.

Helen couldn't help but admire Carissa's ease. She handled such grand occasions with an unflappable grace.

Rafael and Jacob received the male guests in the main building's reception room. Since it was Helen's birthday, the main hall was reserved for her and the female guests.

Due to Helen's special status, the main courtyard and hall had been used for the event.

Meredith and Henrietta arrived, as did Natalie, the prime minister's wife, and Hannah, the defense minister's wife. Mary, her daughter-in-law, and her granddaughter-in-law also made their appearances. Soon, Eleanor arrived with Jessica. Carissa took a glance, and saw a familiar face.

Serena? She had come with Eleanor and Jessica?

That added an interesting twist.

When the matriarch of the Marquis of Jadehill's family arrived, Carissa helped Helen rise to greet her. The elderly lady was advanced in years and rarely attended such social gatherings, but today she had honored them with her presence, so Helen made sure to personally welcome her.

Mary entered amidst a throng of daughters-in-law. No one knew how powerful the family really was, but they certainly had plenty of people. Mary was over ninety years old, and everyone present stood to greet her. Even the high princesses present at the banquet nodded slightly out of respect.

"Oh, there's no need for that!" Mary quickly returned their gestures with a smile. "Today is Lady Helen's birthday celebration. I'm just an old woman here for a good meal."

Meredith smiled and said, "Madam

Clayton, during the freezing rain disaster, you stepped forward and raised a substantial amount of money, sending numerous quiltet

and food to the disaster-stricken areas. The people there were no longer suffering from the cold and hunger because of your generous efforts. Your benevolence and dedication make us, the royal princesses, feel deeply ashamed."

Mary responded, "It was just a modest effort on my part. Please don't speak of it as if it were a great achievement. I cannot bear such

praise. What I did was trivial

compared to the monumental

contributions of the late Duke of

Northwatch and General Dominic, as

well as the Hell Monarch, who

safeguarded the kingdom and

reclaimed territories. So, let us not dwell on it."

Her humility earned her the respect of everyone present.

Helen felt a bit anxious. It would be better if Mary saved those words for when Dakota arrived, so she could hear just how much Helen's son and daughter-in-law had accomplished. Helen was eager to see the jealous, twisted look on Dakota's face.

However, just as Mary finished speaking, Dakota entered with Adelaide, holding her grandson in her left hand and her granddaughter in her right.

The little children were so adorable and sweet that it made people jealous.

Helen could hardly tolerate Dakota. What was she trying to do, flaunt her grandchildren? If it weren't for Rafael being on the battlefield, Helen would be holding grandchildren herself. Due to Dakota's esteemed status, the officials and their families all rose to pay their respects.

Eleanor asked, "Why have only you come, Lady Adelaide? Where are Lord Kendrick's concubines?"

Adelaide replied with a smile, "Lady

Inez's child is still young, and Lady Matilda is pregnant, so it's not convenient for them to come hope you will understand their absence, Lady Helen."

Everyone extended their congratulations, but Helen's eyes burned with jealousy.

Another child? Was the prince a breeding sow? Just a few years into the marriage, there were already four or five children.

Eleanor remarked with a smile, "Lady Dakota, you're truly fortunate. Even at such a young age, you're already surrounded by grandchildren."

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After Dakota took her seat, she smiled and said, "As for fortune, it pales in comparison to the blessings of Madam Clayton from the Marquis of Jadehill's family."

Mary smiled and said, "Everyone here is indeed blessed, and Lady Dakota is even more so. Lady Helen is blessed as well, having a virtuous daughter-in-law. The Hell Monarch has achieved unparalleled military success, which is also a great blessing."

Helen felt a lot better after hearing that. It was no wonder people said others had seen and experienced so much more than she has. Just a casual comment like that could be so comforting.

She immediately beamed. "I do wish that Rafael could enjoy the idle pleasures of the capital city like Lord Kendrick, surrounded by wives and concubines and with children in pairs. It pains me to see my son working tirelessly from dawn until late into the night. I worry for him."

Dakota smiled and said, "That only proves Prince Rafael is capable."

As she spoke, she held her grandchild close and gave him a kiss.

The child's chubby little hand clung to her neck, and in a sweet voice, he said, "Grandma."

That single word melted hearts. Helen, who had just been basking in satisfaction, felt a pang of jealousy.

Eleanor noticed the change in Helen's expression, and commented with a smile, "It has been several months since Lady Carissa entered the family. Why isn't there any news yet?"

Upon hearing this, Serena glanced provocatively at Carissa. Carissa caught the look and merely responded with a faint, dismissive smile.

Eleanor sipped her tea, and said slowly, "In my view, it's important for the royal family's sons to start having children soon to ensure the family's legacy. The court duties? Anyone could handle those."

Her words made Helen's expression darken further. The guests understood she was referring to the lack of news about the Hell Monarch's princess consort having a child.

To avoid offending either side, everyone chose to remain silent.

However, the matriarch of the Marquis of Ironridge's family, Margaret, interjected coldly, "Lady Carissa has only been in the family for a few months, while Lady Jessica has been married for several years with no sign of a child. If you have any effective methods for conceiving, Grand Princess Eleanor, perhaps you should share them with your daughter first."

The two families were not on good terms. Margaret was displeased with Jessica for always returning to her natal home whenever there was an issue, while Eleanor disliked Margaret for her stern and cold demeanor.

Thus, when Margaret made her remark, Eleanor responded with a cold laugh. "Jessica may not have any children, but her husband is not lacking in concubines. Prince Rafael, on the other hand, has neither concubines nor secondary wives."

"You're quite generous, Grand

Princess Eleanor, as you've provided

many concubines for your prince

consort. But what are those

concubines like? Has anyone seen them?" Margaret retorted.

Eleanor replied icily, "Concubines are merely lowly servants. They are not fit to be seen in public, and certainly not allowed to attend banquets."

Margaret immediately shot back, "It's one thing not to allow them to attend banquets, but not even coming out to greet relatives who visit is just plain rude."

As the two women exchanged sharp

remarks, Natalie intervened to

smooth things over, "I've heard there's also a theater troupe and a garden full of flowers that haven't been appreciated yet. Sitting here and chatting is rather dull. Why don't we step outside, enjoy the performance, and admire the

flowers?"

Just as Helen was about to agree, an announcement came from outside.

"The Earl of Silverstone's family has arrived!"

Evelyn, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Zoey, and daughter, Viola, entered the room.

Upon Viola's arrival, everyone paused in surprise.

Why was Viola here? Had the Hell Monarch's princess consort invited her? Was she here to stir trouble? Why would Viola come if she wasn't invited?

While everyone was puzzled, Carissa

approached with a smile to greet the guests and glanced at Viola. With the same smile, she said, "Mrs.. Warren, I don't recall sending an invitation to the Warren family. Did you come with your natal family?"

So, Viola wasn't invited after all? How could she show up uninvited? As a married woman, it was improper to attend a banquet with her natal family.

Moreover, with the lingering grievances between the families, it was unclear whether Viola was either overly bold or naive, or if she had come to cause trouble. Viola looked at Carissa, and asked, "Do you not welcome me, Lady Carissa?"

"Not at all. Everyone here is a guest," Carissa said with a smile. "Please, take a seat."

Viola then saw Serena, and was about to approach her when another announcement came from outside.

"The Farrell family has arrived!"

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Viola's expression froze.

The Farrell family? It was a distant memory she had nearly forgotten.

She hurriedly took a seat in a corner, unsure who from the Farrell family had come. Her former mother-in-law was unlikely to be here, as she had long preferred to stay at home and rarely ventured out. However, just as she settled down, she saw Opal assisting her former mother-in-law, Alice, into the room, followed by several young women from the Farrell family.

"Madam Opal." Carissa quickly stepped forward, greeting Opal and then Alice politely. "How is your health, Madam Alice?"

Seeing Carissa, Alice's eyes softened with sympathy, and she couldn't help but feel a pang of sadness. But she knew the importance of today's occasion and managed to keep her emotions in check, smiling as she replied, "Thank you, Lady Carissa. Everything is well."

After speaking, Alice, along with Opal and the children, went forward to pay their respects to Helen and exchanged pleasantries with the attending princesses. Alice's gaze swept across the room, and she noticed Viola.

She was momentarily taken aback, then walked straight to Viola. "Viola, it's been a long time. How have you been?"

Alice was unaware of Viola's marriage. Despite the uproar in the capital about the simultaneous weddings of Viola and the Hell Monarch's princess consort, Opal had ordered that no one should mention Viola's marriage to Barrett in Alice's presence.

As a result, Alice had remained in the dark.

The others in the room also realized that Alice was unaware of the situation.

The atmosphere grew awkwardly silent. Even those who usually enjoyed the drama of such events remained unusually quiet.

Alice's situation was truly tragic. She had three sons, two of whom died young. Only Thomas survived. Despite his early fame and valor on the battlefield, he perished in combat and would never return.

So when Alice, with tears in her eyes, addressed Viola as if she were still her daughter-in-law, it inevitably tugged at the heartstrings of everyone present.

Viola stood up, her voice barely audible as she said, "Madam Alice, I am well, thanks to your kindness."

She couldn't meet Alice's gaze directly, her eyes darting around, her lips trembling.

Alice was momentarily taken aback. Seeing the silence of the crowd, including the silence from Opal and Evelyn, she suddenly began to understand.

Serena, who had been silent since entering the main hall, seized the opportunity to speak. She quickly approached, and linked her arm with Viola's. "Madam Alice, this is my sister-in-law." Alice looked at Serena, unsure of her identity.

She heard Opal softly explain, "This is the daughter of the Warren family. As for Viola, she is now Mr. Warren's wife."

Alice was aware of Barrett's pursuit of Aurora through his military achievements, as Opal hadn't kept that from her. However, the news of Viola's marriage to Barrett had been concealed. Upon hearing that Viola had married Barrett, Alice was stunned, disbelief evident in her voice.

"General Warren? Barrett Warren?"

Viola nodded slightly. "Yes."

Alice's face went pale. When her son

died in battle, she didn't want her

daughter-in-law to remain

a widow

for the rest of her life, so she

allowed Viola to leave, hoping Viola would find someone who would

treat her well.

She never expected that it would be Barrett, who was known for seeking another wife after his military successes.

Alice had a low opinion of Barrett.

She believed that the Farrell family, being a family of military officials, would not behave in such a manner. The fact that Viola had married Barrett was beyond her expectations.

Alice's voice trembled slightly as she asked, "Does... Does he treat you well?"

Once the question was out, she felt she had overstepped.

Viola and the Farrell family were no longer connected.

"Yes, he does, Viola said, clearly wanting to end the conversation. She also didn't want Serena holding onto her any longer, so she pulled her arm away and suggested, "Let's not stay here any longer. Why don't we go outside and enjoy the flowers?"

Chapter 449

The atmosphere had indeed become awkward; even Helen, who was usually a bit slow to pick up on things, noticed it. She took the initiative to break the silence.

"Not long ago, Carissa added many rare and beautiful flowers to my collection. Why don't we go take a look? The bougainvillea on the wall has also bloomed, and it makes for a vibrant display. If we don't see it now, it will soon wither."

Carissa joined in, "That's right. If you're not interested in flowers and would rather see the performances, follow me."

She first helped Helen down from her seat, and then took Alice's arm gently. "Come, let's go enjoy the flowers. It's been a while since we last spoke, and I'd like to catch up with you."

Alice appeared somewhat dazed. She couldn't understand why Viola had married Barrett, and now, why was she here today? The Farrell family had allowed her to return to her natal family, hoping she would find a suitable match-but Barrett was not that match.

Alice felt a deep sense of revulsion.

Her son, Thomas, was exceptional. Even if Viola found another suitor who wasn't as outstanding as Thomas, he shouldn't be someone of such poor character.

Eleanor was quite displeased with this turn of events. She had been enjoying the sight of Helen's anger and jealousy. However, with the arrival of the Farrell family, it seemed her attempts to provoke Helen using Dakota's grandchildren had been in vain.

But Eleanor noticed the jealousy in Helen's eyes earlier. With a bit of provocation, she was certain Helen would soon start arranging for Rafael to have secondary wives.

Serena followed Eleanor to view the flowers, anxiously scanning the crowd, wondering when she might catch a glimpse of the Hell Monarch.

If she didn't see him, how could her plan succeed?

Last night, Violet and Carissa had made a bet, and Violet had lost. As a result, Violet had disguised herself as a maid for the day. She had firmly said she wouldn't serve anyone but would stand at a distance, observing the guests, especially Eleanor and her companions.

At the moment, nothing seemed amiss, but from the way they exchanged glances and Serena's restless scanning of the surroundings, Violet suspected that they were up to no good.

She summoned Pearl and instructed, "Go and inform Cari that everything here is currently under control."

Pearl acknowledged the command, and made her way to the theater to relay Violet's message to Carissa.

Carissa was attending to several

elderly ladies, including Mary on her left and Alice on her right. The play being performed was a common choice for birthday banquets. The ladies present, who had likely seen this performance numerous times, were not truly focused on the play. Instead, their gathering was more about socializing and strengthening relationships.

Carissa's concern for Alice was not solely due to Viola. Rather, it was because Alice was the mother of Thomas, who had originally served under her grandfather before being transferred to her father's command.

Alice had lost all three of her sons, leaving her with only one illegitimate son and two daughters. Carissa deeply understood the pain of losing loved ones, and recognized Alice's ongoing grief. Alice's initial decision to let Viola leave showed her kindness, but it also revealed how her gentle nature made her susceptible to personal difficulties.

So, no one was paying attention to the play, and the ladies were quietly conversing among themselves.

Alice clasped Carissa's hand tightly, struggling to hold back her tears. She whispered, "Lady Carissa, what kind of person is Mr. Warren? Is he very cruel?"

Carissa replied softly, "Madam Alice, please try to put your mind at ease. Since she's already left your family, there's no need to worry about her anymore. Focus on your own health and your daughters."

Alice's voice was filled with sorrow, "I know I shouldn't interfere, but my son was such an upright and noble man. After gaining military honors Mr. Warren discarded his wife and remarried-he is not a good man. My son cared deeply for Viola. Before he died, he mentioned her in every letter he wrote home. I believe my son would not have wanted her to marry someone like that."

"The Prince family is not to be trifled with. Regardless of what kind of person Barrett is, as long as the Earl of Silverstone's family stands, Viola will not be wronged," Carissa said.

She paused, and continued, "Don't worry about others just focus on yourself. After all, you are no longer family. She will not be buried with Thomas in the future, and since the divorce letter was given to her, who she marries is her own business. Whether her future is good or bad will be something she has to face on her own."

Alice sighed slowly. "You are right, Your Grace. I have indeed meddled too much."

Alice wasn't actually very familiar with Carissa. They had only met a few times when Carissa was younger. Later, when Carissa returned from Meadow Ridge, their families had interacted occasionally, but it was mostly through Melanie. Carissa had only come to offer a polite greeting once in a while.

But with her son gone, Alice felt adrift. Seeing Carissa, she was reminded of how her son had served under Hector and Dominic, and it gave her a sense of connection.

At that moment, a maid approached. "Madam Alice, our mistress requests your presence."

The maid was Mia, a servant of the Prince family-or, more specifically, Zoey's maid.

Opal recognized her, and asked, "Does your mistress have something to discuss?"

"She said she just wants to catch up with Madam Alice," Mia replied.

Opal looked at Alice. "Aunt Alice, do you wish to go?"

Knowing Zoey's nature to be kind and sincere, Alice agreed, "Let's go and have a chat."

She released Carissa's hand, and said softly, "Your Grace, I have taken your words to heart. Don't worry about me."

Carissa saw her out, and the loud drumming of the play made their conversation inaudible to everyone except those nearby. Carissa had ensured that Opal and Mary were seated on either side of her to prevent their conversations from being overheard.

After Alice and Opal left, Mary turned to Carissa with a smile and said, "Your Grace, your compassion will surely bring you future blessings."

Carissa gave a modest smile in return. "I only seek peace of mind. It pales in comparison to your great benevolence."

Mary shook her head. "With your

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current abilities, no one can deceive

you, and you need not concern yourself with others. Even if you were to deal harshly with those who have wronged you, it would only bring you satisfaction and not criticism. And even if there were criticism, I believe you would not need to worry about it. Yet, you have chosen not to act in such a manner."

"Madam Clayton, I'm just an ordinary person. Life is like a play, but life itself is not a play. There's no need for constant strife. If someone wrongs me, I certainly won't tolerate it, Carissa said.

Ordinary people didn't deal with constant battles. Her focus was always on real enemies, those who harmed the kingdom. That was the fate of a military family.

If Carissa wasn't being mistreated, she would prefer a peaceful life. Only those who have fought in wars truly appreciated peace.

Alice was guided to a secluded part of the garden, away from the other ladies who were enjoying the flowers.

Inviting Alice was Zoey's own idea. Neither Evelyn nor Opal knew of this plan, and Viola was also unaware.

The Earl of Silverstone's family and

the Farrell family had not been in touch for a long time. However, Zoey knew of the Farrell family's reputation for kindness. Seeing Alice looking distressed in front of Viola, she felt great sympathy.

So, she invited Alice to talk, hoping to ease her worries about the former daughter-in-law who had been released from her obligation.

Hearing Zoey's words, Alice sighed deeply. "I understand there's no need to worry, but receiving this news so suddenly is rather shocking. If it were someone else, it would be one thing, but it's..."

"Mrs. Murray arranged the match, and the king supported it. Most importantly, Viola agreed to it herself," Zoey explained.

Alice asked, "Was she coerced into agreeing, or did she truly consent?"

Zoey was straightforward. "Mrs. Murray proposed it, and Viola agreed immediately. If she had not, we would have fought for her. But as for her feelings towards Mr. Warren..."

Zoey had intended to explain all at once, but seeing the anxiety on Alice's face, she took a breath before continuing.

"She genuinely admires Mr. Warren. She believes the rumors about him are not true and thinks that his previous divorce was Lady Carissa's fault, not Mr. Warren's."

Alice's face showed signs of disappointment. "How could she think that?"