

## War Song 56

### Chapter 56

Carissa followed Rafael on horseback, glancing at the campfires spaced every few steps. Her heart sank at what she observed.

The Southern Frontier originally had three hundred thousand soldiers, with another hundred thousand seconded from Victory Pass, totaling four hundred thousand soldiers. From her observations, however, not even half of those numbers were left.

Rafael had marched through twenty-three cities, reclaiming all but two. It was clear many soldiers had sacrificed their lives.

Outside the command tent, vanguards and lieutenants stood on either side. Their armor was worn, their faces weather-beaten, and their beards unkempt.

A few generals stood a short distance away from the main tent. Carissa recognized one of them—Timothy Farrell, an old comrade of her father's. He had even held her as a child.

Timothy strode up and stopped before Carissa. He studied her face, then said excitedly, "Carissa Sinclair? Is that you?"

"Timothy!" Carissa's eyes stung.

Timothy's lips trembled slightly as he nodded, then he turned away. Seeing Carissa reminded him of Hector and the six junior generals.

Several more of Hector's former comrades approached, their eyes slightly red under the firelight.

One elderly general asked, "Lady Sinclair, how is your mother's health? Is the cold still troubling her legs?"

Carissa felt a sharp pain in her heart, and tears nearly fell.

She nodded quickly. "I have important matters to discuss with His Highness. We'll catch up later, Timothy

Rafael stood tall outside the main tent, his imposing figure casting a shadow over Carissa. In his usual commanding tone, he ordered, "If you have military intelligence to share, come inside and report it." He lifted the tent flap, and entered. Carissa tightened her grip on her spear and followed.

Inside the tent was chilly, barely warmer than outside, in the center stood a table with maps and a sand table for tactical discussions.

On the south side, there was a bed with bedding that had turned dirty gray, tainted with the scent of blood and medicinal herbs. In the corner, there were discarded blood-stained bandages. There were no chairs or stools. A mat was laid beside the sand table. Rafael sat down first, his posture somewhat peculiar-not cross-legged, but with one leg stretched out and the other bent. "Speak," he said curtly, "about this important military intelligence you have."

Carissa lowered her spear, and looked into his ink-black eyes.

"My second senior received intelligence from Sandona. Approximately three hundred thousand soldiers from Westhaven have entered Sandoria, wearing Sandorian soldiers' armor. They're heading towards the Southern Frontier battlefield."

Rafael frowned. "Your second senior got this intelligence? I recall you went to the Pathfinders Guild. Is she also from the same guild?"

"That's right." Carissa was afraid he might not believe her. "Your Highness, the Intelligence my second senior gathers is reliable. While the exact number of soldiers may vary, three hundred thousand is a minimum estimate, but there are possibly more."

Rafael stared at her. "Why not report directly to the king?"

Carissa explained, "I did, but without solid evidence, His Majesty didn't believe it."

"Your second senior..." Rafael shook his head, his dark eyes flashing. "You should have told him it was intelligence from your eldest senior, He would believe that. The king holds Kyle in high regard."

"I did claim it was from my eldest senior, but I made a mistake. I forged his handwriting in a letter, and the king saw through it." She paused, then looked at Rafael. "Do you believe me?".

"Your second senior, Winona Preston, is the most renowned spy in the martial world. Her reports are rarely wrong. However, the king is unfamiliar with the martial world, and the Pathfinders Guild recognizes only your eldest senior," Rafael said.

Carissa hadn't expected Rafael to know so much about the Pathfinders Guild. Slowly, she felt the heavy burden she had carried all the way here finally lightened.