

War Song 66

Chapter 66

"How is she at fault? She went to the Southern Frontier with important news. If only I had trusted her, we could have been better prepared and not caught off guard. Even a day or an hour can make a difference in warfare. She did her duty. It's my fault for not believing her," Salvador said.

He leaned slightly to the side.

"I had the royal guards watch her, and she still managed to slip away in the middle of the night? It seems her Lightfoot Skills are quite impressive."

Derek smiled. "Your Majesty, she trained for seven to eight years at the Pathfinders Guild, the leading martial arts school in Starhaven. I heard she was one of their most talented apprentices."

"Really?" Salvador was surprised. He only knew of Pathfinders Guild through Kyle, and hadn't realized. Carissa was so capable. "I find it odd that Madam Sinclair would choose Barrett as her son-in-law. With the Sinclairs' standing, she could have picked any prominent family. Why choose the declining Warren family?"

Derek hesitated before replying softly, "I've heard that there were many suitors, but only Barrett swore to Lady Sinclair that he would never take a concubine."

Salvador was momentarily stunned; then, his expression darkened with displeasure. "How ironic. He promised not to take a concubine, but right after achieving some merit, he immediately requested a marriage edict and made me an accomplice in his scheme. Madam Sinclair must have misjudged him."

Derek sighed. "Indeed. Madam Sinclair's misjudgment wasn't limited to Barrett alone."

Salvador looked at him. "What else is there?"

Derek continued, "Lady Leona got married recently. Lady Sinclair sent gifts to help with her wedding preparations, but the gifts didn't even make it past the gates. They were all returned. The princess's household refused them, saying that gifts from a divorced woman were unlucky."

Salvador was stunned. "How could such a thing happen? Lady Heather and Madam Sinclair were sisters! Leona and Carissa have been close since they were young. As cousins, what's the harm in accepting gifts? This divorce was my decision. Did Lady Heather feel that my edict brings misfortune?"

"Divorced women are often looked down upon. Now that the Duke of Northwatch's family has only Lady Sinclair left and with no chance for a comeback, she's left out in the cold. Even her close relatives have distanced themselves." Derek explained.

Salvador thought about the friendship between his mother and Melanie, and frowned deeply.

"This matter must not reach the empress dowager. She is very fond of Carissa, and would have adopted her as a goddaughter if she could. If she learns that Carissa has been treated with such disdain after the divorce, it would surely cause her to fall ill again."

Derek replied, "Yes, Your Majesty. I will be careful."

Salvador's anger grew as he realized Carissa's suffering stemmed from his decision to allow the marriage -between Barrett and Aurora.

"Send word to Hartstone Estate. Prince Harvey and his wife are to reflect on their actions for a month. Inform them that they will not be allowed to come to the palace for New Year's Eve," he ordered.

Derek's eyes flickered with understanding. "I hear and obey, Your Majesty."

As Derek left the palace, he looked up at the gray sky, feeling a heavy weight on his chest. He remembered a similar gray and cold day, when the then-crown prince's meals had been poisoned. Having failed in his duties, Derek was punished by the late king with fifty lashes, and was on the brink of

death.

Melanie had learned of the incident from the empress dowager, and she brought Sebastian to treat him. This move saved his life. If Melanie hadn't taken action, he would have perished in that harsh winter. Now, with Melanie's daughter being treated with such disrespect, how could he stand by and

do nothing? Thus, despite his usual silence, he took the step to file a complaint to the king. Since Harvey was merely a prince with no official duties and stayed in the capital to serve the empress

dowager,

Salvador would not see Derek's complaints as interference in state matters.

Derek summoned two of the court attendants, and went to the Hartstone Estate to deliver the edict. Harvey and Heather exchanged puzzled looks, unable to understand why they were being punished. Salvador had disregarded that Harvey was his uncle, and ordered them to reflect on their actions for a month. Salvador had even barred them from accompanying the empress dowager for New Year's Eve. After receiving the edict, Harvey pulled Derek aside and asked quietly, "Mr. Walker, please tell me. What exactly have my wife and I have done to incur such displeasure from His Majesty?"