

Perish 456

Chapter 456: The Younger Generation

Manas was speaking when he suddenly realized something, stopped mid-sentence, and looked at the two of them. "Don't just focus on eating, you two! Tell me about what's been going on with you," he said.

Casius grabbed a handful of beans, stuffed them into his mouth, and mumbled, "Let me finish eating these first. These beans are really good!"

"I remember my teacher once had my mom make this before. It was just like this and tasted about the same," Naisuya said as she picked up a bean and inspected it closely.

"Exactly. This is the same recipe. Back then, while you all were just busy eating, I paid attention! When helping Aunt Acronis clean the kitchen, I begged her to teach me how to make it.

Later, when I started working, I saved up several months of salary, traded wheat for some lard and broad beans at the market, ground some flour, mixed it with water to make a paste, coated the cleaned beans with it, and fried them in boiling lard..."

Manas said with a bit of pride, "See how much effort I put into making these for you two? You honestly don't feel touched?"

Casius grabbed a few more beans, stuffed them into his mouth, and said slowly, "I think you made these fried beans for yourself, and it just so happened that we showed up, so you decided to bring them out to pretend it was for us."

"Hehe, knowing Manas as I do, that's probably exactly what happened," Naisuya said with a squeaky laugh.

"You two are impossible! You've completely misunderstood my good intentions!" Manas said, trying to look furious. Truth be told, though, they were absolutely right.

After some joking, Manas pulled his expression back to seriousness. "Speaking of which," he said earnestly, "has anything important happened at home while I've been away?"

When Manas said "home," he was referring to the main residence of Leader Maximus, where they had once lived and worked together.

"Teacher's wife, Lady Florist Luscia, is pregnant. Does that count as a big deal?" Casius replied.

"Of course it does! But everyone probably knows by now. I heard that the night the news broke, many tribesmen in Snowdonia and Westeni lit bonfires in their courtyards and cheered... I'm so happy for Teacher!" Manas said sincerely.

Casius and Naisuya nodded in agreement.

"I heard something..." Manas leaned in with a lowered voice and asked mysteriously, "Is it true that Teacher's other wife, Lady Geniandaфра, got into a fight with her and got beaten up? What happened exactly?"

"Manas, didn't the Chief of Internal Affairs remind you before you left the main residence that you shouldn't spread personal matters of the leader's family outside these walls?" Casius asked sternly. "Tell me, where did you hear this from?"

"I didn't spread it; I was just talking quietly among us..." Under Casius' sharp gaze, Manas hesitated for a while before saying, "...It was our department's Chief Officer, Pigeris. Two days ago, he came to tell me to prepare properly for the upcoming migration of tribesmen. While we chatted, he casually mentioned it. I guess Lady Geniandaфра complained to him when they traveled to the Alde Tribe."

"Is that true?"

"Why would I lie to you?"

Casius said nothing more.

Manas, however, started to grumble. "Casius, it's no fun being around you. You treat your brother like a criminal on trial! And after I've been busy all day trying to think of ways to treat you nice! Fine, I'll keep my distance from you in the future!"

"Manas, do you know Dorin?" Naisuya quickly changed the subject to smooth things over.

"Of course I know her! That girl who hates studying but loves to fight!" At the mention of Dorin, Manas winced as though recalling past pain. During military training, he had been beaten up by her numerous times. "She's always shouting about wanting to join the army, but Teacher wouldn't let her and instead made her help you with managing documents. I heard that even after she started working on documents, she still couldn't settle down. Whenever she had a chance, she'd pester Teacher about joining the Military Department. Right?"

Naisuya smiled faintly. "A few days ago, Teacher finally approved Dorin joining the army."

"Really?!" Manas was shocked. "Dorin's a girl! She's not as strong or fast as the guys. If she goes to the battlefield, she'll just be a burden!"

"Dorin won't have to engage in direct combat. She just needs to load crossbows, which isn't that hard."

"You mean to say Teacher put her in the Crossbow Soldiers unit?"

"That's right." Naisuya's face still carried a smile, but her tone held a sense of pride and encouragement for her friend. "Although the Crossbow Soldiers is a newly formed unit in the tribe, it has played an important role in both battles against the Panoni Alliance Army. Dorin, who wasn't great with literacy and arithmetic before, excelled during military training. She was cool-headed during fights, and the instructor often lamented, 'If she weren't a girl, she would definitely become an excellent soldier.'"

Now that she's joined the Crossbow Soldiers, she can finally put her strengths to use. I believe she'll achieve great feats for the tribe on the battlefield!"

"I also hope Dorin will do well in the Crossbow Soldiers!" Manas teased, "At least she's in a better position than Akegu. Akegu was boasting earlier about earning military merit and getting accolades

ahead of us, yet now he's stuck running errands and delivering messages in the Military Department. Haha."

"There's even more good news," Casius said again, "With the tribe moving its center to Ophelia Village, the leader plans to recognize us students, who've been scattered across various departments and started working for the tribe, as Official Tribe Members. Land distribution for us will start soon. This proposal has already passed in the Political Affairs Hall and should be implemented soon."

"Really?!" Manas was astonished. "But isn't it stated in tribal law that we have to be adults before we're recognized as Official Tribe Members and can receive land? (In the Nix Tribe, women are considered adults at 16 and men at 18. Most of this batch of young attendants, including Akegu and Casius, are now 16 or 17.)"

"The leader said that due to extraordinary circumstances, the tribe's occupation of Segestica's territory has led to a desperate need for people literate and numerate to help manage the newly acquired lands and population. Because of this, many students have been recruited from the school as subordinates for various departments. Since they're working as hard as other officials, they should be recognized as adults, granted salary, and allocated land. It's only fair."

"Wow, so we're benefiting from our younger classmates!" Manas joked. As part of the first cohort to graduate and work, they sometimes referred to the newer students as their "younger siblings."

Manas was excited yet slightly worried. "This is really great news! But... farming 50 acres of land is no small feat for us. Especially since I'm here all the time and can't tend to the fields properly. If the harvest is bad and I can't pay taxes, the tribe will punish me!"

Casius reassured him, "You don't need to worry about that. You can hire Foreign Auxiliaries to farm for you. You just need to apply to the Agricultural Department. If you let the auxiliaries completely manage your fields, though, you'll have to give up five or six-tenths of the harvest to the tribe."

"Oh right, the Foreign Auxiliaries were set up precisely to help us with this. I nearly forgot!" Manas scratched his head, chuckled, and then said nonchalantly, "It's just me, and three or four percent of the harvest would suffice (after paying the tribe one-tenth in tax). Plus, the tribe gives me a salary every month, so I can afford to buy a chicken each month."

"All you think about is food," Naisuya muttered, half-scolding.

Manas laughed heartily and asked, "Naisuya, will the tribe give you land too?"

"Manas, haven't you studied tribal law properly? Even though I'm a woman, I'm part of the old tribe members and now work for the tribe just like my mother and Aunt Karina. By law, the tribe should allocate land to me as well," Naisuya answered confidently. "However, by law, land distribution is by household. My mom and I count as one household. She doesn't plan to marry, and I won't have siblings in the future, so the land she owns will naturally pass to me. The tribe wouldn't allocate more land to me. But if I attain a nobler rank than my mom in the future, the tribe will still grant my family additional fiefs."

Manas immediately retorted, "Oh, so you're planning to surpass Aunt Acronis' rank? Haha, that's impossible!"

"Shut up, you annoying pest!" Naisuya said angrily and threw a fried bean at Manas.

Manas opened his mouth, caught the bean, and chewed it loudly for effect. "Mmm, it tastes great. Thanks!" he said with exaggerated gratitude.

Then he turned to Casius and asked, "Where will our land be distributed?"

Casius replied, "Of course, near Ophelia Village. Even our houses will be allocated inside or near villages around Ophelia."

"That's actually pretty nice!"

"It's great for us, though who knows how much longer you'll have to stay here. Even if you have a house, you won't be able to return," Naisuya teased him.

"That's no big deal," Manas said carelessly. "Commerce Department folks like me can't fixate on having a home. We're always dealing with other tribes and powers around us. As our Nix territory expands, maybe one day I'll even be sent as an envoy to Rome!"

"Keep dreaming," Naisuya shot back with a glare.

"Teacher once told us that his goal is to make our tribe as strong as Rome so our tribesmen never have to fear being bullied by others!" Casius said with a determined look. "Let's all work hard to help Teacher achieve his promise. When the time comes, we'll send Manas as our envoy to Rome with pride!"

Chapter 457: Budocaribas's New Discovery

"Casius, what you said is absolutely brilliant!" Manas excitedly slapped Casius on the shoulder, and in that moment, all his previous grievances dissolved: "Yes, let us work together and help our teacher make the tribe even stronger!"

"Mm!"

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From within the tent came bursts of joyous laughter—a reflection of the youths' beautiful hopes for the future.

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Early the next morning, the migration convoy left the camp and continued toward the Sava River.

Previously, due to the war, the Nix Army had dismantled the floating bridge to the west of Todledo and taken the boats and wooden planks. After the war, they quickly rebuilt the bridge.

The convoy crossed the floating bridge and traversed the dense forest. Due to the slow pace of travel, they reached Lin Kou Village near dusk.

Budocaribas looked at Lin Kou Village with some emotion: a month ago, when he first arrived, it was merely a small settlement. Now, most of its wooden walls had been dismantled and it had been transformed into a checkpoint, guarded by only a few soldiers who inspected passersby. The houses in

the village and the outside camp had merged into one area, with specific individuals appointed to manage it, allowing newcomers to settle in without fear of sleeping in the wild, just like their prior situation outside Todledo Village.

He vividly remembered that camp outside Todledo Village one month ago, filled with Pannonian prisoners, so intimidating that they dared not approach...

As the migration convoy settled into the camp, some Nix tribesmen, carrying bundles and retrieving supplies from the carriages, took their wives and children and began to leave the group one after another...

Curious about this, Budocaribas couldn't help but ask the camp overseer, who was helping him arrange accommodations for the tribespeople, "Where are they going?"

"Probably to their new homes. Their new homes are likely in villages nearby, so they can return directly," the overseer replied.

Realization dawned on Budocaribas. "So you've already divided the houses and fields of the Segestica Tribe among your tribesmen. Then the Segestica people in those villages must have been driven out, right?"

"Driven out?" The camp overseer was momentarily stunned, then shook his head with a smile. "We didn't drive them out. Some Segestica people who refused to accept our rule fled, others who resisted joining our tribe were sent beyond Ophelia, but quite a number of Segestica people willingly joined our Nix Tribe and remain in their original villages, living peacefully alongside the old tribesmen we settled there."

Budocaribas, who had much contact with the Nix, knew they had previously integrated Segestica prisoners into their tribe, but their numbers were small and posed no threat. Now, however, they were in Segestica territory. If every village still had many Segestica people, the potential danger could be significant!...

After leading the tribes through Lin Kou Village, Budocaribas's sense of vigilance rose naturally. And now...

He couldn't help but ask, "Aren't you worried that those Segestica people remaining in the villages will harm the tribesmen you've sent to settle there? These tribespeople have wives and children with them!"

Budocaribas's voice was filled with intense questioning, sounding quite agitated.

The camp overseer calmly explained, "You have nothing to worry about. The Segestica citizens who remain in these villages have sincerely joined our tribe. They are now members of the Nix Tribe—why would they harm their own people? These tribespeople didn't just move into the villages today. They've already been living there for over half a month and have been coexisting harmoniously with the former Segestica residents. There hasn't been any conflict to date, so there's no reason to worry!"

"Really?" Budocaribas asked, still skeptical.

"You can go check the nearby villages yourself," the overseer replied, his words stirring curiosity in Budocaribas. After all, he intended for his tribespeople to settle here long-term, and with many Segestica people still inhabiting this land, understanding how they lived under Nix rule was crucial to him.

Learning that Budocaribas intended to visit a nearby village, the overseer did not object. As a subordinate from the Commerce Department, his duty was to ensure the Alde Tribe settled at the Sava River with peace of mind. Thus, he assigned one of his subordinates to accompany Budocaribas's party.

Additionally, he requested Lady Nexia to dispatch a squad from the 200 soldiers escorting the convoy to safeguard Budocaribas and his party.

Budocaribas, along with several tribal leaders and nobles, left the Lin Kou Village camp, following the Commerce Department staff member to the nearest village.

Shortly after leaving the camp, Budocaribas came to a halt. He noticed groups of people hurrying toward the forested mountains on the right side of the road, their expressions solemn. Meanwhile, others emerged from the forest, their faces radiating serene smiles...

Curious, Budocaribas asked, "Where are they going?"

"They're going to worship at the Danu temple," the Commerce Department staff member explained earnestly. "In that forest, our tribe built a temple dedicated to the great Danu Goddess. She is the Mother of the Earth, the Source of Water, the nurturer of all things. People from our tribe, whether Pannonian or Skodisqi, deeply revere her. Since the temple's completion, worshippers have visited daily. These tribespeople probably found some rare free time and are hurrying to worship once more before sunset."

The Danu Goddess... Budocaribas was unfamiliar with this deity's name, as she was clearly not an Illyrian god. Still, he noted an important detail: "You're saying that both the Segestica people and the Skodisqi people worship at this temple?"

"Of course. Haven't you seen? Some of those going to and from the temple are Skodisqi, while others are Segestica," the staff member said, pointing to the nearby crowd.

Budocaribas and his companions scrutinized the people closely. As seasoned warriors in conflicts against the Segestica and Skodisqi, they were well-versed in their appearance. Upon close inspection, they found the statement accurate.

Although the two groups were not walking together—each maintained their distance—they nonetheless moved freely in the same area without Nix soldiers overseeing them. For Budocaribas, who understood the enmity between these two peoples, this lack of conflict was astonishing.

"It's not just the Segestica and Skodisqi people who are worshipping at the temple, is it? I think I saw some of your original tribesmen too," observed one sharp-eyed Alde tribal leader.

"Exactly. Many of our original tribesmen also believe in the Danu Goddess and visit the temple regularly. In fact, the number of her followers is growing, and I myself count as one of them," the Commerce Department staff member said proudly. "After all, our leader is the offspring of the Danu Goddess, who blesses the entire Nix Tribe!"

"What?!" exclaimed Budocaribas, incredulous. "Leader Maximus is Illyrian. How could he possibly be the offspring of some Celtic goddess like Danu? That's simply—"

But seeing the increasingly stern expression on the man's face, Budocaribas stopped himself mid-sentence.

Clearly agitated, the staff member retorted, "The claim that our leader is the offspring of the Danu Goddess has been endorsed by all the Skodisqi and Segestica priests! Not only that, but since the leader guided us to settle here, both the wars and our daily lives have gone smoothly, proving the Danu Goddess's favor upon him! If you don't believe me, you should visit the Danu temple and see for yourself. The Danu Goddess Statue, sculpted personally by our leader, is something no mortal could have created!"

Though Budocaribas's group remained skeptical about the claim that "Leader Maximus is the offspring of the Danu Goddess," they knew better than to pry further into the Nix Tribe's internal beliefs, given the other party's firm stance.

Along the way to the village, Budocaribas and his companions even walked on the same dirt road as some Danu Goddess worshippers.

These worshippers cast Budocaribas and his party curious glances, but whether or not they realized they were Aldeans, none displayed overt hostility—let alone made any aggressive gestures.

Soon, the destination village came into view. Its layout bore some resemblance to the Aldean settlements, though it lacked protective wooden walls. As the sun set, wisps of cooking smoke rose above the homes. The surrounding fields had already been plowed, yet no one was visibly working.

Familiar with Budocaribas's intentions, the Commerce Department staff member led them past the village to the other side.

The group halted, spotting more than 20 villagers still working the land. Their farming methods differed slightly from those along the Kupa River: groups of four or five worked a single plot. One person led an ox, another focused on guiding the plow, and after some time, others took turns. Meanwhile, an older villager meticulously removed debris from the freshly plowed field...

The staff member provided commentary along the way: "Due to the war, some households lack strong laborers. One village came up with a method to address this by pooling everyone's efforts. Those with strength farm the fields, while the less able contribute in other ways, such as clearing debris or cooking

meals. Those who own iron plows or oxen provide them for communal use... This system improved the village's overall farming efficiency. When officials from the Agricultural Department discovered this approach during an inspection, they reported it to the Political Affairs Hall. Now, the system is being promoted throughout all villages..."

Budocaribas fell into deep thought: similar issues plagued the Alde Tribe. Years of war had left many households with more women than men. When they lived in the mountains north of the Murenica River, where farmland was scarce, the problem was less pronounced. But now, with each household settling into plots as large as twenty acres near the Sava River, many families would face labor shortages. Perhaps adopting the Nix approach could be a solution...

Chapter 458: Reunion

Thinking of this, Budocaribas observed more carefully. He noticed the villagers were a mix of Skodisqi people, Segestica people, and old clan members of the Nix tribe. He even saw a peculiar scene: A Skodisqi man and a Segestica man farming side by side. The Skodisqi, who was guiding the plow, shouted at the Segestica man leading the oxen to slow down, and surprisingly, the Segestica man complied. After a while, the Skodisqi man shouted ahead, "Turn now!" and the Segestica man responded, "Got it!"...

Their expressions were wooden, voices cold and sharp, and they avoided eye contact. The entire interaction seemed awkward, yet they managed to plow a whole field in coordination.

Of course, the villagers' ability to cooperate without major disputes could not have been achieved without the efforts of a middle-aged man.

This man stood at the edge of the field, directing the villagers as they worked, assigning tasks as needed. Whenever a situation turned tense, he sternly yelled, preventing conflicts among the villagers...

After a while, the villagers stopped their labor, picked up their tools, and led their oxen back to the village. Only the middle-aged man walked toward them.

As he approached, Budocaribas noticed for the first time that the right hand he kept tucked against his chest was actually severed.

With a stern expression, the middle-aged man questioned, "I am the village chief. Who are you, and what do you want here?"

A subordinate from the Commerce Department stepped forward, promptly introducing himself and then introduced Budocaribas and his party.

The middle-aged man listened but remained skeptical until he noticed the ten fully armed Nix Soldiers standing behind Budocaribas. Only then did his wariness dissipate, and he said seriously, "I am Torkilas, the village chief here. Yesterday, the tribe sent someone to notify us that the Alde Tribe would be migrating here. They instructed us not to be alarmed and to avoid any drastic actions upon your arrival...

Rest assured, I have already warned the villagers. As long as you behave, they won't cause any trouble for you!"

The Chief? He must be the leader of the village... Budocaribas thought to himself, feeling slightly awkward at the clear caution in Torkilas's tone. However, he understood: although many Aldeans used to come to the Nix Territory to work as laborers, this time the entire tribe was migrating—several thousand people entering a land that the Nix had only recently seized. It was natural for the locals to feel wary.

"Please rest assured, we will strictly discipline our tribesmen and absolutely will not cause trouble for you!" Budocaribas promised earnestly.

"Good," Torkilas nodded.

"As far as I know, the Segestica and Skodisqi are mortal enemies. Yet, in your village, these two groups coexist in significant numbers as well. Are you not concerned about potential conflicts?" Budocaribas asked, voicing his most pressing concern.

"What's there to worry about?" Torkilas replied straightforwardly. "Yes, the hatred between these two tribes runs deep, and it's not a small grudge. They only recently joined our tribe, so such animosities can't be resolved so fast.

The Segestica in the village might still desire to dominate the Skodisqi, as they did before. But now they are either old or young and lack the courage. Conversely, the Skodisqi may want to retaliate against the Segestica, but they fear severe tribal punishment, fearing the loss of the rare, good life they now have.

In recent days, there have been several incidents in other villages where Skodisqi killed or injured Segestica out of anger. The offenders were paraded through the villages by soldiers, shamed in public, and ultimately executed or harshly punished. Just the mention of this now makes my villagers pale.

Additionally, both tribes swore an oath of peace in the Dana Temple. They fear divine retribution and dare not break their vow lightly.

Sometimes, tempers flare, and small clashes occur. I don't know how other village chiefs handle it, but I beat and scold them here. I warn them that if they repeat such behavior, I'll parade them through the nearby villages the same way the Legal Department does. They're afraid of losing face, so now they're much more obedient...

I can tell you, over time, as they work together more and more, their hatred will gradually fade. I've seen this before—when I led troops, some of my recruits were Segestica and Skodisqi. At first, they quarreled, but on the battlefield, they became real comrades, coordinating and fighting enemies together."

"Chief, which unit did you serve in before?" a subordinate from the Commerce Department interjected.

"I was a Centurion in the Third Legion. During the battle against the Panoni Alliance Army near the Kolana River, I had a stroke of bad luck—my hand was injured... and I was sent here to be a village chief." Torkilas raised his severed right hand with a casual gesture, but there was a trace of bitterness in his tone.

"Thank you, Chief Torkilas!" Budocaribas said sincerely. "After hearing what you've said, we can now live here with no worries!"

"I'm glad to help," Torkilas replied. "But I must remind you—your group is sizable. Be careful not to trample our fields when passing through tomorrow!"

"Don't worry; I'll make sure to remind my tribesmen!"

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The next morning, the migrating group departed the camp and continued their eastward journey.

Along the way, Nixes with their families steadily left the procession. By the time they were near Osharilia Ophidilia Western Village, the once-massive Nix migration group was nearly halved, leaving behind mostly First Legion soldiers and their families.

"My lady, there it is—our Nix Tribe's new main camp, Ophelia!" Pigeris exclaimed loudly to Nexia, pointing ahead.

From Nexia and the others' perspective, a wide river, even broader than the Kupa River, stretched before them. A fortress straddled both banks of the great river...

"It's considerably larger than Snowdonia!" Acronis couldn't help but exclaim, then shouted excitedly, "Look! It's the leader! The leader is here!"

A group emerged from within Ophelia Western Fortress, quickly heading toward them, led by none other than the Nix Tribe Chief, Maximus.

Geniandaфра, overwhelmed with emotion, yelled joyfully and rushed forward.

"This Daphra, so unruly! Should I reprimand her later?" Acronis muttered disapprovingly under her breath.

Nexia frowned slightly but soon regained her composure, saying calmly, "Let it go. Everyone hasn't seen the leader for a long time. It's natural to be overly excited. Just remind her later."

As he was about to reunite with his wife, whom he hadn't seen in over a month, Maximus felt equally excited. His pace quickened, leaving the older Volenus and others unable to keep up.

At that moment, Maximus heard an exclamation ahead. A familiar figure dashed toward him quickly.

Worried she might trip, Maximus sped up, opened his arms, and soon embraced her warm and fragrant form. Her soft lips pressed against his face, raining kisses while she excitedly exclaimed, "Leader, I've finally seen you! They wouldn't let me meet you! I... I..."

Geniandafra's words were soon choked with sobs, tears brimming in her eyes.

"Alright, don't cry. Everyone is watching..." Maximus gently wiped away her tears, softly comforting her.

Though they hadn't been married long and had been strangers before their wedding, Maximus was moved by the passion and trust reflected in her tearful face.

He understood: Geniandafra, unlike Nexia or Florist Luscia, had not endured many hardships. She had grown up doted on by her parents and cared for by her clansmen, making her somewhat spoiled and headstrong but without guile. Not yet 18, she would have been a high school student in modern terms, yet here she was, bearing the weight of maintaining the alliance between the Aldeans and the Nix Tribe. She tried hard to support her mother country, but she was reprimanded by Nexia. Her entourage had been dismissed; she was alienated, even looked down upon, by others in the main house. The only person she could rely on in the Nix Tribe was her husband.

Maximus sighed to himself, suppressing his rising tenderness. He smiled, released her from his arms, and lovingly patted her back: "Come, let's go greet your two elder sisters."

With that, he continued walking forward.

Maximus had three wives. To create a sense of unity in his family, he had established a rule: the later arrivals must address the earlier ones as "elder sister." Hence, though Florist Luscia and Geniandafra were close in age, Geniandafra had to call her "elder sister." However, Geniandafra remained stubborn and had yet to publicly do so.

Departing Maximus's embrace, Geniandafra felt a moment of disappointment but quickly followed him.

Maximus approached Nexia, embracing her passionately and saying, "Nexia, I've missed you terribly during this time!"

Nexia reciprocated his enthusiasm with a kiss and said with a smile, "Did you miss me? Or were you thinking about Florist Lusia, my younger sister?"

"Both!" Maximus replied without hesitation. He then gave Florist Lusia a gentle hug: "Thank you for all your hard work! Was the journey tiring?"

Chapter 459: The Land Given to Alde

Florist Lusia responded gently, "I'm not tired, my sister takes good care of me."

Maximus, his emotions surging, reached out his hand toward her slightly rounded belly.

Florist Lusia said softly, "The doctor said the baby is still small and doesn't move yet, but he is very healthy."

Maximus nodded and withdrew his hand, the excitement on his face quickly fading.

At that moment, Acronis leaned forward from behind, "Leader, it's been more than a month since we last met—you've lost some weight."

Maximus touched his own face, "Have I?"

"Yes." Acronis said with concern, "It seems you've been too busy lately, not eating or sleeping properly. But now that we're here, you don't have to worry anymore; we'll take good care of you!"

Maximus laughed heartily, "The new main house we're living in now is bigger than before. I've been waiting for you, my capable chief steward, to take charge of it properly! I haven't eaten your cooking in ages, so tonight make a lavish dinner—we'll celebrate together."

"Yes, Leader, leave it to me! I won't let you down!" Acronis said confidently.

Maximus then turned to Nexia and said, "You've walked three days—surely you're all tired. Return to the main house and rest for now; I'll join you there tonight for a proper reunion."

"Leader, don't worry about us; you can go ahead and attend to your duties. We'll take care of ourselves," Nexia responded thoughtfully, then glanced around. "Florist Luscia, Geniandafra, let's go to the main house."

"Okay, sister," Florist Luscia responded immediately.

Under Maximus's smiling gaze, Geniandafra reluctantly murmured a reply.

Led by an attendant, Maximus's three wives, Acronis, and her team entered the camp first.

Afterward, Maximus enthusiastically welcomed the arriving families of Nix officials and the tribesmen's families...

By the time the entire Nix migration group had settled into the camp, his throat was hoarse and his waist and legs sore. But it was not yet time to rest, as the Alde migration group had also arrived closely behind.

Maximus strode forward, "Haha, Elder Budocaribas, welcome, welcome! You certainly kept us waiting!"

Budocaribas said apologetically, "Actually, we were eager to come early, but you know how it is—the Great Chief's funeral and Alistacas's succession were significant events for our tribe. We had to attend, which delayed us quite a bit. I deeply apologize for keeping you waiting!"

"No matter the reason, it's good that you're here! Was the journey smooth?"

"Smooth, very smooth! Thanks to your meticulous arrangements and care!" Budocaribas replied gratefully, then remarked with deep emotion, "This time, I've noticed significant changes here! Just a

month ago, when I last came, we still needed military escorts. Those Segestica people hiding in various tribes glared at us with hatred...

This time, I saw many Segestica people and Skodisqi people along the way. They didn't show hatred or fear, only focused on working in the fields. Some were even helping each other... You Nix people are truly remarkable—bringing two former enemy tribes to the point where they can coexist peacefully in just over a month!"

Maximus replied honestly, "I wouldn't call it peace—just barely able to coexist. There are still many issues, but as long as everyone has the desire for a better life, I believe the people here will come to coexist more harmoniously."

"You're right, everyone desires a better life—that's why we chose to come here," Budocaribas replied, then asked with concern, "Seeing how stable things are here puts my mind at ease, but I wonder—where will our settlement be?"

"We've got everything arranged, just waiting for your question." Maximus gestured behind him, "Bring the map forward."

Immediately, two attendants carried over a wooden map to Maximus.

"Elder Budocaribas, take a look." Maximus pointed to the map and explained, "This is the Sava River. This is our Nix's new main camp—Ophelia. This entire area represents the territory we've fully controlled. We've allocated these locations for your settlements—here, here, and here, involving four former Segestica villages.

We've already relocated the residents of those villages, so you can move in directly. Based on the information you relayed to me through your messenger, your group consists of nine tribes, totaling 8,300 people.

Since your tribe has relatively more people and the other tribes each have fewer than 1,000, I suggest two or three tribes share one village. Additionally, this particular village is the largest, with the most fertile land and a nearby lake. Given your tribe's population of over 2,000, it's best suited as your tribe's settlement."

The detailed and intuitive map was impressive, but Budocaribas had no time to appreciate it. He stared at the black dots representing the villages, marked with red symbols, and his mind raced.

Previously, the messenger had relayed information about the proposed settlements, but Nix hadn't completely controlled this area at that time, so the arrangements were tentative.

Now, the settlements marked on the map had some differences. The four villages were not connected but separated. Three villages were east of the Sava River, south of Ophelia East Village, while the village proposed for his tribe was west of the Sava River, south of Ophelia Western Fortress. The location indeed featured a lake and proximity to the river, surrounded by other villages, with no apparent security issues. However...

Budocaribas furrowed his brow, hesitated briefly, then couldn't hold back and said, "Leader Maximus, the settlements you allocated differ from what you previously mentioned. Why not let our tribes settle closer together? Being dispersed like this might make our tribesmen uneasy!"

Quintus chimed in to reply, "We wanted to do so for easier management for both your tribes and ours, but the challenge was relocating all the residents of adjacent villages. For example, this one—"

Quintus pointed to a village on the map near another marked settlement, "More than half of the Segestica people in this village have voluntarily joined us Nix, becoming part of our tribe. Some elderly folks insisted they wouldn't leave no matter what, saying things like, 'Even if I die, my bones must rest on my family's land.'...

We put considerable effort into reassuring these Segestica people who willingly joined us. Naturally, we couldn't forcibly relocate them, which would only provoke dissatisfaction and anger, harming regional stability, wouldn't you agree? So we've done our best to relocate the villagers and managed to gather these settlements..."

Budocaribas found no counterarguments and remained silent.

Maximus spoke up, "Elder Budocaribas, if you're dissatisfied with our arrangement and want your tribes to settle together, there is one alternative."

"What alternative?" Budocaribas asked eagerly.

"There are two areas of Segestica territory not yet under Nix's control—the northern region and the Gonami Lake area in the south," Maximus pointed to the map and explained, "The Gonami Lake area near Brochi is not something we plan to act on for now.

The northern Segestica tribes still hold some power, but I've heard the Yapode people—who have enmity with Segestica—have recently been clashing repeatedly with the northern Segestica tribes. If they hear news that Segestica's core territory has been occupied by Nix, they will undoubtedly launch another war against these local tribes. At that time, we'll assess the situation and might send troops to occupy this region, after which we can allocate part of the land for your settlement."

Privately, Budocaribas shook his head. This was merely Nix's plan and depended on when the Yapode people would strike; it wouldn't happen soon. He had already brought his tribe here—should they return to wait? And what would the people along the Murenica River think of him?

Quintus observed Budocaribas's expression and added, "You don't need to worry. We'll build roads connecting these villages and construct several more wooden bridges across the Sava River. Even if your tribes don't settle together, the convenience of travel here might exceed what you experienced living in the mountain regions."

Budocaribas paused and then asked, "What settlement arrangements did you make for the Xisaites tribesmen?"

Quintus pointed to three spots on the map.

Budocaribas examined them closely: three villages, still scattered across the area and not adjacent to the Alde tribes' settlements.

Budocaribas sighed and said, "Leader Maximus, please give me a moment. I need to discuss this with the other leaders. By the way, may I borrow this map for now?"

"No problem."

Budocaribas carried the wooden map back to his group.

Chapter 460: Leisure Time

"Leader, do you think Budocaribas and the others will agree to accept these settlements we've allocated to them?" Volenus asked quietly from the side.

Maximus smiled faintly: "They have no choice but to accept. Actually, I think the leaders care more about this matter, while the Aldean tribesmen will not think much of it—they'll only focus on moving into those villages as soon as possible and starting to farm those fertile lands."

Maximus's words were soon proven true.

Budocaribas and several other Aldean tribal leaders finally made their decision: they accepted the settlements provided by the Nix Tribe. Moreover, the villages assigned to each tribe were mutually agreed upon—Budocaribas's tribe was allocated the very settlement that Maximus had previously recommended.

Initially, Budocaribas had planned for his tribe to settle on the East Bank, closer to the other Aldean tribes.

However, when Maximus pointed to the map and introduced the settlements, some Aldean tribesmen following behind Budocaribas had heard every word. Later, as he discussed his choices with the other tribal leaders, many tribesmen gathered around, strongly opposing his selection of other locations, arguing: "Leader Maximus gave us such a good place, and you choose not to accept it? Are you even fit to be our leader?"

Budocaribas had no choice but to give in.

Maximus originally planned to host a banquet for Budocaribas and the other Aldean tribal leaders.

Budocaribas declined, stating that he wanted to lead the tribesmen to their new homes as quickly as possible and settle them down, ensuring peace of mind.

Maximus understood and dispatched subordinates from the Commerce Department to serve as guides, leading them to their respective settlements and assisting them in resolving difficulties during the transition.

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Night fell, and after several rounds of passion, Maximus finally collapsed onto Nexia.

Nexia gently caressed her husband's broad back as the two rested closely entwined, savoring the tender intimacy after the fiery storm of desire.

After an indeterminate period of time, Maximus rolled over to lie beside her, reached out to embrace her shoulder, and spoke softly: "Nexia, you've worked hard. Over this time, the stability maintained near the Kupa River owes much to your efforts!"

"I've only sat indoors every day, listening to reports from various departments and occasionally giving a nod—what's so laborious about that? You, on the other hand, have been exhausted to the point of losing weight!"

Nexia leaned closer to Maximus, gently stroking his cheek, and whispered, "Earlier, I disciplined Geniandafra. You won't blame me, will you?"

"You are my First Lady. Managing our household is within your rights. You executed your duties admirably in accordance with proper protocol. Why would I blame you?"

Maximus kissed her cheek softly and murmured, "Now that we've relocated to Ophelia, with the main house being larger and more people expected to gather here, you must maintain the same strictness as before to keep the household in order."

"Since the leader himself says so..." Nexia's gaze grew mischievous. "Geniandafra breached the rules during the day and behaved inappropriately before the tribesmen. Shouldn't I issue further punishment?"

"Of course you should—that's well within your authority," Maximus replied without hesitation, but then his tone shifted. "However, don't be too harsh. You must realize that after occupying this land, we'll face counterattacks from the Pannonian Tribe Alliance. For the Kupa River to serve as a stable rear base, maintaining a strong alliance with the Aldean tribes is essential!"

I've also received word that Alistacas and some of the Aldean elders are dissatisfied with the relocation of Budocaribas's tribes to our territory. As the most influential elder in the Aldean tribes, Cleobrotas's attitude towards us is now crucial..."

Before Maximus could finish his sentence, the perceptive Nexia caught onto his intention. She traced circles lightly on his chest with a finger and spoke softly, "I can mend my relationship with Geniandafra and help her feel at home here. But—Leader—you must promise me one thing."

"What would that be?"

"To join me once more."

"Right now?"

"Leader, are you tired?" By candlelight, Nexia propped up her upper body, her eyes shimmering, her sweat-dappled skin gleaming seductively.

Without another word, Maximus flipped over, pressing Nexia beneath him, proving himself through actions.

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The next evening, in Florist Luscia's chamber, Maximus behaved differently.

He first leaned close to Florist Luscia's abdomen, whispering gently to the unborn child within. Then he lay at her side, holding her hand and casually chatting about their experiences over the past month.

Florist Luscia, not being much of a conversationalist, soon left Maximus talking alone.

As boredom set in, he reached out to gently caress his wife.

Due to her pregnancy, Florist Luscia's body had grown more voluptuous, stirring Maximus's desires, but he suppressed them for the sake of the child.

Florist Luscia felt his restraint and spoke softly, "Leader, why don't you... go find Sister instead?"

Maximus replied, "I'm fine, tonight I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay here and keep you company."

Florist Luscia hesitated briefly before suggesting, "Why don't I... why don't I use my hand..."

Maximus paused in surprise—his once-shy wife had never been so forward. Raising his head slightly to examine her expression, he found her burying her face in his chest, her skin glowing with warmth.

A sudden idea flashed in his mind. With mock seriousness, he replied, "Using your hand might be a bit... uncomfortable. Better to use—never mind, let's stay here and keep talking."

Florist Luscia fell silent for a few moments before unexpectedly sitting up and leaning in slowly...

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The third evening, in Geniandafra's chamber, she clung to Maximus like a koala, her body constantly shifting...

Being in a "sage moment," Maximus sought to divert his focus by asking, "I heard Nexia said something to you yesterday?"

"...Yes."

"Why was that?"

"...She said that as your wife and the daughter of an Aldean leader, I should conduct myself elegantly and dignifiedly in front of the tribesmen to project authority and dissuade others from underestimating us."

"That doesn't sound like criticism—it's words meant for your benefit."

Geniandafra remained silent.

"I also heard that Nexia sent some of your attendants back to take care of you. She seems to genuinely care for you."

Geniandafra couldn't help but reply, "But that day, she had people beat me with rods—it hurt so much! I still have scars on my backside!"

"Show me where—I'll take a look," Maximus said casually.

Geniandafra truly turned over, lowered her trousers, and the snowy glow of her skin dazzled Maximus's eyes.

Truth be told, Geniandafra's pampered lifestyle had endowed her with smooth, supple, and firm skin—better than both Nexia and Florist Lusia.

Unable to resist, Maximus placed his hand on her: "Is the scar here?"

"Not there—higher... No, not there, move to the right... a bit left... No! Don't... don't touch there..."

Soon, the wooden bed in the chamber began shaking once more.

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In recent days, aside from the Public Works Department needing to select workshop sites along the Sava River and construct them before relocating, the Nix people had largely completed their migration to the new tribal center at Ophelia.

Following this, Maximus hosted a grand tribal awards ceremony at the Ophelia East Village square. Because he allowed village chiefs and administrative leaders from various towns and villages to bring ten outstanding tribesmen from their jurisdictions to attend, the square was packed with people that day.

Under the watchful eyes of the masses, Maximus awarded tribesmen who had earned promotions to Knights due to their contributions in the recent war. These included:

The nine department heads, promoted for their meticulous planning and preparation throughout the war, ensuring its smooth execution, and their efforts to successfully annex the Segestica territory.

Various commanders, captains, officers, and legion soldiers, including the crossbow soldiers, all promoted for their tangible battle merits.

Minujus, Spukala, and numerous doctors and artisans, recognized for their professional expertise, which benefited the war effort—for example, saving severely injured soldiers, lowering prisoners' hostility, accelerating their allegiance, and tirelessly producing weapons in the iron workshops.

...

In total, nearly a thousand were promoted to Knights—all of whom had followed Maximus since the rebel army days. Notably, a significant factor for many achieving this promotion was marrying women from the original rebel army, saving them from earning extra military merits.

Although they shared the title of Knight, their situations varied.