

## Civilization 711

### Chapter 711: Dance of the Cat and Dance of the Deer

"Clan Leader, you summoned me."

A voice, ethereal as smoke, drifted in, seeming to carry both a smile and a hint of curiosity. It was like the gentle rain of April, falling drop by drop into one's heart, signaling that spring had arrived.

Zicao Clan Leader Guramo turned indifferently to see a stunningly beautiful young girl appear in the great hall. She was draped in a tender yellow robe, with hair tied at her waist. She had a delicate face, curved willow eyebrows, a petite nose, and lips thin as rose petals. However, what captured the most attention were her spirited eyes. Those bright eyes were brimming with emotion, reflecting a pond in autumn, yet also seemed to hide a hint of spring's light.

"Yes, Medina, my daughter."

Guramo's gaze moved from the girl's face downward, scanning over her budding fullness, passing her slender waist, down her shapely long legs, to the beautifully curved insteps. The girl radiated the lively energy of youth but also possessed an alluring charm. To those in the know, it was clear she was an exceptional dancer, and moreover, a creature of remarkable pliability.

After watching for a while, Guramo nodded expressionlessly, satisfied with the masterpiece he had meticulously cultivated.

"Medina, perform the Vastec's Dance of the Cat."

"Clan Leader, here?"

The girl's eyes twinkled with laughter as she asked.

Guramo looked around the hall, considering the setting for the King's banquet, and confidently affirmed.

"Yes, right here."

Medina gently bit her lip, then shed her light yellow robe, revealing her exquisitely crafted collarbones, a close-fitting plain undershirt, and her tightly stretched pale legs. Then, she gathered up her black hair, waiting for the sound of a flute.

"Take off your shoes, let down your hair," Guramo commanded calmly. Bare feet would add an extra layer of allure to the dance, and loose hair could provoke a man's desire to conquer.

Medina obediently removed her shoes, revealing tiny, delicate toes. Her toenails were painted with crimson rouge, drawing even more attention from onlookers. Then, she let her hair down, exuding a bit of wildness, like a small jungle cat.

Soon, the lingering flute began, accompanied by enticing bell sounds. Medina started to gently stretch her arms, fluidly twisting her waist. She smiled with her eyes, slightly curving her lips as if teasing. Her body formed one arc after another, swaying like waves. Her chest, waist, and hips shifted freely between peaks and valleys, provoking wild thoughts.

Guramo nodded gently, occasionally giving instructions.

"Lean slightly forward with your upper body to make it more prominent."

"Keep your lower body perky and rotate freely."

"Your waist, your waist! The enchantment of the Dance of the Cat lies in the waist! Yes, just like that, with your navel quivering slightly, like ripples. Very good!"

Medina eventually fell into a perfect rhythm. Guramo stopped talking and simply watched in silence. The high-frequency trembling of the dance was physically demanding, and the girl soon began to breathe lightly like an orchid. Her breaths, whimpering and seductive, tugged at the primal instincts of the watchers.

The bamboo flute's melody grew livelier, and Medina's dance became increasingly passionate and bold. Her cheeks flushed with exertion, and her skin glowed with a faint pink hue, a sign of great physical

exertion. The lively tune then eased, becoming smoother and more relaxing. The girl's movements also slowed, her expression a bit languid, and her eyes seemingly ready to drip water.

"Ding-ding~ Ding-ding~"

The music suddenly receded, followed by a few soft bell sounds. The stunning girl, seemingly without notice, was sprawled on the ground, stretching her arms, chest to the floor, buttocks arched high, in a tempting stretch, like a cat just awakened. Then, she crawled forward like a cat, stopping before Guramo, tilting up her head to reveal her beautiful face.

Her gaze was alluring as she lightly licked her upper lip with her tongue. Then, she looked at Guramo with a seductive gaze and softly meowed.

"Meow~"

Guramo instantly melted, his body tingling as if electrified. Even with his vast experience, he found his mind swayed and hard to suppress. After a few moments, his face showed sincere admiration.

"Excellent! Excellent! A natural born enchantress, an irresistible dance!"

Medina then calmly stood up, bowed, and stepped back. A maid immediately came forward to wipe the sweat from her neck and brought her honey-sweetened saltwater.

Guramo fell into thought. The Dance of the Cat, while enchanting, was more suited for private quarters, to breach the last defenses of others. At the banquet, a more appropriate choice would be...

After a while, once Medina had rested, Guramo once again instructed.

"Medina, dance the Mistec's Dance of the Deer once more."

Medina nodded. She draped herself in a light brown short robe, still exposing her slender and rounded thighs, and then tied up her soft, waist-length hair.

The sound of the bamboo flute promptly rose, this time accompanied by deep, low drumbeats. The young girl's expression turned innocent and curious, her face blossoming with radiant smiles, like a little deer that had mistakenly wandered into a human village. She tiptoed, stretched her long legs, and leapt gracefully, extending her beautiful body. When she leaped, she was full of energy; when she extended, it was as if a flower was blooming; and when she landed, it was in sync with the drumbeats. Her legs had excellent lines, and her arches were exceedingly beautiful, causing an inexplicable restlessness in one's heart. "The Dance of the Deer is an imitation of a deer's dance. The key is in the leaping, in the legs and feet. You must keep your legs tightly stretched, your feet highly pointed."

Guramo watched calmly and issued instructions.

"No, your foot posture is still not right. Stop. Look at me."

The music paused immediately. Medina turned to look as well.

Guramo slowly pointed his toes. He first lifted his hind foot's heel, while the front of the foot remained grounded.

"This is the cat's step, just like you dance in the Dance of the Cat."

Then, he pointed his toes upwards again, this time completely on his tiptoes, landing in a position akin to ballet. From this movement alone, one could tell his balance and agility were on par with a seasoned samurai.

"This is the deer step. Your power must reach all the way to your toes, this integrated sense of beauty can make a lasting impression on anyone! Come, let's try it again!"

The music resumed, and Medina bit her lip, leaping again. This time, she entirely used the power of her toes, like a dragonfly skimming over the water's surface, or a lotus standing tall and straight.

"Not bad!"

Guramo slightly nodded his head. Medina's talent for dance was exceptional, likely because her mother had been an excellent dancer from the Zapotecs.

At this thought, Guramo's expression shifted slightly, tinged with regret. That woman, although only one of his many concubines, had given birth to the most beautiful daughter for him. If he had paid a bit more attention back then, preventing her suicide, perhaps she could have given birth to two more masterpieces...

After a few moments, Guramo regained his indifferent demeanor. Watching Medina's Dance of the Deer, he still felt it lacked a bit of maturity.

"After all, it is newly learned, and the Dance of the Deer is more difficult..."

He thought for a moment and smiled faintly.

"However, to be captivating, the dance moves are secondary..."

Dancing on her tiptoes was not only exhausting but also somewhat painful. As Medina continued, a trace of pain appeared on her face, as if she was on the verge of tears, making her pitiable to watch.

Guramo's eyes lit up. He called for a halt again.

"Stop, very good! Medina, maintain that expression, remember that expression. It can turn a man into a beast!"

Then, Guramo pondered for a moment and instructed his handmaid.

"Bring two small silver anklets, the ones with tiny spikes."

Medina lowered her eyes. As the handmaid put the anklets on her, a faint stinging pain traveled up from her ankles.

"Good! Medina, let's continue. Dance the final part."

Medina obediently danced on her toes, and the tinkling of the anklets started little by little from the girl's ankles. The drumbeats got faster, and the ringing of the bells became more urgent. The more she danced, the stronger the sensation of stinging pain and exhaustion became. Her toes curled up, her lips clamped shut, and her eyes misted over. Until her last forceful leap and fall, then her body softened and she collapsed to the ground, emitting a fragile cry.

"Ah!"

Medina fell to the ground in pain, then looked back at Guramo. Her robe was disheveled, her legs sprawled across the floor, her chest heaved dramatically, and her eyes brimmed with tears. At that moment, she resembled a wounded deer tightly caught in a rope, helplessly looking at the hunter, waiting for the strong one's ravage.

"Good! Good! Absolutely perfect!"

Guramo couldn't help but exclaim aloud. His expression was satisfied, he exhaled deeply, as if beholding the most beautiful masterpiece.

"Medina, my daughter, he will be utterly unable to resist you!"

Chapter 712: Southern Topography, Three Routes Southward!

The Kingdom's south, northern Zicao County, the small town of Aotuo (now El Puente Alto). A circle of no more than two meters high—simple stone walls—encompassed this little town of one square mile and a population of just a thousand or two. To call it a town might be generous; it barely functioned militarily, and perhaps the term township would be more apt. There were no significant constructions within the town except for a newly built Chief Divine Temple, a modest commercial market, and some common houses serving as resting places for the traveling merchants.

During the western campaign, in the "Month of Ultimacy," Marshal Iskali led five thousand southern reinforcements through Aotuo town toward the battlefield in the Capital's Lake Region. They forcibly requisitioned provisions here and executed the local Lord. After the campaign, Aotuo town became directly administered by the Kingdom, marking the boundary between the Royal central control and the local authorities. To the north of this line, peasants had been registered for household taxation and

conscripted into militia colonies; southward lay vast noble lands and autonomous tribal villages. Of course, this implicit boundary was soon to vanish.

Atop Aotuo town, the Black Wolf's banners flew high, and outside the walls lay a continuous stretch of military encampments and patrolling Samurai. King Xiulote was leading a seven thousand-strong Imperial Guard Legion stationed here, awaiting the arrival of the southern Nobility. He did not stay within the confines of the cramped town but chose to rest in the vast camp outside.

In fact, whenever he left the Capital City, Xiulote preferred staying in the rigorous military encampments, amongst the plain Samurai, a practice similar to that of Eastern Roman Emperor Basil II. For within the loyal legions and under the protection of tens of thousands of Samurai, he felt a strong sense of security and a power to change the world!

At this moment, the King was sitting crossed-legged in the grand tent, examining reports from various legions while studying a topographical map of the south on the case table.

Heading south from the Capital Region, the terrain of hills gradually increased, with mountains running north to south starting to form barriers east and west. There were approximately three main passageways from the southern Capital Region to Zicao County and the southwestern mountainous areas. Small towns like Aotuo were scattered along these three routes, surviving on the trade from caravans traveling north and south.

The first and most westerly route was an army march of 250 miles southwest from the southwestern Qinganbate mining area (now Tingambato), reaching Apachigan City (now Apatzingán). That was the Fief of the Palm Family, on the edge of the southwestern mountainous region, beyond which lay the mountain-dwelling Tecos Tribe. Continuing 400 miles west from Apachigan City, through tortuous mountain passes, one would reach the heart of the iron ore-rich Colima Mountain Region, Colima City (now Colima).

Xiulote extended his pen and drew a red circle in the middle of this route. Although he was awaiting a response from the southern Nobility, tens of thousands of soldiers were not going to just stand idle. Three legions had already headed south, not granting the southern Nobility any time to muster a rebellion.

Now, the eight thousand-strong Guajili Legion from Toltec was positioned precisely at the red circle. They had just captured a hereditary Noble's Manor. The local hereditary Nobility occupied the mountain passes, fortified their villages for self-protection, and refused passage to the Royal Army. Yet, merely

two days later, the Great Nobility that issued this command became prisoners of the Royal Army and were sent to Aotuo town as "turkeys" to 'kill the chicken to scare the monkey'.

The second slightly western route went directly south from the Qinganbate mining area through two intersecting mountain paths to reach the westernmost side of Atoyac Lake. This route was 200 miles long, rather smooth, and featured wide mountain plains and valleys.

The eight thousand strong Second Spear Legion from Ezpan was marching south along this road. The Second Spear Legion consisted of Prepetcha Samurai, who proved much more efficient at local coordination. Lords along the way complied with providing provisions and cleared the paths, with none daring to take up arms in resistance.

The third central route ran south from the storage hub of Patzcuaro City for over 300 miles, passing through the small town of Aotuo, and arriving at Kulamo City in the middle of Atoyac Lake.

Xiulote was on this road. Olosh's Jingji Legion had already moved south along this route, now less than 100 miles from Kulamo City. Ahead of them was another influential, honored Noble with control over a population of more than ten thousand: the Xiteli Family.

Further east from this road lay continuous undulating forests, with Weytamo State to the south, separated by the Tarsas River far across. The region was sparsely populated with tribal villages and scattered Tekos Barbarians. Due to the high cost of direct rule here, it would retain the current state of loose control and autonomy and was not part of the scope of the current southern campaign. However, if any southern Great Nobility fled there, the Royal Army would show no mercy.

In summary, the Zicao Family's Fief was around Kulamo City (now Los Cimientos), and the Palm Family's Fief was in the area of Apachigan City. Between the two cities over a stretch of two hundred miles lived a concentrated population of more than a hundred thousand, representing the essence of Zicao County and the most focal point for the southern Great Nobility.

From the behavior of the southern Nobility, the further west toward the Colima Mountain Region, the stronger their resistance. The closer east toward Atoyac Lake, the weaker their willingness to resist... At least to the King at this moment, that seemed to be the case.



After examining the situation, Xiulote nodded in satisfaction. Tens of thousands of Samurai descended upon the south with overwhelming momentum, and the southern Nobility had no capacity to resist. As such, there was no need for mercy; demote and replace them, directly subjugating two hundred thousand of the south's people!

With this thought, Xiulote smiled confidently. His gaze followed the Great Lake downward, and more plans emerged one by one. After replacing the southern Nobility, he would establish a shipyard along the shore of Atoyac Lake. Then, the army would continue south along the river, subduing the Tecos Tribes on both banks until they reached the estuary of the Tarsas River. Afterward, they would head north along the coastal route controlled by the merchant Telali, conquering the various groups of Colima...

At that moment, an Envoy hurriedly arrived and exchanged a few words with Bertade. Then, the Head Warrior respectfully reported back.

"Your Highness, the Clan Leader Guramo of the Zicao Family requests a private audience with you."

"Clan Leader Guramo of the Zicao? A private audience?"

Xiulote frowned. He knew without asking what Guramo wanted to request, but he had already planned to swallow up all the territories surrounding Kulamo City. There were convenient thoroughfares and waterways, fertile riverside farmlands, and profitable foreign trade routes—central to the future southern development of the Kingdom. The Kingdom's southern Shipyard would also be established there.

As for the fate reserved for Guramo, it was to be reassigned to the North Coast of the Lerma River, given a fief in the barren Guamare State, to keep the company of wilderness Tribes and to balance the local Otomi Nobility.

The heart of a King was, of course, inscrutable. Xiulote indifferently refused.

"Denied! I will summon all the southern Nobility collectively! Has Zotol of the Palm Family arrived yet?"

"Zotol has not come, and I fear he will not come. The Scouts report that the Palm Family has rallied four or five southwestern Nobilities, relocating their women and children to the southwestern mountain region. Their Samurai and Militia have been fully mobilized, assembling in Apachigan City. It seems they are prepared to resist to the end."

At these words, Xiulote's brow raised slightly. The Palm Family was a mountain region Nobility, originally scheduled to be reassigned to the Pamus State in the wilderness to cultivate the land and supplement Balamo's command... After a few moments, he smiled faintly and drew a red circle on Apachigan City.

"If that's the case, there is no need to hold back against the rebellious southern Nobility! Order the Guajili Legion under Black Wolf to accelerate their pace and strike directly at Apachigan City! Instruct him to keep the Guajili Tribe in line, not allowing the Nobles to escape into the southwestern mountains, and to refrain from slaughtering civilians indiscriminately!"

"I will follow Your will."

Bertade respectfully accepted the order. Afterward, he spoke in a grave tone.

"Aside from a few from the southwestern mountains, most of the great southern Nobles have arrived. When do you plan to summon them?"

Xiulote glanced at the sky outside the tent, where the sun was dipping westward, dusk about to settle. He tossed aside the pen in his hand and stood up to ask.

"Are the noble captives sent by the Guajili Legion all ready?"

"Your Highness, they are ready. The Artillery Camp is also in position."

"Good! Then let them go to the parade ground outside the camp to witness the wheel of history and listen to the voice of truth!"

"...I will follow You, my King."

## Chapter 713: The Roaring Cannons, The Most Magnificent Movement

The southern lands teemed with life. The green leaves never fell throughout the year, and flowers continued to bloom after the fall, adding a touch of color to the twilight.

Outside Otto City's military camp, seven thousand Imperial Guard Legion stood in a single line. Mexica Samurai, Prepetcha Samurai, Otomi Warriors, warriors of the Tecos Tribe, Guajili red-haired Hunters... Elite warriors from all tribes across the lands gathered under the King's command. Each of them wore a grim expression, donned in Copper Armor, gripping bronze weapons, many with Longbows and Javelins slung across their backs.

After resting in the Capital City, the Imperial Guard Legion expanded to seven thousand men, and the proportion of Copper Armor had also increased to eighty percent. At this moment, one could see nothing but a golden "ocean," brimming with the power of metal.

Xiulote, dressed in refined golden Copper Armor, stood on a high platform, surrounded by hundreds of Armored Personal Guards. In front of the platform, hundreds of southern Nnobility and Escorts stood, each with a fearful and uneasy expression. In front of the Nnobility and some one hundred meters away, five hundred warriors of the Artillery Camp had finished loading ten Divine Eagle Cannons and thirty Tiger Squat Cannons, their muzzles pointed towards the west.

To the west lay the fiery red sunset, the glistening mountains, and below the mountains more than twenty Nnobles bound hand and foot, with ashen faces.

Guramo's expression was solemn. He stood among the ranks of the Nnobility, silent.

Not long ago, he had taken Medina up north, just in time to encounter the Kingdom's Jingji Legion headed south. A full eight thousand Samurai passed by him, all in impeccable military order, high in morale, and armed to the teeth - a truly strong army. His heart was filled with worry; the combat strength of this legion was clearly much stronger than any southern forces, leaving him uncertain of how to resist. However, when he arrived outside Otto City and saw the golden-armored Imperial Guard Legion, only then did he realize what an unstoppable force truly looked like...

By Guramo's side, old Crow Xiteli watched the Nnobility prisoners nearby, his hands and feet trembling with fear.

They were the Yolodila family, established for generations in the southwest, occupying the mountain passes, commanding several hundred private soldiers, and renowned for their bravery. Yet the King had merely sent a small detachment, and within a day or two, the Yolodila family was completely annihilated, not a single male descendant escaping. At this moment, these Nnobility prisoners were tied up before the crowd, their fate only too apparent.

"Your Highness, the Artillery Camp is ready and can fire at any time!"

Tupa, the Camp Commander of the Artillery, stepped onto the platform and respectfully reported back to the King. He was formerly the deputy general of the Black Wolf, had participated in the nocturnal fire raid during the northern campaign, and had performed outstandingly. Also, as a former trusted aide from His Highness's early years, consistently loyal and brave, he was promoted to be responsible for the Artillery Camp, with a bright future ahead of him.

"Hmm, wait a little longer, let the southern Nnobility enjoy the sunset a bit more."

Xiulote smiled indifferently, patiently waiting. It was only when the setting sun dipped behind the mountains and the sky was filled with red clouds that he slightly nodded.

"Go ahead."

Tupa saluted and retreated. He went in front of the Artillery Camp and loudly proclaimed.

"...The hereditary southern Nnobility Yolodila, obstructing the Royal Army's advance southward, disobedient to the King's orders! The Yolodila family has betrayed the Kingdom, and their crimes are unpardonable. All their lands are hereby confiscated, and all male descendants are to be executed on the spot!"

Tupa declared this loudly three times, each time more smoothly than the last. To memorize this statement, he had spent two full days.

One hundred meters away, the southern Nnobility stood at the prime spot for witnessing the execution, each trembling with fear, their hearts filled with terror. Low murmurs rose among the Nnobility but quickly quieted down.

A rabbit's death is a warning to the fox; old Crow Xiteli was similarly agitated. He quietly asked Guramo.

"Guramo, how will the Mexica execute young Yolodila and his family? Will it be a sacrifice?"

Guramo shook his head. He stretched out his hand and pointed at the golden bronze beasts in front of him, still without speaking. The Mexica displayed these bronze beasts prominently, evidently intending to use them in the execution.

"Hm? What exactly is this..."

"Sun Divine Eagle Cannon, fire!!"

Artillery Camp Commander Tupa waved the small flag and barked the command. The cannoneers immediately lit the fuses of the Divine Eagle Cannons and then quickly covered their ears, hunkering down on both sides of the cannons.

"Boom! Boom! Boom!..."

With a terrifying sound like Thunderbolt, it instantly exploded, as if the God of Thunder were roaring! The shocking cannon fire echoed between heaven and earth, and for a moment, the southern Nnobility cried out in terror, shuddering with fear, some even panicking and running away. The bound prisoners collapsed to the ground, howling desperately.

Hearing the dreadful cannon fire, Guramo shivered all over, lost control of his limbs, and shook uncontrollably. Fortunately, his years of dance practice and excellent martial skills allowed him to barely maintain his balance. Two steps away, old Crow Xiteli stumbled and fell to the ground. Then his body trembled violently, his old legs twitched, and suddenly his pants became wet.

Xiulote waved the command flag, and hundreds of warriors silently moved forward, herding the hundred-plus fleeing Nnobility back to the "viewing platform." It was only after the reverberating cannon fire had faded into the distance that people struggled to regain their senses. Guramo frowned and, with disdain, helped Xiteli up, then stared blankly at the still-smoking bronze beasts.

The range of the Divine Eagle Cannon was long, and this volley did not aim for the captives who were at arm's length. Ten stone cannonballs traced powerful trajectories, striking heavily into the forest a mile away, snapping several large trees. A giant tree swayed perilously and slowly toppled to the west, crashing to the ground with a thunderous "boom". Then, other trees followed suit, falling one after another with several more "booms".

Watching this scene, the faces of the surrounding nobility turned pale. Guramo was no exception. He whispered to himself.

"Oh Three Divines, please bless your last children..."

If such thick trees could be snapped by a single shot from the copper beasts, then the walls of the nobility's manors would likewise crumble with ease. Should the Royal Army attack with the copper beasts, apart from Kulamo City with its solid stone walls, all other wooden fortress manors would be utterly indefensible.

Xiulote watched the nobles' blood-drained faces with satisfaction and nodded approvingly. Half a quarter later, as the sunset was almost complete, the King once again waved his hand to signal.

Tupa, excited, commanded loudly.

"Rain God Tiger Squat Cannon, fire!!"

"Boom! Boom! Boom!..."

The continuous sounds of thunder rose again. The southern nobility trembled in terror like weeds in a downpour, struggling to keep their composure in the storm.

"Thump!"

The old crow Xiteli fell to the ground again. He closed his eyes in despair, covering his ears, waiting for the judgment to end. Now, he had no intention of resisting the King's army. His pants were drenched,

but he need not feel embarrassed. Because among the nobility, he was far from the only one with wet pants.

Guramo covered his ears and widened his eyes, striving to discern the details of the copper beast's roaring.

At the moment of thunder, a white mist rose from the cannon's round mouth, then a large bunch of stone balls furiously shot out. Faster than arrows, they ferociously struck the noble captives a hundred meters away. Almost instantly, more than twenty nobles dropped limply to the ground. With barely a scream, they were turned into perforated sieves. Large patches of blood and flesh scattered across the ground, as if left behind by demons after a feast.

"So, just by igniting a flame, the copper beasts spew out stone balls and emit smoke... What kind of Divine Arts is this?"

Guramo pondered intently but without any answer. He took a deep breath and smelled the scent of volcanic demons. Suddenly, he came to a realization and bowed his head in silence.

"This isn't Divine Arts! The Divine Arts of the kingdoms have never possessed such power. This must be the witchcraft of volcanic demons! The brutal Mexica people must have made a deal with the mythological volcanic demons, obtaining terrible power through the sacrifice of flesh and blood!"

Above the platform, Xiulote averted his gaze, not looking at the captives executed by the gunfire. Only the harshest measures could deter the nobility before him from rejecting the Kingdom's decree of reform, to ensure that the rectification of the south could be accomplished with the least cost and minimal civilian casualties. That would be the true act of mercy.

Seeing the power of the Tiger Squat Cannon, the enthusiastic Camp Commander of the Artillery, Tupa, was so heated that his whole body shook. To command such a powerful force, he had no doubts about earning battle achievements and promotions. And with the trust of His Highness and enough merit, he might even lead an army on his own and become a Legion Commander like the Black Wolf!

Thinking this, Tupa suddenly raised both hands, taking the lead in shouting.

"Praise the Chief Divine! May the Divine protect His Majesty!... He is omnipotent!"

The gunners of the Artillery Camp also came to their senses and cheered in unison, followed by hundreds of personal guards, and finally the entire legion!

"May the Divine protect His Majesty! Omnipotent!"

In the midst of thunderous cheers from tens of thousands, the southern nobility maintained a deathly silence. The King sniffed the gunpowder-laden wind with relish, luxuriating in the legion's cheers. Then, he raised his left arm, and thousands of voices instantly fell silent.

"We'll have a banquet in the army tonight! Right here in this drill ground!"

The King paused, then in an elevated voice, he boldly proclaimed.

"Roar! My Samurai! Tonight, I will rejoice with you all!"

"Roar! May the Divine protect His Majesty! Omnipotent!"

Cheers erupted once more, reverberating throughout the entire drill ground, merging with the rumbling of the cannons amongst the mountains into the most majestic symphony!

#### Chapter 714: Banquet in the Military Camp

Moonlight indifferent, the night sky hanging low, large bonfires rose inside and outside the training field, dispelling the shadows of the mountains. The King held a feast in his camp, entertaining the great nobility from the South.

Across the vast training field, fires were scattered. Samurai sat in different small circles according to their units, cooking their usual fare. And at the center, around which everyone was gathered, there was an exceptionally bright bonfire, that of the King and his nobility.



Xiulote sat at the head, surrounded by more than a dozen armored personal guards. Even though it was a night banquet, he hadn't removed his armor. The nobility sat below him, their escorts all dismissed. And outside the large circle, hundreds of elite warriors stood solemnly, each clad in copper armor, holding long spears, silent and imposing.

"I have returned from my northern campaign and led the army southward, intending to reorganize the South."

The King spoke openly, his gaze sharp as a blade, sweeping over those before him. The place fell silent, with only the King's words.

"All of you are great nobility from the South of the Kingdom, inherited from the old Tarasco dynasty. You are willing to heed the call and present yourselves before me, which shows you still have some loyalty and reverence in your hearts."

The flickering firelight illuminated the uneasy faces of the nobility. The King smiled faintly, raising his wine cup.

"Since that is the case, I have prepared a feast in the camp to entertain you! Praise the Chief Divine!"

"Praise the Chief Divine! Praise Your Majesty!"

Upon hearing this, the nobility uttered softly, their expressions slightly relaxed, as they echoed with a smile. But when the samurai brought the food and placed it before the nobility, everyone quieted down once again.

The old crow, Xiteli, looked astonished at the clay bowl and cup before him. The bowl contained only two rough corn cakes, a spoonful of stale black bean paste, and a few boiled beans, with not even a slice of meat. The cup held murky fruit wine, which smelled sour, the sort of inferior drink commoners consumed.

"This, this..."

Such fare was scorned even by the personal servants of the great nobility. The last time Xiteli ate such a meal was thirty years ago, when the Tekos Barbarians invaded. He looked towards the King at the head, only to see the King's expression unchanged, heartily eating his cakes.

Guramo glanced at the food in front of him, his face darkening momentarily before he bowed his head to hide his expression and began to gnaw on the corn cakes. Next to him, Medina, wearing a black robe and a veiled mask, stared blankly at the food. She had just recovered from the terrifying roar of the copper beasts and was very hungry. However, looking at the rough food before her, she felt no desire to eat.

"Medina, you have to dance later."

Guramo gave his daughter a cold look and commanded in a low voice.

"Eat!"

The girl trembled slightly and obediently bowed her head, nibbling on the cooked beans like a well-behaved fawn.

Xiulote swept his gaze over the attendees, pausing slightly here. He had long noticed this veiled woman and could roughly guess Guramo's intentions, but it mattered little at the moment. After scanning the crowd, he asked with a smile.

"How is it? Not to your taste?"

The old crow, Xiteli, opened his mouth but dared not utter a sound. The other nobles looked at each other and also remained silent. Only Guramo looked up, also smiling in response.

"Your Majesty, though the corn cakes are coarse, they are quite filling. The black bean paste may be old, but is well-preserved. And the beans are cooked thoroughly, posing no risk of poisoning. This food, I have eaten before, it's the regular meal of a warrior on campaign! Your Majesty treats us with the grace of a warrior, and my heart is overjoyed. Praise the Chief Divine! Praise Your Majesty!"

"Oh? Well said, this is indeed the meal of a warrior on campaign."

Xiulote looked at Guramo with some surprise. The man had a handsome appearance, a calm demeanor, and an air of elegance that earned Xiulote's favor.

"I campaigned in the north for months, deep into the endless wilderness, where transporting food was extremely difficult. Most times, I ate this kind of meal with my warriors."

Upon hearing this, Guramo's face showed reverence, and he sincerely praised.

"Your Majesty is invincible in attack and undefeated in battle, revered by warriors and admired by maidens!... Come, let us all raise a toast, to our supreme King!"

With that, he lifted his clay cup and drank the sour fruit wine in one gulp. The surrounding nobility glanced at each other and also raised their cups to toast.

"Praise Your Majesty!"

Xiteli grimaced, suppressing the urge to vomit and managed to down the rice wine. He looked enviously at Guramo and then at the veiled Medina, thinking to himself.

"This man is as slippery as a snake and has such a beautiful daughter. Perhaps in the future, I will need to rely on him..."

"Very good!"

Xiulote nodded and also emptied his drink. Then, he bent down and continued eating the food in his bowl. The nobility relaxed and tried their best to cope with the King's evening banquet.

Soon, the King finished his dinner, leaving behind a clean, empty bowl. Seeing the King stop, the nobility felt relieved and also ceased eating.

Xiulote pondered for a moment. He glanced at the uneasy nobles and then smiled faintly.

"After the dinner, next is the enjoyment of song and dance. Come, my samurai, dance for me!"

"As you command, Your Majesty!"

A unified shout rose from the surrounding armored warriors, causing the nobles to tremble. Following that, the deep sound of the war drums began to play. Under the lead of the shield guard, Ters, the hundreds of samurai lifted their copper spears and marched to the beat of the drums, dancing with their weapons on the outer circle! Warrior Tupa, clad in heavy armor and with a red pouch tied around his waist, striking his shield, stood in the center of where the nobles were seated and sang out boldly!

"

Ha-hoo! Awooo! Hiss! Ahh!"

Jaguar runs, wolves howl, green snakes dance, bald eagles soar!

The warrior's heart, has never known any fear!

I raise the blade of obsidian, coming to the battlefield,

I'm eager to fight to the death!

In battle, I seek death eagerly, wanting to sever your head, then rip out my own heart.

Together offered to the most high Chief Divine!

Remember, you must use the blade of obsidian,

I too will use the blade of obsidian!

This is a fight for the Chief Divine,

Let us fight to the death together!

Let us fight to the death together!!..."

This is a war song for the Chief Divine of Mexica, passed down in the Alliance for a long time, usually sung before a great battle. Veteran Mexica warriors are devout in belief, killing like hemp, unafraid of life and death. They grew up in war since childhood, always accompanied by death; when they sing this song, naturally, there's a breathtaking momentum!

Hearing such a murderous song, Xiteli's hands and feet trembled, and he felt the urge to urinate once again. He lowered his head, screaming madly inside.

"Damn it! Terrible Mexica barbarians! Terrible barbarians!!"

Beside him, Guramo was fully engrossed, eyes wide, watching this strange song and dance art. The warriors waved their Long Spears, stepping in unison, Armor clanging, their killing intent sprawling. Their movements were hammered out to perfection, simple and forceful, as if genuine combat on the battlefield!

"What an absolutely beautiful art! The art of slaughter! This is the war dance only survivors of a hundred battles could perform!"

Guramo murmured to himself, admiring sincerely. Then, casting a cold look at the trembling Medina next to him, he said.

"Lift your head, look at His Majesty."

Medina bit her lip, raising her head to reveal moist eyes. She looked at His Majesty above, the leader of the warriors, the powerful God of Death, and also the barbaric Barbarian King.

The warriors' Long Spears danced just two steps away, as if they could stab out at any moment and kill everyone present. The southern Nobility trembled, barely making it to the end of the song and dance. Then, Tupa opened the bag at his waist, took out a bloodstained head, stepped forward, and offered it to the King.

"Your Majesty! This is the head of the hereditary noble Yolodila! Offered to you, my highest sun!"

Xiulote received the head indifferently. He took a glance and nodded. Although Yolodila had been killed by cannon fire, his face still remained largely intact.

"This, is the fate of the traitor! Guards, pass it down, let the Nobility take a good look!"

The fresh head passed through the hands of the nobles in attendance. Everyone's hearts were filled with fear, and a cowardly noble even fainted on the spot. Xiteli, looking at the terrified expression on Yolodila's face before death, felt a desolation rising in his heart. He trembled as he passed the head to Guramo, who casually glanced at it before handing it to Medina.

Medina's limbs shook, her body going limp. At that moment, a deep, cold voice reached her ears.

"Remember, Medina. If you cannot succeed, this will be your fate. And the fate of our family... the Mexica people are so cruel."

Hearing this, the girl bit her lip hard. She passed the head down, looking at the red stain on her hands, her face gradually flushed with a peculiar ruddiness, she managed a seductive smile. At that moment, it was as if a spirit that had been repressed for many years awoke within her.

"I know, Father. I know the fate of Mother."

Guramo paused, shocked. It was the first time in many years Medina had called him father. However, the current situation did not allow for prolonged contemplation. The King's words arrived once more.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, after enjoying the warriors' dinner and admiring the warriors' dance."

Xiulote looked at the fearful expressions of the many Nobility, a smile of satisfaction on his face. He spoke aloud.

"Next, we should talk about the issue of the southern fief."

"Your Majesty."

As the King paused, Guramo suddenly stood up. The warriors on the perimeter immediately pointed their Long Spears towards the Clan Leader of the Zicao. Surrounded by spears, he bowed respectfully and proposed with a smile.

"The warrior's dance is so magnificent, unforgettable. Your Majesty has treated us with great kindness, and according to ritual, we should also offer something in return."

Following this, Guramo reached out and pulled down the veil of Medina. A face of stunning beauty appeared before everyone. Upon seeing her, the nobles in the room gave a low murmur, their faces filled with admiring awe.

"Rose beauty, the southernmost beautiful girl, Medina!"

At these words, Xiulote's brow lifted, his gaze fixed on the exquisite girl. Those clear, watery eyes and her turning smile radiated boundless charm.

The King lost his composure for a moment, pondering. He intended to refuse, but when he spoke, he said.

"Alright!"

Chapter 715: The Redistribution of Fiefs, The Dance of the Maiden, and The King's Command

The night breeze fluttered, and the bonfire flickered. Guramo took out a bamboo flute from his bosom and began to play, and the cheerful melody soared through the gathering.

Medina gently removed her black robe, revealing a slender waist and legs as pale as jade. Then, bending down, she slowly slipped off her cloth shoes, and the crisp sound of bells chimed in response.

Xiulote looked over upon hearing the sound. On the delicate ankles of the girl, there were exquisitely crafted silver bracelets, from which small silver bells hung. Near the silver bracelets, the skin bore faint red marks, signs of repeated friction. The King's gaze continued downward, pausing momentarily on the blush-painted toenails, before swiftly turning away.

Before everyone, Medina's face blushed, betraying a hint of shy coquettishness. Then, swaying her waist gently to the rhythm of the bamboo flute, her arms naturally reached out like blossoming crabapple flowers. This prelude to the dance showcased the girl's perfect figure to the King's eyes.

The prelude then gave way to the main dance. Soon, the girl's steps became more urgent. She rose up on her tiptoes, barely touching the ground, light as a feather between the fires, just like a forest deer. Innocence played across the deer's face—she looked around curiously, then shyly turned her head away upon locking eyes with the King. Her hair fell lightly, concealing her youthful profile, yet failing to hide her striking beauty.

Next, Medina beamed radiantly, singing alone. Her voice was like spring rain falling to earth, filled with lingering affection.

"I am a deer of the forest, the messenger of the Goddess of Spring.

I leap lightly through the woods, drinking sweetly from the flowers' nectar.

I graze on the fresh, green grass, letting my body also grow tender.

Then, the thumping of drums suddenly resounds!"



At this point, Medina's face was suddenly marred by panic. With moist eyes, she gave the King a fearful glance, and then fled into the distance.

"The strong Hunter is chasing me! He intends to capture me.

I run into the vine-dense jungle, but he persists in pursuit.

I run into the shallow streams, but he still pursues relentlessly.

I run into the beautiful gardens, but he never ceases to chase!"

Medina tensed her feet, leaping and landing. Her legs, as long and as white as those of a deer, caught the King's gaze, stirring within him an inexplicable restlessness, as if lighting a flame. Then, the girl's hurried singing fanned that flame even larger.

"The thumping of drums resound! I fall in the garden.

His heart draws near to mine. His body is so strong.

He stretches out his mighty hands, gripping my waist tightly.

I am finally captured by him, turned into his prey!

Struggling in pain, with my tender body,

I satisfy his bloodthirsty desire, bringing him soft pleasure...

Ah!"

Somehow, Medina found herself back in front of the King. The dance on tiptoes was too exhausting, and the pain from the ankle bracelet was unbearable. Finally unable to endure, she stumbled and fell into the King's arms.

"Clang!"

Bertade's expression was steely as he suddenly drew his bronze sword.

"It's alright."

Xiulote spoke softly, and the Head Warrior bowed his head and stepped back. Following that, a soft body nestled into the King's embrace, still carrying the heat and sweat from the vigorous dance.

Medina's complexion was flushed, and she gasped for breath, exhaling a fragrance like that of orchids. Her teeth were white and even, clearly the result of long-term chewing on chewing gum from the maninka tree. Her lips were as red as roses, brimming with the allure of blooming flowers. Her eyes misted over, like a plaintive cry, looking up at the King's handsome face, singing the last verse.

"From now on, I leave the Goddess's embrace, bound by a strong warrior.

Blood flows, he bites my throat, claiming all of me!

I am born in his arms, I die in his arms.

And then I understand, fate has handed me over to you.

I am yours... my warrior, my King~"

Somehow, the venue had become completely silent. The nobles uniformly lowered their heads, avoiding the gaze of the King at the head seat. A smile crossed Guramo's face as he too waited in silence. Bertade lowered his bronze sword, looking at the King, hesitating to speak.

Xiulote took a deep breath as he gazed at the soft beauty in his arms, inhaling the fragrance of the girl which truly resembled that of a deer. From birth, this was an experience he had never had before, and a challenge he had never faced. In that moment, flames ignited within his body, carrying with them a violent force, shaking his rationality. It wasn't until several breaths later that the image of a girl in a white dress appeared in his mind.

The King bit his lip fiercely and struggled to his feet, placing Medina down where she was. Then, he stepped back twice, turned around, and avoided looking at the girl lying askew. The nobles were surprised by the King's resolve, and the smile on Guramo's lips disappeared in an instant.

"That should be enough. Bertade, distribute the land reform documents to them!"

"Your will be done, Your Highness!"

The Head Warrior bowed respectfully. He cast a serene glance at Medina and then ordered his Personal Guard Warriors to hand out the documents.

Medina hugged her legs while sitting on the ground, dumbly staring at the back of the King. Then, she adjusted her disheveled hair, stood up, and coyly smiled softly before turning and walking towards Guramo.

Xiulote then turned back, looking at the girl's retreating figure. A breeze blew by, the air still scented with traces of the girl's fragrance. The King had an expressionless face, the campfire casting flickering shadows upon it, as if burning within his heart as well.

Guramo did not watch his returning daughter. He gripped the document in his hand, his whole body trembling slightly. The text was written in Mexica script, supplemented with the traditional pictographic writing of the Kingdom, leaving no room for ambiguity.

"Land Redistribution Decree: Guramo, clan leader of the noble Zicao family... A review of your current fief, Kulamo, shows 31,000 people and 500,000 acres of land. According to the laws of the Kingdom, a noble of your honor is granted a base allotment of 8,000 acres of land and 400 servants... Therefore, you are ordered to relinquish your fief in Kulamo and the Zicao noble family is to be reassigned to the north coast of the Lerma River, Guamare State. The Kingdom will re-allot 24,000 acres of land; apart from your

direct descendants, you are permitted to take up to 1,200 servants. This must be completed within one month!"

From 500,000 acres of fertile southern soil to 24,000 acres of poor wilderness mountain land. From overseeing a population of over 30,000 to barely more than 1,000. Not to mention, the Zicao family would lose the manors built over several generations and their foreign trade routes via Lake Atoyac. They were to go to the wild Northern Wilderness, to live alongside the fierce Canine Descendants...

Guramo pressed his hand to his forehead, feeling a wave of dizziness. His footing unstable, he staggered and fell to the side. Medina promptly stepped forward to help, but he shoved her away angrily.

"Get away!"

The girl pursed her lips, obediently let go, and sat down in a corner. She draped a black robe over herself, veiled her face again, and the flush on her cheeks gradually faded as her eyes took on a submissive look. Then, she subconsciously glanced at the head seat, catching the King's gaze which had just been withdrawn, and smiled shyly.

"Your Majesty, this, this, this cannot be! I beg you, show mercy, spare us!"

The old Crow Xiteli knelt to the ground, pleading desperately to the King at the head seat. Clutched in his hands was a document, the King's merciless judgment.

"Land Redistribution Decree: Xiteli, clan leader of the noble Crow Family... A review of your current fief north of Lake Atoyac shows 12,000 people and 200,000 acres of land. According to the laws of the Kingdom, a noble of your honor is granted a base allotment of 8,000 acres of land and 400 servants... Therefore, you are ordered to relinquish your lands north of the lake and the Crow noble family is to be reassigned to the north coast of the Lerma River, Otapan State. The Kingdom will re-allot 10,000 acres of land; apart from your direct descendants, you are permitted to take up to 500 servants. This must be completed within one month!"

For Xiteli, following the Royal Decree would completely destroy the Crow family's two hundred years of expansion and accumulation. 500 servants weren't even enough to serve the nearly one hundred direct descendants of the family, let alone till the land! Were even the descendants of the noble families to

labor like lowly farmers, holding farming tools and toiling in the fields all day, their skin darkened by the sun?

The rest of the southern Great Nobility also finished reading the "Land Redistribution Decree." The hereditary nobility had generally been reduced by ninety percent, and the noble families of honor had been almost reduced by ninety-five percent! If this were the Tarasco Kingdom's standards, everyone would have been demoted by one level of nobility. Moreover, everyone was to migrate north of the Lerma River, to develop and defend the wild lands.

With this realization, the Great Nobility moved forward en masse, kneeling and begging. They grasped the King's robe, weeping inconsolably.

"Your Majesty, we implore you, spare us! I am willing to offer a large Tribute!"

"Yes, Your Majesty, I am your loyal servant! I will give up thirty percent of my lands, and guard the south for generations for you!"

"Chief Divine be my witness! I will give up fifty percent of my fief! I will offer my daughter to you! Please lessen the punishment on my family, Your Majesty!"

"That's right, that's right! Not just offering daughters, but concubines and wives too! Your Majesty, we..."

"Silence!!"

Xiulote bellowed. The Personal Guard Warriors swiftly drew their War Clubs and raised their Long Spears, aiming at the fearful nobles, forcing them to back off. The King swept his gaze over everyone coldly, resolute in his judgment.

"This is a Royal Decree! A Royal Decree, once issued, cannot be defied or altered!"

Next, the King drew his Bronze Sword from his waist with a "clang," pointing it at the kneeling crowd.

"You are nobles from the old Tarasco regime, having done nothing to merit the Kingdom's favor! You will be reassigned to guard the Northern Land beyond the Lerma River in order to retain your titles and it is your sole opportunity! Now, you have two choices: either comply or be sacrificed!"

The venue fell silent once again. The nobles' complexions turned deathly pale as if lifeless. The old Crow Xiteli's eyes were filled with tears as he faced the inescapable fate. Guramo clenched his fingers tightly, lowering his head, contemplating his next move.

The King gave one final look around the crowd and laughed coldly.

"Once you have your documents, you may leave! Return to your fiefs and prepare for relocation. Of course, you also have the alternative of a third option, to resist to the end, resulting in the annihilation of your entire clan!"

Having said that, Xiulote glanced at the girl in the black robe one last time, then turned and walked towards the great tent without looking back.

## Chapter 716: Charm

The night deepened. The moonlight was sparse; the stars hidden, and the earth plunged into shadow, with the mountains and forests succumbing to darkness.

The Imperial Guard Legion's encampment was austere and heavily fortified, quiet yet deadly. Elite samurais holding torches patrolled outside the camp. They were guarding the king inside the large tent and also keeping watch over the nobles staying in the small town.

Xiulote, dressed in military attire, sat cross-legged in the large tent. He held a scroll in his hands, while beneath him lay a soft Jaguar fur carpet. A fire basin was lit inside the tent, which was open at the top, allowing the night wind to surge in intermittently. The southern November was still warm; there was no need for a blanket to sleep comfortably.

After some time, the king felt inexplicably restless. He tossed away the scroll in his hand, revealing its cover — it was the new tax decree issued by the Alliance, freshly enacted. The decree further cemented King Aweit's authority, clarified the tribute requirements for the nobility, and was to start with this year's tribute. In other words, it was an act of centralizing power, increasing the taxes on all levels of the nobility, including the Kingdom of the Lake.

Xiulote took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. Then he looked at the Head Warrior.

"Bertade, what's the situation with the southern nobles?"

"Your Highness, some nobles left overnight, while others lodged in the city. Most seem resigned to their fate, but a few still appear to be struggling."

"Hmm, send envoys to have the three army troops heading south quicken their pace! Have the western troops take control of Apachigan. The eastern troops station themselves in Kulamo City, and the central troops cut off both areas, ready to advance east or west depending on the situation. As long as the Royal Army swiftly moves south to control key locations, no matter how harsh the land reduction, the local nobles will have to comply!"

"As you command, Your Highness."

The Head Warrior nodded and bowed, then promptly summoned a trusted aide to arrange for the envoy.

Xiulote picked up the scroll once more and began to read, but his restlessness persisted. Suddenly, he spoke.

"Bertade, the Gulamo Family..."

"Your Highness?"

"Never mind."

The king spoke half a sentence and then fell silent. Bertade bowed his head slightly, understanding the unspoken words, and did not ask further. The tent remained quiet until Shield Guard Ters entered to report back.

"Your Highness!"

"Yes."

"An envoy from a southern Great Nobility has arrived."

"Do not admit them."

"It's the girl who danced last night; she's right outside the tent."

At these words, Xiulote lifted his head and, through the tent's curtains, saw a slender and graceful figure standing quietly beside the bonfire at the entrance of the large tent.

The king glanced at the Head Warrior and seeing that Bertade was looking down with no expression, went ahead, as if possessed, and spoke.

"Let her in... let's hear what the Gulamo Family has to say."

"As you command, Your Highness."

Ters obeyed and left the tent. Soon, the tent door reopened, and a stunningly beautiful girl, barefoot, stepped inside. The breeze from the opened top fluttered the fire basin slightly, and the large tent became suffused with a faint musky scent, as well as an enticing allure.

"Your Majesty, I pay my respects to you."

Medina knelt down to greet him, her posture as graceful as a cat's. Her voice trembled slightly, melodious as a cry, like a cat's paw scratching at one's heart.

"Hmm."



The king watched the beauty on the ground without expression.

"What is it?"

"Your Majesty, the Clan Leader sent me here."

Medina raised her head, revealing a face on the verge of tears.

"He requests that you lessen the punishment on our family."

Xiulote slightly raised his eyebrows, silent and cold.

"Your Majesty, the Zicao Family has guarded the south for generations. Kulamo City and Atoyac Lake, that's our home."

Tears glistened in Medina's eyes. She knee-walked two steps closer to the fire basin in the tent. The firelight fully illuminated her body, revealing full curves and a slender waist, impossible to grasp with one hand.

"Your Majesty, the Clan Leader is willing to hand over seventy percent of the land and population, only asking to keep the manor fief on the north coast of the lake. The Zicao Family would become your most loyal servants, at your disposal, offering up... our bodies and spirits."

As she said this, the girl slowly removed her black robe, exposing her perfect body. She brought a jade finger to her lips and gently swayed her waist as she used the strength of her calves to slowly stand up from the ground. Her body was so flexible, like a curled-up cat suddenly stretching out, revealing both length and laziness.

Xiulote caught his breath, and warmth surged in his lower abdomen. But at this moment, he still maintained his reason and said sternly to the girl before him.

"The Zicao Family must leave the Kingdom's south. The north coast of Atoyac Lake will be taken into direct control by the Kingdom!"

Upon hearing this, Medina dropped her gaze; the king before her intended to seize her beautiful homeland and drive her family to the northern wilderness. When she opened her eyes again, they were full of spring ardor.

"Your Majesty, please allow me to dance for you the Dance of the Cat from Vastec~"

Medina cast a coquettish glance at the King, her eyes brimming as if about to overflow with water. Then, she let down her hair, barefooted, her body swayed, twirling right in front of the King.

Xiulote's breathing grew heavier, unable to voice his refusal. His gaze followed the girl's movements, gliding over her voluptuous curves, her cinched waist, and then up again to her pert backside. He watched as her jade-like legs danced, the silver bells on her ankles chiming, her delicate feet stepping in the manner of a cat... The King's heart, within the rising flames, was fervent, enduring a trial like never before.

Medina changed her dance moves, fully displaying the beauty of a young girl. She was like a boneless wave of water, dancing before the King, attracting the savage and unrestrained fire. Her steps struck like the beat of a drum, accompanied by breaths heavy from exertion that fell into the King's heart. Then, the intense dance suddenly eased, coming to a gentle halt. She lay on the ground like a tired playful cat, her delicate feet swaying lightly, bringing a crisp sound of bells.

The sound of bells gently swayed, the cat napped and then awoke. She murmured softly, lying on the ground, stretching in a seductive manner. Next, the agile cat crawled a few steps, coming to the feet of the King, wrapping around his legs coquettishly, lifting her head to reveal an incredibly beautiful face.

Medina's gaze was seductive as she stretched out her tongue, licking her tender lips. Then, she looked up purely at the King, like an innocent cat, and let out a light call.

"Meow~"

Xiulote's body instantly softened, a rush of heat surged from his lower belly to the top of his head, turning his eyes red in a moment. The King abruptly reached out and grasped the girl's arm tightly, lifting her from the ground as if an eagle had seized a cat. The scent of orchids assaulted him, as if carrying some aphrodisiac spice, triggering the wildest desires of the heart,

The King, with red eyes, looked at the soft girl, like a beast about to devour its prey. Then, under the last of his rationality and guard, he decisively pushed the girl away.

"Withdraw!!"

"Ah!"

Medina stumbled back two steps, falling askew onto the carpet. She clutched her arm in pain, tears forming in her eyes. She looked up helplessly at the King, once again becoming a pitiable doe.

"Your Majesty..."

"Hmph! Tell Gulamo!"

Xiulote took a couple of deep breaths, his voice stern as he commanded.

"Hand over the fief obediently, and be sealed on the north coast of the Lerma River! Stop playing these little games!"

Hearing this, Bertade glanced at His Highness and gave a serene smile. The tent fell into silence. Only the girl's low sobs were heard.

Xiulote took a few deep breaths, gradually calming his emotions. Then, he looked at Medina who had fallen to the ground and let out a soft sigh. The King stood up, took a couple of steps forward, and helped the girl to her feet, then draped a concealing black robe over her.

"Medina, tell your father,"

The King's movements were gentle, his tone indifferent.

"The north coast of the Lerma River has fertile land as well. It is sparsely populated, vast in area, said to be more than twenty thousand acres, but in truth, it holds boundless potential. The Kingdom needs manpower to defend the north, balance the power of the Otomi clans. He can, like his ancestors, open up the frontier, recruit people from the wilderness, and establish a new prosperous territory!"

Then, Xiulote stepped back, looking quietly at the girl.

"Additionally, as long as Gulamo swiftly hands over the lands and sets an example, the Kingdom shall allow him to take away several hundred more people... Have you remembered this, Medina?"

Medina cast her eyes down, not speaking. After a while, she pulled her robe tighter and nodded silently.

"Yes, I have remembered."

"Good, then you may leave!"

Xiulote turned to walk away, but then seemed to remember something.

"Bertade."

"Your Highness, I am here."

The Head Warrior replied respectfully, stirring from his still stance like a sculpture.

"Send a few Samurais to escort Medina back."

A smile crossed the King's face.

"Also, give her a jug of warm honey tea. She has danced for so long and sweated quite a bit, a hot tea will refresh her."

Bertade nodded. He scooped honeyed Hibiscus Tea from a clay pot over the brazier and poured it into a pottery jug. The jug was rustic with the Royal Family's emblem, clearly a newly fired purple clay pot.

"Miss Medina, please go this way."

The Head Warrior approached calmly, handing the warm jug to the girl.

Medina nodded silently, hugging the jug closely. She walked a few steps, reaching the front of the tent, then suddenly turned back, blooming with a radiant smile.

"Your Majesty, the Clan Leader has his plans. But as for me, I merely admire you wholeheartedly~"

Xiulote turned at the sound, only to see the girl flashing a coquettish smile. She pressed her finger to her lips, blew a playful kiss, and waved at the King.

"Oh, my King! I simply wanted to offer myself to you!"

The King stood still, watching the girl's disappearing figure leave the tent. He felt a sense of loss in his heart. At that moment, the King's hardened heart finally began to melt, defenseless before an utmost beautiful girl.

Chapter 717: The King and the Maiden, Together to...

The night dispersed, and the sun rose. Early next morning, the southern nobility hurriedly left Aotuo city heading south, each to their own fief. The king did not try to retain them, nor did he see any of the nobles. As sunset gave way to moonrise, and darkness once again descended, Aotuo city returned to its usual tranquility.

The Black Wolf's royal banner fluttered in the night. Xiulote was still busy in the tent. He gazed at the map of the southern terrain, pondering the subsequent arrangements.

"Bertade, Zicao County is vast and the environment complex. After the southern nobility's change of enfeoffment, I plan to form a new Zicao Legion and hand it over to the veteran Etalik."

The Head Warrior nodded respectfully.

"Your Majesty, General Etalik is calm and steady and familiar with the situation in Zicao County, indeed a suitable Legion Commander. With the general's qualifications, he should already be commanding a legion."

"Mm, I indeed owe him that..."

Hearing this, Xiulote smiled in agreement. Etalik was a loyal samurai of the family, having followed his grandfather for many years. Whether it be loyalty, qualifications, abilities, or merits, he was more than enough to secure a region.

"Bertade, where should the manpower for the new legion come from?"

"Your Majesty, General Etalik currently has a thousand samurai at his disposal. Necali, Director of the Mining and Metallurgy Bureau, has under him not only a thousand samurai but also more than three thousand miners, and two thousand recuperating Tarasco surrendered soldiers. These surrendered soldiers have nearly been worn down by a year of mining..."

"Mm, then transfer them to the south. That makes three thousand men."

Xiulote nodded slightly. Using surrendered soldiers for mining was exceedingly dangerous; once the kingdom supplemented the workforce with miners, these men were replaced. Furthermore, the Jingji Legion's march southward did not include Necali's Qinganbate Personal Guard Warrior camp. In this era, large mines must have military suppression, else a rebellion could erupt any minute.

"The rest of the manpower will be supplemented from the farmland troops and the militia of Zicao County. Then continue to station locally, on a semi-production basis..."

Given the kingdom's current situation, it's impossible to maintain another standing legion. In fact, the new legion's upkeep would have to fall upon the land and taxes soon to be collected from Zicao County.

The monarch and his minister continued to discuss for a while, during which Zicao County was already treated as a direct jurisdiction of the kingdom. After all, with more than thirty thousand elite troops heading southward, equipped with copper armor, longbows, and copper cannons, the southern nobility had no means to resist.

Suddenly, Shield Guard Ters lifted the tent flap and strode in. He looked towards his Highness and smiled simply.

"Your Highness!"

"Mm?"

"The girl from last night, she has come again."

Hearing this, Xiulote's eyebrows rose as he looked at Bertade.

"It's so late, Guramo still hasn't gone south?"

"Your Highness, Guramo left for the south early this morning. Miss Medina... she might have snuck out, or Guramo might have left her behind, or perhaps, it could be both."

Bertade, understanding the situation, lowered his head and replied.

"Oh."

Xiulote nodded his head. He pondered for a while, roughly guessing Guramo's intentions. The king hesitated, then glanced at Bertade again. The Head Warrior remained silent, his gaze downcast.

"Mm, then... let her in."

Ters turned and left. Soon, the tent flap opened again, and a graceful figure appeared before the king.

Tonight, Medina was different, lacking her original seduction, but rather, she was stunningly dressed. She wore a fitting pale-yellow gown, a feathered cloak draped over her shoulders, and embroidered cotton shoes on her feet. She had her hair up, with light rouge on her lips, and even her nails were dyed a pale blue. At this moment, she held onto the clay pot from last night, gathered her courage, and stood before the king.

"Your Majesty, I greet you!"

Medina set down the pot and knelt to pay her respects. Her face bore a pure smile, yet could not hide the loss and unease within.

"Mm."

The king gave a nod, his face expressionless.

"Medina, why have you come?"

"Your Majesty... "

Tears instantly welled up in the girl's eyes. She lowered her head and whispered.

"The Clan Leader... doesn't want me anymore. I... I had no choice but to come, to seek refuge with you..."



Xiulote's brow rose. He fell silent for a moment, then spoke.

"Medina, I can send a samurai to escort you back to Zicao Manor."

"Your Majesty!... Wow..."

Medina could no longer hold back, and she wept openly on the ground.

"I beg you, please take me in! If I go back to the manor, the Clan Leader... the Clan Leader will... will kill me!"

"Mm?!"

Shocked by this, Xiulote asked the girl in a stern voice.

"Medina, isn't Guramo your father?"

"Your Majesty... I am merely one among the dozens of children of the Clan Leader. To him, I am just..."

Weeping, Medina's voice broke with sobs. Her petite nose twitched slightly, her expression filled with pain.

Seeing this, something in Xiulote's heart seemed to be quietly pricked. He slowly stood, stepped forward, and gazed down at the pitiful figure on the ground.

"Medina, speak out... "

"Your Majesty... at Zicao Manor, I am nothing but a beautiful tool, a lovely piece of art."

Medina's cry grew more frantic, her face revealing the loneliness that came from deep within her heart.

"Since I can remember, I have had no mother. As soon as I could walk, I was subjected to endless dance practices, singing lessons, bird rearing, and poetry recitation. And as I grew a little older, I had to learn how to attract others, to please them... Any slight misstep and I would suffer punishment, be subjected to the terrible water punishment... Your Majesty, I... I am scared..."

Rearing birds was intended to train one's eyes to be captivating. At this time, the water punishment primarily involved intermittent asphyxiation as a form of punishment, excruciatingly painful but leaving no scars.

Xiulote's heart filled once more with compassion from a future lifetime. He gently extended his hand, stroking the young girl's hair.

"Don't be afraid... don't be afraid..."

"Your Majesty... do you know... my mother, she died by suicide... After her death, the Clan Leader severed her head... and when I was little, I accidentally entered the Clan Leader's collection room..."

Medina's face showed terror. She fearfully extended her tender hand, hugging Xiulote's large hand, pressing it to her cheek. She gripped so tightly, as if clinging to the last straw, her blue nails pressing hard against the back of the King's hand. Fortunately, before she could break the King's skin, the girl regained some sense and withdrew her fingers.

"Heads... collection..."

Upon hearing this, Xiulote lowered his eyes. The nobility of this era had the macabre hobby of collecting heads, typically treated with preservative herbs, as a kind of special trophy or collectible.

The King silently felt the girl's cheeks, warm and soft, moistened with tears. He tenderly helped the girl up, reaching out his arms to wrap around her slender waist, pulling her into his embrace.

"Medina, don't be afraid... I am here."

Hearing this, Medina looked up at the handsome King with tears in her eyes, full of hope.

"Your Majesty... will you... shelter me?"

Xiulote gazed into the young girl's eyes, fell silent for a while, then nodded affirmatively. Next, he looked towards the Head Warrior.

"Bertade?"

Bertade sighed silently. He replied in a low voice.

"Your Majesty, since Miss Medina has left her clan, her absence won't have much impact. She can enter the Capital City, become a Priestess serving the Spirit at the Temple of the Goddess of Spring. As long as she doesn't appear in public or involve herself in the politics of the Kingdom, the Alliance won't..."

"Enter the Temple, serve the Spirit..."

Xiulote lowered his eyes, nodding. He thought of another girl and a flicker of guilt surfaced, his surging desire once again restrained. After a while, he looked calmly at the girl.

"Medina, would you be willing?"

Medina stopped crying, staring blankly at the King's sincere eyes for a long time, speechless, her thoughts a mystery. After a while, her gaze grew flirtatious, and her words revealed hints of springtime affection.

"Your Majesty, I would like that."

As Medina spoke passionately, she strained to tip-toe, reaching for the King's lips with a kiss. Xiulote was taken aback. He couldn't help but lower his head to meet the girl's lips with his own.

The girl's lips were so tender, as beautiful as a rose, and they carried the gentle breath of spring. The King greedily savored them, feeling a softness he had never known before. Though somewhat unbelievable, this was indeed his first kiss.

"Medina..."

After a long time, the two slowly parted. The King's eyes became tender. He had opened his heart, let down all his guards, and now accepted the charming person before him.

Medina's face flushed with a strange red. She looked at the King seductively and giggled softly.

"So, the feeling of a kiss is so wonderful."

Then, the maiden gently stretched out her hands, caressing Xiulote's handsome face. Her pale blue nails lightly grazed the King's face, then brushed over his neck, soft as a cat's paw.

"Your Majesty... do you know? I was so lonely, so longing for company, so wishing to be saved... If, if only, I could have met you when I was young, how wonderful that would have been..."

Hearing the maiden's words, Xiulote felt a sense of foreboding. He took a deep breath, lightly inhaling the girl's fragrance, feeling the warmth in his embrace, and asked in confusion.

"Medina, you..."

Medina withdrew her tender hand, her smile becoming more enchanting and yet more bizarre.

"Your Majesty, I am very fortunate to have met you. How I wish to go with you to the... Netherworld!"

At her words, alarm bells rang loudly in the King's heart. He looked at Medina in astonishment, only to see her gaze suddenly turn sharp. Then, he felt a severe pain in his waist.

"Clang!"

Unknown when, the maiden's hand had produced a small, dusky blue Short Dagger. The dagger thrust at the King's waist, only to be blocked by the Copper Armor worn underneath.

"Medina!"

Xiulote roared in anger, like a wounded beast. His expression was one of incredulity and filled with the rage of being betrayed by someone he trusted. He had no time to think further, immediately retreating while reaching for the Bronze Sword on his waist.

"My King!"

Bertade had been keeping his distance, more than a dozen steps away, to avoid disturbing the King and the young lady. Now, seeing what was unfolding, his eyes burning with fury, he drew his Bronze Sword and rushed forward.

"Whoosh! Ziing!"

Medina, wearing a bizarre smile, danced nimbly, always staying within a step of Xiulote's movements. She waved the dusky blue dagger, aiming for the King's cheek, then slashing at his arms, hands, thighs... at every place not covered by Armor.

Xiulote kept retreating, relying on his unrelenting Samurai training to dodge the maiden's attacks with difficulty. He was constrained, trying not to be sliced by the dusky blue dagger, and thus the Bronze Sword at his waist remained unsheathed. However, the girl's movements were quicker than imagined! Before Bertade arrived, she finally cornered Xiulote, wounding the King's arm.

"Your Highness!"

Bertade cried out in agony as dozens of Personal Guard Warriors flooded into the tent, holding Long Spears, surrounding the King and the young lady.

Xiulote leaned against the edge of the tent. He looked at the blue wound on his arm, his head spinning.

Medina stopped her actions and stood there gently, wearing a bewitching smile.

"My King, I've caught you. Let us go together!..."

Chapter 718: Meteor

"Bang!"

Bertade's eyes reddened as he turned the back of his sword and knocked Medina to the ground. Then he extended his long sword and flicked the azure dagger away. Following that, he suddenly reached out and grabbed the girl's neck and shouted angrily.

"What is this poison? Where is the antidote?!"

"Cough, cough!"

Medina moaned painfully and with difficulty, she said.

"There's no antidote... I don't have an antidote on me."

Bertade quickly searched her but found no vials. Then, he recalled the clay pot the girl had brought into the tent and urgently commanded.

"Ters, bring me that clay pot! Trusted aide, quickly summon the herb priest from the army!"

A few trusted aides immediately left the tent. The Mexica legion always carried several priests skilled in herbs, who were not at the service of ordinary samurai, but were always ready to treat important leaders.

Ters picked up the clay pot, Bertade quickly opened it, but saw yesterday's hibiscus tea untouched. His eyes reddened once more as he forcefully grasped Medina's neck, as if he might strangle her at any moment.

"Speak! What poison is this?!"

Medina struggled painfully while trying hard to shake her head.

"There's no antidote..."

Xiulote leaned against the tent as if sensing the passing of life. In this lifetime, there were still too many things he had not done... Frustration grew in his heart, along with a sense of powerlessness that eventually turned into a self-deprecating chuckle.

"In the end, I'm just an ordinary person... unable to withstand the trials of human nature..."

Then, before death approached, Xiulote looked at the girl and smiled miserably.

"Medina, why?"

Bertade released his grip. The girl took a few difficult breaths, tidied her disheveled hair, and said seductively.

"Your Majesty, the Clan Leader said the entire kingdom rested on you alone. By assassinating you, the kingdom would lose its leader, and the officers he had previously contacted would also start their rebellion, securing our family's fief. Even the Tarasco Kingdom could have a chance to be restored and perhaps, even more, is unknown..."

Xiulote was silent. He nodded slightly, then shook his head, and asked again.

"Medina, I'm asking why you were so willing to die?"

Medina stood frozen. Her gaze was blurry and vacant, looking at the handsome King with a pitiful smile.

"Why? Your Majesty, while I live, I am but a tool and plaything, accompanied by pain and fear, a beautifully plumaged caged bird... Even you, Your Majesty, only thought to lock me in the Temple for your leisurely pleasure!"

Hearing this, Xiulote cast down his gaze. He stared deeply at his own desires, sighed softly.

"Medina, isn't it good to be alive?"

The girl shook her head, graced him with a gentle smile, like a lovely daisy exuding the beauty of death.

"Your Majesty, it's not good to be alive! In death, I gain freedom and relief, and I can even take many with me, many people I want to... I used to hate them so much, now I don't hate them anymore, but let's go together!..."

Xiulote didn't speak. He silently watched the girl with the vacant gaze, listening to her soft whisper, until two Mexica-born herb priests hurried into the tent.

"Bertade..."

"Your Highness!"

"Don't be sad... After I die, make sure to bury my body under the Moon Pyramid in Teotihuacan City..."

"Your Highness!"

"Rest assured, my King, you will not die. You have been kind to me, how could I bear for you to die? Besides, if you die, who will help me send them on their way..."

Medina smiled alluringly, her gaze tenderly fixed on the King, and suddenly she spoke.



Xiulote looked in her direction, only to see Medina pressing her fingertip to her lips. Her cheeks once again took on an odd red color. The girl coquettishly kissed her hand, chuckled, and blew the King a kiss, her pale blue nails enchantingly swaying.

"My King, please be sure to remember Medina!..."

Having said that, Medina laughed and placed her slender hand on her neck, forcefully scratching hard! The pale blue nails cut deep into her skin, and red blood flowed out instantly. With a carefree smile, she threw her head back, gazing at the dark sky through the roof of the tent.

"... Mother, I'm coming!~"

In just a few breaths, Medina's pupils lost focus. She lay silently on the ground, like a rose in full bloom, yet deflated – so dazzlingly stunning, yet carrying hurtful thorns.

Xiulote stared blankly at the deceased girl, feeling a surge of emotions in his chest, yet unable to utter a single word.

Bertade had no time to care. His gaze was fixed intently on the two herb priests. An older priest was inspecting the King's wound, carefully cleaning it. The younger priest was examining the azure short dagger, then brought it close to his nose to sniff. After a moment, both priests looked at each other with surprise on their faces.

"What is it! What herbs will counteract the poison?!"

Bertade grabbed the arm of the older priest, urgently pressing for an answer.

"This... this... there is no antidote..."

The aged priest answered slowly. Xiulote sighed silently, closed his eyes, waiting for life's end. The Head Warrior felt darkness before his eyes, and he suddenly brandished his bronze sword, placing it on the old priest's neck.

"Treat the King!"

"...Your, Your Reverence, the Head Eagle Warrior!"

The young priest, looking terrified, hastily responded.

"This is ordinary indigo dye, it's not poisonous!"

A deathly silence fell in the tent. Xiulote instantly opened his eyes. The Head Warrior stood stunned for a few moments, then lowered his bronze sword.

"Not poisonous?"

"Yes, yes. There's no antidote because there's no poison."

The old priest finally finished speaking. The King clenched his teeth and looked again at the deceased girl. Her lips had turned purple, as if a rose had withered and decayed.

"Go, examine her nails!"

The priests hurried to the girl's side, carefully taking some of the blue substance from her nails with a special bone plate. Bertade personally took action, using a cloth sterilized with agave juice to bandage the wound of the King. Moments later, the priests had a unanimous result.

"Your Highness, this is a special frog poison, extremely toxic. The frog must come from the southern Mistec or the Zapotecs rainforest."

"Indeed. The exact species still needs to be identified..."

"Is there an antidote?"

The King suddenly asked. He remembered several occasions when Medina's nails had grazed his skin, tenderly caressing him, but never truly breaking it open.

"...There is... but, but the poison is too fierce, it's too late to use it."

The priests lowered their heads, not daring to meet the King's eyes.

Xiulote felt a deep chill of fear within him. Tonight was the closest he had come to death, kissing the God of Death's rose amidst the intoxication of gentleness. After some time, he stood up and walked to the deceased girl, his expression changing.

"Medina..."

Xiulote sighed deeply, a mysterious sadness appearing on his face. He watched the peaceful Medina, as if she were simply asleep before him.

The King closed his eyes, recollecting the brief encounters with the girl over the past two days: the innocent doe, the enchanting kitten, the beautiful lady, the helpless girl, the sharp assassin... and the rose that chose death for the sake of freedom.

After a long while, Xiulote opened his eyes to look at her in sleep.

"You've won! From now on, I will be unable to forget you... Rest in peace~"

"Your Highness."

Bertade knelt in front of the King, his face full of self-reproach.

"I failed to protect you! ...There are no women in the camp, and before entering the tent, the trusted aides did not inspect carefully..."

"Ha! It's not your fault... It is my own mistake... Besides, the real poison was not on the dagger, but under the nails. The trusted aides are pure samurai, lacking such experience..."

Xiulote shook his head, lowered his gaze, and let out a long breath.

He reflected on his own mistakes; he hadn't maintained his guard in the face of temptation. He had let down his defenses against the exceedingly beautiful girl and thus had stepped closer to danger...

"Ha... I am already powerful enough, glorious enough. My enemies can hardly defeat me head-on, and so the assassins lurking in the shadows have become something I must face! In this era, poison and daggers have buried many a hero..." Xiulote looked up, at this moment when death had brushed past him, gazing into the dark sky.

The sky held no moonlight, nor stars, as if it was the path the King was destined to take. On this path, he was fated to make enemies of countless people, a path strewn with bones. And he, must be as hard as iron, ever vigilant.

"Bertade."

"Your Highness."

"Bury Medina well... Place a jar with her, and a rose on top."

"...As you command."

Bertade bowed deeply. After some time, he hesitantly asked,

"Your Highness, you mentioned earlier, the Moon Pyramid in the Holy City?"

Xiulote gave the Head Warrior a deep look, kept silent, and explained nothing. Bertade didn't ask further, as if he had understood.

A moment later, the King, expressionless, issued a Royal Decree.

"At dawn tomorrow, the Imperial Guard Legion shall march south, bring all the cannons! ...I shall sacrifice Guramo with my own hands!!"

"As you command! My supreme sun, may you never fall!"

On Bertade's face appeared a fervor long unseen, just like when he first met his sovereign.

#### Chapter 719: Guramo in Action

The night was deep, and 120 miles south of Aotuo, the Jingji Legion had made their encampment.

Guramo, leader of the Zicao Clan, dressed in black, climbed the nearest hill with a dozen trusted aides. His expression was solemn as he watched the distant camp, where flickers of bonfires shimmered. Patrolling samurais surrounded the camp, so the group dared not get too close and could only skirt around it from the hills.

Guramo looked over the camp housing thousands, a force the southern nobility could hardly resist. Then, he turned back to look north, where darkness enveloped the mountains, and a more formidable evil approached, carrying the roar of a volcanic demon.

"Rustle~~"

Guramo took a deep breath, his body trembling with excitement, just like a gambler throwing dice.

By this time, Medina's assassination should have yielded results. Her nails were coated with jungle frog poison—just scratching the King's skin and slightly contaminating his blood should be sufficient to take away the exceptionally powerful King.

"The deadly lancehead viper needs only one bite to take the life of a formidable Jaguar... Even the weak, when seizing the strong's vulnerability, can turn the tables and win... May the Goddess Halatana bless me, I will offer her human sacrifices!"

Guramo lowered his head and prayed for a moment, seeking a blessing from the moon.

Ever since seeing the order to redistribute fiefs, he had harbored thoughts of murder. And when Medina informed him that the King refused to compromise, he resolved himself to assassinate! No matter how severe the consequences of a failed assassination might be, it was worth the risk.

Because he saw clearly that the nascent kingdom, which was barely emerging, entirely depended on the King. The Mexica legion, the Prepetcha Spear legion, the Tarasco Surrendered Army, the Barbarian legion... all these diverse forces were united solely by the prestige and charisma of the King. Once the King was dead, the kingdom would disintegrate in an instant, and even if the Mexica sent another Prince, it would do no good. The balance of power would be difficult to restore, and inescapable conflict would ensue. By then, the Prepetcha generals he had contacted would make the choices he desired.

Thinking of this, Guramo felt his chest where several key secret letters were hidden. Two of these corresponded to the Jingji Legion before him.

"Clan leader."

A trusted aide came forward and reported in a low voice.

"Shall we rest here?"

After traveling 120 miles in a day, everyone was extremely tired. Guramo glanced at his trusted aide, then at the others, and nodded slightly.

"Rest for an hour, then continue on our way. We are still 100 miles from Kulamo City, and we must return to our fief by noon tomorrow!"

Regardless of whether the assassination was successful, Guramo had to face the wrath of the Imperial Guard Legion. And the only possibility to withstand the terrifying copper beast of the Imperial Guards would be Kulamo City, fortified with stone walls.

The group found a hollow in the mountains and cautiously rested for an hour. When it was time to leave, they encountered a problem. In the group, two dancers and musicians, after resting, suffered leg pains and could no longer walk.

Guramo looked at them indifferently; they were his favorite dancer and musician, specially prepared for Medina's dance, though they hadn't been used.

"Kill them."

"Family Head?"

"Kill them. Cut off their heads and throw them down the mountain."

"Yes."

The trusted aides pulled out Long Daggers, and soon there were two screams. Then, the bodies were decapitated, making them hard to recognize.

"Continue marching!"

Soon, the group continued along the mountain path, moving through the night. After forty miles, the Crow Family's manor was already in sight. It was the fief of the old Crow Xiteli and the last noble territory on the way to Kulamo City. The Crow Family had several hundred private samurai warriors and thousands of Militia, making it the only force capable of buying time for the Zicao Family at this moment.

As dawn approached, Guramo ordered the group to halt. He pondered for a moment, then called two Death Warriors.

"Sagebrush."

"Family Head."

"Stay near the manor. After we pass, go to the Crow Manor. The old Crow surely has not returned yet. Tell his eldest son, young Crow, that the northern King has been assassinated by us! The southern nobles and the Prepetcha generals from the Royal Army have agreed to join forces and restore the Tarasco Kingdom!"

"As you command, Family Head."

Sagebrush knelt and bowed.

Guramo thought for a moment, then pulled a secret letter from his breast. This letter was correspondence with Ezpan, the commander of the second Spear Legion; it was the least important and contained minimal content.

"Take this. If young Crow does not believe it, just wave this letter in front of him. He probably cannot fully recognize Mexica script, just the seal."

"As you command, Family Head."

Guramo nodded and then turned to another Death Warrior.

"Rosemary."

"Family Head."

"You go to the northern mountain road. If the Jingji Legion of the Kingdom comes there, you shall report them. Claim that the Crow Family intends to rebel!"



"As you command, Family Head."

As Guramo spoke, he reached for two other critical secret letters, hesitated for a moment, and then withdrew his hand. The time was not yet ripe. He still hoped for the assassination of Medina. He couldn't risk exposing the generals who could truly respond after the King's death.

"Keep moving!"

After leaving the two men behind, Guramo once again embarked on the journey back home. His physical fitness was excellent, and his movements were quick, even surpassing those of the veteran Samurai by his side.

The morning sun showered over the southern fields, and the mist over Atoyac Lake dispersed in the wind. As the sun climbed into the mid-sky, they finally arrived at Kulamo City.

Guramo couldn't rest yet. He issued another command.

"Thyme, Bay Laurel."

"Family Head."

"Go to Kulamo City and contact the Militia that has been prepared in advance."

"As you command, Family Head."

In Kulamo City, there were one thousand Mexica Samurai and nearly two thousand Militia. Although these Militia were disbanded by the Mexica, they were actually still controlled by the Zicao Family. The Zicao Family had been managing their fief in Kulamo for over two hundred years, with their influence deeply entrenched in all aspects. Their potential influence was enormous, yet once they left their southern lands, all would be lost.

Guramo looked around once more, eyeing the few remaining Death Warriors. After a moment of thought, he selected an assassin who looked particularly timid.

"Eucalyptus."

"Family Head."

"Take these three secret letters."

Guramo fished in his robe and handed over three relatively unimportant letters to Eucalyptus, keeping the two critical ones.

"Go to the Mexica leader in Kulamo City, Etalik, and report that a Surrendered General, Prepetcha, is preparing to rebel. Get as close to him as possible!"

"As you command, Family Head."

"Do you still have Frog Poison?"

"Yes."

"Remember, do not use a Dagger; it's too easily spotted. Use your fingernails!"

"As you command, Family Head."

Guramo nodded. He gave a faint glance at the Death Warriors. These men were the essence he had cultivated for over a decade. In this era of unending wars, the Zicao family's foothold in the south depended not on being skilled in arts or dance but on assassins and poison!

However, in the face of the overwhelming odds, in front of thousands of Samurai, the power of assassins seemed so frail.

Guramo sighed for the first time. He turned to the remaining people.

"Let's go! Return to the manor and rally the family's Samurai. The survival of the Zicao Family hinges on this single effort!"

The group set out on their final path. Guramo pursed his lips and silently gazed toward the East. If raising troops failed, he still had one last resort...

The sun rose high into the sky, the bright sunlight glinting on Atoyac Lake. And beneath the sunlight, the shadow of the broken wood of the Zicao was unmistakably visible.

#### Chapter 720: Jingji Legion, Huitu and the Sky

The sunlight spilled over, and the outskirts of Aotuo City bustled with noise. Seven thousand of the Imperial Guard Legion broke camp and marched southward, their white-gold cloth armor gleaming in the fields. Heavy copper cannons were mounted on gun carriages, dragged forward by accompanying Militia.

The flag of the Black Wolf fluttered high, with five hundred trusted aides closely guarding it. Accompanied by the Head Warrior, Xiulote climbed a small hill. The hill was dotted with tall broken cloth trees and some blooming large dahlias. Among the tall trees and flourishing flowers stood a solitary grave. It was marked by an unlettered stele, with an abstract rose carved at the center.

The King stood still, silently gazing at the solitary grave. He didn't approach, nor did he speak. He just watched a hummingbird, gracefully dancing between the flowers and the lone grave. Not until the sun slanted, and the tree shadows covered the tomb, did the hummingbird gently peck at the abstract rose, as if delivering a final kiss, before it shook its wings and hurriedly flew into the distant sky.

The King smiled tenderly, turned around, and buried everything deep in his heart. His heart grew even harder, filling the last gap and letting go of the final tenderness. Only after the ritual of life could one truly become a King.

"Let's go!"

"As you command, Your Highness."

The two walked down the hill in silence. Armored trusted aides clanked in their copper armor, surrounding them. It was only when they reached the foot of the hill that the King spoke indifferently.

"When did the Envoy sent to the Jingji Legion set off?"

"Your Majesty, he left last night; he should have arrived by now."

Bertade lifted his head and looked at the sun, which had passed its zenith. Envoys in the army were all fast runners, with their legs tightly wrapped in linen. They could run more than two hundred miles in a day and a night. Of course, they would need to rest or be replaced the next day.

"Hmm."

The King nodded and looked south, his expression turning solemn.

"The army marches south, forty miles a day! Within five days, I want us to reach Kulamo City!"

"We shall fulfill your will, Your Highness."

A strong wind blew south a hundred miles, reaching the camp of the Jingji Legion.

Inside the tent, a line of copper-armored trusted aides held bronze axes, their faces stern. Jaguar Olosh sat cross-legged in the main seat, frowning as he listened to the Scout's report. He had just finished reading the Royal Decree from the King, ordering the army to set out, when the Scout encountered a civilian Samurai from nearby, reporting the Crow Family's intent to rebel.

"Has the Crow Family shown any unusual movements?"

"Commander, since dawn, the warriors of the Crow Family have been assembling, and the Militia in their territory are being conscripted."

"Fools, the lot of them!"

Jaguar Olosh's eyes bulged with rage as he bellowed furiously.

"These damned southern Nobility dare to attempt to assassinate His Highness! The legions, to arms, surround the Crow Manor entirely! I want to exterminate them all, a sacrifice to the Chief Divine!"

Upon hearing this, Huitu Puap and the sky Family Head Oorta exchanged glances. Puap made a mouth gesture, and with no response from Oorta, he stepped forward alone.

"Respected Commander Olosh!"

"Camp Commander Puap, what do you wish to say?"

Jaguar Olosh gave Huitu a fierce glance, speaking with a cold voice.

"I've heard you've received quite a few benefits from the Crow Family. Are you trying to plead for the Crow Family?"

Huitu's back broke out in "swoosh" with sweat. He forced a smile and said.

"Commander, those were just trivial knick-knacks, I will send them all to you later. The Crow Family has always been compliant and surely would not fail to see the bigger picture... The critical thing now is the Royal Decree. The damned Zicao Clan Leader actually dared to attempt to assassinate His Highness! Each and every one of our Lepecha warriors is outraged, Your Majesty is our sun!... The Zicao Family has been guarding the south for generations and operating in Kulamo City for a long time. Although General Etalik is brave, he only has a thousand men..."

"Puap, what exactly are you trying to say?!"

Jaguar Olosh stood up and watched Huitu intently, his robust body creating an oppressive aura.

"... Commander, the Qinchongcan warrior camp requests permission to immediately march south to subdue the Zicao Family!"

"Exactly! Commander, please grant us half a day's respite! Clan Leader Xiteli of the Crow Family went to attend Your Majesty's banquet and is on his way back. Though aged, he can still move swiftly; he should arrive by tonight at the latest. Even if someone from the Crow Family is being foolish, the old Clan Leader would not be so foolish as to resist the King's army... Also, the Sky warrior camp requests permission to immediately march south to subdue the Zicao Family!"

It was then that Sky Family Head Oorta stepped forward and respectfully made his request. Born into a prestigious Nobility, although young, he led the loyal Sky Family warriors. Having surrendered to the Kingdom earlier and married a Mexica noblewoman, his words carried more weight within the Jingji Legion than those of Huitu.

"Oorta, since you've asked, I'll wait half a day!"

After a moment of contemplation, Jaguar Olosh nodded. Although he was furious with the southern Nobility's assassination attempt, he wouldn't let it cause a massacre, delaying more critical matters. The key to the eastern road army lay in Kulamo City. Jaguar Olosh made a decision, looking at the two men.

"Since the two of you want this opportunity to distinguish yourselves, I'll give it to you! Puap, take two thousand of your own troops and attack the Zicao Manor! Oorta, you go and reinforce Kulamo City! Remember, the Zicao Family's crime is unforgivable; do not go the way of Guramo!"

"As you command, Commander!"

They both kneeled to pay their respects and then turned and departed. Jaguar Olosh watched their departing figures intently until they disappeared outside the tent. The assassination attempt on His Highness made him suspicious of the two camp commanders from Lepecha. However, since His Highness was safe and sound, and the Kingdom as solid as ever, no legion would dare rise in rebellion and court self-destruction.

With these thoughts, Jaguar returned to his seat inside the grand tent. He glanced at the armored warriors inside and then felt the sturdy armor beneath his battle robe, muttering to himself in a low voice.

"Then let's wait longer! Let's see how they perform!"

Outside the grand tent, Puap trudged forward, head down, as Oorta hurried behind. After more than a hundred steps, Oorta finally let out a deep sigh.

"Huitu, how could this be! How dare Guramo attempt to assassinate His Majesty! And he didn't even succeed!"

"Hmph, Oorta, he's always been a viper. Only you were blinded by the women he sent! And dragged me into this mess!"

"I've already sent my trusted aide back to the Capital Region to kill them all."

Oorta offered a weak counterargument, his heart still felt a tinge of reluctance. The high-born women of Mexica were haughty and overbearing, nowhere as charming and accommodating or as understanding as the beauties from the Zicao Family.

"Huitu, the biggest problem now is the secret letter we wrote to him! We agreed to support each other, but who would have thought he'd dare to start a rebellion and assassinate His Majesty!"

"Damn it! I can barely read, I only drew some pictographic symbols, how could that be interpreted as an alliance with him!"

Puap suppressed the raging anger in his heart, looked around, and growled in a low voice.

"His Majesty was campaigning thousands of miles to the north, with no certainty of when he would return. Blinded by folly, I let you drag me into enjoying his beauties and writing a letter of mutual

contact! Without you, I would never have had dealings with such high nobility. You have truly dragged me into trouble!"

"Huitu, you didn't say that at the time! When you were drunk, didn't you also say that because the Clan Leader showed you great favor, if His Majesty did not return from the northern campaign, we would together support Prince Shatini..."

"Shush!!"

Huitu Puap quickly covered Oorta's mouth with his hand.

"Do you want to die! You dare speak such words in the military camp!"

"Aren't we already at your camp's edge?"

"My camp's edge is still under His Majesty's samurai! Qinchongcan warriors have surrendered for many years, worship the Chief Divine, accept military fiefs, with families in the Capital City... If they report to the War Priest..."

Hearing this, Oorta fell silent. Although his own Sky Samurai camp was comparatively better off, it had also accepted divisions of land from His Majesty, was instructed by priests, and had been deeply infiltrated by the Kingdom, no longer serving as private military strength. After a while, he muttered under his breath.

"Huitu, we were just making idle conversation. We'll just be more careful in the future."

"Haha, that's if there is a future to speak of."

Huitu Puap's face darkened.

"Because the Prince was attacked, the Camp Commander already harbored a killing intent towards us in the grand tent today."



"What? Huitu, could you have seen it wrong?"

Oorta was suddenly agitated. He had not noticed any such intent.

Huitu Puap swept a cold glance at Oorta. To be precise, the Camp Commander's killing intent today was aimed at him. Because Oorta did not really pose any threat, he was easy to deal with.

"Oorta, words spoken, deeds done, always leave traces."

After pondering for a moment, Huitu's expression turned fierce.

"Our request to head south this time is to buy time! We must clean up loose ends before His Majesty heads south!"

"Yes, indeed so."

Oorta nodded, his gaze also filled with killing intent.

"Huitu, considering the journey, Guramo is probably around this area. Should we send samurai to search..."

"No. Guramo has surely already headed south by now, he might even be back in his fief."

Huitu shook his head and looked toward the south, his voice grave.

"If he dared attempt such a major act as assassinating His Majesty, then he must be prepared for a desperate struggle. We'll set off immediately, bypassing the Crow Family's manor, and head straight for Kulamo City to make the kill!"

"Good! I will send an envoy to the Crow Family, and the army will depart south immediately! We must kill Guramo!"

The two Prepetcha generals looked at each other and clasped arms together. Their faces were filled with unrestrainable killing intent, not for the sake of the Kingdom, but for themselves.

"Caw! Caw!"

As the sun dipped in the west, a crow flew over the sky, emitting a deathly cry. It curiously glanced down at the manor, where it saw members of its kind, while the watchful eyes of the Crow Family observed four thousand Prepetcha warriors quickly marching south past the edge of the manor, kicking up plumes of dust and obscuring the sky.