Empress 131

Chapter 131: The Closest Place to the Heartbeat (Part 2)

But he knew well that this warmth was false.

This was a harbor to give the mind a break, not a true refuge.

Although the Cabinet and Sif appeared amicable now, once the Imperial Authority was completely undermined, they wouldn’t be so polite.

Racing against time, he couldn’t afford to linger in the harbor.

When Lisa placed the last dish on the table, Roland looked at her curiously and asked with a smile:

"What day is it today, such a feast?"

"Guess." Lisa rested her chin in her hand and smiled at Roland.

"First, let’s rule out the wrong answer—your birthday," Roland joked half-seriously.

Lisa felt the warmth from the ruby at her chest, bowed her head slightly, and looked at the gem nestled in her fair skin, illuminated by candlelight, exceptionally beautiful.

This was a gift from Roland, the best birthday gift.

"Did you really forget?" Lisa gently reminded him.

"Sorry, I’ve been a bit busy lately. I truly forgot. Is it some important day for you?"

"Of course it’s important, even more so than my birthday," Lisa said softly.

Roland was a bit puzzled. Was there something more important than Lisa’s own birthday?

It shouldn’t be her parents’ birthdays; they rarely celebrated, and both were in summer. Nor was it their memorial days—they had passed away in spring.

Just as Roland was racking his brains and starting to daydream, Lisa softly asked:

"You must have encountered a lot of troublesome things on your trip to Dovor Port, right?"

"A bit, but it’s all been resolved," Roland said with a smile.

"You’ve been busy and tired lately, don’t you want to take some time off and rest?" Lisa’s eyes were full of concern.

"I’m a bit tired, but who isn’t? You work all day and then come home to cook and clean; you work harder than I do."

"Thank you, but I’m not as hardworking as you."

Lisa sighed lightly: "At least I wouldn’t forget my brother’s birthday."

"My... birthday?" Roland was in a daze for a few seconds before he realized.

Today was his nineteenth birthday.

Nineteen is a truly delicate age.

To say he’s young, he’s nineteen.

To say he’s grown, he’s nineteen.

At nineteen before his transmigration, he was confidently sitting in a university classroom, battling brain-burning courses while books compiled from the wisdom of countless sages surrounded him.

At nineteen after transmigration, he wore the Knight Order Leader’s uniform, ready to match wits with the top politicians of this world.

It’s hard to say which battle was tougher, but the latter obviously had a lower margin for error.

After all, a failed exam could be retaken, but a failure in political games spelled the end.

At least before his transmigration, he wasn’t so busy as to forget his birthday, celebrating each one with his adoptive father and brothers from his dorm.

"Hey, really forgot?" Lisa thought Roland was pretending, but he actually did.

"Sorry." Roland used a smile to mask his feelings, instantly realizing what gift Sif had given him.

"It’s your birthday; there’s no need to apologize," Lisa’s gaze softened progressively.

"I’m not apologizing for the birthday, but for us soon having to leave here," Roland took the opportunity to steer the conversation.

"Ah, moving again? But it’s quite nice here."

Lisa’s gaze traveled slowly over every corner of the room, her emotions visibly dim, even her voice carrying some solitude.

Although the furniture was a gift from the Empress, all arrangements and tidying were handled by her alone.

Cleaning the two-story room was exhausting, but thinking the spacious and bright room would boost Roland’s mood, she had no complaints.

Had they just moved in, only to move again so soon?

"Did the Empress gift you a new mansion? But I prefer it here." Lisa sighed softly.

"No, we’re leaving the Imperial Capital."

Since the plan was about to start, Roland didn’t hide it any longer, explaining the outline to Lisa, and in the process revealing Sif’s true identity.

Lisa’s pupils constricted sharply as she murmured, "I always felt she had more poise than the icy Empress, seems it wasn’t an illusion."

Knowing Roland had truly befriended someone powerful this time, she sincerely felt happy for him.

But she quickly thought of her awkward position, and her smile froze.

Roland didn’t know what she was thinking and assumed she was reluctant to leave the comfortable life of the Imperial Capital, so he smiled and explained, "Sister, overseas, the sunshine is bright, and the scenery is better. You’ll definitely like it."

"I... you’re right, I will like it. Come look at the birthday gift I got you."

Lisa didn’t want to pass on her bad mood to Roland, so she smiled and handed him a gift box she took out from under the table with both hands.

Roland carefully took the box; inside, a beautiful silver-cased flip pocket watch lay quietly.

"This is a mechanical pocket watch from my hometown. I noticed your previous iron one was broken, so I had a new one customized for you. Now that you're the Knight Order Leader, you have a status to uphold, so this watch suits you well."

During this era, mechanical watches hadn't evolved to be worn on the wrist. High-quality pocket watches were often luxury items allocated to Nobility and wealthy merchants, not yet widespread.

Given Roland's status, a mere pocket watch wasn't a problem.

He had one in his jacket pocket already.

A pocket watch Sif gave him.

Sif's watch was more luxurious than Lisa's, its case alone was artistically crafted, worth a pretty sum, matched with the White Rose emblem of the Sussex Imperial Family, holding considerable market value.

Lisa's watch wasn't as expensive, but it was custom-made.

The back of the watch depicted a scene of two youngsters nestled under candlelight reading together.

Though in profile, faces obscured by hair strands, it was unmistakably Roland and Lisa.

When Roland's literacy was still limited, Lisa would hold a book and read to him.

Fortunately, his jacket had two pockets, perfectly fitting two watches.

Roland put away the watch, his gaze earnest, softly saying, "Thank you, this watch brings back many warm memories, it's the best birthday gift I've received today."

He wasn't lying; Sif hadn't mentioned her watch was a birthday gift.

Placing the watch in the right upper pocket of his jacket and buttoning it, Roland picked up a fork and knife, starting to battle the steak.

Lisa also picked up her knife and fork, watching Roland's chest pocket.

Seeing his right chest subtly bulging, she thought of the distance between the watch and his heart...

It seemed quite far.

Her gaze shifted to Roland's left chest, realizing there was actually a pocket there too.

About to remind Roland to store the watch in that pocket, she suddenly realized that pocket was similarly bulging.

Noticing a slight scent of alcohol on Roland, Lisa suddenly understood.

The fork and knife stopped mid-air, clattering onto the plate, splattering sauce.

"Sorry, slipped."

Lisa lowered her head slightly.

Even though she accepted Roland's arrangement silently and planned on helping him pursue Sif, seeing Sif closer to Roland's heart was still somewhat bittersweet.

Sigh, next time, she shouldn't squeeze so much lemon juice into the dish.

Expecting Sif to be a Count, she never imagined she was the Empress, it's simply...

Wait, the Empress?!

Although the Empress’s husband held the title of Prince, for the Empress’s dignity, he could only have one wife, and couldn’t even have public mistresses.

Did she intend to be a lifelong, hidden lover, even having children in Sif’s care?

Such a bleak prospect made Lisa’s vision dim slightly.

The knife and fork fell onto the plate again, making a crisp sound.

Roland looked up at Lisa, asking softly, "Sister, anything on your mind?"

"No."

"You blinked." Roland exposed her directly.

Lisa bit her lip, widening her eyes.

"A girl’s secrets are not for you to pry. I need to pack after dinner!"

"Yes, Sister Lisa!"

Roland exaggerated his response, his gentle voice lingering by Lisa’s ears.

"If it’s just thoughts, I won’t ask. Make sure to tell me if there’s trouble."

"Understood, eat quickly, or it’ll get cold."

Lisa bowed her head slightly, the foie gras on the fork melting in her mouth, the intertwining sweetness dissipating away the slight melancholy.

Perhaps everything beautiful in the world might be illusory, but food never disappoints.

Maybe that’s the source of the Chef’s extraordinary power.

As things stood, better eat well first.