Empress 170

Chapter 170: Don't Be So Extreme

Governor's Mansion, Count's Office.

The door was tightly closed. Roland and Stanley sat across from each other on the sofa, with Sif seated behind the desk.

Stanley was no ordinary person. He was once the Deputy Commander of the Imperial Knight Order and also managed a substantial merchant guild, which provided him with a convenient intelligence network.

He also knew that Count Sif was actually the Empress.

Since he was here for an interview out of respect for the Empress, naturally, Sif should take the main seat.

Roland handed the reins of today's conversation to Sif. He would not interfere too much; his only task was to keep a close watch on Stanley to prevent him from making a reckless move against Sif.

Although the possibility was almost zero, precaution was still necessary.

He could sense that Stanley's abilities had improved significantly compared to before, and his gaze had become more composed rather than sinister.

In such a confined space, Stanley still posed a certain threat.

Sif understood Roland's look.

Under the desk, her small fist was clenched, and her palm was slightly sweaty.

If Mr. Stanley were applying for another position, he might only be rated as an A-level candidate. But if he were applying for a position in the commercial field, he would be a potential S-level talent.

This was an important test Roland gave her.

If she could hold her ground in a confrontation with Stanley, then she also had S-level potential.

Faced with Stanley, whose expression was calm, eyes gentle, and gave no hint of a flaw, Sif picked up a teacup, took a small sip, and decided to ease into a greeting.

"Mr. Stanley, long time no see. How have you been lately?"

Roland almost couldn't hold back his laughter.

True to form, Sif. Such a beautiful girl, yet with such a sharp tongue.

Sure enough, Stanley's face, which was calm just a moment ago, changed slightly. Veins bulged on his forehead, and his hand, which had been casually resting on the sofa edge, unknowingly clenched.

If it weren't for the fact that the provided intelligence was useful enough, he would have already died in the Knight Order's prison.

Did she actually ask him how he was?

Stanley instinctively thought Sif was mocking him and looked up somewhat angrily.

Seeing Sif's eyes as clear as water, Stanley's just-ignited anger dissipated entirely.

As a successful businessman, he had met countless people of various kinds, but such clear eyes were something he was seeing for the first time.

He really couldn't get angry.

Because Her Majesty the Empress was simply asking if he was well.

He cleared his throat and said somewhat helplessly, "Thank you, Your Majesty, for pardoning my crimes and retaining part of my assets so I could safely arrive overseas."

"After the Knight Order's upheaval, my previous family completely severed ties with me. I can finally face reality and find my true family."

"The Lord Governor should know that in the pine forest, I once wanted to hit you to escape at the opportune moment. It wasn't that I didn't care about my family's survival; rather, they weren't my family."

At this point, Stanley's expression became unnatural, clearly not wanting to say more.

Sif stifled the urge to gossip and gently said, "Congratulations on reuniting with your family."

Perhaps thinking of how Stanley could find his family while she was an indisputable orphan, Sif's demeanor turned slightly melancholic.

Stanley was very savvy in social interactions and immediately saw through Sif's sense of longing.

He certainly couldn't offer consolation since the former Emperor theoretically wasn't dead yet.

Some things are better left unsaid, no matter how well-intentioned.

He cleared his throat and straightforwardly changed the subject, "Lord Count, can we begin the interview?"

If feeling down, then work.

You'll soon find work even more disheartening.

Indeed, Sif's sadness vanished instantly.

She regained her vigor and calmly asked, "Mr. Stanley, I want to hear your views on the current state of commercial development in the Governor's Territory, as well as your ideas for future development."

"My views?"

Stanley picked up the teacup, took a sip, and said something shocking, "What Governor's Territory? This place is almost becoming the territory of the Samaritans."

Sif frowned slightly and softly asked, "Mr. Stanley, please don't spread alarmist talk; I want to hear constructive remarks."

"Lord Count, you know about the Three Overseas Provinces, oh, sorry, they are now called the Governor's Territory. Do you know how much tax revenue is submitted to the Empire annually from here?"

"Last year, it was 390,000 pounds," Sif answered in an instant.

As the Vice Governor of the Governor's Territory, she was quite familiar with these basic numbers.

Stanley was clearly somewhat surprised.

He initially thought Sif was a puppet manipulated by Roland, a standard flower vase, but didn't expect her to be so familiar with the territory's situation.

This was good too. Serving an Empress with real power was better than bending to powerful ministers.

Considering Roland's decisive demeanor when turning hostile, Stanley still felt somewhat apprehensive.

An Empress with a simple mind was better.

Stanley thought silently.

Since the Empress was someone who understood, he went straight to the point:

"It’s not 390,000 pounds but actually a deficit. Last year, the Empire’s finances spent about 2.1 million pounds on maintaining stability, military expenses, and administrative costs for the Three Provinces. After deducting taxes, we are still running a deficit of over 1.7 million pounds."

Sif calmly said, "Of course, I know that. This is also the reason those short-sighted politicians clamor to abandon the overseas provinces."

Stanley’s lips curled slightly as he asked in a low voice, "Has Your Majesty ever considered why even the poorest provinces at home can guarantee a slight profit, yet the wealthy Three Overseas Provinces are bleeding the Empire dry?"

"Military expenses? Maintaining stability? Over the years, the Three Provinces have not been at war. While these expenses are considerable, they shouldn’t lead to deficits."

Sif’s breathing became a bit rapid as she asked in a deep voice, "Then why do you say?"

"It’s very simple; if rats get into the granary, naturally, the grain won’t be kept. I’m not talking about official corruption, but the Samarian Merchant Alliance engaging in monopolies under the protection of the officials."