Empress 211

Chapter 211: Petrified Elves and Elvenized Trees_2

This is a story from an unknown number of years ago, all the people involved have already perished, so thinking about it serves no purpose.

She sighed softly, continuing to recount the past.

After the Tree Elves gained the upper hand, they quickly seized control of the dialogue.

They forbade the consumption of plants because plants were their parents.

Roland was speechless.

Elves are nature’s favorites. While they don’t reject meat, eggs, and milk, their diet is light and primarily vegetarian.

"If they don’t allow us to eat plants, do they expect elves to eat meat? Five hundred million elves is not a small number, even if flora and fauna thrived in the Third Era, it wouldn’t be enough."

"No, animals can’t be eaten either."

Roland was amused, "If plants can’t be eaten, and animals can’t be eaten, do you eat mushrooms all day long?"

"Yes, after the Tree Elves seized power, for nearly three hundred years, our legal food was a variety of mushrooms."

Roland opened his mouth but suddenly found himself at a loss for words.

He realized that humans simply can’t compare to the stubborn elves when it comes to extremities.

"How is it enough to only eat mushrooms? I don’t believe these Tree Elves don’t eat anything."

"They indeed don’t eat. They dare to be so extreme because they have a trump card. Tree Elves that have been purified by Ancient Trees have evolved chloroplasts. They can absorb energy through photosynthesis like plants."

Roland: "..."

After a long time, he slowly asked, "Can photosynthesis sustain elves? I mean, is the energy sufficient?"

"Of course, it’s not enough. So these fools choose to stand still like plants, moving very little. Only when they find us maliciously acquiring extra food do they angrily uproot themselves to hunt us down."

"You cannot imagine the suffocating oppression. In the dense forests of the Third Era, every tree was their eyes. Whenever our people acquired food, even if it were a bird’s egg, they were considered heretical and subjected to execution by trees."

Roland didn’t ask what execution by trees meant, as it didn’t sound like a nice term.

He didn’t know how to comfort Elf Sylph.

This memory indeed was too painful.

He couldn’t even tell if it was trees turning into elves or elves turning into trees.

But it was a bit too extreme.

Elf Sylph bit her lip and said: "Execution by trees is binding my fellows to a post and then sowing fast-growing tree seeds inside their bodies. As the seeds take root and sprout, the inflicted are drained into a mummy, and a grotesque punitive tree grows strong. At most, there were hundreds of thousands of punitive trees just near the royal city."

Roland’s face changed slightly.

It was indeed a horrifying and cruel method.

As the Human Race’s greatest enemy is the Human Race, so is it with the Elves.

The topic was truly heavy, and Roland felt suffocated, so he casually asked, "With Tree Elves being so tyrannical, didn’t the Earth Spirits take the chance to attack?"

"No, because they were also in a civil war."

Elf Sylph’s lips displayed a hint of disdain, "Their reasons for civil war were even more absurd than ours. As you surely know, the Earth Spirit is divided internally into two branches: the Long-haired Earth Spirit and the Hairless Earth Spirit, but both are the descendants of Titans; they are actually one family."

"They used ’Naked Ape’ and ’Yehu’ as derogatory names for each other and launched a brutal civil war."

Elf Sylph softly said, "The civil war between the Tree Elves and Blood Elves can somewhat be understood; the civil war between the Long-haired Earth Spirit and Hairless Earth Spirit I completely fail to understand."

"It’s not surprising, resources ran out."

Roland calmly said, "According to ancient texts, with climate changes, the once-dense forests are gradually turning into scattered woodlands, with less and less food. This is the reason for the conflicts between the Naked Ape and Yehu, and also the root of the conflict between the Tree Elves and Blood Elves."

"Because of dwindling resources, not everyone could maintain their original standard of living. Tree Elves chose to align with plants, naturally fearing that after losing their mobility, they’d be treated as food by you. Naked Apes and Yehus directly vied for living space and resources."

Elf Sylph’s eyes widened, looking at Roland in disbelief, her chest heaving with shock.

Seeing her astonished expression, Roland was puzzled and asked, "Has no one thought in this direction all these years?"

Elf Sylph fell silent, and after a long time, she slowly said, "Creativity and innovative thinking are not our race’s forte. The classics of the sages have never written about the kin killing each other due to resource scarcity."

That’s because the Elves’ ancestors lived in such abundant conditions!

Such events have been recorded countless times in human history.

One can only say the rich resources of the Third Era protected Elves and Earth Spirits too well.

No wonder they were utterly defeated before the Divine Punishment Legion, powerless to resist.

In contrast, the Magic Empire, whose paper strength was inferior to theirs, achieved a tragic victory over the Divine Punishment Legion, preserving a spark.

The Magic Empire, after all, is an excellent representative of the Human Race.

Creation and courage are the immortal songs of triumph for humans over other wise races.

Of course, he absolutely wouldn’t say these words out loud.

Although he didn’t say it, Elf Sylph already vaguely saw the expression in Roland’s eyes.

She didn’t refute, since it was the truth.

With a somewhat somber tone, she finished telling the last piece of history before the downfall of the Elf Race.

With the Tree Elves' continuous oppression of the Blood Elves, the Blood Elves exploded completely.

They chose to counter with magic, extremity against extremity, cruelty against cruelty.

They injected their blood into tall plants with yet unused wisdom, creating feral trees that consumed Ancient Trees as nourishment.

These trees were called Tree Demons.

So, that's how Tree Demons originated.

The longest-living trees, and the most primitive in every aspect, the ginkgo, were chosen by the Blood Elves to become vengeful Tree Demons.

Blood Elves sacrificed their flesh and blood, entrusted their souls to these tall trees, enabling the ginkgo to possess wisdom, becoming blades of rebellion.

In the forest, brutal Tree Demons voraciously consumed those Ancient Trees that had gained wisdom but couldn't move, treating Tree Elves as nutrients.

Hearing this scene, Roland's lips twitched a bit.

Imagining the scant forests standing up to gnaw at each other, he didn't know what to say for a moment.

Though the Blood Elves' fighting will was resolute, the number of Tree Elves was overwhelming, thus Blood Elves were at a disadvantage in the war.

Seeing the Elf Race about to be wiped out by a Mysterious Race, Elf King Yaslan sacrificed himself, transforming into seven Flower Seas to protect his people.

"Flower Seas are not flowers, nor are they seas, but blood pools formed by the blood of the people."

"Each clansman who died in battle would boost the power of the Flower Seas. With the support of the Flower Seas, we won, but the cost was unimaginable."

The war concluded in a tragic victory for the Blood Elves.

After this legitimate contention, the Blood Elf population reduced to less than two million.

To avoid disaster reoccurrences, all records about Tree Elves were destroyed, and topics related to Tree Elves became absolutely taboo.

This was why Roland’s heritage had no records of Tree Elves.

The war had another consequence, all Ancient Trees died, and the World Tree was burned completely by the endless flames kindled by enraged Blood Elves.

The Elf Race lost its barrier.

Fortunately, the Earth Spirits also bled rivers, and couldn’t invade.

While the elves were recuperating, the Barbarians, whom they looked down upon, invaded the fertile centerlands, seizing living space.

For survival, the Blood Elves and Tree Demons fought as they retreated to the original homeland of the Elf Race.

As the seven Flower Seas gradually withered and fell, the elves became debilitated.

By the time the Final Return Day arrived, the Divine Punishment Legion came as scheduled.

Elf Sylph laughed self-deprecatingly, "The Divine Punishment Legion descended on us as if we had a Tier One demigod level powerhouse. This wasn't divine punishment, but a massacre."

"The unsatiated Divine Punishment Legion turned its wrath onto other races. The Barbarians who occupied our homeland, and the Earth Spirits regaining vitality, were also targeted by the Divine Punishment Legion."

"We came from the forest and perished in the wasteland. This is the entirety of the Third Era's history."

After saying this, Elf Sylph seemed to have exhausted all her energy, bowing down slowly, lying by the Flower Sea, quietly falling asleep.

Before she fell asleep, she subconsciously drew back her feet, covering them with her dress.

Roland did not disturb her, only leaving silently.

This storytelling consumed the little energy Elf Sylph had left, and she had just engraved all her memories into Roland's mind through a special spell, before drifting into sleep.

Rest well.

I will surely awaken you.

Chapter 212: Elves Can Burn, But I Can't?

The era of the Elves has come to an end.

The era of the Earth Spirits has also ended.

Yet, the Tree Demons from their era have been resurrected three epochs later.

Roland vaguely felt that this must be related to the approaching day of return.

Knowing the background of these Tree Demons, Roland conceived a bold idea. Since these Tree Demons are also striving for survival, is reconciliation possible?

Of course, what he wanted wasn’t allies, but loyal henchmen.

If negotiations fall through, then burn them!

The Tree Demons indeed contributed to the Elf Race, but what does that have to do with him?

If the Tree Demons obstruct his interests, he would burn the trees without hesitation.

The Blood Elves who loved nature once angrily burned the World Tree.

If the Elves could burn it, why couldn’t he?

When Roland woke up, the rising morning light just began to spill into the room.

As he got up and dressed, Lisa, who was so excited she hadn’t slept all night, rushed in.

"I did it, I did it!"

"Congratulations, sister. What’s your advancement ability?"

Lisa proudly held her head high, arms crossed over her chest, face full of pride.

"I am now a Tier Eight [Temperature Control Apprentice], with the special ability of advanced flame control."

To verify her words, Lisa spread her arms, slowly closing them, and a flame appeared out of thin air between her palms.

She skillfully manipulated the flame, showing off by spelling Roland’s and her own names with it.

As her fingertips danced, the flame names merged and returned to her palm.

Being her first attempt at precise control, the high temperature of the flame made Lisa’s cheeks slightly hot, almost burning her palms.

Fortunately, she didn’t make a fool of herself.

Applause sounded, and Roland sincerely offered words of praise.

"That’s amazing. Most of the Apprentice Mages in the Magic Association can’t do this."

"This is just technique. If we were outside, I could show you the power of the flames."

Lisa seemed somewhat dissatisfied with Roland’s comparison, wanting to drag Roland outside to fiercely demonstrate the power of the flame.

Roland smiled and asked, "If it’s the trees of the whole valley, can they be burned down?"

Lisa was slightly taken aback, instantly understanding Roland’s intention.

She felt a bit of regret, as the valley had many ingredients.

Regret aside, she wouldn’t let it affect Roland’s decision.

If they had to burn, then they’d burn thoroughly.

She nodded solemnly, "Of course, no problem, it’s just a pity about this garden. I had many dishes planned for you all."

"Nothing to regret, your flames are a weapon to force their submission. Only a few trees in the valley may have gained wisdom, those wild vegetables aren’t their companions."

Lisa understood the implication in Roland’s words.

He intended to make the Tree Demons compromise.

After all, Tree Demons don’t have legs; no matter how strong, it’s useless.

Moreover, Roland now had a thorough understanding of their background, no longer risking being nearly killed by antidotes.

Without delay, Roland went to Norton’s lab to restock on high explosive incendiary bombs, prepared kerosene to ignite the trees, and called upon a squad of cavalry to set out.

Of course, Count Sif, who personally wanted revenge, certainly couldn’t be left behind.

She donned armor, prepared various potions and poisons, mounted her horse, and proudly rode at the front of the troop.

The group arrived at the valley.

Under Roland’s arrangements, the cavalry grabbed shovels and hoes, starting to dig firebreak lines outside the valley.

Not necessarily needed, but maximum pressure must be applied.

With preparations complete, Roland, Sif, and Lisa entered the valley.

As soon as they entered the valley, he unscrewed the oil can in his hand, pouring kerosene into the densest areas of trees.

The tallest tree in the valley, the Golden Ginkgo, was naturally not spared.

Despite its appearance during the day looking only like a red pine.

Catching the agitation in the air and seeing the flame dancing on Lisa’s palm, the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon knew the end was near and decided not to pretend anymore.

Its angry voice slowly echoed.

"Despicable humans, since you want to kill us, let’s perish together! Foolish human, your mistake was entering the valley in person, I will never spare you!"

Thorny spikes emerged from the ground beneath Roland.

But Roland was prepared, lifting his specially made iron-soled boot, he stomped heavily.

With the Elf Sylph providing information, he knew the weakness of the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon better than they did themselves.

His boots were enhanced with special attacking compounds prepared for the Tree Demons.

"Aaaah!!!"

The withering-like pain caused the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon to feel dizzy.

Despicable human, how could this be?

The Tree Demon furiously swayed its branches, countless leaves fell like raindrops.

Roland and others raised custom iron umbrellas, spinning them to deflect the rain of leaves.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon was stunned.

Its revival was too brief, the growth rings recalculated from zero, making it far weaker than at its peak. Even with growth rings over a hundred, Roland wouldn’t be able to handle it this way.

It had once been a great tree with three hundred thousand rings, but now it only had seventy-five.

With ample nutrients and a few decades of time, it could return to its peak state.

But time was not on its side.

Today was the day of its end.

"I hate this so much!"

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon cried out in pain, blood oozing down its trunk.

"Don’t do anything foolish!"

Roland knew what this guy wanted to do and shouted loudly, "You were comrades of the Blood Elves, and I am the only surviving inheritor of the Blood Elves; we shouldn’t be enemies!"

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon paused, its voice sounded weak.

"What, what did you say?"

"Are you familiar with the Grand General of the Elf Race, the one who resembles her deeply!"

At Roland’s signal, Sif removed her masked armor, revealing a sweet smile.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon looked at Sif in a daze, almost unable to believe its eyes.

"Impossible, absolutely impossible! The Grand General, she..."

"I was given a vision of her by chance; she wanted me to take care of you. We are friends and shouldn’t kill each other!"

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon fell silent.

Instinctively, it didn’t want to trust the despicable human before it.

But he could indeed mention key terms like the inheritor, Blood Elf, and Grand General; he must be informed.

It asked hauntingly, "How is the Grand General now?"

"She has completely died, and cannot be resurrected for the time being."

Though knowing this was the outcome, the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon couldn’t help but sob at Roland’s declaration.

"Impossible, absolutely impossible, the Grand General was invincible, how could she die!"

Faced with the Tree Demon’s outcry, Roland calmly said, "Divine retribution has descended, all beings are equal, nothing is impossible."

The Tree Demon emitted a sorrowful wail.

After an uncertain amount of time, it let out a heavy sigh.

"Human, when the day of final return comes, all life will meet their end. Your scheming is pointless, it’s all in vain."

"Whether it’s in vain is not for you to decide, but me!"

Having said the good words, it was time to talk business.

"Submit to me, or face death."

Chapter 213: Pinky Promise

Under Roland’s threats, the tree demons surrendered.

Survival or death, there was no choice.

Roland’s demands were harsh, requiring the signing of a master-servant contract, with the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon entirely obedient to Roland’s orders.

But Roland also retained a sliver of hope for it, not letting it fall into despair.

As long as the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon could get itself out of this valley by its own ability, Roland would dissolve the contract and give it freedom.

With the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon's current strength, it would take decades to recover to its peak, and at least ten thousand years to evolve the ability to walk.

Ten thousand years was too far away; Roland was lazy to think that far ahead.

At least for now, the tree demon was his loyal servant.

With the contract signed, Roland felt at ease, and after asking the Golden Tree Demon a few questions, he had it switch to Red Pine Wood Form.

Besides the Golden Tree Demon, there were dozens of smaller tree demons in the valley, with very weak powers, negligible.

These Pine and Cypress Tree Demons had low intelligence but very strong force.

Each tree demon could easily lift over a ton, while some larger tree demons could lift more than five tons.

Roland had a preliminary plan on how to exploit these tree demons.

He did not intend to use them for fighting.

Tree demons couldn't leave the valley, and even if they could walk, their clumsiness was a fatal flaw.

Very strong, right?

Capable of carrying and hitting, right?

Go have a good discussion with the artillery.

After much thought, Roland planned to build a munitions factory here.

To leverage the tremendous strength of tree demons to replace some mechanical functions.

Create assembly lines in the valley, squeezing every bit of effort from these tireless tree demons.

Seeing Roland's excited yet cunning smile, the Golden Tree Demon felt a little uneasy, but it had no choice.

Even if it didn't care about its own life, these children were still very young.

Let them bask more in the sunlight.

Even if divine punishment would eventually come, there was still plenty of time to enjoy before that.

Actually, Roland's conditions weren't that harsh.

Letting them bask in the sunlight during the day.

At night, they had to work hard for Roland.

Though unable to figure out what tricks Roland might pull as a cunning guy, he always felt a chilly breeze blowing behind him.

After all humans left, the Golden Tree Demon sighed at the other young tree demons:

"Children, spread your branches and leaves, and bask in the sunlight to your heart’s content. This is our last enjoyment."

Leaving the valley, Lisa looked at Roland and asked curiously: "Roland, is that dream-telling elf you mentioned real?"

"Of course it’s fake, how can there be such a coincidence."

"Then how do you know there’s an Elf Grand General who looks very similar to Sif?" Lisa asked full of doubt.

Just as Roland was pondering how to weave a tale, Sif helped him out.

"It’s not strange, to our eyes, trees of the same kind look similar. To these trees, elf females looking alike is also normal."

Lisa looked suspiciously at Roland, then at the calm expression of Sif, feeling something strange.

These two definitely had something hidden from her.

But Sif’s sincere expression made it hard for her to question.

She had to dispel her worries and start thinking about what to eat for lunch.

Returning to the Governor’s Mansion, after seeing Lisa leave, Sif hurriedly grabbed Roland’s wrist and rushed into a small study, locking the door.

"We should be honest between us, shouldn’t we?"

"Of course, but everyone has things they’re not comfortable sharing. Like your weight, would you like to tell me?"

"Certainly, my weight is 49 kg, very healthy relative to my height. Neither fat nor thin."

"Roland, if it’s really inconvenient, then don’t say it, but do not deceive me. But I am the [Elf Princess], and you are the [Inheritor] of the Elf Race, there are matters I should know."

Looking at Sif’s clear eyes, Roland raised his hands.

"I met an elf in a dream who looks very much like you; she’s the Elf Race’s Grand General. She shared many things about the tree demons with me."

Roland briefly recounted the dream elf’s story.

But he didn’t mention the Flower Sea Dream Realm’s difference from ordinary dreams.

This wasn’t concealment but confidentiality.

The meeting in a dream and the encounter in the Flower Sea Dream Realm were vastly different.

He really didn’t wish anyone to know about Elf Sylph.

Roland shared the newly acquired knowledge with Sif.

The bloody and fierce war nearly made Sif forget that Roland had mentioned an Elf Race Grand General who looked very similar to her, but after Roland finished the story, she remembered.

She lowered her head and asked gloomily: "Did you fall in love with that beautiful elf in your dream, and therefore treat me differently because I resemble her?"

Roland suddenly became alert.

He hasn’t been in love and doesn’t understand girls, but he could sense the tremble under Sif’s calm tone.

At least he knew Sif well.

She is fragile yet proud.

She is unique.

She absolutely wouldn’t become anyone’s substitute.

Just as Elf Sylph had stated, either choose her first or have no choice at all.

If now he said the wrong thing, their previously perfect mutual trust would develop cracks.

He shouted: "You’re human, she’s an elf, you are completely different."

"You’re the most beautiful girl in my heart, without exception. Even if that Elf Grand General stood here, it’d be the same."

"I haven’t fallen in love with the elf from the Flower Sea, and you’re not anyone’s replacement; you’re my best friend, Sif."

Roland awkwardly laughed, tugging at a strand of hair by his ear:

"I’m not good at expressing, but you surely understand me. Of course, you can also consider me approaching you as wanting to improve."

Want to improve, right?

Sif suddenly recalled what Teacher Wald had said.

Once Roland assists her in reclaiming imperial authority, their relationship would change.

Chapter 214: Pinky Swear (Part 2)

The most difficult thing is to be a power minister who holds all the authority.

You either usurp the throne or die disgraced.

Very few power ministers can land safely, ending well.

Unless you give him a title, give him land, so that his descendants can enjoy generous treatment.

The credit for establishing and seizing power is too great, even a hereditary duke is somewhat insufficient.

Teacher Wald said it must be higher than a duke.

At the time, she naturally thought it was a grand duke like the Jinquehua family, but now she understands.

She was really naive, truly.

Roland and she are very close, trusting each other, and no matter what title Roland is given, there will be no problem between them.

But what about the next generation?

The descendants of a grand duke may not be as loyal as the grand duke himself.

After she and Roland die, will Roland's descendants have other ideas?

The Grand Dukes of Sussex already have a status and power similar to the King, having independent financial and military authority, making them potential traitors.

Granting Roland the title of Grand Duke of the Three Overseas Provinces is practically digging a pit for future generations.

There is only one solution.

Make Roland a Prince.

Her children will be his children; why differentiate between them?

Was this what Teacher Wald meant?!

Sif suddenly realized, her cheeks instantly turned as red as the evening sky.

She remembered the moment of near-death last night.

At that time, her brief life quickly flashed before her eyes.

Apart from childhood memories, there was only Roland, Roland, Roland.

Before meeting Roland, her life was carefree but also boring.

Roland holds a special meaning for her.

She originally thought it surpassed everything as friendship, but last night she realized.

There is no pure friendship between men and women unless there's a matter of sexual orientation or appearance.

People always fail to see their own intentions unless something major happens.

Last night, when Sif almost died, she understood her own heart.

She secretly glanced at Roland, observing his calm eyes, somewhat unsure.

Does Roland like her?

He should like her; after all, the Magic Mirror said she was the most beautiful girl in the world.

But there is a Lisa by his side.

They grew up together, familiar with each other, with a solid emotional foundation.

Sif felt a bit flustered.

She knew that Lisa held a very special place in Roland's heart, and they often interacted very intimately.

Could it be that the person Roland loves is her?

Sif's heart was in turmoil.

What to do?

She believed that in many ways she was better than Lisa, but Lisa outshone her in many other ways.

Even if Roland had ninety-nine reasons to choose her, he also had one reason to choose Lisa: their strong emotional foundation.

If not for what happened last night, Sif wouldn't think too much and would even pretend to graciously bless Roland.

But now she couldn't.

No one will she let take her place!

Seeing Roland's slightly surprised expression, Sif realized she had been daydreaming for too long. Just as she was about to speak, she forgot what Roland just said and could only stick out her tongue slightly, asking softly:

"What did you say just now?"

"I said, you are not a substitute for anyone. Being good to you is both helping a friend and wanting to improve myself."

Roland looked sincerely at Sif, speaking calmly.

He was trying to divert Sif's attention.

He could sense Sif's heart racing.

Obviously, his explanation was not perfect, Sif was still mindful, even quite angry.

He could understand Sif.

No matter how he explained it, the fact that the Elf Grand General in the dream resembled Sif could easily cause misunderstandings.

He felt a bit guilty.

He had a special liking for the Elf Sylph in the dream, but the Elf only had awareness left, his feelings for her were simple, he felt happy in the Flower Sea, and also hoped she was happy.

The girl he likes is Sif.

But he couldn't say it now.

The shadow of the Elf Grand General still loomed over Sif, and confessing his feelings now would lack purity of motive.

It's better to follow Sister Lisa's advice and help Sif achieve her dreams.

Time reveals the truth, she will understand one day.

Roland's words made Sif's heart beat even faster.

Want to improve?

He is already the Captain of the Imperial Knight Order, and the Governor, and he has clearly stated he doesn't want to be the Chief Minister, intending to hand over the position to Alben.

If not for power, then it's for a title.

The problem goes back to the beginning.

The most suitable title higher than a duke is a prince!

But she couldn’t bring it up.

If in Roland’s heart Lisa is the beloved and she is just a friend, can she still grant him the title of prince?

Forcibly granting the title of prince would taint it.

With Roland’s character, even if he reluctantly accepts, he wouldn’t be happy.

What to do? Who can save poor Sif?

Sif felt a bit lost.

She couldn’t confess now, could she?

If the one Roland loves is Lisa, a rash confession would pressure Roland into becoming a scoundrel.

Maybe in others’ eyes, Roland might be a complete jerk, but in her heart, he is the best.

She absolutely didn’t want Roland to resent her.

Just as the air was about to solidify, Sif finally woke up from her confusion.

"Roland, considering your accomplishments, even a duke title seems insufficient. Rest assured, I certainly won’t shortchange you, and I’ll definitely give you a satisfactory outcome!"

Roland almost grabbed Sif’s hand to express his eternal understanding.

Does he want a duke? He wants to be a prince!

But he couldn’t say it now.

He’ll wait until his achievements leave no choice but the title of prince.

"I..."

"I..."

Both spoke at the same time, then both stopped.

"You first!"

"You first!"

Their eyes met, and they both laughed.

"Alright, I’ll go first then."

This time, Sif didn’t stand on ceremony, slightly embarrassed, she lowered her head and softly said:

"Roland, the only people I can rely on are you and Teacher Wald. The teacher is getting old and not in good health. I couldn’t bear to let him suffer at sea this time, so you’re the only one accompanying me."

"We are friends, and also monarch and subject, there’s no need to be so distant." Roland replied modestly.

"I don’t want to be monarch and subject with you!"

Sif’s tone suddenly became agitated, and she quickly realized her blunder, hurriedly making amends:

"What I mean is, let’s never become those kinds of monarch and subject who plot against and guard against each other, okay?"

"Okay!"

"Can you promise me something?"

Sif’s heart was pounding fiercely.

Roland was also very nervous; the atmosphere today was peculiar, making his heart race.

Though Sif trusted him greatly, she was still a monarch with real power, would she bear any resentment if he kept making decisions for her?

He didn’t want Sif to just grit her teeth and bear it.

He was very curious about what Sif wanted from him.

"You, are you nineteen this year?"

"Yes." Roland felt a little speechless; how could someone who gave him a gold pocket watch on his birthday not know his age?

"Roland, can you refrain from considering marriage before you help me regain power?"

"Ah?"

Roland was dumbfounded.

What kind of request is this?

He racked his brains but couldn’t figure out the situation.

Girls’ thoughts are really unpredictable.

Sif, seeing Roland in a daze, felt her heart trembling slightly.

His relationship with Lisa was indeed complex!

She knew it; when is a younger brother ever supposed to spend hours at a sister’s room late at night?

Non-biological siblings are too susceptible to trouble.

"What I mean is, you’re still young, don’t rush into making decisions."

"In return, I will find you a bride of noble identity and outstanding beauty. Even if it’s a princess from some country, I will help you win her over."

"Really?"

Roland’s heart began to race.

Seeing Roland didn’t directly refuse, Sif’s heart almost jumped out of her throat.

Aha, his love for Lisa isn’t that strong after all.

Is this what men are like?

This is good, too; if he were resolute, how could he become a prince?

"Of course, it’s a promise from the Empress of the Sussex Empire!" Sif’s voice trembled slightly.

"A monarch’s word is law!"

Roland quickly extended his right pinky finger.

Though she didn’t know what this mysterious gesture was, Sif imitated and extended her slender pinky finger.

Their pinkies hooked together.

They were thinking of the same thing.

But they both believed the other was not thinking of the same thing.

So they both chose to use a promise to bind each other, ensuring their well-intended arrangements are "obliged" to be accepted.

Pinky swear.

Roland let out a breath.

Great, when the time comes, he will request the Empress of Sussex to become his wife, a monarch’s word is law, no backing out!

Sif let out a breath.

Great, when the time comes, she will make the Empress of Sussex his wife, a pinky swear, no backing out!

Chapter 215: Sif’s Troubles

Governor’s Mansion small dining room, four dishes and a soup, accompanied by beautiful women.

Roland’s mood was exceptionally delightful.

The beauty accompanying him at this moment was not Sif, but Lisa.

Seeing the unmistakable smile on his lips, Lisa couldn’t hold back her words.

"Why do you keep smiling?"

"Oh, nothing, just thought of something happy." Roland casually replied.

Sister Lisa seemed a bit absent-minded, and the quality of the food was not good; the long-unseen steak was overcooked.

But Roland didn’t mind.

Seeing the smile in Roland’s eyes, Lisa couldn’t help but ask, "Roland, was it true that the elf you saw in your dream looked like Sif?"

"It’s true."

"So you’re eyeing Sif based on the standard of your dream lover?" Lisa also noticed the food was poorly prepared today, with too much vinegar accidentally added.

"Don’t be ridiculous, am I such a shallow person?" Roland shook his head with a smile.

"Yet you’re still smiling." Lisa tasted the steak, frowning slightly, feeling an urge to dump all the food and start over.

"Mr. William is coming." Roland knew if the topic continued, it would only be filled with lies and deceit, so he subtly changed the subject.

"William?"

Lisa was stunned for a while before recalling this was the Chief Minister of the Imperial Cabinet, responsible for many affairs like the Empire’s foreign and domestic policies.

"I just got word that the international summit discussing the fate of the Val City State will be held here, and Mr. William will attend the meeting as our country’s plenipotentiary representative."

"Since it’s about the fate of Val City State, why not hold it on the Val Lake Shore?" Lisa’s eyes were full of confusion.

"The fate of Val City doesn’t have to be decided in Val City. Politics is too complicated, just don’t ask, eat."

If the fate of the Sudent Zone can be decided in Munich, naturally the fate of the Val City State can be decided in Hansa.

There is nothing new under the sun.

Lisa obediently shut her mouth, picked up the knife and fork, and began eating silently.

Roland was right; politics was an area beyond her knowledge, no need to concern herself too much.

Since an international conference was to be held, naturally, the meeting preparations had to be thorough.

As the Chief Logistics Officer, she was going to be busy.

As Lisa thought about how to get busy next, she forgot all the questions she planned to ask before.

Seeing Lisa not continuing to press for answers, Roland also breathed a sigh of relief.

He didn’t want to hide things from his sister, but some things really can’t be spoken of until they’re done.

Exchanging merits for the title of Prince, how could he speak of such a matter carelessly?

...

Empress’s Palace, bedchamber.

Sif lay on the bed, covering herself with a quilt, trying hard not to let her laughter spill out.

Seeing Sif wriggling irregularly under the velvet blanket, the Magic Mirror couldn’t help but ask:

"Master, do you have something on your mind? I might not be able to offer any advice, but I can certainly be a listener."

"I’m fine, I’m great."

Sif lifted the blanket, and her soft voice floated over.

"Magic Mirror, Magic Mirror, who is the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"Of course, it’s you, my master."

"What’s my score today?"

"100," the Magic Mirror replied calmly.

"Hey? It’s usually 99, occasionally 90, but today it’s a perfect score?"

Sif came to the mirror in surprise, looking at herself in it.

Her appearance was as it always was, with a bit more redness due to joy, indeed a bit prettier than usual.

"What about that woman?"

"She ranks second, 97."

"And Lisa?"

"Twenty-first, 87."

Sif was stupefied for a moment, puzzled, "How did she rise so fast?"

She sees Lisa every day; though beautiful, is it that exaggerated?

"Maybe she is also in as good a mood as you are."

After a few seconds pause, Sif’s tone gradually calmed, and she softly asked, "If she is the benchmark at 60, what’s my score?"

"99,"

Magic Mirror calmly said, "Master, you are scored 99 because the scoring ceiling is only so high; she scores 87 because she happens to be 87."

Once again, Sif’s expression was dominated by joy.

The Magic Mirror indeed is a transcendent presence with divine artifact characteristics—a hallmark of fairness.

Carefully admiring the perfect score girl in the mirror, Sif nodded in satisfaction and slowly asked:

"Magic Mirror, have you ever seen pure love?"

"Never."

A very high-quality answer.

"You’ve followed quite a few noble women, not once?"

Magic Mirror answered honestly, "Master, you ought to know, noble women often have no destiny with pure love."

Sif’s expression slightly changed.

The Magic Mirror was right.

For noble women, marriage is often a part of political transactions.

The basis for alliances between countries is mutual interests, with the highest form being marriage.

Even as a Princess or even an Empress, marriages are beyond their control.

Sif’s mood was somewhat low, and she softly asked, "Is there really none?"

"It depends on how you define love."

The Magic Mirror calmly said, "Absolutely pure love only exists in novels. If you lower the standards, as long as you can marry the person you like, support each other faithfully, then..."

Sif’s eyes lit up.

The Magic Mirror is York Clan’s heirloom treasure, accompanying the family ancestor for many years, and the people it followed were at least princesses in rank.

Before following the York Clan, it even followed some special-status women during the Magic Empire.

It records the lives of countless noble women.

If it says there is, then there must be...

"Almost none," the Magic Mirror calmly said.

"Almost none?" Sif was stunned.

"Yes, just say that the human tendency to like the new and dislike the old leaves me speechless. Most of the women I’ve followed were quite beautiful in appearance, though not as beautiful as you, many still scored over 80."

"Even women of such noble status, well-educated and beautiful, cannot find true love?"

Sif was somewhat shocked, but she didn’t rush to retort; she listened quietly instead.

"Yes." The Magic Mirror responded directly.

Sif clenched the silk handkerchief in her hand, twisting it into a ball.

Seeing Sif remain silent, the Magic Mirror continued, "I have witnessed more than once how princesses brought men other than their husbands home, while their husbands seldom came by, and even in front of me..."

"Shut up!"

Sif interrupted the Magic Mirror before it could start recounting the R-rated story.

"I would never do that!"

The Magic Mirror obediently shut its mouth.

It couldn’t quite understand why Sif was so agitated, as it hadn’t said that she would do such things.

Seeing Sif silent for a long time, it tried to console her, "Master, it’s too early for you to think about these things; after all, you haven’t even found love, let alone marriage."

"Magic Mirror, shut up!"

This time, Sif was genuinely angry.

The Magic Mirror’s words had hurt her.

Unlike other princesses who behaved wantonly, she certainly wouldn't act so unwisely, so the previous comments from the Magic Mirror merely displeased her without making her particularly angry.

Others are others, she is herself.

But the last bit of consolation from the Magic Mirror triggered her intense anger.

Were it not for the fact that the Magic Mirror couldn't be destroyed, she might have grabbed the Hammer to strike it.

She stormed out towards the door in a fury.

"William will arrive in Hansa this afternoon, and you're responsible for welcoming him. Just leave the diplomatic negotiations to him without interference."

Sif walked towards the library.

The library at the Governor's Mansion housed many collections from the old Hansa Kingdom, perhaps holding the answers about love.

After all, the Magic Mirror was just a broken mirror that knew nothing.

Upon leaving the Palace, she resumed her identity as Count Sif.

The library director, not expecting a visit from the Count, greeted her very hospitably.

"Lord Count, why have you personally come? If there's any book you want to read, just send a message through a servant and I'll personally select books for you and have them delivered."

Seeing the director’s eager demeanor, Sif softly asked, "Are you well-acquainted with the library’s collection?"

"Of course, the Hansa Library was founded in Magic New Calendar 917, expanding through three dynasties in the Hansa Kingdom and surviving through the devastations of war. It currently houses 170,000 volumes, particularly rich in art books."

"Art books? Do you have... those on love?"

The director’s lips curled into an exaggerated smile, "Lord Count, the most celebrated theme in art books is never heroism but love."

Sif’s eyes lit up.

The director indeed understood art.

Given that the Lord Count wanted to read about love, the director dared not delay.

He selected a collection of poetry, a collection of essays, an anthology of short stories, and the novels "The Woes of Young Vina" and "Blood-soaked Rose."

Sif didn’t return to the Palace, nor did she go to the main building of the Governor’s Mansion.

Feeling somewhat restless, she didn’t feel like working today.

Seeing her unease, the director thoughtfully suggested the third floor of the library for reading.

"Lord Count, it’s very quiet there, and you won’t be disturbed during your reading."

"Thank you."

Following the director’s guidance, Sif sat by a window, brewed a pot of tea, and in the aroma of the tea, opened the books to search for accounts of love in literary arts.

The poetry was beautiful, and she liked it a lot.

But poetry is like a heavily adorned woman — elegant but unreal.

She wasn’t looking for these.

The essays were similar.

Sif hesitated momentarily over the other two novels and chose the one with a more specific name: "The Woes of Young Vina."

Young Vina was the daughter of a Hereditary Duke, of noble birth, well protected since childhood but rarely had the chance to interact with peers of the opposite sex.

With her father’s meticulous care, she hardly had any opportunity to speak much with young men.

Such a girl raised in that manner was absolutely pure.

This was Vina’s father’s obsession.

Indeed, she was pure, pure to the point of being naïve, Sif silently mocked in her heart.

Young Vina’s background was similar to hers, giving Sif more anticipation.

If Vina could find sweet love, so can she.

During an outing, Vina was rescued by a handsome young man named Bertie, and fell in love at first sight.

Then came a wondrous yet unrealistic love story.

The novel was penned by the renowned Weimar Federation Literary Scholar, Faust.

Though the Odin People were less advanced in visual arts, they excelled in music and literature.

With elegant prose, the novel chronicled the love of a young boy and girl.

Vina and Bertie were ready to give everything for each other.

Even their lives.

Young Vina and young Bertie adventured together, watched stars back-to-back under the bright moonlight, confiding in each other.

However, when the young girl eagerly awaited Bertie's confession, Bertie remorsefully admitted he already had someone he fancied, a childhood neighbor.

Their love was as beautiful as a dream, but when morning came, the dream ended, and he had to return home.

Sif's heart stopped like the young Vina in the book.

A love that arrived suddenly and left even more abruptly.

Vina left Bertie angrily.

Since he loved another, she wouldn’t linger.

Time passed quickly.

Vina’s father arranged a well-matched marriage for her with another young Duke.

Years went by and Vina’s affluent life was dull and unexciting.

Nostalgic for her adventurous days, she took a carriage under the guise of a journey to revisit those cherished memories.

In the place where she met Bertie long ago, she reminisced about the beautiful past and impulsively sought out Bertie.

She just wanted to see him once and see what kind of person he had fallen for.

But what she heard was devastating news.

Bertie was dead.

He never had a beloved partner.

After learning of her identity, Bertie’s uncle handed Vina, whose feelings were mixed, a letter Bertie had left behind.

In the letter, Bertie confessed his love to Vina.

He adored the beautiful and cheerful Vina but was aware of the gulf between commoners and nobility, choosing to leave silently so his love wouldn’t be tainted by the world.

There was no childhood sweetheart; he died a lonely boy.

Sif was moved to tears by the story of love separated by life and death, choking up several times.

But after her tears dried, a sudden realization hit her.

While there is a gulf between nobility and commoners, it’s not impossible to bridge.

If Bertie had opted for a marriage where he joined her family, he could’ve married Vina, adopting her family’s surname.

Changing a surname might be disgraceful, but Bertie had none to begin with, so the issue was moot.

What fools, if they liked each other, why not spell it out?

Sif was about to reproach these fictional lovers when Roland suddenly came to mind.

Indeed, many things can’t simply be clarified.

Vina was Bertie’s untouched love, preferring to let go rather than tarnish it with mundanity.

He longed for pure love over a compromising marriage.

Sif put the book down, sighed, and opened the second novel, "Blood-soaked Rose."

This book was not much different from the first.

Also featuring pure love between a young man and woman.

They met through battle and fought fiercely to protect each other.

When the girl lay in the boy’s arms, like a rose soaked in blood, she finally faced her true self.

Sadly, they had run out of time.

"So why wait until near death to speak?"

Sif mumbled softly, suddenly speechless as she remembered last night.

She fully understood the heroine’s feelings.

Some words are indeed hard to utter.

Last night, thinking death was near, she steeled herself to say something to Roland, only to be rescued.

Upon awakening, the mood became entirely wrong, and she couldn’t find the words.

Sif had intended to find answers in books, but found a collection of mistakes instead.

So, what should she do?

Sif pondered for a long time, feeling just as troubled as that rose-red young girl.

After an unknown while, she realized.

There is indeed a great divide between nobility and commoners, but it isn’t entirely impossible to bridge.

So, I'll just wait for you at the finish line.

Chapter 217: Survival of the Fittest Conference

Hansa City has never been this bustling.

The main participants witnessing the Val City State's Holy Spring Revival have gathered here to discuss the international situation after this event.

The host of the conference is the Sussex Empire.

Other participants include the Jin Yuan Republic, the Weimar Federation, the Tirol Kingdom, the Divine Court of Light, and, unexpectedly yet not unexpectedly, the Vladimir Empire.

As for Val City State, the event location?

They indeed received an invitation, but they do not have the qualifications to enter the venue.

The results would be communicated to them after the meeting.

Apart from that, this meeting has nothing to do with them.

The representatives of Val City State protested, and the response was simple.

Val City State is a product of the last international conference. If they do not accept it, it means the signatories of the Continental Treaty have no obligation to guarantee their security.

Besides, many other countries and forces were invited to attend.

This international conference triggered by the Holy Spring Revival thus commenced.

Since this is a meeting to discuss significant matters, the number of participants is small.

The relevant parties attending the meeting have 3-5 representatives present.

Countries invited to attend could only send 1 representative.

The chief representative of Sussex Empire's negotiations is Prime Minister William, with Governor Roland and Count Sif attending the meeting as assistant negotiators.

The host country's Supreme Leader, Empress Sylph portrayed by the Magic Mirror, only briefly attended the opening ceremony before returning to her palace, leaving the leadership of the meeting to William.

After all, this is an important meeting deciding the future of many countries, so several countries have dispatched high-level representatives at the prime minister/leader level.

Only the Vladimir Empire is different.

Their prime minister did not come.

But their Empress came.

Although Sif had previously faced a tense and exciting confrontation with her, Sofia did not appear in her capacity as Empress at that time.

This is the first time in recent years she is attending an international meeting as an Empress, indicating the significance she places on this meeting.

No one questioned why she wanted to attend this meeting.

Since she wanted to come, no one could stop her.

After all, coming to the meeting, Sofia was not aggressive, but the chilling coldness on her still made her seem distant.

Roland observed Sofia from the corner of his eye.

With a tall and slim figure, standing at approximately 1.72 meters, her curves were well-proportioned, and her facial features looked as if they were carved out of gemstones.

Among the women Roland had seen, only Sif surpassed her.

Although Sister Lisa also has an intellectual and mature style, she was far behind in comparison.

Sofia's long hair was casually draped over her shoulders, her light blue hair color appeared especially striking.

Her sapphire eyes and frost-like eyebrows made her face look less like a normal person and more like a queen stepping out from a snow fairy tale.

Though she was a cold and ruthless enemy, Roland still rated her appearance and demeanor very highly.

This kind of woman doesn't belong to the mundane world; she should go to the world she belongs to sooner.

Roland thought silently.

Unlike Roland's leisurely demeanor, Sif was extremely tense.

She always felt as if a cold gaze was occasionally scrutinizing her.

Although there was no murderous intent, the chill was equally bone-piercing.

Just as sweat was constantly seeping from her palms, a warm hand grasped her increasingly cold hand.

It was Roland.

He sat upright, extending his hand from under the conference table.

Sif's heartbeat slowly returned to normal, and she even managed to give Sofia a calm smile, as if nothing had happened just now.

Sif gradually calmed her mind, feeling a secret joy like evading a teacher's gaze during a prank in class.

While everyone was worried about the future, she was more worried about not being seen by others.

Sofia caught a glimpse of Sif's fleetingly relaxed expression.

It wasn't faked.

She was somewhat surprised.

At their first meeting in Sussex, Sif nearly collapsed; she only held on through sheer stubbornness and some mysterious power.

But this time was different.

Although still at an absolute disadvantage, she could easily break free.

Sif's rapid progress made Sofia's eyes light up.

This meeting was initially planned for Angelina to attend, but this loyal subordinate had demonstrated immense combat power and poor judgment in the past few months.

Even if she attended, Sofia would have to support her from behind.

Given this, she decided to come herself.

As for Angelina...

Politics is a social activity that greatly tests participants' wisdom, often beyond what most people can handle.

Even having participants suppress personal likes and dislikes to make rational choices is already very challenging.

Intelligence has never been Angelina's strong suit, forcing subordinates to take on work beyond their ability is her problem.

That's why Sofia attended in person.

Just to see how fast Sif was growing.

For her, this meeting's primary goal was half achieved.

As for the other half...

After William finished his opening remarks, Sofia stood up, her cold gaze sweeping across the room.

The room fell silent; a pin drop could be heard.

No one knew what she wanted to do.

Although she was unlikely to start a massacre in such a setting, thinking of the countless souls unjustly condemned in connection to the name Sofia, they were a bit uneasy.

Avoid eye contact, avoid it entirely.

The representatives shifted their gaze away.

Despite some anxiety, as the meeting host, William couldn’t avoid it.

And he didn’t intend to hide from it.

Sussex never shies away from any gaze.

"Esteemed Empress Sofia, do you have anything to say? The meeting has already started, and your comments will be part of the discussion."

William gently reminded Sofia to be cautious with her words.

Sofia’s cold face revealed a slight smile.

Her voice wasn’t loud, yet it clearly reached everyone’s ears.

"What I have to say is not directly related to the Holy Spring Revival."

"Then what do you want to say?" William smiled, not displeased with Sofia for going off-topic.

After all, there are almost no people who dare to express displeasure towards Sofia.

"The Continental Treaty should expire in June, at which time another international meeting will have to be held, a hassle. Since everyone is gathered, I suggest we end it early to save some time."

William narrowed his eyes, feeling a sudden chill.

The Continental Treaty is about to expire. Whether to renew, and how to renew it, is naturally decided by holding an international meeting.

Holding an international meeting is very troublesome; just the preparatory work requires a lot of effort.

Sofia’s suggestion isn’t without reason.

But what she wants isn’t this, it’s to use the opportunity after the end of the Continental Treaty to reset international relations and pressure everyone.

With the treaty ending, the peace agreements between major countries will also expire.

Theoretically, all countries will exist in a Schrodinger state of friendship and hostility.

Sofia didn’t change the relations between countries; she simply made the friendly ones band together more and the ones with grudges more resentful.

Among the countries participating in the Holy Spring Revival, many have conflicts.

With this move, she directly changes the situation and alters Vladimir’s marginalized position in this event.

Should this suggestion, named a threat, be accepted?

Chapter 218: Sir, Times Have Changed

With just one sentence, the originally unconcerned nations all became tense.

The representatives of various countries present had somewhat unnatural expressions.

They looked serious and fell into deep thought.

The representative of the Wende Empire, which borders the Vladimir Empire, looked even more troubled.

As a neighboring country with a similar culture, the Wende Empire has had countless wars with the Vladimir Empire throughout history, with deep-seated hatred.

As long as there is conflict with the Rurik People, the Wende Empire will definitely side against them.

They would rather cooperate with countries with entirely different cultures than be friendly with the closely related Vladimir Empire.

At the time the Continent Treaty was signed, the Wende Empire was at the peak of its strength, having annexed several small neighboring countries, and then targeted the large but weak Vladimir Empire.

If not for the need to recuperate from years of warfare, they would certainly not have signed the Continent Treaty.

The price for their signing was the cession of approximately thirty thousand square kilometers of territory from the Vladimir Empire.

The land ceded was not extensive, but it was extremely humiliating.

However, less than a century later, the situation reversed.

The current Vladimir Empire is at the height of its strength, while the Wende Empire has seen successive inept emperors and a parliament full of corrupt and incompetent officials, leading to a continuous decline in national power.

The treaty is about to expire, and the Wende Empire is definitely the one most eager to renew it.

Of course, just a look at Sofia's mocking smile indicates that renewing the treaty won't come cheap.

The land swallowed back then must undoubtedly be returned in full, and numerous additional benefits must also be provided.

It's quite frustrating, but circumstances leave them with no choice.

With just one sentence, Sofia brought the assembly to a collective silence, while making everyone seriously contemplate who truly rules this era.

William narrowed his eyes and quickly understood Sofia's intent.

The Continent Treaty would automatically expire in a few months, and ending it several months early to discuss renewal was quite normal, but this changed the focus of the meeting.

He couldn't allow this situation to occur.

Clearing his throat, William smiled and responded, "Honorable Empress Sofia, the matter you mentioned involves numerous nations and is unrelated to the current meeting."

"I suggest adding this issue to the meeting agenda and discussing it after determining the future of the Val City State."

Sofia smiled but remained unwavering.

"Terminating the treaty would better facilitate open discussions about the future of the Val City State. I suggest we seek the opinions of everyone here."

"If you're worried that ending the treaty prematurely will trouble your nation, I can assure that no conflicts will erupt during this meeting."

Although William was on the podium while Sofia stood below, her gaze at William carried a certain authoritative aura as if looking down on him.

William disliked this feeling very much.

He looked towards Sif, seeking her opinion with his eyes.

Sif gave a slight nod, leaving the decision to William.

Despite any disagreements in power distribution, their interests aligned when it came to national interest.

The powerful Sussex needed both of them to uphold it.

Sofia's proposal seemed like a suggestion, but it was actually a form of pressure.

Ending the treaty early would allow nations to declare war freely.

If they did not accept it, despite having various reasons, it would give off the impression of fearing the Vladimir Empire.

Even if it meant making an extra trip to maintain peace for the last few months, denying fear was out of the question.

At this point, any retreat would be seen as an act of cowardice.

The Vladimir Empire had been rapidly expanding in recent years, extending its influence around the edges of the Rodinia Continent and other continents.

Constrained by the Continent Treaty, they could not expand freely within the Rodinia Continent.

Almost everyone believed they would not renew the treaty once it ended.

The only mystery was who their next target would be.

Most people speculated that it would be either the Wende Empire or the Talia Kingdom, the two weakened great nations.

The Vladimir Empire’s navy was weak, so their priority targets for expansion were naturally their land neighbors.

Since there was no direct threat of war, Sussex naturally would not show weakness.

With a smile, William asked, "Before answering, I have a question. Will your country choose to renew the treaty once it ends?"

Although it seemed like a casual question, it was a reminder to other nations that the treaty was the last chain binding the Vladimir Empire.

If the treaty ended early, neighboring countries would be on their own.

The representatives of the Wende Empire and Talia Kingdom looked quite uneasy.

There are still some buffer zones between Talia and Vladimir, so the perceived threat wasn’t too severe, but it’s different for the Wende Empire.

They felt the biting chill from the Land of the Frost.

Before Sofia could speak, the Wende Empire's representative impatiently shouted.

"I am firmly opposed. The Wende Empire is a defender of international order and would never casually tear up a treaty. Even if only one second remains, the treaty is still valid unless one cares not for national reputation."

Sofia did not turn around, just said calmly, "It's the first time I've heard someone voice the most cowardly words with the loudest voice."

"I'd like to remind you that I am conversing with Prime Minister William, and rudely interrupting is an offense to me. Your nation's offense has been noted."

The representative of the Wende Empire's face turned pale.

The Rurik People's target was indeed them.

If Sofia's reason for declaring war was being offended at an international conference, his head would certainly be taken by the enraged Emperor as an apology.

The Wende Empire representative looked ashen.

Sofia, no longer concerned with the small fry, calmly turned to William.

"I refuse to answer, but I will re-evaluate based on the current circumstances of each country."

Chapter 219: Sir, Times Have Changed (Part 2)

Flawless diplomatic rhetoric.

Refusing to answer is sometimes a kind of answer.

Obviously, unless she gains sufficient benefits, Sofia will not make concessions.

Where do the benefits come from?

The representatives from various countries fell into deep thought.

Either cut meat from oneself or use meat from others.

Those present are politicians, not philanthropists, and naturally unwilling to cut their own meat.

However, there’s a ready victim, the Val City State.

Everyone suddenly realized.

Sofia still wants to delve into the affairs of Val City State, but can’t directly say it because she’s not a direct party, thus choosing to terminate the treaty early.

Understanding this, William calmly provided an answer.

"Ending the treaty a few days early or late makes no difference to the Sussex Empire. Our country’s interests on the continent are defended by the Empire’s soldiers with guns and cannons, not by treaties."

"I agree to terminate the treaty early."

William’s words were firm, representing the attitude of the Sussex Empire.

If you want war, then there shall be war!

Sofia nodded in satisfaction and turned her gaze to the representative of the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

"Mr. Edward, what is your opinion?"

"Her Majesty the Empress and the Prime Minister agree, my disagreement would seem out of place. I, representing the Jin Yuan Republic, agree to terminate the treaty early."

The person referred to as Edward is the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Jin Yuan Republic; he can independently decide national affairs.

Since Vladimir and Sussex recognize the treaty's invalidity, it is meaningless for others to insist.

At such times, one must not show weakness.

Being the world's third strongest power, the Jin Yuan Republic is experiencing internal upheaval and cannot afford to lose momentum.

Any hesitation at this moment could reveal their vulnerability to potential enemies.

Seeing Edward's calm expression, those representatives who were certain Jin Yuan couldn't manage were now somewhat hesitant.

The coup in Jin Yuan was carried out quickly; they have probably completed internal integration.

Even if there are conflicts, they won't greatly affect the country's strength.

However, Roland knows Edward is merely pretending.

The reason is simple; his attitude is too resolute.

How could one be so decisive about something so important?

Sofia did not hesitate because she is the long-planned mastermind.

William didn't hesitate because the Sussex Empire's comprehensive national power is strong, and it has a powerful navy, making it not difficult to protect the Three Overseas Provinces.

Back then, even the continental countries united against Sussex could not take away these overseas provinces; he is certainly unafraid.

Taking a step back, even in future wars if defeated, just abandoning the Three Overseas Provinces would allow them to rely on the wealthy mainland and the abundant resources of the colonies to be self-sufficient, even able to block ocean access and starve continental enemies.

Sussex stands in an invincible position; they are, of course, not apprehensive.

What does Jin Yuan have?

They can only hold on.

After William agreed, Sif squinted her eyes, pondering.

Is this guy doing it on purpose?

The Three Overseas Provinces cannot withstand continental powers alone.

Without support from the mainland and colonies, the Three Overseas Provinces are viewed as prey by continental countries.

Could William be hoping for a war to rid himself of the burdensome Three Overseas Provinces?

If the Three Overseas Provinces fall, Sif and Roland, who are in charge here, will be held accountable.

Sif, as the national leader, does not have to take responsibility, but Roland cannot escape guilt.

His fate will either be an execution for absolution, or imprisonment after relinquishing all power.

By then, Sif would have to humbly yield to the Cabinet.

She frowned slightly and gripped Roland's hand even tighter.

Roland drew an inverted question mark in her palm with his pinky finger.

Sif bit her lip, her slender fingers traced around in Roland's palm.

"William is targeting you, mean."

To prevent other representatives from noticing her small gestures with Roland, she used the simplest words to express herself.

Roland certainly understood what Sif was saying.

He smiled slightly, swallowing the words he had prepared, and drew a smiley face in Sif's palm.

His confidence was passed on to Sif.

Sif's lightly creased brows gradually relaxed, curiously observing representatives from other countries.

The three major powers have expressed their stance, making opposition from other countries meaningless.

Any concession is a symbol of weakness. Since that’s the case, let’s face it head-on.

"The Tirol Kingdom agrees to end the treaty."

"The Prudon Kingdom agrees."

"The Weimar Federation opposes!"

"The Wende Empire opposes!"

"The Talia Kingdom agrees."

"The Nubian Kingdom abstains."

...

With all expressing their positions, the century-old continental treaty hereby ends.

Whether the treaty will continue is significant, temporarily not discussed.

The theme of this meeting remains the future of Val City State.

Although the focus of participants has shifted elsewhere.

Countries far from Val City State wish to leave quickly and discuss the impacts of the treaty’s ending behind closed doors.

The meeting continues.

The representative from Val City State was called in.

William smiled kindly, inviting him to the podium, and asked softly:

"Executive Officer Tony, as the representative of the city concerned with the Holy Spring Revival, I'd like to hear your vision for the future."

William was polite but did not refer to the other as a "country concerned," using "city concerned" instead.

This was no slip of the tongue.

As a seasoned expert in diplomacy, precise wording is essential.

To prevent ambiguities in communication, everyone present even used the language of the Magic Empire.

This dead language is difficult to master; besides diplomats and high-ranking officials, ordinary people wouldn't learn it.

But its complexity and precision make it suitable for diplomatic occasions.

Executive Officer Tony's face turned somewhat sullen.

As a representative of a small country surviving within the gaps between major powers, he is skilled at reading expressions and sensing implied meanings.

He understood.

The Sussex Empire does not support Val City State's existence as an independent nation.

Though Sussex maintains its status as the world's number one power with some effort, destroying Val City State is straightforward.

Tony took a deep breath and his gaze swept across the room.

He did not rush to express his position, but began singing a once popular song that few people remember now.

"By Val Lake."

The last continental meeting was held by Val Lake.

Participating countries shared friendly exchanges and unanimously agreed to preserve Val City State.

This song was composed by a famous minstrel of the time to commemorate peace.

Under the constraints of the continental treaty, small conflicts between countries persisted, yet large-scale wars resulting in over ten thousand casualties did not occur.

The continental treaty, in some ways, maintained peace.

Val City State was also known as the International Friendship City.

Now everything has changed.

The Sussex Empire, which once fully supported the independence and autonomy of Val City State, has become the first to stab with a knife.

Executive Officer Tony sang with great emotion.

His singing technique is barely better than Roland's.

Add to that he stayed in tune.

His singing was only about emotion.

Hot tears rolled down his cheeks, his voice choked, and his eyelids slightly flushed.

The melodious singing echoed in the conference hall and permeated through the windows into the square.

The staff of the delegations from various countries, faintly hearing the song, all smiled.

This is a song of peace.

Listen, the singer is almost moved to tears.

No need to think; peace is about to arrive.

Val City State is really lucky; although this meeting is not by Val Lake, the outcome will not change much.

This is an era of civilization, with peace as the main theme.

People quietly thought.

However, those inside the meeting were not so optimistic.

Mr. Tony’s emotionally charged singing touched the most tender places in people’s hearts.

Some representatives hung their heads slightly, some sighed, and others avoided Sofia’s gaze, singing along.

Sif tapped Roland’s palm, gently writing "Moved."

Roland asked with his fingertips, "Are you agreeing to preserve Val City State?"

"Not necessarily."

Sif’s reply was crisp.

"Being moved does not equal support. From the perspective of national interest, dismembering and dividing Val City State is most beneficial for us."

Roland said nothing, but his mood was somewhat complicated.

If it were the Sif from a few months ago, she would be weeping with emotion, asking Roland why Val City State couldn’t be preserved.

But now she can calmly stand from the perspective of national interest and pronounce a death sentence for Val City State.

A slight chill spread across his palm.

It felt as though ice was clasped in his hand.

Any growth comes at a cost.

The innocent girlish heart he personally killed is the cost.

Chapter 220: Peace of an Era

The spoils conference progressed rapidly.

The representative of Val City State, Executive Officer Tony, tearfully made two demands.

First, Val City State needs peace.

Second, Val City State must never be annexed by any country.

Apart from this, they are willing to make concessions, even at great cost.

It must be said, he is an excellent diplomat.

He has a clear understanding of the country's predicament and knows that without paying a great price, it is impossible to satiate the hungry wolves.

However, he underestimated the level of hunger of these wolves.

Mr. Tony is an excellent orator; when he used his magnetic voice to evoke memories of the great events a century ago, the softest parts of the hearts of many country representatives were touched.

Even the often cold and ruthless Empress Sofia's gaze softened slightly.

A gentle voice filled the chilly air, echoing above the conference hall as Sofia delivered her final verdict.

"Mr. Tony, your demands can be met."

"Val City State will be divided into several parts, occupied in zones by our country, the Sussex Empire, the Wende Empire, the Jin Yuan Republic, and the Tirol Kingdom. This way, your country won't be annexed by any single nation."

"Since your country ceases to exist, naturally, there will be no survival crisis, and peace will arrive."

Sofia's eyes fell on Tony's stunned face, softly freezing his tears.

Tony opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word.

This was not a negotiation with him but rather informing him of the result.

Compared to a hundred years ago, he at least had the right to know the result first in the hall.

Progress, albeit not much.

A century ago, it was the major powers of the continent that tread on the corpse of the Odin Empire to create many small nations, among them Val City State.

Val City State came from the Void, so how could it possibly exist forever?

Tony, choked with emotion, stared sharply at Sofia and asked: "Can I refuse?"

Sofia did not reply; instead, she returned to her seat.

She had a severe aversion to stupidity, and talking to fools quickly fatigued her.

Whether one can refuse is determined by national strength, not by human will.

If the steak on the plate could talk, it surely wouldn’t want to be eaten, but the steak cannot refuse.

The room fell silent, and no one attended to the representative from Val City State, though some countries also felt the same humiliation that Val City State did.

The Weimar Federation’s representative, Frank, stood up, taking a deep breath.

He did not intend to defend Val City State.

Since Sofia spoke those words, Val City State being dissected was a foregone conclusion.

What angered him was the exclusion of the Weimar Federation from the list of diners.

Although the Weimar Federation’s national strength is not as strong as the aforementioned countries, it is nonetheless a major nation, a successor of the Odin Empire. Why does the Tirol Kingdom get a seat at the table, and they do not?

"Her Majesty Sofia, have you forgotten our country?"

Sofia looked up at him, her voice especially gentle, yet her words almost froze Frank’s blood on the spot.

"Mr. Frank, no need to rush. Your country has some strength, and its order is fairly stable, so it won’t be on the brink of extinction for now."

"However, I kindly remind you, if your country cannot centralize its power and continues to allow unscrupulous merchants to usurp national assets and civilian wealth, by the next meeting, your country might be on the menu."

Frank was stunned.

Other country representatives also felt a slight chill.

Everyone knew Frank desired the authority to dine at the table, yet Sofia's answer was simple: the right to dine wasn't granted, but being served as a dish was imminent.

Frank's face turned beetroot red, losing all the composure he had during the meeting with Roland.

Diplomatic skills, linguistic art, in the face of absolute power, are mere laughs.

Though harshly worded, no one thought Sofia arrogant.

The continental treaty concluded, the shackles restraining the Sussex Empire were undone, and the gigantic bear confined within was liberated.

The representatives of countries present were secretly alarmed; aside from Sussex, who could stand against Sofia?

If the Odin Empire were revived, integrating all resources, it certainly could.

However, the complete Odin Empire itself is a joke.

The Prince Elector system never allowed them to unite internally; the hatred between each Prince Elector far exceeded foreign animosity.

Even now, the legacy of Odin persists.

The self-proclaimed legal successors of the Odin Empire, the Prudon Kingdom, the Tirol Kingdom, and the Weimar Federation, are all eager to tear each other apart.

These Three Kingdoms could indeed unite to withstand the Vladimir Empire, but can they unite?

Everyone felt somewhat uneasy.

Many country representatives didn’t dare meet Sofia’s striking azure eyes.

Only Tony clenching his fists couldn’t help but laugh.

Weimar Federation, deservedly so!

As a neighboring country, not stepping forward to speak for them is one thing, but wanting to join the division as another.

They don’t even consider their own strength yet dare to jump out and boast.

Tony let out a hearty laugh, loudly saying: "Today it is Val City State that is divided, tomorrow it’s the Weimar Federation, and who will be next? You all better think carefully!"

His meaning was clear; under Sofia’s rule, the Vladimir Empire has already broken its chains, and their ambition is not merely a piece of Val City State’s territory but larger lands.

Tony’s words indeed worked; many representatives from various countries began seriously contemplating the international situation post-continental treaty.

The Wende Empire’s representative quickly stood up and loudly declared: "Fellow representatives, someone dares to openly threaten other countries at today’s international meeting; what will they dare to do in some time, I can hardly imagine!"