Empress 31

Chapter 31: Let’s Keep This from the Empress

"So many?!"

Sylph’s face was covered with frost, and the trembling light veil couldn’t hide her murderous intent.

Minister of Justice Alben worked efficiently and concluded the case thoroughly in just three days.

Lori himself pleaded guilty on the spot, which could be disregarded. But given his numerous misdeeds and considerable ill-gotten wealth, Alben, following the principles of swift, severe, and strict punishment, treated all his assets as illegal income.

Apart from a small amount left for the family’s basic living expenses, all the rest was confiscated.

After all, Sussex is a country ruled by law, and Alben did not push them to the brink but exiled Lori’s family to the harsh cold of the Northern Locke Province of the Empire (referring to Lori’s siblings, nieces, and nephews, not involving the noble in-laws).

This place is within the Arctic Circle, covered in ice and snow all year round. It’s considered lucky if even one out of ten survives.

Alben showed mercy, at least giving Lori’s family a chance.

Whether they can seize it depends on the favor of the gods.

Besides that, other involved personnel were also completely eradicated, uprooted.

In view of the Taimashi Gang’s blatant violence in the Imperial Capital, severely affecting public perception, Alben proposed a special cleanup operation within the capital’s limits to crack down on gang members.

Sylph was in an excellent mood and naturally agreed without hesitation.

Just as she thought this matter was over, Alben took another report out of his pocket and presented it to her.

"Your Majesty, the amount of illicit money seized from the involved personnel is overwhelmingly large. Revealing it truthfully would severely damage the national image. I suggest concluding the case with this report."

Sylph glanced through it briefly, and the content was essentially the same as the previous report, except the amount of money was significantly less.

This way, the number truly didn’t seem as staggering.

What about the money being concealed?

Seeing Sylph deep in thought, Alben stepped forward half a step and whispered:

"Your Majesty, you have yet to personally govern and cannot freely use the national treasury, though you need money for many things. Please accept this money and don’t let it go to waste."

"Is this appropriate?" Sylph initially wanted to refuse decisively, but her words took a turn.

Teacher Roland had once said, don’t panic in situations; first, observe the other party’s stance.

Among the Cabinet Ministers, the Minister of Justice ranks relatively lower, with authority limited to legal matters.

It seems he wants to advance.

Roland often used this term, and thinking carefully, it’s quite fitting.

Who doesn’t want to advance?

She also wanted to be an Empress with real power and survive the struggle with Sofia.

Sir Alben might not be a moral paragon, but he’s better than opposing her.

Sylph looked at Alben with a pleasant demeanor, a flash of inspiration crossing her mind, slowly smiling as she said:

"Sir Alben, the cleanup campaign requires funding. Take this money and carry it out."

"Since this money comes from darkness, using it to dispel darkness is good."

She raised her hand, softly but firmly saying, "I have noted your loyalty and diligence, go ahead."

Alben was utterly astounded.

He knew the Empress’s financial situation.

She couldn’t tap into the national treasury for the time being; the previous Emperor squandered the private funds, and she was very short on money.

Why wouldn’t she accept such timely goodwill?

Alben’s face turned particularly ugly.

Sylph noticed his thoughts and gently consoled him: "Sir Alben, you don’t need to overthink; just focus on the work, I notice everything."

Since Sylph said thus, Alben did not persist further and reluctantly put away the second report, bidding farewell.

After meeting with Alben, Sylph’s work for the day was also over.

Cabinet Ministers rarely sought her out, only Teacher frequently visited.

Although Alben was greedy, his professional skills were exceptional; he was a talent worth using.

After staying in the small study for a while, Wald came to the Imperial Palace to give her the routine report.

After listening to Teacher’s report, Sylph didn’t say much, only expressing "Noted."

She couldn’t interfere with the Cabinet without reason; asking Alben for minor matters was fine since she was the person involved.

Constantly guiding the Cabinet’s work might lead to impeachment.

After Wald finished speaking, Sylph, smiling happily, recounted today’s report from Alben, resting her chin on her hands with a bit of pride, waiting for praise.

Wald stared dumbfounded at Sylph, and after a long pause, he slowly said:

"Your Majesty, you mean you gave Sir Alben all the 13,000 pounds of embezzled money meant for you as a gift?"

"Yes, Sir Alben worked hard, he deserves a reward. I don’t have money, so I simply gave him this money. This way, he’ll surely be grateful and work loyally."

Wald stared blankly at Sylph, feeling faint, the world spinning around him.

He always knew this child was a blank slate in terms of politics, but not to this extent, leaving him with a sense of helplessness rising in his heart.

Can such a pure child truly navigate the grimy waters of politics?

Exhausted, Wald couldn't hold on anymore and collapsed.

Sylph, quick-witted, caught Teacher and settled him into a seat.

This time, she had experience, immediately summoning the court physician, then avoiding others' sight, transformed into Count Sif, and fled by carriage.

No need to think to know the task was done wrong, possibly a zero-score.

But she still couldn't understand, where did she go wrong?

Teacher Roland, do you have the answer?

...

The Earl's Mansion.

Having heard the re-enactment by Sif, despite trying hard not to laugh, Roland couldn't help tapping the table and laughing heartily.

Sif felt a bit annoyed.

Was it really that funny?

It seemed the mistake was truly egregious this time.

She bit her lip, glared at Roland, and said each word deliberately: "Have you laughed enough? This is an affront to the Empress!"

"Indeed, it’s an affront, but you won’t report it to her, will you?"

"You!" Sif, choked, couldn’t find words to say.

She had no choice but to change the topic and continue asking: "Is it strange that Her Majesty, who was educated to be an elegant and noble Lady, doesn’t understand politics?"

"Not really, but it’s quite a rare talent to choose the zero-score answer accurately among all choices."

"Roland, don’t push it. Even if I don’t report, she might find out."

Perhaps feeling the statement was inappropriate, Sif hurriedly changed the topic, "Then quickly tell me the answer, I still have to return to the palace to reply to her."

Roland struggled to suppress his laughter, speaking softly: "Was my previous action an affront to Her Majesty the Empress?"

"It’s good you know." Sif bit her lip.

"You are Her Majesty’s most trusted minister, not reporting me, does it mean we have a small secret kept from the Empress?"

Sif nodded, with a peculiar expression.

Was it kept a secret?

Roland lightly clapped his hands, seriously stating: "See, doesn’t that make our relationship much closer?"

Sif was dumbfounded, staring at Roland in a daze, her expression subtly changing.

She might be politically naive, but she wasn’t a fool.

She certainly understood Roland’s implication.

Alben intended to establish trust beyond sovereign and subject by sharing the spoils with the Empress.

Had Sylph accepted at the time, an alliance would have been formed, turning him into an inroad into the Cabinet.

If more such people existed, the power struggle might shift from an overseas development version to an Imperial Capital power struggle version.

An instant difference led to a world of difference.

Roland’s words awakened Sif, her expression turning grim, she muttered faintly: "Did Her Majesty miss such an excellent opportunity, should I privately seek out Alben again?"

"That is unnecessary."

Roland surely didn’t wish to have his rants about the Empress relayed back.

The deed was done; there are no remedies for regret, only adapting to changing circumstances.

Moreover, a compromised power structure only delays problems, harboring endless hidden troubles.

He earnestly stated: "What Her Majesty did wasn’t wrong, accepting Alben might result in him becoming the future Chief Minister of the Cabinet, is that good?"

"Such individuals are better left as adversaries."

Roland comforted Sif with a smile but swallowed the second half of his sentence.

Just, the Minister of Justice would henceforth be a sworn enemy to Her Majesty.