Empress 411

Chapter 411: That Is the Empress's Wedding Ring!

The moment Angelina forcefully pinched the Ice Crystal Blue Ring, the temperature at the small plateau, which had only been mildly chilly, suddenly plummeted.

At the instant the temperature dropped, Roland distinctly felt that Death was smiling at him, and he could even hear the soundtrack of the pallbearers in his ears.

Without a hint of hesitation, he immediately activated the Divine Protection.

This was the life-saving measure he had to activate manually; other rings and armor were passive and required no active activation.

Although using Divine Protection required a full day of cooldown, he dared not be negligent.

One can bet on anything, but never on life.

Angelina herself posed no real threat to him; the only killer move came from this ring.

There's no need to think twice; this was the trump card left to her by Empress Sofia.

To die by such a trump card could be considered...

Bah, how could he possibly die from a mere ring!

Roland opened his full defensive powers, resisting the fatal cold contained within the ring.

Facing such a wide-range super cold attack, evasion was utterly useless; one could only endure it.

The moment the ring shattered, boundless cold erupted, turning the already snow-covered plateau into a world of ice and snow.

Angelina shivered in fear, completely stunned.

She knew the Empress was invincible, but never dreamt that a ring containing one-tenth of her attack power could possess such might.

If the Empress herself came personally, Roland would undoubtedly shatter like an ant, but this was merely one-tenth of her full-force attack!

Angelina did not know that the number the Empress gave her was somewhat conservative; the energy of this ring was not one-tenth, but one-third.

Empress Sofia knew well that whoever made Angelina use the ring must be a Tier Seven powerhouse.

Since someone was using unfair means, don’t blame her for being ruthless.

Of course, this was one-third of Sofia’s true power from over a year ago; how much Sofia’s power had grown over this year, no one knew.

Angelina looked at Roland, now turned into an ice sculpture, and sighed with relief.

The piercing cold unleashed by the ring was unbearable even to her, adept in ice manipulation, how could Roland, struck directly, have any chance of survival.

"This ring has one-tenth of Her Majesty the Empress’s attack power; your death is not unjust,"

Angelina approached the ice sculpture of Roland trapped by the Ice Barrier, whispering softly.

She raised her dual swords, crossed them in front of her chest, and bowed with the highest salute to warriors of the Rurik people.

A powerful and respectable opponent.

Daring to challenge the Empress, commendable courage.

If he were not an enemy of Her Majesty the Empress, perhaps they could have been friends, Angelina felt somewhat regretful.

Thinking of Roland's demeanor when accepting a one-on-one duel, she couldn't help but sigh.

Indeed worthy of the Captain of the Imperial Knight Order, very knightly.

If he knew this would be the outcome, would he regret it?

Right at the moment when Roland turned into an ice sculpture, up in a hot air balloon hundreds of meters high, Lisa was watching through a telescope almost fainted.

She simply couldn't believe her eyes.

How is this possible?

Before being frozen, Roland was still holding absolute advantage, how could he be overturned in an instant?

That ring! It must be that damned ring!

Recalling the scene of Angelina forcefully pinching the ring, Lisa realized it in a flash of insight.

Angelina didn’t have the ability to defeat Roland; it must be the ring’s doing, for sure it was Sofia’s doing!

She tossed away the telescope, stepped forward, and leapt into the sky.

However, she was dragged back by Christine with a long spear before she could fly away.

"What do you think you’re doing?" Christine asked Lisa puzzlingly.

"I’m going to parachute down and avenge Roland!" Lisa’s eyes were red with anger, ready to kick Christine away if she dared to intervene.

"Where’s your parachute then?" Christine squinted and asked.

Lisa was stunned, cold sweat pouring from her forehead.

In a moment of chaos, she had already lost her mind, she hadn’t even noticed whether she had a parachute pack on her back.

Parachuting without a parachute is simply suicide.

Christine pulled out a parachute pack from behind, casually threw it toward the snowy valley.

The parachute pack wavered as it descended, like a snowflake drifting down.

Lisa was furious, grabbing Christine’s collar in anger, unable to speak.

"You, you..."

"Do you think Roland is dead?" Christine questioned.

Lisa was caught off guard by Christine’s question.

That’s right, Roland was just frozen into a statue, who said he was definitely dead?

"Then I should go down, I can manipulate fire and help him thaw."

"Fire can melt ice, but he’s really dead."

Christine said seriously, "Miss Lisa, please respect science. Violent thermal expansion and contraction will cause fragile materials to shatter."

Lisa wanted to ask what thermal expansion and contraction are, but felt that it would just reveal her ignorance, so she held back.

But she couldn’t help but retort, "You serve the Goddess, yet believe in those heresies?"

"This is not heresy; it is science. Without understanding science, how can one serve the Goddess?" Christine did not look at Lisa disdainfully, but her chilly tone still stung Lisa’s heart.

Lisa clenched her fists, unable to argue with Christine, hurriedly refocusing on the statue-like frozen Roland.

He rested quietly with his eyes tightly closed, as if asleep.

The barrier was exceptionally firm, sealing him inside, just like statues of classically handsome men from the Magic Empire era commonly found in squares.

Angelina picked up the scattered Aurum Steel Dual Swords, focusing on the ring fragments on the ground.

She was surprised to find the ring was regenerating at a speed visible to the naked eye.

Chapter 412: That's the Empress's Wedding Ring! (Part 2)

What is happening?

She carefully picked up the scattered fragments, feeling the piercing cold emanating from them.

She almost threw away the ring pieces, but remembering that this was the Empress's bestowed item, she dared not be careless. She had to grit her teeth and endure, allowing the ring to rapidly restore by drawing from her energy.

The hot air balloon still floated in the air, with only a parachute pack falling.

Angelina was a bit surprised. She had initially thought the concerned Lisa would descend from the sky to snatch Roland's statue, or even make a move against her.

Her duel with Roland was a gentleman's agreement, having no restraint over an enraged woman.

If Lisa took action, she'd likely be in trouble.

The Ice Crystal Blue Ring, though powerful, could only save her once.

If Lisa attacked in anger, she certainly wouldn't sit still, but the outcome would probably be tragic.

But she was fearless, taking down Roland was a significant achievement, even if it meant sacrificing all seventeen thousand stationed in Val City.

Roland's value could conservatively equal a hundred thousand troops.

This was what the Shadow Sanctuary's chief, Sahalin, had said personally.

The Shadow Sanctuary’s second in command, along with seventeen thousand regular troops, trading Roland’s life and the Sussex Empire’s thriving destiny, was a bargain for sure.

Angelina had long prepared for a bloodstained White Mountain.

However, Lisa and Christine did nothing; aside from the parachute pack they dropped, they just watched.

Angelina was a bit puzzled.

According to her intelligence, Lisa’s feelings for Roland had long surpassed sibling affection and resembled romantic love. Although Christine was only an ally of Roland, she owed him a favor, and wouldn’t back down until it was repaid.

These two had absolute reasons to move against her, yet they stood still.

Could it be that Roland isn’t dead?

Angelina suspiciously looked at Roland within the Ice Barrier, bit her lip, and wielding her dual swords, stabbed fiercely.

"Ding!"

A crisp sound rang out; the Ice Barrier remained motionless, without even a clear scratch, as if mocking her overestimation of her abilities.

Angelina wasn’t annoyed; she even wanted to laugh a bit.

This was the energy contained in the Empress’s bestowed Ice Crystal Blue Ring, capable of freezing souls; mere Aurum Steel Dual Swords couldn’t harm it in the slightest.

If even such excellent weapons couldn't inflict damage, then Roland certainly couldn't break through the barrier.

At such terrifying low temperatures, an ordinary human would freeze to death instantly.

Though Roland was a Transcendent, he was ultimately flesh and blood, and could at most hold out for a little while—freezing to death all the same.

Since Roland was undoubtedly doomed, Angelina thought little of it.

She quietly stood, continuing to replenish the Ice Crystal Blue Ring with energy.

It was an upright duel, and she was the victor.

Unless the Sussex Empire was willing to lose face, they could only let her go.

Lisa wouldn't descend, and she couldn't ascend, both parties remained where they were, waiting.

Angelina was waiting for Roland to die completely.

Lisa was waiting for Roland to break out of the ice.

What was Roland doing? He was freezing to death, frantically searching for a heat source.

...

In a dreamscape, amidst a sea of flowers.

No time to be amazed at why he returned to the Flower Sea from a battle, Roland now needed warmth.

It was so damn cold!

Is this the true power of Empress Sofia? This is the extreme cold embrace that can freeze souls, the lethal frost that can shatter steel.

A flesh and blood body of carbon-based life cannot withstand it.

The Magic Spring Ring gifted by the Magic Association shattered the instant he was frozen.

The Divine Protection only endured for a moment before shattering.

Had it not been for the White Wolf Leather Armor to resist the cold, he would have been frozen stiff.

In the piercing extreme cold, his spirit left his body and instinctively fled to a safe place, the Elf Flower Sea.

Roland nearly cried from the cold but held back.

He saw Elf Sylph dazing under the Ginkgo Tree.

Clenching his teeth, he tried to maintain a calm expression and tremblingly walked over.

"Sylph, can you make some fire? I’m a bit cold."

The dazing Elf Sylph looked up at his words, her gaze slightly surprised upon seeing Roland’s eyebrows, eyelashes, and beard all covered with peculiar azure frost. Elf Sylph seemed to recall something terrible, her complexion changed drastically, and her voice trembled slightly.

"Is this the Power of Frosty Winter?!"

Her fingertips trembled incessantly, and her once fair face was devoid of any color.

"Roland, who on earth did you offend to end up like this?"

"It was that damned woman Sofia. Let’s not talk now, I’m about to freeze to death." Roland’s lips had already started to turn blue.

Elf Sylph clapped softly and began chanting quickly.

Though lighting a fire in the Flower Sea was absolutely forbidden, faced with Roland’s life-threatening situation, she couldn’t care less about so many taboos; saving him was the top priority.

A milky white flame leaped from her palm, quickly falling.

Elf Sylph didn’t have time to think about how to extinguish the fire if the Flower Sea ignited.

The sooner the flame was lit, the more hope there was for saving Roland; if she couldn’t save him, the entire dreamlike Flower Sea would be doomed.

The milky-white flame fell swiftly.

At the moment of landing, the milky white turned to azure blue, the flickering flame solidified into a form, becoming an unusual flame-shaped ice block, lying quietly on the ground.

The Flower Sea swayed gracefully, fragrant and pleasing, with no trace of burning.

Both Roland and Elf Sylph were stunned.

What is happening?

The flame was not in a conventional form but existed close to a plasma state, can this even freeze?

The falling flame ice crystal was resplendent, exceptionally beautiful, radiating deadly brilliance, yet filling Roland with deep despair.

If the Flower Sea and Elf Sylph couldn't save him, who else could?

What kind of demon technique was Sofia using, was this the power a Tier Seven should have?

Chapter 413: That's the Empress's Wedding Ring! (Part 3)

Could Sofia really be invincible in the world, even storing energy rings as terrifying as this?

As he felt the last of his body warmth gradually fading, Roland's thoughts slowed down more and more.

His life began to play out like a slideshow, but only a few frames had been shown before it froze.

Roland was truly angry.

Damn it, is there no sense of reason, not even allowed to go through the process of light before death?

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something to Elf Sylph, but his consciousness gradually blurred, and his rigid body toppled forward.

Elf Sylph cried out, rushing toward the fallen Roland, alarm mixed with sadness, with invisible tears trailing down her cheeks.

These were false tears.

She, without a physical form, couldn't cry at all.

Only in dreams could she barely hold Roland.

However, the moment the intangible tears slipped down, they froze, turning into clear ice crystals on the ground.

"Roland, you..."

Elf Sylph bit her lip, her eyelashes trembling lightly.

In an instant, countless memories surfaced, the years of the Third Era slowly turning like a yellowing scroll.

She closed her eyes, holding Roland, spinning her body like a butterfly, and sat down together.

Under the skirt, a pair of perfect jade feet slowly slipped out, snuggling into Roland’s embrace.

The skin of her jade feet was somewhat different from her corpse-like white body.

The jade feet, though fair, appeared more like those of a living person.

Beneath the fair skin, veins were faintly visible, and the tender toes were round and full, releasing the exotic fragrance of myriad flowers collected from the Flower Sea at the tips, like clouds and mist.

Even if one is not a foot fetishist, seeing such a perfect work of art makes it hard to resist the urge to lick.

Fortunately, Roland was unconscious, so Elf Sylph needn’t worry about her most delicate and sensitive parts being sent into Roland’s mouth for play.

The warmth spread as the soles touched his palm.

Like a drowning person grasping a final straw, Roland instinctively held on to the only warmth in the icy world.

He clutched this flame tightly, stuffing it into his embrace.

Elf Sylph's soul trembled.

She opened her mouth, unable to make any sound, her entire body uncontrollably limp, like a snake with its backbone removed, futilely writhing.

Tears swirled in her eyes, her pearly teeth biting her crimson lips, her bloodless face flushed bright red, and she couldn't escape Roland's iron grip, only persist with clenched teeth.

The searing heat from the tips of her feet brought Roland the only warmth amid the extreme cold, preventing his body and soul from freezing completely.

As he struggled desperately against the cold, Angelina outside the Ice Barrier was continuously channeling energy to restore the Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

She could clearly feel the Ice Crystal Blue Ring recovering at a faster pace.

She could even sense that she grew stronger through this ring's restoration.

As long as she had time to recover energy, even if Lisa descended, she would have the strength for a fight.

She couldn't help but tear up with joy.

This was her effort, and even more so, the Empress's blessing.

Without the Empress’s favor, she might have spent her life as a choir member at some church school.

Though singing hymns in a choir to praise the Goddess wasn’t necessarily bad, clearly following the Empress promised a more illustrious future.

Everything she had was given by the Empress, and she wouldn’t mind being crushed to dust for the Empress.

Her peripheral vision glanced at the Ice Barrier.

Roland was an excellent enemy, superior to her in both strength and intelligence, possessing even some knightly demeanor; she willingly acknowledged Roland was stronger than she.

But unfortunately, he was the Empress’s enemy.

Standing against the Empress meant dying with dignity was already a kind of happiness.

Angelina walked towards the Ice Barrier, extending her hands, donning bear-skin gloves with strong cold resistance.

If she couldn’t break the Ice Barrier, she’d haul it back as a trophy.

As her hands touched the icy wall, the "dead" Roland suddenly opened his eyes, showing a sunny, brilliant smile.

Though he was still in the ice wall and maintained his frozen posture, Angelina’s heart suddenly sank.

He wasn’t dead yet?!

How could this be!

No one could withstand the Empress’s attack, even at one-tenth strength!

"Boom!"

With a loud noise, Roland’s scepter shattered the Ice Barrier, accurately hovering above Angelina’s head.

"You lost."

Roland said lightly.

He hadn’t lost to Angelina, but was nearly crushed by Sofia’s random attack.

Without Elf Sylph’s help, he couldn’t even wake up.

His peripheral vision glanced at the Ice Crystal Blue Ring in Angelina’s hand, suddenly realizing.

Angelina’s attempt to restore this ring absorbed a lot of Extreme Cold Energy, which granted him the chance to escape from death.

He vaguely touched upon Sofia’s true strength.

Powerful, but not invincible.

In the past, Sofia seemed godlike before peers of the same level.

Now, she finally revealed her Energy Bar.

Suffocating data, but no longer an invincible health lock.

Roland wanted to laugh at himself.

He became the first person to survive Sofia’s attack.

Even if it was only one-tenth of the power.

This shameful event had become something to boast and pride over, truly ridiculous.

Roland didn’t even feel like harshly taunting Angelina.

But from Angelina’s perspective, the whole world had collapsed.

The invincible Empress couldn’t even kill a same-level enemy with aftershocks?

She even forgot to make some symbolic struggle.

Only when Roland casually took the ring from her hand did she react.

"That’s the Empress’s bestowed ring!"

"Now it’s mine." Roland finally smiled.

The joy between people never connects, most times built upon others’ suffering.

Chapter 414: That’s the Empress’s Wedding Ring! (Part 4)

The thrill that Roland felt as he seized the ring belonging to Sofia from Angelina was indescribable.

With a hint of provocation, he put the ring on his middle finger in front of Angelina, then raised his finger towards her.

This was a greeting from his hometown.

He initially intended to wear it on his pinky finger, but that would imply a vow of celibacy, which could easily cause Sif to misunderstand, so he decided to wear it on his middle finger instead.

This indicated that his heart belonged to someone.

Sif would certainly appreciate this way of wearing it.

Seeing Roland's such rude and disrespectful behavior, Angelina's face turned ashen, and her resilient heart felt as if it was being torn apart.

She stared blankly at Roland, suddenly overwhelmed by despair, crying as she knelt down, covering her face with her hands, only sobbing continuously.

The Empress's wedding ring was disgraced by this shameless rogue right in front of her, and she was powerless to stop it.

Even if the Empress were to kill Roland, this humiliation could not be undone.

And it was all because of her; she could only atone with her death.

Wait, she could still die.

Angelina released her hands, her cold gaze fixed on Roland, making Roland somewhat uneasy in his heart.

"Hey, I warn you, don’t do anything foolish. You’ve already lost. For the sake of the seventeen thousand soldiers returning safely home, I advise you to stay calm. You’re a commander in chief, you can’t act recklessly."

Angelina laughed.

This fool Roland didn’t even realize the huge mess he had created.

By taking the Empress’s wedding ring and even wearing it on a finger symbolizing being taken, he was essentially proposing to Empress Sofia in front of everyone.

As everyone knew, the Empress had experienced a failed marriage.

No affection, no children, she remained a maiden until she ended her husband’s life.

It was an indescribable humiliation.

Angelina wanted to live a little longer to see just how bizarre Roland’s death would be.

However, she couldn’t.

Because her death was bound to be more abstract than Roland’s.

Two swords simultaneously thrust towards the throat and heart.

Farewell, world!

Angelina smiled faintly, wishing to leave a trace of a smile in this world before she died.

Unfortunately, how could Roland allow his trophy to be ruined?

The scepter swept, and the two swords flew over ten meters away.

Roland clutched Angelina’s mouth, pried it open fiercely, and poured a vial of potion down her throat from who knows where.

Angelina, utterly exhausted and with most of her energy depleted from repairing the ring, couldn’t resist, and could only let Roland have his way.

After pouring the potion, Roland said coldly:

"Swear in Sofia’s name that you won’t escape, immediately!"

"I refuse!"

"After your death, you will be made into a nude ice sculpture, exhibited as an art piece in Hansa City, named ’The Beautiful Idiot.’" Roland’s voice was as cold as a devil’s.

Angelina was stunned; she couldn’t even think of words to curse Roland.

She vaguely felt that he truly dared to do it.

After all, if he dared to wear the Empress’s wedding ring on his middle finger, what else wouldn’t he dare to do?

Angelina collapsed on the ground, mechanically raised her right hand, and whimpered as she swore.

"In the name of the great Master of the Frosty Winter, Empress of the Vladimir Empire, I, Angelina, vow to abide by the duel oath, obey Roland as a prisoner of war, not escape and not act contrary to the identity of a prisoner of war. If this vow is broken, I am willing to forever fall to the Polar Glacier, my soul frozen until the world’s end."

Having sworn, Angelina smiled with relief.

Being a prisoner of war was fine; she could witness Roland’s death herself.

Roland also breathed a sigh of relief; he did not expect Angelina to be so forthright.

It was evident; he wasn’t shattered by Sofia’s direct attack which broke Angelina’s defenses.

The Rurik People have unwavering faith in Empress Sofia’s invincibility; as long as Sofia’s myth of invincibility was broken, the Rurik People’s mindset would collapse instantly.

Angelina was the first, but certainly not the last.

Having won, Roland naturally possessed the demeanor of a victor.

He smiled and helped Angelina up, making a gesture of invitation.

"Welcome, Miss Angelina, to Hansa City as a guest. You’re free to move within the designated zone, but you cannot leave Hansa City, nor contact outsiders."

Courtesy is mutual.

Since Angelina swore a solemn vow not to run, it should be executed according to the standards of house arrest.

Chapter 415: The Saintess’s Request

Roland: "This was a glorious victory, I shattered Sofia’s myth of invincibility and defeated her ring!"

Angelina: "Hmph, some people are already dead, just not buried yet."

Lisa: "Boohoo, I’m just glad you’re okay, Roland. I was really scared."

Christine: "I knew you would win."

In short, this twist-filled duel has ended.

Roland won, Angelina lost.

As the victor, naturally, he should display a victor’s grace. He tactfully explained to Angelina that he was only trying to scare her and would never freeze a lady into a naked ice sculpture for display.

"Do I look like that kind of person?"

Roland’s gaze was as firm as if he were ready to join the party.

Angelina answered Roland with a single word.

"Tch!"

Having decided to give up resistance, she didn’t play any tricks and voluntarily handed over the battle banner and various spoils according to the agreement, completing the transfer of the camp.

Seventeen thousand soldiers were led by her deputy, retaining only a few self-defense weapons, and were allowed passage back home through friendly Tirol Kingdom.

She calmly accepted the arrangement and allowed Roland to seal her powers, escorting her back to Hansa City for settling.

This war no longer concerned her; from now on, she would just quietly watch how Roland meets his end.

To be fair, Roland was quite gentlemanly, arranging for her to have a manor and even buying a few servants who spoke the Rurik Language to take care of (monitor) her life.

Of course, courtesy aside, precautions still needed to be taken.

Roland had Norton install specially made shackles on her, which didn't affect walking, but would trigger an alarm if she left the manor grounds.

Besides this, she also had several magic marks on her body. If she dared to run, she would definitely be caught.

Angelina accepted these arrangements calmly and never resisted.

She seemed more concerned about whether the food in Hansa City suited her taste.

Roland assigned the task of settling Angelina to the rear and didn't pay much attention.

In the direct confrontation between nations, someone like Angelina didn't affect the overall situation.

Her staying put was good; even if she ran, it didn't matter.

The Shadow Sanctuary interior was already compromised; returning would pose a threat.

Facing Roland on the battlefield again, her mindset would be completely unstable.

Roland even vaguely hoped she would actually make a run for it.

He had no hatred towards Angelina; she was a simple girl with a simple mind and simple thoughts, making her easy to defeat.

The key to the war wasn’t her but Sofia.

No one knew what Sofia was doing or where she was.

Roland thought silently, she had to be made to appear as soon as possible.

Detaining Angelina was a severe provocation, but far from enough.

A knightly duel resulting in capture was just ordinary humiliation, even a normal win or loss, not considered an insult.

Expelling the Vladimir Empire’s army and seizing their banner was indeed an insult, but Sofia’s remaining government could handle it.

This was far from enough!

Roland thought long and hard but couldn’t devise a plan to force Sofia to appear, so he decided to carry out the original plan.

Val City State’s restoration.

When Mr. Tony stood once again in Friendship Square of Val City State, watching the banner, down for less than three years, rise anew, his voice was choked with emotion.

His raspy voice sang once more that famous song "On the Shores of Val Lake."

This song represented civilization and friendship and was also written to celebrate the enactment of the continental treaty.

To be fair, Mr. Tony's singing skills were very poor; without Roland, he was basically at the bottom tier in politics.

Combined with his emotional state, his singing was even more unbearable.

But his song resonated with others.

More and more Val City-State people emerged from their homes, walked onto the streets, and looked up at the city-state flag that rose again after two years.

The tricolor flag, symbolizing peace, friendship, and freedom, once again fluttered over Val City State.

Some thought of the young officers who perished for the nation when Val City State was dissolved, and others recalled compatriots who were bullied to death by foreign troops in the past two years, unable to hold back their tears.

Roland watched quietly, not participating in the ceremony.

After all, the Sussex Empire he belonged to was also one of the culprits in the division of Val City State.

Saying anything at this moment would easily cause resentment, so it was better to say nothing.

He glanced back and only saw Lisa, not Christine.

"Miss Saintess went to the Divine Hall of Light. Should we go take a look?" Lisa's eyes sparkled with curiosity and excitement.

"Let's go, there's nothing else to do anyway."

Roland, having the title of Knight of Honor of the Light, figured it reasonable to visit his own divine hall while he was there.

The Goddess of Light might not like him, but that didn’t mean the divine servants knew about it.

Roland and Lisa casually strolled down the streets of Val City State, looking at the bustling crowds and their genuine joy, a smile spreading on their lips.

Indeed, smiles are infectious.

Noticing Roland’s expression, Lisa curiously asked, "You support their restoration; won’t Miss Sif have an opinion? For such a big matter, you should discuss it with her more."

She looked down at the shiny crocodile leather shoe tip, softly murmuring, "Roland, even though Miss Sif trusts you, she is still the Empress. Sometimes you should be a bit more careful."

Roland was momentarily stunned, and looking at Lisa’s worried face, he almost couldn’t hold back his laughter, but he continued along with her words.

"Alright, I got it."

Sif’s absolute trust in him was something he knew well enough; there was no need to show off in front of his sister.

Showing off affection always ends badly; this applies everywhere.

Perhaps feeling their previous conversation was a bit heavy, Lisa quickly changed the subject, "By the way, where is the ring you seized, can I take a look?"

Chapter 416: The Saintess’s Request (Part 2)

"Here, take it."

Roland casually took off the ring from his left middle finger and placed it in Lisa’s warm palm.

Lisa caressed the ring, feeling the cold emanating from it, and lowered her head slightly, speaking softly:

"At that time, I wanted to come down and save you, but Miss Saintess forbade it. She said you could extricate yourself and also mentioned my using fire to melt the Ice Barrier would cause thermal expansion..."

"She's right; it's thermal expansion and contraction. The drastic temperature change could cause the ice block to crack, and who knows, I might crack along with it."

A hint of surprise flickered in Roland's eyes. He found it hard to associate the Divine Court's Saintess with knowledge of physics.

This reasoning would make sense coming from Norton, but hearing it from the Saintess was somewhat jarring.

Yet he quickly came to terms with it.

In this world, gods do exist, so believing in them is also materialistic. For the Saintess, the face of the Divine Court, learning physics is normal.

His understanding of this world was still far from enough.

Lisa toyed with the ring for a moment before returning it to Roland.

She need not worry about Roland suspecting her of letting him die; there were just some things she had to say.

Having said it, she felt relieved.

After returning the ring to Roland, Lisa caught a glimpse of him wearing it again on his middle finger and felt something was amiss.

This ring came from Empress Sofia, and Roland wearing it seemed odd.

After a moment of hesitation, she changed the topic, "Roland, how long do you intend to keep Angelina locked up?"

"Until Sofia is enraged enough to come out of hiding."

Lisa suddenly realized, so that’s it.

This makes sense; Roland wouldn’t do such a boring thing.

It seems that wearing Sofia’s ring on the middle finger is also part of the provocation.

Perhaps to Sofia, this act is more humiliating than detaining Angelina.

Thinking that the ring has an Ice Attribute, she sighed softly, "It’s a pity I don’t understand Ice Magic, so I can’t replenish the ring’s energy. Neither Anthony nor Sura is skilled in Ice Magic."

Roland smiled and shook his head, "It’s all right, someone will help replenish it."

"Who?" Lisa’s curiosity was piqued.

"Angelina."

Roland’s lips curled into a mischievous smile as he teased, "I don’t keep idle people here; even prisoners of war must work to earn daily supplies and food."

Lisa: "..."

She laughed in relief.

This is Roland’s style; helping Val City State regain independence seemed contrary to Roland’s habits.

Seeing Lisa hesitating to speak, Roland knew she still couldn’t quite understand the reason for backing Val City State’s revival.

The public explanation is "fully respecting the Val people’s right to autonomy," but everyone knows that’s nonsense.

If they truly respected them, why annex them back then?

If they truly respected them, why station troops now?

Some matters shouldn’t be examined too closely; probing deeper only reveals more issues.

Though Val City State has regained independence, it lacks self-determination in military and diplomatic authority, and the crucial White Mountain Magic Crystal Ore Vein has been taken by Roland.

Rather than a country, it’s more a semi-colony disguised as a nation.

This is the limit of compromise for the Sussex people.

Tony is a shrewd politician; he understands this perfectly.

He didn’t take up the role of Governor of New Val City State but continued his position in the Imperial Cabinet of the Sussex Empire.

He intends to use himself as a buffer and bridge, allowing the motherland to take a slight respite amid big powers’ struggles and maintain dignity as much as possible.

This requires high political wisdom and skill; none but him can achieve it.

While Mr. Tony was delivering a passionate speech at the square, Roland and Lisa had already arrived at the Divine Hall of Light.

The Holy Spring, dry for a thousand years, was now flowing, with priests and nuns carefully cleaning and collecting Holy Water.

Holy Water is different from river water; though also colorless and transparent, it tastes sweet and refreshing, a sip can brighten the soul and bring tears of joy.

According to Roland's observations, Holy Water's real composition is high-quality mineral water infused with dissolved Light Divine Power.

Though it doesn't miraculously cure all diseases as the clergy boast, it certainly benefits the human body.

In an era scattered with quack doctors where butchers could double as surgeons, the clergy's healing ability already surpasses that of doctors, and with Holy Water, it's even more effective.

As Roland and Lisa briefly watched, they saw several citizens blessed with Holy Water fervently thanking the Goddess statue.

Some even expressed their willingness to devote themselves to the faith.

They showed plenty of sincerity, but the Divine Hall of Light doesn't just accept anyone; everyone has the right to believe in the Goddess, but beliefs vary.

Large religious organizations all have strict hierarchical systems.

Clergy are like this, so are followers.

The follower treatment disparity in Val City State is even more significant.

Ordinary followers need to pray for three days and participate in a lottery, with only the fortunate ones obtaining a small amount of Holy Water.

High Tier followers demonstrate their devotion through generous donations and naturally don’t need to queue for a lottery; they can request Holy Water allocation whenever needed.

Standing nearby and observing for a while, Roland saw no faith, only business.

While he remained calmly observing, a High Tier white-robed priest finally noticed him and hurriedly approached.

"His Highness the Light, you should’ve let us know you were coming so we could prepare a welcoming ceremony." The priest respectfully bowed to Roland.

Roland, as a Knight of Light, holds a very high status, akin to a Cardinal with real power and an official Saintess, only second to the Pope, even Christine, who hasn’t yet become an official Saintess, doesn’t have his standing.

Moreover, he possesses significant secular authority, and the white-robed priest wouldn’t dare slight him.

Chapter 417: The Saintess’s Request (Part 3)

Roland’s status is just slightly below that of the Pope/Emperor, much higher than an ordinary King/Prince.

The white robed Priest even felt that calling him ’Your Highness’ was somewhat insufficient.

Above ’Your Highness’, but not quite ’Emperor’—how should he be addressed? It really puzzled the white robed Priest.

Fortunately, Roland didn’t care for such titles, just smiling and nodding in response as a greeting.

Roland had a good impression of this smooth-talking white robed Priest and proactively asked for his name.

The white robed Priest was flattered, standing up straight, his voice trembling a bit, "Your Highness, my name is Martin, and I follow Miss Saintess to Val City on official duty as a Ceremonial Priest."

"Do a good job, I'm a keen judge of character, you at least have the potential to be an Archbishop."

Roland smiled and encouraged Martin a bit, then bid farewell after asking for Christine's whereabouts.

After parting with Martin, Lisa looked back at the white robed Priest who was trembling with excitement and couldn't help whispering:

"Roland, this Martin doesn't look like a priest at all, more like a businessman. Are you sure he can make it to Archbishop? That's overseeing a provincial diocese, only below a Cardinal."

Roland smiled and patted Lisa on the shoulder, teasing:

"I can't even see my own future, how could I possibly understand others? I'm not Alina."

"Then you..."

Halfway through her sentence, Lisa swallowed her words.

She embarrassedly stuck out her tongue, having been cooped up for a month or two in the underground Magic Cultivation Room, forgetting basic social interactions.

Just like praising someone else's child as clever, it's all just politeness.

Lisa quickened her pace to catch up with Roland, suddenly remembering his pat on her shoulder and feeling a bit unhappy.

"Roland, don’t pat my shoulder in the future."

Eh? A pat on the shoulder doesn’t seem too extreme, does it?

Roland was puzzled, he remembered clearly, Lisa once stole a kiss while he was drunk, which was much bolder than a pat on the shoulder, right?

Shrugging, Roland raised his hands in surrender.

He never understood a girl’s mind, so he figured he’d give up on guessing and simply complied.

With a still slightly annoyed Lisa, Roland found Miss Saintess.

What surprised him was that there was not only one Saintess in the Divine Hall.

Erin?

Due to Christine, Roland didn’t have much fondness for this Saintess candidate.

He wanted to support Christine to become the official Saintess, which naturally made Erin his adversary.

Seeing Roland’s figure, Erin’s face changed slightly, but she still stepped forward to greet him.

"Your Highness the Light, long time no see."

Roland replied indifferently, asking in a deep voice: "Miss Erin, coming from afar, what brings you here?"

"Your Highness the Light, have you heard about the Wende Empire being invaded by the Vladimir Empire?"

"I haven't heard, is this a recent event?"

Erin nodded, some helplessness in her voice: "The Vladimir Empire claims they need passage to reclaim the Val City State occupation zone, but the Wende Empire refused, leading to a small-scale conflict between the two, with casualties nearing a thousand."

"Oh." was Roland's simple acknowledgment, without further words.

Erin furrowed her brow slightly, trying hard to control her emotions and not make her inquiry sound like an accusation.

"Your Highness the Light, if my guess isn't wrong, all of this stems from you, doesn't it?"

"Miss Erin, one cannot speak carelessly."

Though Roland was indeed the source, he adamantly refused to admit it, even righteously countering:

"Our Sussex Empire is a peace-loving nation. Over the years, the Val City-State People have longed to restore their nation, and we heeded their call to help them realize that dream. On the other hand, the Vladimir Empire has been aggressive, leading the partitioning of Val City State, ignoring their national sentiments. They must take responsibility for all bloodshed incidents."

Erin: "..."

She widened her eyes, almost unable to believe Roland's ability to say such things with a straight face.

This was standard diplomatic rhetoric, and she, having been educated among the elite from a young age, could spout them for three hours without repeating herself.

Was this the attitude of speaking properly?

Seeing Erin’s displeased expression, Christine gave a gentle cough and interjected.

"Erin, these are the struggles of secular powers, we shouldn’t interfere."

"Christine, didn’t you have these concerns when you fought for His Highness the Light?" Unexpectedly, Christine sided against her, and Erin’s temper flared up instantly.

"Stop!"

Roland noticed the corners of Christine’s eyes narrowing, indicating her anger, and hurriedly stepped in to mediate.

"Erin, you’re the guest here, you may speak first."

Though he let Erin speak first, Roland emphasized her status as a guest in a firm tone, and Christine seemed satisfied, her expression gradually relaxing.

Erin cleared her throat, succinctly explaining her point.

Within the Divine Court of Light, there weren’t monolithic views—a faction within the Vladimir Empire’s Divine Court of Light stood opposed to the one spread across Central Rodinia.

If it was a secular struggle, they could ignore it, but if anyone clashed with the Vladimir Empire, they would surely back them up.

The Wende Empire was the only empire steadfast in the Faith in Light, incredibly significant to the Divine Court of Light.

The Divine Court of Light naturally wouldn't stand by and watch the Wende Empire fall, so they sent Erin to Val City Divine Hall seeking aid.

Holy Water, Holy Hall, Temple Warriors, funding, even Christine herself, she wanted them all.

But Christine didn't want to give any of it.

This was the team she had painstakingly built, her hard-earned support for Roland, and also the foundation for her ambition for the Papacy—these were hers!

After understanding both sides' conflict, Roland took just a second to make a decision.

"Miss Erin, I understand your request, you may return now."

"Wait, so do you agree or disagree?" Erin seemed a bit panicked. Roland's cold demeanor was beyond expectations, naturally making her anxious.

"Miss Erin, in terms of status, I am higher than you. In terms of authority, Christine and I are responsible for all matters in the North Rodinia Governor District of the Val City State. You do not have the right to mobilize any resources."

After a slight pause, Roland replaced it with a bright smile.

"Of course, as fellow guardians of the Light, bathing in the Goddess's glory, and since you contributed much during the Holy Spring Revival, you may take some Holy Water with you."

After speaking, Roland pretended to glance at Christine, asking with a smile:

"Christine, what do you think?"

"As you command!" Christine, out of Erin’s sight, gave Roland a thumbs-up, though her voice remained formally serious.

In an official tone, she reminded Erin that not even a Cardinal had the authority to order Roland.

That was the condition promised when Roland was brought on, one that no one could violate.

Chapter 418: The Saintess’s Refusal

Erin was full of anger, but she did not know how to vent it.

Indeed, she did not receive an edict from the Pope; her only reliance was a sincere handwritten letter from Cardinal Iga.

Iga also had no authority to command Roland and could only persuade him.

Both Iga and Erin, like Christine, were from the Wende Empire.

In fact, many of the higher-ups in the Divine Court of Light were from the Wende Empire.

The Wende Empire was already struggling to resist both the Prudon Kingdom and the Vladimir Empire, even more so fighting on two fronts simultaneously.

Moreover, the backward veto system of the High tier Councilors made it extremely difficult for them to organize resistance.

The situation was urgent, leaving the Wende Empire no choice but to seek assistance from the Divine Court of Light.

Honestly, as long as there were other ways, they would not want to seek help from the Divine Court of Light.

Those greedy priests would demand sky-high prices without hesitation.

Even if the invaders were defeated with the help of the Divine Court, the Imperial Family would suffer enormous losses.

But they had no choice.

During the national emergency, the parliament was still in endless quarrels, and the High tier Councilors were relentlessly using their veto power for personal grievances and disputes.

Fortunately, the Vladimir Empire had only launched a probing attack for now.

Once they got serious, Wende Empire's situation would be even more dire.

In desperation, the Emperor of the Empire had to bypass the parliament and directly seek aid from the Divine Court.

This led to the scene of Erin requesting support from Christine.

However, Erin seemed to have forgotten one thing: although there were tens of thousands of large contingent temple warriors, many elite warriors, and a high tier sanctuary here, they had nothing to do with her.

The high tier sanctuary and elite warriors were units assigned during the efforts to recruit Roland and were merely managed by Christine.

The large-scale expanded temple warriors were also built with Roland's money and Christine's efforts, without utilizing any resources from the Divine Court.

Neither reason nor law gave Erin the right to mobilize these troops.

Unless she had an official edict from the Pope, legally she had no justification, and even then it would only be legal justification.

The Pope was no fool and would never issue an order destined not to be carried out.

This was purely Erin's wishful thinking.

Even Iga's handwritten letter revealed a trace of helplessness.

Such a simple truth, Erin, of course, understood; she was merely hoping that Christine's feelings for her homeland would surpass everything else.

The Wende Empire was facing grave peril, and every citizen of Wende had the duty to take up arms to resist the invasion.

This was Erin's logic.

But Christine did not agree.

In her view, she was a servant of the Goddess on earth and did not belong to any secular nation.

Faithful devotion, loyalty to the Divine Court was what a Saintess should do.

If the Wende Empire could not hold on, it meant there was no seat for her on the old ship of the new world, and it should exit the historical stage.

Going against the tide of history was like a praying mantis trying to stop a chariot.

Iga's handwritten letter was written very earnestly, starting from Wende Empire's long history and brilliant culture, going on to the blatant aggressiveness of the Vladimir Empire, and finally gently reminding Roland that losing lips also made it hard to keep one's teeth intact.

Admittedly, it was a very compelling letter; Roland was very moved but still resolutely refused.

It was not because of disagreement but rather differing positions.

In Roland's view, the fall of the Wende Empire was not good news, but their directly blocking the Vladimir Empire was even worse.

At least the Vladimir Empire was far away, with long supply lines, and limited force mobilization. The Wende Empire and the Governor's Territory were less than five hundred kilometers apart, too close for comfort.

His attitude was quite similar to Christine's.

If they had the capability to establish an empire, they should have the strength to protect their foundation.

If they could fight, they should fight; if unable to fight, they should defend; if able to defend, they should defend; if unable to defend, they should flee; if able to flee, they should flee; if unable to flee, they should surrender; if able to surrender, they should surrender; if unable to surrender, they should die.

The world had always been this cruel.

It was only on the home ground of the Flower Sea that he and Sif had a slight chance of victory; going to Sofia's home ground for direct confrontation was courting death.

Roland's reply was also sincere.

He used data and tables to contrast the power disparities and potential for war, while also listing the logistical vulnerabilities of the Vladimir Empire.

Ultimately, he concluded that the Wende Empire should hold out and resist; if unable to resist, they should flee, take their living forces to exile abroad, and establish a government in exile.

To defeat the Vladimir Empire, they had to confront them in places where their supply lines were hardest to maintain.

For example, the Val City State, or even the Jin Yuan Republic.

If they won, the Wende Empire had a chance of restoration.

At the end of the handwritten letter, Roland, after much thought, still reminded Iga to be wary of being stabbed in the back by the Tirol Kingdom.

Sending troops was out of the question; these were elite forces he had paid to nurture!

Sending Christine back to assist was also impossible; Christine was Roland's campaign commander, and more importantly, Roland's designated final battle commander.

During the final showdown, Roland and Sif would leave the battlefield to face off against Sofia, leaving the frontline to Christine.

Just as Roland handed the handwritten letter to Erin, intending for her to leave, an unexpected figure stepped forward.

"I am willing to follow Miss Erin and share life and death with Wende."

The person who stepped forward was another high tier sanctuary, only half a level lower than Christine, named Joseph.

He had participated in the Battle of Helensburg and had made great contributions in defeating the Oden Kingdom.

He was a citizen of the Wende Empire; his grandfather was a famous general of the Empire.

Although he was a high tier sanctuary, which should stay out of secular struggles, he could not forsake his motherland.

"As long as we draw breath, Wende will never perish.

Take up arms and drive the enemy away, ushering in the dawn of our land.

Forward, forward..."

He sang the national anthem solemnly and passionately, his gaze calm.

His gaze gently fell on Christine’s face, with no blame or resentment, only calm and resolve.

He did not intend to morally coerce Christine, only to express his determination.

Christine avoided Joseph’s gaze, her expression calm as still water, yet the fine, fair hands hidden in her sleeves trembled slightly.

The Wende Empire, after all, was her homeland.

Seeing the struggle in her eyes, Roland softly sighed in his heart and painfully said:

"Christine, if you want to leave, you can take ten thousand temple warriors and all paladins. But you must promise not to do anything foolish, and if you fail, you must return to see me."

This was Roland’s bottom line.

Christine raised her head in surprise, her lips trembling, unable to speak a word for a long time.

She knew Roland too well to have ever thought he would be so generous.

Looking into Roland’s clear eyes, she knew he was not just being polite; he was serious.

Erin’s eyebrows lifted in joy, her voice slightly excited, "Thank you, Roland."

"That’s great, Christine, we can fight side by side again, your command..."

"No, I won’t leave."

Christine cut off Erin’s words, coldly refusing.

"Why?!" Erin’s eyes widened, her beautiful face visibly distorted.

Even that tight-fisted Roland agreed to spare resources, so what did Christine mean by this?

That was ten thousand temple warriors! Although the combat power of the extended temple warriors was slightly inferior, when used effectively, they could demonstrate the combat strength of fifty thousand ordinary troops.

And then there was Christine.

She was a top-tier commander, a magician on the battlefield.

Her presence was equivalent to an army of a hundred thousand.

Roland’s generous offer was equivalent to gifting a force with the equivalent strength of a hundred and fifty thousand troops.

Even Cardinal Iga could not have imagined, but Roland offered it.

Yet Christine refused to accept.

Erin was somewhat bewildered.

Seeing her bewildered look, Christine calmly explained:

"Erin, from a political perspective, the Wende Empire is already decayed; instead of sinking with a decaying ship, it’s better to build a new one."

"From a military perspective, the Val City line is the best decisive battleground."

"I will bury the barbaric Vladimir people here; I will support the reconstruction of a new Wende, but I will not be buried alongside the decayed Imperial Family."

Christine’s attitude was resolute; she raised a hand to stop Erin, who wanted to say more, directly seeing her off.

"Erin, you may leave now."

Erin’s eyes were slightly red; she bit her lip, fearing she might shed tears in front of these detestable figures.

As she turned to leave, Joseph glanced back at Christine.

His gaze held a bit of confusion, a touch of helplessness, some sorrow, and a hint of indifference.

He turned and left firmly.

He knew very well that they would not meet again.

Perhaps when they see each other again, it would be in a new cycle.

Chapter 419: Is This Also Part of the Humiliation?

Christine watched Joseph's back, her eyes filled with desolation.

Joseph was a descendant of the teacher, only a year or two older than her. As a youth, he was sent to the Divine Court and ascended to the high tier Sanctuary through his abilities, truly a promising young man.

Does he not know the Wende Empire's demise is inevitable?

Of course, he knows.

Even if he knows, some things still must be done.

Joseph's family is a hereditary nobility of the Wende Empire, with ancestors who were renowned generals. Their fate is deeply tied to the Empire.

If he doesn't return, people will criticize him for the rest of his life.

Christine is different.

She is clergy serving the Goddess, merely born in the Wende Empire.

She has received the Wende Empire's grace but has long repaid it with her performances on the battlefield.

Though she feels sorrow for the Empire's plight, she has no stance or reason to accompany it to the grave.

Though feeling some melancholy, Christine maintained her expression well, not mentioning the recent upheaval, and instead briefed Roland on the expansion of the Temple Warriors.

With Roland's strong support, the Temple Warriors lost in the Battle of Helentz Castle were fully replenished and continued to expand to 37,000.

This army is temporarily designated as the 19th Light Guard Army Division.

Although the number is similar to that of a full field army, Christine maintains the nominal structure of a division.

If an army's numbers are at the army level, and its combat power is at the army level, then it is an army-level unit.

Even if in name it is a division.

As long as the benefits are reaped, it's better to stay low-key.

After the introduction, seeing Christine in low spirits, Roland wisely bid farewell and left, allowing Christine to digest her melancholy herself.

Some matters cannot be advised by outsiders, better not to mention them.

Watching Roland leave, Christine sat back in her chair wearily, her slender body sinking deep into the large leather seat, her eyelids drooping.

The firmness and decisiveness from earlier were gone, leaving only helplessness and confusion in her eyes.

She made the most rational choice, but does absolute rationality truly exist in this world?

"Teacher, if it were you, what would you choose?"

She once sacrificed thousands as bait to annihilate the main force of the rebels, achieving a brilliant victory, earning the title "Cold-blooded Witch" from this victory.

In the recent Battle of Helentz Castle, she completed her transformation.

She was no longer that cold-blooded witch who viewed everyone as pawns, but a wise leader with both decision-making skills and human emotions.

Yet today, she made a cold-blooded choice once more.

Roland gave her the opportunity to choose; she could have returned with ten thousand men to try to turn the tide, and if the battle went poorly, she could have led the Wende Imperial Family to retreat and form a government-in-exile.

She could care for the Wende people’s feelings, boost morale, and preserve her reputation.

But, can she win if she goes back?

Entering the professional realm, Christine’s spirit was instantly invigorated.

She approached the military map, staring at the surroundings of the Wende Empire, frowning and thinking, occasionally moving some pieces onto it.

No need to mark data; she knows the weight of these pieces.

War is the cruelest art, in which she is a professional.

After a rapid simulation in her mind, she came to a relatively reliable conclusion.

If the Wende Empire were united, if the parliament didn't hinder, if the nation could quickly unleash its war potential, if Sofia never appeared, there indeed would be a significant chance of winning.

As the dawn of victory appeared, Christine could not smile.

Because these prerequisites are exceedingly harsh.

The aged Wende Empire is plagued by internal conflicts, the parliament knows nothing but hindrance, Sofia is only missing, not dead, she will come sooner or later.

The Wende Empire, though it has the potential to mobilize millions of troops, is ultimately doomed.

The process may be quick, maybe slow, but it will come eventually.

This depends on the degree of internal strife.

Christine exhaled and her expression returned to calm.

The Wende won't perish!

Even if the entire nation falls, as long as Wende people remain, there's hope for restoration.

But it's crucial to preserve the spark.

She and these Temple Warriors are the sparks of Wende's restoration.

She recalled Joseph's eyes at the time of farewell, instantly understanding.

Joseph understood too, so he wouldn't use moral coercion to force her to return.

In this vast Empire, if no one accompanies its final act, it would be too tragic.

Joseph will live and die with Wende, ensuring the world knows the spirit of the Wende people.

The subsequent restoration is up to Christine.

Neither of them has it easy.

Standing by the window, Miss Saintess cast her gaze northward.

Beyond the horizon, several hundred kilometers away, is Hansa City's center, in the Governor's Territory.

The city isn't large, but it's vibrant.

Colleagues are intensely competitive among themselves, yet extremely united externally.

Only such a team could possibly defeat Sofia.

No time to mourn the impending doom of the Wende Empire, after handling the transition matters in Val City, Roland handed the city over to Tony and Christine, and returned to Hansa City.

Sif will soon come to the front lines, waiting for Sofia to appear.

He must seize the time to recharge the Ice Crystal Blue Ring, letting Sif also understand Sofia's true strength.

The decisive battle is nearing; every moment is precious.

...

Without hearing a knock, the courtyard door opened.

Angelina, who was reading newspapers, looked up in surprise.

She had been under house arrest at a manor in the suburbs of Hansa City for a week.

Initially captured, she was sleepless, overwhelmed by shame, anger, and sadness, tossing and turning all night without sleeping well.

Fearing Roland might change his mind and continue to humiliate her, and fearing the Empress's wrath over her failure.

Chapter 420: Is This Also Part of the Humiliation?

But she quickly realized that her anxiety was pointless, only leaving her sleep-deprived with puffy eyes.

Since she couldn't escape, she might as well settle in peacefully.

Though Roland was a scoundrel, he maintained a decent facade, accommodating her with the highest-ranking prisoner treatment and even thoughtfully arranging for a Rurik chef skilled in making her hometown cuisine.

In just a few days, her sadness magically became an appetite, and she even gained two pounds.

She was only under house arrest, not really imprisoned, and she was even allowed two newspapers a week and could borrow three books.

Unfortunately, she couldn't choose the newspapers freely and couldn't see firsthand news from her homeland.

Roland designated her newspapers as the overseas edition of "The Sun" and "Rodinia Weekly."

The book selection was also meticulously curated by Roland.

Today, she was reading an encyclopedia about the Undersea World.

The various new and fascinating knowledge immersed her so much that she almost forgot this world.

However, the world had not forgotten her.

The one who came to see her was Roland.

Angelina bit her lip, her face somewhat grim.

She originally thought she wouldn’t have to see Roland, who seemed harmless to humans and animals but was actually shameless, but he had come nonetheless.

Was he here to inspect his spoils of war or to toy with her like a cat with a mouse?

If this was two days after she had first been captured, Angelina might have been emotionally distraught, but now she felt quite calm.

Her Majesty the Empress had often said that reading brings peace, but she could never quite calm her mind — it was only as a captive that she had the opportunity to read.

She had indeed failed to meet the Empress’s expectations.

With a light sigh, she inserted a bookmark at the half-read section and closed the book. Before she could return it to the shelf, Roland appeared at the study door.

Since he was already here, Angelina couldn’t be bothered to put away the book.

She stood up and was about to salute Roland when her hand, raised halfway, froze in the air.

What identity should she use to greet Roland?

A military salute was definitely out of the question.

The face of an Imperial soldier had been utterly lost by her.

After a moment of confusion, Angelina pinched at an imaginary skirt, performed a curtsey.

Her knees were somewhat stiff, making the motion quite awkward, causing Angelina’s lips to twitch slightly.

Fortunately, Roland didn’t care and casually gestured for her to sit down.

Roland easily settled into another chair, smiling as he greeted her.

"How are you finding the stay here?"

A few days ago, Angelina might have lost her temper and argued with Roland.

Now she just smiled calmly, "I’m good, the chef you found is very authentic, and the food tastes like home."

"That’s good. If you have any difficulties in life, feel free to tell the maids. Sussex is a civilized country; we don’t mistreat prisoners of war."

Angelina bit her lip and swallowed her words.

Catching a glimpse of the book’s cover on the table, Roland’s lips curled into an attractive smile.

This was a book he had brought back from the sea, becoming a creation of his after being processed.

Spreading knowledge to the high-ranking officials of the barbaric Rurik People could earn him an Inheritor Badge, and the thought of the upcoming badge almost made Roland laugh outright.

His purpose this trip was not for this but to recharge the ring.

After some small talk, Roland removed the Ice Crystal Blue Ring from his left ring finger and slowly raised it.

"This is the trump card Sofia gave you, right?"

Angelina didn’t speak, her face slightly red.

Holding the ring bestowed by the Empress yet captured by Roland was a shame she couldn’t cleanse.

Angelina’s feelings were written all over her face, no need to guess — it was obvious.

Roland indeed couldn’t figure out the thoughts of a proper girl, but fortunately, Angelina was just a neutral soul hiding in a girl’s body.

As long as he didn’t regard her as a girl, it was easily understandable.

"Angelina, if you were my subordinate and experienced such a catastrophic failure, how do you think I would handle you?"

"Kill." Angelina’s answer was succinct.

Roland almost laughed out of anger; was that how she viewed him?

Silently noting this grudge, he shrugged and calmly said, "Assigning tasks beyond a subordinate's abilities should lead to the leader bearing the major responsibility."

Angelina suddenly looked up, her eyes wide.

She comprehended three foreign languages, and Roland's Sussex Language was flourished and precise, an authentic Imperial Capital accent, all of which she heard clearly.

Yet, although she understood each word Roland said, she couldn't grasp the meaning when they were combined.

Roland was tired of babbling, so he stated directly, "You have an intelligence network; you should know I'm not lying."

Angelina tried to recall, indeed thinking of a few minor incidents.

Under Roland's command, the cavalry officer Jes, due to his overzealous handling of a warehouse arson case, was apprehensive, and it was indeed Roland who took full responsibility.

He wasn't bragging; if a command error occurred, he indeed would take responsibility.

Would the Empress do the same, or possibly be less than Roland?

This terrifying thought just emerged, startling Angelina greatly.

She hurriedly dispelled this terrible notion and screamed somewhat angrily.

"What do you mean? Are you trying to take this opportunity to belittle Her Majesty the Empress? I'll tell you, Her Majesty would do the same, and so would every excellent leader!"

Watching Angelina's face twist in anger, Roland was initially startled, then relieved.

He was merely speaking casually, yet it angered Angelina.

It seemed Sofia wasn't so forgiving, or at least not always forgiving.

Noting this critical information, Roland nodded and agreed with a smile, "I believe that; it's a basic quality of an excellent leader."

Although Roland verbally gave in, Angelina had no mood to waste words with him, her tone also gaining a touch of coldness.