Empress 421

Chapter 421: Is This Also Part of the Humiliation? (3)

"Lord Governor, I am merely a captive now. If you have any requests, please state them directly. If not, I'd like to rest."

"It's not much, really. You're skilled in manipulating ice, so I'd like you to help recharge the ring."

"What did you say? Recharge Her Majesty the Empress's ring so that you can play with it?" Angelina could hardly believe that such a shameless request was being made.

"Yes." Roland admitted frankly.

Angelina was amused by Roland's shamelessness.

A rogue is always a rogue; never harbor any fantasies about him.

"I refuse. Even a prisoner of war has dignity." Angelina's attitude was resolute.

"Do you truly refuse?" Roland squinted his eyes.

"I'd rather die than submit." Angelina raised her head with candor.

While her looks weren't the most stunning, she still had bright eyes and white teeth, with delicate features. Her youthful face was free of makeup and full of collagen, exuding a certain feminine charm.

Roland's gaze moved down from her face.

The places that needed to be big were big enough, and her every movement carried a certain steely grace. Most men would find it hard to resist such a beauty.

However, every day when Roland opened his eyes, he saw Sif, and when he closed them, he saw Elf Sylph. His threshold for appreciating beauty far surpassed that of ordinary people.

To him, Angelina ranked at a level of being passably attractive, but not much more.

Noticing Roland’s gaze roaming her body, Angelina was somewhat displeased and frowned.

"Lord Governor, as a gentleman, isn’t it rather impolite to look at a lady in such a manner?"

"I’m not a gentleman; I’m a rogue." Roland said calmly.

Resting his chin on his hand, he smiled like a fox, "I’m pondering what pose your beautiful body should take as an ice sculpture to attract more visitors."

Angelina’s face turned exceptionally unsightly.

She wasn’t afraid of death, but such a humiliating way to die was hard to accept.

"Her Majesty the Empress will never let you off!"

"From the way you put it, will she let me off if I don’t do this?" Roland remained calm.

Angelina was at a loss for words, so she switched to a softer tone, "Do you truly not care about your reputation?"

"I care, very much so. But compared to death, mere reputation is nothing. I’ve mentioned before, failures beyond one’s abilities won’t be held accountable. You’re being forced, and the Empress can forgive you."

Angelina was momentarily speechless.

After going in circles, was this what Roland had been waiting for her to realize?

This was what she had said herself—The Empress wouldn’t fault her subordinates. Was she now to retract her previous words?

Angelina’s face turned unsightly, her lips nearly biting into her own skin.

Roland knew she was wavering and gave her no time to think, directly handing the ring to her.

"My patience is not great."

Humiliated tears rolled down Angelina’s cheeks. She vowed to make Roland pay sooner or later. Grinding her teeth, she accepted the ring and angrily said:

"I am weak. Even if I give it my all, I cannot fully restore it. Is it necessary?"

"Whether it’s necessary is for me to decide!"

Roland’s smile disappeared as he calmly said, "I’m going to find the ice sculptor now. If I don’t see a fully recharged ring in three days, your beauty will be displayed to everyone."

Angelina nearly fainted.

She softly retorted, "Lord Governor, is this what you meant by not punishing a subordinate for the lack of ability?"

"I wouldn’t trouble a subordinate, but you are an enemy."

Roland teased with a smile, "Of course, you can always surrender, which I would warmly welcome."

Angelina responded with a single word.

"Pah!"

Roland paid no mind to Angelina’s livid face, laughing heartily as he walked away.

Couldn’t handle Sofia, but can’t handle you?

...

The next morning, Roland took the ring from a red-eyed Angelina.

In all fairness, Angelina had truly put in effort.

It seemed she wasn’t very interested in publicly displaying her charm.

Her strength was indeed far inferior to Sofia’s, but this ring had been modified by Sofia to be rechargeable and reusable. With enough patience, she could restore it to eighty or ninety percent.

Feeling the icy cold and fierce killing intent emanating from the ring, Roland’s smile was radiant.

Sif would be arriving shortly, and this ring could be shared with her, letting her experience the might of even one-tenth of Sofia’s attack power.

Chapter 422: Which Empress?

She has arrived.

The accompanying historians appear calm, silently recording the Empress’s itinerary.

The beautiful and glorious Empress Sylph Sussex York arrived in the loyal city of Hansa on September 21, 1794.

Green leafed five-petaled White Rose banners fluttered through the streets, artillery fired twenty-one shots, and the red carpet stretched from the city gates all the way to the central square.

Caesar Roland personally led foreign officials ten miles out of the city to welcome her.

When the Empress lifted the curtain and stepped out of the carriage, waving to her subjects, the cheers were deafening.

There were no pre-arranged actors, it was all genuine emotion.

Roland dared to vouch for it with his integrity, at least he hadn't set up anything.

He smiled as he looked at the dazzling Sif, the sun-like figure eliciting his reflections.

When they left the Imperial Capital, they couldn't be described as stray dogs, but they were certainly in a sorry state.

Yet when Sif returned to Hansa City, everything had changed.

She was now a monarch wielding complete Imperial Authority.

She had dealt with disloyal opposition.

She guided burgeoning industries, such as commerce, education, and finance.

She personally opened new territories for the Empire.

Reflecting on these achievements, Roland, as the man behind the Empress, felt honored.

Sif's expression remained majestically stern yet amiable, elegantly waving to each person, exchanging gentle glances with her subjects.

Many witnessed the Empress's majestic appearance for the first time—they could hardly believe such a beautiful and otherworldly girl existed in the mortal world.

She was so perfect she didn't seem human, but rather resembled the most beautiful race in legend—the Elf.

Led by someone, an individual knelt on the ground, overwhelmed and in tears.

The crowd effect quickly took hold; soon, more and more people knelt, unable to look directly at the radiant halo behind the Empress.

Sif squinted, glancing at Roland with some doubt.

Isn't this a bit overacted?

Roland shrugged, smilingly responded with a look.

It's not acting, it's all emotion.

The welcoming contingent, along with self-invited citizens, totaled over thirty thousand people, yet Sif and Roland's gazes could precisely lock onto each other amid the crowd.

In just one look, they completed an exchange.

Roland did not advise Sif on how to handle it.

Once again, an impromptu test was presented.

Sif’s lips curled upward, she no longer feared examinations because she knew the full-score answer.

Extending her hands, raising them in a lifting gesture, she signaled everyone to stand.

The kneeling crowd hurriedly stood up.

As they awaited the Empress’s speech with excitement and trepidation, Sif’s crisp voice spread far through the amplification Magic Array, echoing over the city.

"Subjects, remember, the people of Sussex need not kneel to anyone. I will defend your freedom and dignity!"

The entire audience fell silent, then erupted into thunderous cheers.

Someone began to sing "Empress Tianyou," the melodious tune infecting all present.

More and more people joined the chorus, the song grew louder, causing the entire city to gently tremble.

Sif glanced at Roland out of the corner of her eye.

Three parts pride mixed with seven parts joy of reunion, gently spreading.

Roland raised his hands, clapping rhythmically.

The admiration was heartfelt.

This was indeed a perfect answer, more impressive than the lines he anticipated.

Although it seemed somewhat incongruous for an absolute monarch to promise freedom and dignity to the subjects, everyone was willing to believe, and that was enough.

The city's entrance ceremony resonated toward a nearby manor.

Angelina, reading at the time, was disturbed by the loud sound, hence reluctantly put down her book, climbed onto the rooftop, and raised her telescope to view the scene.

This was her reward for recharging the Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

Her field of view had expanded.

From this angle, she could observe the entrance ceremony from afar.

As she watched the beautiful and proud Sif, admired by all, Angelina bit her lip, silently grumbling.

Such a beautiful girl, she would surely be quite captivating if made into an ice sculpture, wouldn't she?

Hope you can smile like that when facing Her Majesty Sofia.

An absolute monarch promising freedom and dignity to their subjects?

How absurd.

How can she say this shamelessly without any emotional burden? Who taught her this?

Angelina put down the telescope, wordless.

She knew well who taught Sif—it was Roland.

This is your last romantic moment, enjoy it well.

Disinterestedly, Angelina jumped off the rooftop, returned to the study under the cautious eyes of two maids, and resumed her reading.

She realized she'd indeed wasted too much time before.

Her Majesty the Empress was right, no matter how busy, one ought to make time to read more books.

Thoughts of her life's fire extinguishing in the Empress's wrath oddly imparted a sense of urgency in time's passing.

There's no time left to waste; there are many books she must read.

The disputes and deceit beyond suddenly felt extraordinarily distant.

Among the books she could borrow, her favorite were astronomy and geography.

Regrettably confined here, she couldn't go out to witness this beautiful world.

Fortunately, she still had a telescope; nighttime belonged to her romantic moments.

She could gaze at the stars.

Compared to the vast cosmos, humans are so insignificant.

Be it Sif or Roland, even the invincible Her Majesty Sofia, they are nothing compared to the myriad stars.

Even the high Goddess is insignificant against the cosmic expanse.

We are all ants, just that some ants are slightly stronger.

Having attained a deep understanding, Angelina no longer paid attention to the cheer outside, pulled out a copy of "Basic Astrology" from the shelf, and began studying it carefully.

Tonight, she'll watch the stars.

Chapter 423: Which Empress? (Part 2)

Angelina will be stargazing tonight, and Hansa City is set to hold a grand welcome ceremony for the Empress.

Some are excited, eager to witness something even more spectacular.

Rupert, the newly appointed Chief of Military Intelligence, is also part of the Empress's entourage.

The Empress setting sail is not merely visiting familiar grounds. Sif doesn't plan to return so soon this time.

She has outlined a development blueprint and handed local governance back to the Cabinet.

It seems as if it's back to the beginning, yet it's completely different from when Edward was in office.

During Edward's reign, imperial authority and ministerial power fiercely clashed, constantly pulling against each other.

With Sif's accession, the Cabinet is no longer a political faction vying for power with her but has turned into her administrative body for handling domestic and foreign affairs.

She holds absolute power.

Only Roland can share core power with her; everyone else is merely a worker.

Rupert didn't want to stay in the mainland. He volunteered, requesting to accompany them.

His reason was simple: he wanted to be closer to the enemy, which would enhance the accuracy and timeliness of intelligence gathering.

Such a reasonable reason, Sif naturally couldn't refuse.

Actually, even if Rupert didn't mention it, she would have requested him to accompany her.

As war is imminent, logistics and intelligence must be prioritized.

If Rupert didn't proactively ask to accompany her, then either his loyalty or ability would likely be flawed.

Yet Sif didn't notice Rupert's eyes burning with the soul of gossip.

His intelligence updates swiftly.

He knew Roland captured Angelina, driving out the Vladimir Empire's troops.

These pieces of intelligence are nothing; a keen expert can always uncover terrifying truths from details.

He noticed that Roland's left-hand middle finger sported a new ring.

The Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

Seven years ago, the wedding ring from when Empress Sofia married the former Emperor of the Vladimir Empire.

At that time, she was still very young, gracefully beautiful, with a gentle smile, pure as water.

It was after she personally killed her husband, who subjected her to emotional abuse, that she ceased to smile.

That wedding ring is a magic ring passed down through generations of the Sofia Clan.

Named the Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

Now it rests on Roland’s left-hand middle finger.

Noticing this detail, Rupert’s whole body trembled with excitement.

Just based on this ring, The Sun could release several special issues, potentially breaking sales records!

"Unspoken stories between the Empress’s loyal subject and an enemy nation’s Empress."

"The lover of my lover is not my lover."

"Details exposed, she finally notices the origin of that ring."

"Shocking, the outbreak of a world war actually caused by a ring."

...

Rupert’s mind trembles.

After the ultimate trembling, he is immediately seized by endless torment.

The Sun cannot write.

Previously, he was just a carefree aristocrat, a reckless noble scion, a media tycoon, free to gossip.

But not anymore.

Now, he is a key minister of the Empire, the Chief of Intelligence.

An official with cabinet-level rank letting his own tabloid report the Empress’s scandals? Is this right? This is not right.

Now he is a dignified person and must be dignified.

Thinking that he can’t expose this shocking discovery, Rupert feels so sad he wants to cry, yet he still came.

Even if he can’t expose it, he must at least watch the show from the front row on site.

How will the Empress treat Roland? Will she be suspicious? Will she be angry?

He is very curious.

He has already provided Her Majesty the Empress with the most detailed intelligence, and she can understand.

Dominated by the soul of the gossip-seeker, Rupert walks somewhat stealthily.

Throughout the banquet, he is the most absent-minded.

He keeps waiting for the Empress to question, but regrettably, she does not.

Just when he thought this moment wouldn't come, that they would resolve it privately, the clear voice of the Empress rings out.

"Lord Roland, you defeated Angelina; have you seized any special trophies?"

Sif's expression is calm, her tone unwavering.

Her glance sweeps across the entire room, watching everyone's expressions.

Most people are hoping for promotion and wealth, but only Rupert is anxious like a monkey.

She felt like laughing.

This guy may understand intelligence, but he doesn't understand hearts at all.

There is only one person in this world worthy of her complete trust, and that is Roland.

He is her world.

Isn't it just a wedding ring? Even if Roland asked her on the spot to help propose to Sofia...

She wouldn't blame Roland; she would accompany him to the New World.

For instance, a romantic Nether River trip.

How could Roland betray?

Facing Sif’s calm "casual" inquiry, Roland strode to the center of the banquet hall, took off the ring from his left hand, raised it high, letting everyone present see it.

"The trophy is here, the Ice Crystal Blue Ring, Empress Sofia’s wedding ring."

The room fell silent.

Is this something you can just talk about?

No one knew what Roland intended, including Sif.

She knew Roland surely had his reasons for doing this; she was waiting.

Some were silent, some frowned.

In Rurik customs, wearing a wedding ring on the left middle finger signifies soon leaving singlehood.

Roland’s action was truly outrageous.

Bordeaux couldn’t help but tease, "Governor, do you intend to marry that woman?"

Of course, he wasn’t trying to undermine Roland, just reminding Roland to quickly clarify his stance to avoid misunderstandings.

Most people present understood his meaning and laughed aloud.

Sif joined in the jest, "Lord Roland, although your status is extraordinary and your strength is notable, wanting to marry Sofia is almost impossible; you might have to become a consort to have a chance."

Under everyone’s gaze, Roland walked forward step by step, his expression calm.

"Your Majesty, I’ve achieved countless merits for the Empire. I wish for you to prepare a grand wedding worthy of my status. I want to propose to that distinguished lady far away in the sky, whose outstanding temperament, beauty, and surpassing status I’ve admired."

Wait, what nonsense is he talking?

The whole room was bewildered; the guests at the banquet were dumbfounded.

If it was about the adjectives, it could be Sif, it could be Sofia, but what does far away in the sky mean?

Empress Sif is right here.

Everyone was just joking, are you serious?

Sif’s slightly blushing cheeks turned pale in an instant.

The blood in her body almost froze, leaving her completely stunned.

There’s only one person who matches all those descriptors—Sofia.

Her lips trembled, desperately searching for reasons to comfort herself.

Roland surely hasn’t fallen for the enemy; he could never like the cold woman who murdered her husband; he must be sacrificing himself for her survival.

It must be that!

Her mind went blank, subconsciously responding numbly:

"As you wish, is the person you wish to propose to Sofia?"

The room fell silent.

You could hear a pin drop.

Just when the atmosphere was close to suffocating, Roland couldn't help but burst out in hearty laughter.

Hearing Sif's heartbroken voice, he felt a bit pained, also a bit angry.

You idiot, how could I possibly be associated with such a woman?

Forget it, forget it; he couldn't figure out a girl's mind; it's normal for a girl not to understand his mind.

Might as well be honest and say it straight.

Roland moved forward slowly, his steps steady, his voice firm.

"I once encountered the most beautiful girl in the world."

"I initially thought it was a dream."

"Yet she appeared before me."

"When her bright eyes struck the chords of my heart, I finally realized I was long trapped."

"Beautiful Miss Sylph, would you descend from the clouds and walk beside this ordinary man through life’s journey with me?"

Sif was stunned.

Far away in the sky was merely an adjective?

She was so silly to forget Roland was the champion of the essay contest.

"Oh my, the Empress is pregnant, who did it?" It’s not fiction, but the truth.

Everyone suddenly realized.

Hey, Roland this guy, proposing, he had to take such a detour.

Indeed, a cultured man, even nonsense must take a turn.

Sif stood up, walked to the center of the banquet hall.

Her eyelashes trembled, tears had unknowingly moistened the corners of her eyes.

Her pace matched Roland’s perfectly.

Their strides were steady as they advanced towards each other.

The speed of meeting each other is countless times greater than carrying on alone.

Because some paths can’t be completed alone.

For instance, love.

Sif raised her slender fingers to meet him.

The Ice Crystal Blue Ring fit precisely on her slender ring finger, automatically adjusting to size, gently wrapping her fair fingers.

She choked as she nodded, closed her eyes, gently responding, "I do."

Under everyone’s gaze, Roland embraced her warm soft waist and bent over for a kiss.

Chapter 424: Everyone Is a Shipper

Some rejoice while others fret.

Upon learning that Roland proposed to the Empress, it was naturally a time of celebration throughout the Sussex Empire.

As the Empress reached adulthood and took the throne, her marriage gradually became the focus of public attention.

Marriages of the Imperial Family and high-ranking officials often have nothing to do with love, but are tied to politics.

As political figures, separating emotion from interest is a basic maneuver.

According to conventional logic, female monarchs often marry significant foreign figures, allowing their children to inherit the family name and the throne.

The reason for not marrying within one's own country's nobility is simple: it could disrupt the political balance, even potentially causing the most crucial crown to change hands.

Imperial authority is above all else, and even the smallest risk is not allowed to exist.

To ensure that members of the Imperial Family are willing to accept these rules, outside of marriage, these political elites can freely pursue love.

Having children with their spouses, and enjoying love with their lovers.

This is the unspoken rule.

Sofia was forced to kill her husband because he went too far.

To humiliate Sofia and her family, the rebellious former Emperor left Sofia as a mere mascot in the cold palace, never touching her, while playing wildly outside.

To be fair, none of his lovers were as beautiful or graceful as Sofia, but he simply disliked the Prudon people, and disliked the marriage arranged by his mother.

Sofia was insulted, Sofia was furious, he died.

Sif's marriage has recently become the biggest topic of discussion among the citizens of the Sussex Empire during their idle conversations.

They acknowledge the feelings between Roland and Sif, but don't believe they will marry.

Roland's power is simply too great.

If Roland held ill intentions, he could fully use the marriage to change the dynasty of the Empire. At that point, the Imperial Family of the Sussex Empire would have become the Lundebel Clan.

This is politics.

The citizens of the Sussex Empire felt a bit regretful.

Though they knew that it was more appropriate for the Empress to marry foreign nobility, they still felt it was a pity.

They would much prefer the Empress to marry for love.

The Empress, dazzling and beautiful like an elf, even had to endure worldly erosion, which truly pained them.

Roland's open proposal filled them with excitement.

The Empress agreeing on the spot excited them even more, leading them to pop open champagne immediately.

A hundred million citizens instantly became enthusiasts, not caring what surname the Imperial Family bore, only wanting to see the Empress wear the wedding gown and marry her beloved.

News of Roland's proposal quickly spread across the Rodinia Continent.

Rupert finally couldn't hold back, writing an engaging story in the dead of night under an anonymous name.

The Empress did not allow him to make unfounded reports about the Imperial Family.

But what he wrote was all based on true stories, not rumors, so it was fine.

The Sun broke records once again in terms of both unit price and sales.

The special hardcover edition, featuring images of the proposal scene, sold out despite being priced at one Su Pound.

Many people couldn’t read, but few were blind.

Many bought a copy to take home simply as a keepsake.

After The Sun announced that all net profits from the sales of the special edition would go toward the Empress’s wedding, the newspaper’s sales network was nearly trampled flat by enthusiastic crowds.

The adoration and fervor Sif enjoyed couldn’t be matched even by the biggest stars in the entertainment industry.

There are many old-timers who don’t like actors, but few Sussex people dislike the Empress.

If you don’t cheer for the Empress’s love, what are your principles?

As this question arose, those Sussex people who hadn’t yet had the chance to buy the special edition hurried to line up at the newspaper’s sales outlets.

Taking advantage of this newspaper and special edition buying craze, Roland seized the opportunity for the Minister of Culture and Education to send people to promote compulsory education among the commonfolk.

"If you can’t read, you can’t even understand the Empress’s love story, only look at a picture!"

This down-to-earth slogan instantly awakened fools who previously considered education dispensable.

True, without education you can’t even understand a newspaper, isn’t that frustrating.

Roland designed elementary educational materials for these people, recruiting primary teachers from various countries on the Rodinia Continent to conduct literacy education.

His language teaching material template came from another world.

Since he didn’t need to pay cross-dimensional royalties, he used it with peace of mind.

After further simplification, Roland took advantage of this surge in popularity to compile four basic courses: Basic Linguistics, Basic Mathematics, Basic Nature, and Basic Military Science.

Upon seeing the materials he compiled, the Minister of Culture and Education couldn’t help but criticize them for being too simple and too crude.

In response to the Minister’s objection, Roland maintained his stance.

Be it art or science, there must be a foundation.

What he aims to do is spread the basics.

Some also reminded him that war with the Vladimir Empire was imminent, and allocating a large amount of resources to the slow-reaping compulsory education was misplaced prioritization, hoping Roland would change his plan.

Wait until the war is over, then implement compulsory education!

At least seven cabinet ministers signed this suggestion, including the wise William and Roland’s confidant Ados.

Roland circled the suggestion, simply wrote "read", and then instructed his secretary to file it in the archives.

The cabinet ministers' opinions were good, but it's a pity they didn't understand the value of Inheritors.

Having felt the power of the Ice Crystal Blue Ring, Roland clearly knew how terrifying Sofia's power was.

She indeed revealed her data bars, no longer in an invincible state.

But Sofia's data was overly flamboyant, filled with an overwhelming sense of numerical inflation beauty.

And yet this was her strength before she secluded herself for training.

As her return day approaches, will Sofia's power really not grow again?

Roland felt urgency, he urgently needed an opportunity to break the deadlock.

Leveraging the proposal hype to promote compulsory education was the breakthrough he envisioned.

He wants to be the father of compulsory education in the Sussex Empire.

Even if this becomes the act that digs the grave for absolute imperial authority in the future.

The living have the right to worry about tomorrow, the dead do not.

With the mindset of "since it's already done, might as well do it thoroughly," Roland publicly proposed to Sif with the Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

It was romantic but also a solid slap in Sofia's face.

Even directly proposing to Sofia wouldn't have been so insulting.

Roland, of course, couldn’t propose to Sofia, not for fear of rejection, but for fear that she would directly agree and have him organize the wedding, which would leave him dumbfounded.

Calling off a wedding is a major insult not only back home but here as well.

Sofia’s patience isn’t so great, she can’t wait three years, she would immediately expose him.

Without public provocation, Sofia wouldn’t be angry; provoking too much, excessive anger is also not good.

So Roland chose to use Sofia’s engagement ring to propose to Sif.

The insult was strong, but not absolute.

Roland and Sif planned to embark on an empire tour.

The Sussex Empire is vast, they planned to visit each province, allowing more subjects to witness the Empress’s graceful bearing and promote compulsory education.

"Do you want to learn about the Empress’s story? Want to read and see the news? Join the compulsory education! Every imperial citizen has the right to receive no less than three years of compulsory education."

"Compulsory education is free!"

In Sussex language, free and freedom are the same word.

This promotional slogan has a double meaning.

Compulsory education is both free and liberating.

Before the empire tour begins, Sif still had one thing to do.

Test the power of Sofia.

With Roland protecting her, Christine prepared for emergency rescue. She was going to challenge Sofia—

’s ring.

The challenge was set at White Mountain.

Standing on the Flower Sea, backed by a Ginkgo Tree, with Roland by her side, facing the diminished Ice Crystal Blue Ring, winning was certain, but what she wanted was not just victory, but a total victory.

She wanted to melt the ice amidst laughter, blooming like flowers, leaving the most beautiful smile for Roland.

Even a slightly disheveled hair wouldn’t count as a complete victory.

Under the Ginkgo Tree, Sif’s expression was calm, as if on an outing.

Before her was a spread of a tablecloth and an array of food.

A bottle of Milan Champagne, to be opened after verification ended.

Although the food was excellent, Roland truly had no appetite, after accompanying a few bites, he once again emphasized the power unleashed by the Ice Crystal Blue Ring.

Sif collected her thoughts, her expression serious, nodding solemnly.

While she longed for a complete victory, she would never be overconfident.

After eating her favorite Golden Apple, she abruptly stood up and said with a smile, "Let’s begin."

Roland and Christine wasted no time, directly casting buffs on her.

Holy Light flowed from their hands, slowly falling upon Sif.

With all the standard buffs in place, Roland adjusted his status, ready to use Divine Protection to save her at any moment.

Christine also placed an entire barrel of Holy Water beside her.

If the Holy Knight, best at protecting allies, and the Divine Priest, best at healing and dispelling, together couldn’t save her, then except for a descent by the Goddess, no one could.

It’s just a diminished ring, there won’t be a problem.

Roland made full preparations but didn’t truly believe anything would go wrong.

After exchanging another glance with Sif, Roland took out a Magic Scroll, activating the ring.

A deep blue chill erupted, instantly enveloping Sif.

Looking at the exquisitely beautiful, sculpture-like Sif, Roland’s face lost all color, becoming equally pale.

No, there’s something wrong with this ring!

The color of this chill is clearly problematic.

The chill that froze him that day was blue, but never as deep as today's.

The difference was like the color disparity between Uranus and Neptune.

The chill driven by extraordinary power, the closer it got to absolute zero, the deeper the color became.

It's said that the extreme cold of black ice can approach absolute zero infinitely.

Deep blue chill carries a deadly low temperature beyond the tolerance limit of carbon-based life.

Without the slightest hesitation, Roland released the Divine Protection.

Christine was also startled, grabbing the Holy Water barrel and pouring it over.

The Holy Water possesses a nearly constant temperature, which is the most suitable for humans to taste.

The pale milky condensed Holy Water splashed onto the ice sculpture, making a "sizzling" sound, as the hard ice melted like ice cream under the sun.

Roland cast a glance at Christine with a reconciliatory look, slightly relieved.

Fortunately, it was just the ring, not Sofia herself, frightening but not fatal.

Just as Roland sighed in relief and continued observing, the ice that was just melting suddenly solidified, with the Holy Water also freezing.

A faint white added a touch of liveliness to the original pure blue.

If this were ice cream, Roland would think the maker brimmed with artistic imagination.

But this wasn't ice cream, it was his wife Sif.

Roland's soul nearly froze.

The last drop of Holy Water froze, the surrounding temperature plummeted.

Christine, unable to withstand the chill's onslaught, was forced to retreat.

She was about to pull Roland away with her but saw a tall figure lunging towards the ice sculpture.

Roland's robe fluttered in the air, he was shirtless, fiercely embracing the ice sculpture.

Chapter 425: Lover's Snow

"Ah!!!"

The bone-chilling cold nearly froze Roland on the spot.

But in the moment he lunged forward, his nearly frozen soul ceased to tremble.

He could feel that Sif was still alive.

The battle was not over.

Just as Roland was about to use his body heat to share the severe cold, he felt a dizzying whirl and was sucked into a world ravaged by extreme cold.

Watching Roland leap onto the ice sculpture, enveloped by spreading ice, becoming a new ice sculpture, Christine was dumbfounded.

But she quickly recovered.

This scene was identical to the day Roland had struggled inside the ice sculpture.

Only it had shifted from a solo to a duet.

Christine didn’t know that even that day had been a duet, but with another Sif.

She couldn’t interfere in this battle, only retreating continuously as the cold spread.

After withdrawing to a safe zone, Christine began to pray.

"Great Goddess of Light, your supreme glory baths the world, you bestow the resurrecting Holy Spring of Light upon the ignorant, your most devoted adherent prays to you, please protect the Knight of Light."

"Roland has also contributed to the Holy Spring Revival, please save him."

Christine prayed incessantly, receiving no response.

Feeling unsettled, yet she dared not feel disappointed.

Roland, after all, wasn’t a devout believer; perhaps the Goddess had her considerations.

Christine didn’t know that if the Goddess saw Roland’s misfortune, she would not only refrain from helping but would even gleefully watch.

Gods are not omnipotent.

Those ordinary gods who cannot wield laws are merely mortals living in the Divine Domain.

The Goddess of Light doesn't command the Light Law, but can adeptly use the Power of Light.

As Christine's prayers faltered, Roland entered the world within the ice sculpture.

In the icy and snowy landscape, golden ginkgo faced the wind, a sea of flowers as lush and vibrant as brocade, exceptionally enchanting.

Sif stood at the center of the sea of flowers, her long hair blowing in the wind, her open arms like a general, directing the entire sea of flowers to resist the encroachment of cold.

The sea of flowers was like a boat in a cold wind, swaying precariously but not sinking.

Roland quickly ran to Sif.

Exchanging glances, they read each other's intent.

This ring indeed had issues.

It was Sofia's trap.

The first activation would release an attack equivalent to one-tenth of Sofia's power, but due to the extreme cold, ordinary Tier Seven wouldn't withstand it.

Sofia must have tampered with the ring, and once recharged, the power would multiply.

This was her true deadly move.

Only those who could block the second attack would be outstanding among Tier Seven.

Seeing Sif struggling yet composed, Roland was no longer panicked.

Now it was a remote battle between Sif and Sofia, he couldn't directly intervene.

Sif's feet had already penetrated the earth, like the roots of a plant, deeply buried, drawing on the earth's heavy energy.

Roland barely survived one-tenth of the power, but Sif confronted one-third of the power with poise.

This didn't mean Sif's strength far exceeded Roland's.

Because this was her home field, the Flower Sea.

In her home field, her combat power could increase at least fivefold.

The sea of flowers wouldn't wither, the ginkgo wouldn't wilt, she'd never fall.

Golden ginkgo + blood-red sea of flowers + Sif herself, that was her ultimate strength.

Unable to help Sif directly, Roland didn't want to stand idly by.

He thrust the scepter into the ground, providing energy to the sea of flowers.

This was also indirect support for Sif.

Feeling the warmth from Roland's scepter inserted, Sif's lips curved into a smile.

If she faced Sofia alone, she'd likely not withstand it today.

But she wasn't alone.

She had broad shoulders to lean on.

Sif's eyes sparkled with bright light, with the verdant wilderness gradually appearing in her pupils.

The chill dispersed.

Victory was at hand.

The situation was under control, but Sif remained vigilant without a shred of complacency. The closer to victory, the more likely accidents occurred.

Too many tragedies of being overtaken on the eve of victory, she didn't wish to experience it.

Before the chill fully receded, she had to stay alert.

Sif's brow furrowed lightly, she couldn't feel her feet.

Just moments ago, her feet were rapidly transforming into roots, burrowing into the earth.

She knew this was the usual manipulation of ginkgo trees and the sea of flowers by the Elf Imperial Family, not panicking.

Yet, her feet burrowing into the earth was somewhat exaggerated.

Beyond the chronicles in ancient texts.

If it were only so, she wouldn't be too flustered, but she lost her sense of her feet once again.

Those fair and jade-like feet were too perfect, perfect unlike human.

The last time she traversed territories expanding the sea of flowers, she felt somewhat strange.

Now the feeling was even stranger.

These were her feet, yet didn't feel like her original feet.

Could it be her feet had issues, was this actually a pair of prosthetic feet?

The doubt was fleeting, she quickly sensed the sky dimming.

Heavy clouds gathered.

Sif looked up and saw a hand-sized snowflake falling.

Her face changed.

This snowflake was not only unusually large, but it also wasn't the typical six-pointed shape.

A very rare twelve-pointed snowflake.

Normal snowflakes are six-pointed, but with the help of the wind, some snowflakes happen to collide and merge with each other, becoming a slightly imperfect twelve-pointed snowflake.

This type of snowflake has a melodious name, Lover’s Snow.

Two snowflakes collide and merge, forced to change but unable to let go, eventually forming a twelve-pointed snowflake.

Much like human love.

Full of bumps and obstacles, yet unable to let go.

In a heavy snowfall, there will always be a few Lover’s Snow, quietly merging into the snow, becoming part of the vast world.

While Lover’s Snow is rare, a standard twelve-pointed Lover’s Snow is one in a billion.

However, today’s snow is all Lover’s Snow.

Standard twelve-pointed Lover’s Snow.

This is clearly not snowfall from nature, but snow controlled by someone.

Lover’s Snow will reduce its power in the face of true love, but will cause more than double the harm to impure couples and single people.

Sif’s originally melancholic expression suddenly became radiant.

If it’s fated to end, being buried in this Lover’s Snow is quite romantic.

She turned to Roland, softly whispering, "Kiss me."

Ah?!

Roland widened his eyes. Did he hear wrong?

No matter what Sif said, even if it was to end her suffering, it would make some sense, but this "Kiss me" threw his mind into chaos.

"Five minutes left, I don’t want to leave with regrets."

Sif gently whispered, "I’m the center of this ice storm, you can leave. Actually, Miss Lisa also..."

"Shut up!"

Roland interrupted her roughly, holding her trembling body tightly.

Her body temperature was dropping.

Slowly but irreversibly.

No wonder Sif urged him to hurry, within five minutes she would freeze.

And her soul would be frozen and shattered at the same time.

Without any hesitation, he kissed her.

But he didn’t take off Sif’s clothes.

The snow was already so cold, he couldn’t bear to let her freeze more.

Even if he wanted to, he couldn’t do it.

Sif didn’t understand men at all, it’s too cold for some things to work.

An ice sculpture of them kissing, with smiles on their faces, would make everyone sigh.

A naked ice sculpture would become the world’s laughing stock.

At least Angelina would laugh herself out.

That scoundrel Roland threatened to turn her into a nude ice sculpture every day, and ended up having his own disgrace permanently preserved. How could she not laugh?

Roland still held a sliver of hope, what if they didn’t freeze to death and were saved? That would be a social death worse than dying.

How could he and Sif face anyone then?

Feeling Roland not taking things further, Sif felt a little regret, but she still immersed herself in Roland’s warm embrace.

At least in his arms, it wasn’t that cold, and she could hold on a little longer.

Sif inexplicably recalled the scene when she first learned Roland’s name.

The winning submission of the writing contest, "Oh my, the Empress is pregnant, who did it?"

Unfortunately, the Empress in reality would not become pregnant; she was about to freeze to death.

Sif sighed in her heart, continuing to enjoy the warmth from Roland, closing her eyes to await death.

If encountering wolves and leopards in the wild, a normal person would fight desperately. If faced with a tiger or even a T-Rex, what else can one do but pray the predator would be swift with their bite?

Upon seeing the Lover's Snow, Sif already knew the outcome and stopped resisting.

Just quietly enjoying the last warmth of life.

This feeling is actually quite good.

It's a pity five minutes is too short; if this warmth could have a duration, how she wished it would last a lifetime.

Feeling her body gradually cooling, a crystal-clear tear rolled down her cheek, freezing...

Wait, why didn't it freeze?

Sif abruptly opened her eyes, looking at the sky in astonishment.

Roland lifted his head almost at the same time.

They embraced each other, exchanging warmth, breathing in each other's scent, wanting to engrave everything about the other into their souls.

They were even envisioning the possibility of journeying together on the Nether River.

As they looked up, the snow stopped.

To be precise, the snow continued to fall, just no longer concerned with them.

Lover's Snow whirled down, yet not a single flake landed on them.

The twelve-pointed snow destroys life but cannot shake the emotion of giving warmth to each other even in the face of death.

The snow kept falling ceaselessly.

Roland and Sif clung to each other and wept, celebrating their survival.

They didn’t notice, standing far away on the Peak of White Mountain, beside the heavy ice cliffs, was an exceptionally beautiful Ice Beauty.

Her gaze fell upon Roland and Sif, thinking something, murmuring softly.

"Interesting fellows, at least you are qualified to live until the Return Day arrives."

Watching the last snowflake fall, the Ice Beauty tapped her toe and vanished.

Arriving with the wind, departing with the snow, as if she had never appeared.

Chapter 426: Just a Wedding Gift?

"Mr. Molotov, the diplomatic document protesting against the Sussex people is ready. Please have a look."

The muscular diplomatic attaché stood in front of Envoy Molotov, holding the prepared document up with both hands.

The man referred to as Molotov was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Vladimir Empire. For years, he had been shuttling between the countries of the Rodinia Continent, making major autonomous decisions within the framework outlined by the Empress before her disappearance.

His diplomatic style was both as fearless as a bear and as cunning as a fox.

He rarely used protests as a way to vent emotions.

However, Roland's actions were intolerable to him.

Expelling the garrison from Val City and detaining Angelina was considered normal conflict between two countries, something he wouldn't be too outraged about, and he was even considering ways to redeem Angelina.

But Roland took the Empress's ring as a trophy, which was akin to dancing on the Empire's face.

Moreover, he openly used Her Majesty Sofia's wedding ring as a token to propose marriage.

Roland's actions ignited the fury of the hardliners within the Vladimir Empire, who clamored to teach Roland a lesson through war.

Waving the young diplomat away, Molotov could only feel a headache.

The rational voices drowned in the overwhelming public sentiment, and anyone opposing the war risked being labeled a traitor.

But he understood this was precisely the result Roland wanted.

The Empress was the soul of the Empire. With her, the Empire was invincible; without her, the Empire was just a stronger country.

That sly Roland wanted to strike while the Empress was absent and didn't want to give up the advantage of fighting on his own turf.

Although Molotov was a diplomat, he knew enough about military affairs not to engage in such a losing deal.

He planned to formally protest to Roland, then privately negotiate to redeem Angelina.

Though Angelina wasn't too bright, she was the second-ranked member of the Shadow Sanctuary. Beautiful and tutored by the Empress, she was considered a little Sofia in their homeland and was very popular.

Her prolonged detention by the enemy was a significant blow to domestic morale.

Molotov had been angrily berated by young people several times.

He didn't care about these curses, but he had to consider public morale.

Angelina must be redeemed, and they must not appear weak publicly. Although difficult, the seasoned diplomat was confident.

He knew Roland well; as long as enough was paid, there was little that couldn't be negotiated.

Thinking of the price to be paid, Molotov snorted lightly, unable to conceal his anger.

Let's just keep it in the little fox's vault for now.

Once the Empress returns, what was swallowed will be spat out.

Just as Molotov was preparing to have a reliable agent deliver the protest document to Hansa City, urgent footsteps echoed from the corridor.

He furrowed his brow slightly, a bit displeased.

Diplomacy was an art, and great diplomats were artists; how could they be so flustered?

He disliked any breaches of etiquette by diplomatic staff while working.

He decided to give his young staff a Molotov-style warning.

A knock on the door sounded, but the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not respond immediately.

He elegantly sipped from the freshly brewed coffee, waited a minute, then coldly said:

"Come in."

The young diplomat standing at the door hurriedly pushed the door open, didn't even have time to salute Molotov, and eagerly held up the envelope and box in his hands.

"It—it's Her Majesty the Empress's personal letter!"

"What?!" The coffee cup in Molotov's hand slipped to the floor, shattering.

He couldn't care less about elegance, swooping down to the young diplomat's side like a gust of wind.

"Are you sure?" He could hardly believe it.

After Her Majesty left nearly two years ago, she hadn't reappeared. Malicious people even spread rumors that the Empress had disappeared.

The rumor-mongers were naturally sent to Jidong to plant potatoes, never to return, but the fact such rumors existed showed how many were anxious about her absence.

After confirmation, Molotov trembled with excitement.

The past year, he'd been excessively stifled in diplomacy. If the Empress were here, why should he suffer Roland's wrath?

Holding the personal letter, not yet opened, his tone was already particularly firm.

"Ivan, draft a new diplomatic document demanding the Sussex Empire immediately release our illegally detained official Angelina and publicly apologize."

"Remember, the wording must be stern, reminding them Her Majesty the Empress is watching this matter."

The young diplomat called Ivan promptly stood at attention and saluted Molotov.

Seeing Molotov didn't intend for him to leave immediately, he respectfully stood by, curiosity itching like a cat's scratch.

What on earth did Her Majesty write?

Molotov opened the letter, felt reassured by the familiar handwriting.

This was indeed the Empress's handwriting and tone.

The Empress's letter got straight to the point, first affirming Molotov's work over the years, then immediately addressing the issue of Angelina's detention.

Her Majesty noticed this matter; she must be very angry.

Roland the little fox is in trouble this time!

Molotov thought with a pleased smile.

With anticipation and curiosity, the Foreign Minister turned to the second page of the letter, his pupils seemingly shaken as if by an earthquake.

"Lord Molotov, the box contains the wedding gift I prepared for Sylph and Roland. Please hand it over."

Wait, what does Her Majesty mean by this? Could she be conceding to Roland?

Molotov was stunned.

He even suspected that the letter was a forgery, but after repeatedly checking the paper, handwriting, and seal, he was very sure of its authenticity.

The Empress specifically reminded that the box must not be opened without permission, so he naturally dared not open it.

However, this letter was merely an order and did not explain the reason, leaving him holding his breath in frustration.

Although feeling depressed, Molotov quickly adjusted his mood and stopped dwelling on it.

Unless necessary, the Empress rarely explains the reasons for her orders.

She can always make the wisest decisions, and no one dares to doubt her decisions.

Since this is the Empress’s order, what else can he say?

He turned his head to look at the eager young diplomat waiting.

"Ivan, draft a diplomatic document to congratulate the Empress of the Sussex Empire and Caesar on their upcoming wedding. Make sure the tone is sincere."

"Huh?!"

The young diplomat’s brain almost short-circuited.

Wait, isn’t this completely different from the order given a few minutes ago?

He mumbled and asked, "What about the previous diplomatic document?"

"Get out!"

Molotov could no longer hold back, angrily growling.

Ivan, knowing he had misspoken while not clear-headed just now, quickly scampered away.

No more nonsense, how can we still speak of threats when we’re sending a congratulatory gift?

After Ivan rolled out, Molotov saw the coffee cup on the floor shattered into several pieces, thinking about how this thing was a jade piece bought from thousands of kilometers away in Nubia, he felt heartache.

He squatted down, reached out to touch the largest shard, and sighed sorrowfully.

The sigh had just sounded when he became dazed.

What am I doing?

The old diplomat’s fingertips were trembling.

Serving as a diplomat for over thirty years, what storms hasn't he weathered? How could he be heartbroken and trembling over a delicate coffee cup?

Molotov, oh Molotov, have you truly lived for nothing! Don't weep for a shattered coffee cup!

He laughed heartily, grabbed the largest piece, and smashed it down forcefully.

As the crisp sound of shattering rang out, he stroked his bushy beard, laughing especially joyfully.

How could Her Majesty the Empress bow her head? She is truly an invincible existence.

Whether in terms of personal combat strength or state governance, she is invincible.

If the Empress acts this way, she surely has her reasons. Not understanding it is where he falls short. What he should do is enhance his learning, not question the Empress.

Molotov picked up the handwritten letter and the exquisite little box and headed to the Prime Minister's office.

The Prime Minister takes charge when the Empress is absent, and such a significant matter must be discussed with him.

It both clarifies responsibility and avoids offending anyone.

...

"Sif, can you guess what Sofia will send us as a gift?" Roland, looking at the exquisite box on the table, was amazed.

Sif, who was flipping through diplomatic letters, had a somewhat peculiar expression and said nothing.

She was a bit confused.

This diplomatic letter was written politely but coldly, using standard diplomatic verbiage.

It simply congratulated her and Roland while subtly expressing hope for Angelina's return home.

Her and Roland's relationship had already been announced, so naturally, other countries would send gifts. Even though the Vladimir Empire and Sussex did not have good relations, they haven't gone to war.

It was normal for Saint Rurik Palace to send gifts.

After all, Angelina was a high-ranking official, and staying abroad for an extended time was not ideal. Wanting her to return home was also normal.

But putting these two matters together with Sofia's gift seemed bizarre no matter how it was viewed.

Faced with Roland's question, Sif shook her head blankly.

"Alright, stop guessing, let's open it and see."

Given Sofia's status, any gift she sent would not be ordinary and likely carries deep meaning.

What exactly it was, Roland was also very curious.

Sif looked at the keyhole on the box, astonishingly discovering that a ring could be embedded, and she tentatively placed the Ice Crystal Blue Ring in it, finding it a perfect fit.

With a "click," the box was opened.

A ring encrusted with a purple gem lay there quietly, and just by looking at the gem’s texture, one could tell it was no ordinary item.

Beside the ring, there was also a letter, and judging by the seal on the envelope’s surface, it was Sofia’s own handwriting.

"Huh?"

Sif could never have imagined it would be a ring.

She had thought of many possibilities but had never imagined it would be just a simple gift.

Chapter 427: Sending You Home

Sif’s mind went blank, she completely couldn’t figure out what Sofia wanted to do.

Not only could she not figure it out, but even the always knowledgeable Roland couldn’t understand it.

You can’t blame them, after all, no one has ever seen someone as peculiar as Sofia.

The handwritten letter from Sofia was so normal that it seemed not normal at all.

In the letter, she congratulated Roland and Sif, while also introducing the origin of this gift.

The Ice Crystal Blue Ring and this Violet Ring both came from Sofia’s family, the Augusta Clan, large nobility of the Prudon Kingdom.

This pair of rings was a gift given by the Emperor of the Odin Empire when the Augusta Clan was granted nobility for serving the Odin Empire.

This pair of rings has been worn by important family members at their weddings, a tradition that has lasted for hundreds of years.

The Augusta Clan is a large noble family in the Prudon Kingdom; Sofia's marriage alliance with the Rurik Clan was a significant move to expand the family's interests.

To show importance, this pair of rings accompanied as a dowry abroad.

This is the first time these rings are leaving Prudon, leaving the Augusta Clan.

Normally, this precious pair of rings would become heirlooms of the Rurik Clan with the marriage.

Unexpectedly, these rings would witness a new, happy marriage.

However, the unexpected happened.

The previous dozen couples who wore these rings weren't extremely loving, but at least they didn't become too strained.

However, Sofia's marriage with the former Emperor couldn't even maintain the appearance of mutual respect.

According to unspoken rules, even without feelings, they had to try to have a child as an heir and then go their separate ways.

However, Sofia's husband was excessively outrageous.

He equally hated every member of the Odin People, including the goddess-like beautiful Sofia.

Hatred blinded his eyes, he disregarded his wife's beauty and disappeared on the wedding night, went out carousing.

Later, he even threatened Sofia, demanding she accept an illegitimate child from outside as the heir.

With such madness, naturally, his end was meeting a gruesome fate by Sofia's own hands.

After killing her husband and ascending to the throne, Sofia's heart was as icy as the extreme northern land, never again interacting with men.

She never had feelings for her husband, just wanted to maintain a formal marriage, have a child as an heir.

However, someone broke the rules and trampled on her dignity.

Breaking the rules didn't matter, as rules were all set by the Imperial Family anyway.

But trampling on her dignity warranted death.

After ascending to the throne, Sofia sealed away this pair of rings, no longer using them.

"Although the process was complicated, it's fate that the rings fell into your hands. Good things come in pairs, consider these two rings as gifts."

Could this be true?

Roland carefully went through the letter, trying to deduce the implied meaning between the lines.

Sif also racked her brains, pondering deeply.

As the two of them stared blankly at each other for a long time, Roland suddenly laughed.

"I’m really foolish, truly."

"You understood?" Sif’s eyes lit up.

Roland played with the Violet Ring for a moment and teased with a smile, "A person like Sofia doesn’t have that many schemes, if she wanted to kill someone, she’d just do it directly."

Sif suddenly understood.

Roland was right.

It wasn’t saying Sofia didn’t have a good mind, but in the face of absolute strength, there was no need for strategy.

If you can kill with one blow, why waste so many words.

So, it really is a congratulatory gift.

Seeing Sif’s confused gaze, Roland softly asked, "If Sofia were to get married, would you send a gift?"

"Of course, and it must match her status. I am the current patriarch of the York Clan, I can’t be disrespectful."

Sif spoke calmly.

As soon as the words fell, she suddenly realized.

Oh well, it’s really overcomplicating things. Even if Sofia wanted to personally chop someone up, the proper etiquette wouldn’t be neglected because she was from an esteemed noble family.

Even before a life-or-death duel, there would be polite exchanges between the parties; this is the demeanor of the noble.

"I thought she'd take the opportunity to ask us to release Angelina." Sif sneered slightly and softly complained.

Roland smiled and said, "She didn't say it, but we can release her."

Sif was stunned for a moment and understood Roland's meaning.

Some words don't need to be said explicitly, nor can they be said explicitly.

If Sofia directly brought it up, it would confirm Angelina's detention as a fact.

After all, she's not bound hand and foot; in outsiders' eyes, she could be a guest, not a captive.

Some matters can only be tacitly understood; speaking them out loses their meaning.

Sif shrugged, her eyebrows curving in a smile.

"Then let her go. After all, she's not of much value anymore."

Roland nodded, packed up Sofia's handwritten letter, and walked out.

"I'll see her off since I'm the one who invited her; it's only reasonable that I do the send-off."

Sif surely wouldn't object.

A war between the two countries is bound to happen sooner or later, maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after, but definitely not now.

Sofia took the initiative to compromise, so let’s reciprocate courteously.

...

Until Roland appeared at the door, Angelina, engrossed in her book, remained focused on her reading, unaware someone was at the door.

You can’t blame her; the seal Roland personally placed on her reduced her abilities to that of an ordinary person, drastically decreasing her sensory abilities.

Roland simply stood at the door observing Angelina without making a sound.

After a full five minutes, he was very certain that Angelina was truly focused on reading, and was deeply absorbed.

If she weren’t focused, she wouldn’t occasionally smile like an aunt while reading.

Roland cleared his throat, reminding Angelina of his presence.

The captive lady finally realized someone had arrived and jolted her head up.

Seeing Roland, her good reading mood instantly shattered, she bit her lip and asked:

"What do you want?"

"To send you home." Roland’s tone was calm.

Angelina’s hand trembled, the book slipped from her palm and dropped to the ground.

As she picked up the book, she tried hard to hide her panic, smiling self-deprecatingly:

"Being a normal person feels awful, can’t even hold a book steady."

"Do you want to lift the power seal?" Roland’s expression remained calm.

Angelina wanted to deny it, but looking into Roland’s deep eyes, she knew denial was meaningless, and since she was about to die, she decided not to hide it.

"Of course I want to! Would you want to be sealed?"

As everyone knows, the words of political figures often have implicit meanings, precise and elegant.

When an ordinary person says ’send you home,’ it mostly means literally, but in a special context, ’send you home’ can have numerous implications.

If it were two athletes in a competition, ’send you home’ means defeat.

If a warden says it to a prisoner, it means execution is coming.

Angelina’s brain isn’t particularly clever, but she understands such simple hints.

"Roland, before leaving, I’d like a good meal."

"No problem, I’ll have the chef prepare it, ensuring it’s authentic Rurik cuisine." As long as Angelina agrees to leave, the farewell meal must be lavish.

Angelina slowly shook her head, "I’ve had Rurik cuisine for twenty-three years, I’m fed up with it."

"Then local Hansa dishes?" Roland frowned, the overseas province's food was delicious and filling but clearly lacked class, a bit inappropriate.

"No, I want to enjoy the standard banquet Talia Kingdom offers for sending off esteemed guests."

This is simple.

Not only can it be done, but it must be top-notch.

Roland thought of Lisa.

Angelina must be an important figure, and if she enjoys top-tier Talia cuisine, it would surely enhance Lisa's status.

He smiled and nodded, "No problem, I guarantee it'll be the most authentic Talia cuisine. Pack up your things first."

After seeing Roland's somewhat jaunty departure, Angelina bit her lip, knowing that he intended to provoke the Empress by killing her. Her life was on the verge of ending.

She knew what Roland really meant by 'send off.'

Even though she had always been slow-witted, she understood that hidden implication clearly.

Realizing she had no chance of escaping, and death was inevitable, she decided to finish reading that book, to at least get to the end of Julius and Romulus's love story.

The bitterness of reality suffices, at least let the love story in the novel be a little sweeter.

Chapter 428: Pain! Pain! Pain!

The banquet was held in the small banquet hall of the Governor's Mansion.

It was just a simple farewell banquet, accompanied by Roland and Lisa.

Considering the many eyes around, Roland did not want people to discover Angelina’s prisoner status, so he thoughtfully had a maid send over an appropriate dress.

This outfit wasn’t exactly a formal gown, but its design was elegant yet lively, perfectly suited for such a semi-formal banquet occasion.

When the carriage to pick Angelina up arrived at the manor on the outskirts of the city, Angelina happened to see the novel’s scene where Julius and Romulus were about to break through their family obstacles and elope.

She really wanted to read on, but she didn’t have the time.

Regretfully closing the book, Angelina couldn’t help but flip to the end of the story.

"After many ordeals, they were buried together, never to part."

A smile appeared on Angelina’s lips.

To walk hand in hand through life and be buried together after death. How romantic.

Although she skipped the climax to reach the important part at the end, she had already imagined the novel’s storyline.

Romulus and Julius overcame family obstacles to be together, finally leading a happy life and being buried in the same tomb.

How wonderful.

Life indeed has its moments of beauty worth looking forward to.

About to leave this world, taking with her such a beautiful story and enjoying a grand meal from the culinary kingdom of Talia, indeed...

Indeed, she was reluctant to part with this world.

Angelina turned slightly, trembling lips betraying her true thoughts. She was still so young, she truly didn't want to die.

When captured by Roland, she always felt she could return to her country through diplomatic means.

While under house arrest at the manor, Roland held her captive according to the standard of a noble prisoner of war, which amidst her anxiety gave her a greater longing for life.

However, the situation suddenly took a drastic turn, and she didn't understand why Roland's attitude changed so quickly.

Could it be that the two countries were already at war?

Being placed under house arrest, her channels for obtaining information were completely cut off, and the two newspapers she was allowed to read were mainly based on popular trends, hardly involving current political affairs.

Recently, the only news she had been following was Roland proposing to Sif.

Getting married is one thing, but she had never heard of a custom involving killing for a marriage offering, right?

After thinking long and hard, the only explanation was that the two countries were at war.

Although the Rodinia Continent was vast, in the end it could not accommodate two overlords.

Between Sofia and Sylph, a victor had to be decided sooner or later.

She didn't think Sylph had much of a chance, but Sussex's overall strength was superior.

This war was destined to be extremely brutal.

And as the first high-ranking official to be sacrificed, would her name be recorded in the annals of history?

Angelina was silent for a moment, somewhat dejected.

Probably not.

The Shadow Sanctuary was a presence hidden in plain sight. Even though the rank was high, it was not for public recognition, and even if one died in duty, the records would only be internal.

Fortunately, her rank was not low, and the compensation was quite generous.

But she wouldn't be able to spend the money herself, as she had no family, so it would eventually return to the national treasury.

Some matters are better left unthought, but upon careful consideration, the more she thought about it, the angrier she got.

Boarding the carriage with a stern face, Angelina looked at the beautiful dress, feeling even more discomfort.

Caressing the smooth silk fabric, Angelina was suddenly startled as she realized her thoughts had quietly changed.

If it had been a year ago, she might have laughed and faced death head-on.

Now she did not want to die anymore.

She was still herself; the only difference was that she had been forced to read during her time in captivity.

Thinking of the books she had read during this time, her heart was in turmoil.

Was this also part of Roland's plan, to use books to shake her resolve? Angelina's mind clearly felt insufficient.

Lost in a daze, the carriage drove into the Governor's Mansion, guided by the maid into the banquet hall.

The host of the banquet, Roland, was already waiting for her.

Angelina quickened her steps forward, looking at the long, narrowed dress at her waist, hesitating multiple times before holding the hem of her skirt and giving Roland the most standard lady's salute.

As a high-tier intelligence officer, she had received professional etiquette training, but she didn't use it often.

Watching Angelina's slightly awkward movements, Roland almost couldn't keep from laughing.

Angelina in a formal dress always seemed like a bloodthirsty coyote pretending to be a clumsy little golden retriever.

Roland did not mock his guest; he made a gesture of invitation, inviting Angelina to take a seat.

Accompanying Roland was Lisa.

She spent most of her time practicing magic at the Magic Association and would come up to relax for a few days when she got restless.

Today happened to be one of her days to get some fresh air on the surface.

Her attitude towards Angelina wasn't particularly friendly. Remembering that this person almost used the Ice Crystal Blue Ring to end Roland's life, it was difficult for her to feel positively inclined.

With a cold greeting, she returned to her seat, her eyes even showed a hint of anger.

Seeing Lisa's gaze, Angelina was convinced this was a last meal before execution.

Roland was a politician and could hide his emotions, but Lisa couldn't. Her eyes said it all.

Since she was doomed, she might as well enjoy the meal.

Once the hosts and guests were seated, Roland began to compose some flattering words for Angelina.

Should he praise her beauty? Angelina indeed counted as a beauty, but compared to Sylph, there was a significant gap.

And with Lisa present, it would be somewhat impolite to praise another woman in front of her.

Should he praise her for her notable strength? Uh, although that was also a fact, praising a defeated prisoner of war for her strength felt like a face-slapping insult, even more impolite.

For a moment, Roland couldn't figure out what to praise Angelina for, so he resorted to a few superficial pleasantries with a smile.

Roland’s perfunctory attitude only deepened Angelina’s misunderstanding.

In this era, gentlemen were always very attentive to etiquette, especially towards female guests.

The fact that Roland couldn’t even be bothered to offer a few polite words showed that he already regarded her as dead.

Chapter 429: Pain! Pain! Pain! (Part 2)

Who would care about the feelings of the dead.

Angelina sighed softly, turning her grief into appetite, and began to feast.

Looking at the dazzling array of dishes and seafood, her appetite increased.

The black beer also tasted good, getting drunk before the execution would numb the pain, so she drank more.

Seeing Angelina drinking heavily, Roland couldn’t help but remind, "Miss Angelina, pairing seafood with beer can easily trigger gout, drink less."

Angelina laughed at herself, raised her glass, and drank several more gulps.

Gout? She’s about to die soon, why care about that?

She smiled and declined, "I like it."

No amount of money can buy happiness; since Angelina didn’t care, Roland was too lazy to persuade her further.

He didn’t eat seafood; pork knuckles, roast meat, and sausages paired well with beer too.

Leave the seafood for the two ladies.

Watching Angelina continuously swallow, Lisa, who initially wore a stern expression, gradually softened her expression and smiled as she tentatively asked:

"Angelina, do you like the food?"

"This is the best Talia seafood feast I've ever enjoyed."

Angelina was very honest.

Lisa was moved in her heart, already receiving a four-star review from Angelina in her Soul Card.

With a smile on her face, Lisa cheerfully continued the conversation, "As long as you like it, if there's another chance to visit, I'll cook for you again!"

The four-star review from an important guest from a distant country brought Lisa a lot of satisfaction, and she gained more affection for the honest Angelina.

Her invitation was sincere, but to Angelina, it sounded especially insincere.

Another visit, return from the Netherworld?

She didn't respond but continued her battle with a giant lobster.

The fresh and juicy seafood and rich black beer lifted her spirits significantly.

Dinner ended in a fairly harmonious atmosphere.

Her maid helped the drunk Angelina onto a carriage. Lisa thoughtfully packed the unfinished dishes and prepared a bottle of red wine for her to enjoy the next morning.

After watching the carriage leave, Lisa shook her head with a smile, "Are all Rurik girls such good eaters? Her appetite is bigger than yours."

"That’s because you cook well. By the way, did she give you a good review?"

Roland knew that Lisa could gain Extraordinary Abilities by collecting favorable reviews from important figures, so he asked with interest.

"She did, a four-star review. Although she’s an enemy, she’s quite honest."

Lisa sighed and murmured softly, "If only there were no war, I would have liked to invite Sofia to taste the seafood feast too."

Roland laughed silently.

A simple wish, but unfortunately destined to be unfulfilled.

War isn’t something a Monarch can decide unilaterally.

Sussex is the sovereign of the Ocean, Vladimir Empire is the king of the land.

When ocean faces land, who truly rules the Theia Plane? Such matters can’t be resolved through mere words; ultimately, only war can decide.

Although knowing it’s impossible, Roland still comforted her, "As long as one is alive, there are infinite possibilities. Sofia is a perfectionist; regular cuisine wouldn’t gain her approval."

Lisa, unconvinced, stood up proudly and gave a faint snort without speaking.

As long as she's as honest as Angelina, she would surely appreciate!

Unfortunately, Angelina's strength and potential were still lacking, and there was only a silver commendation badge added to the Soul Card.

The commendation badge was originally meant to rate gourmet food, but the clever Lisa quickly discovered its other uses.

Important guests are divided into three levels.

Gold, Silver, and Copper.

Roland, Sif, and Alina were all Gold, leading Lisa to think all evaluators were Gold until Sura's Silver appeared, and she suddenly realized that there were differences even among guests.

The weight of a Gold guest's commendation badge is higher, a Copper commendation can only be considered better than nothing.

Through the different levels of guests, Lisa could also gauge these people's potential levels.

Sura and Angelina's strength and potential fell far short compared to Roland.

But none of that mattered; those willing to give good reviews were good guests.

Lisa really disliked those who ate and didn't speak well of it.

After sending off Angelina, Roland returned to the office to continue reviewing documents.

The Empire's tour was about to begin; he must complete his work quickly to let the Governor's Territory and the nation as a whole operate within the framework he set.

Hosting Angelina was merely a means to convey goodwill to Sofia; in Roland's eyes, she was just a slightly important supporting role.

Roland certainly wouldn't care about Angelina's little thoughts.

...

By the following noon, the hungover Angelina awoke from sleep with pain.

Sharp pain radiated from her wrists and ankle joints.

As expected, what's meant to come has come.

Angelina laughed at herself, looking at the ceiling with resignation, waiting for death to arrive.

Even in death, a person of status must maintain dignity.

Poisoned wine was indeed a death befitting her status, allowing for a dignified preservation of the corpse.

She quietly awaited the pain to spread throughout her body, for stiffness to set in, but it didn't; she only encountered more pain.

What's going on?

Angelina struggled to sit up, seeing an insulated food box on a small dining table not far away, with a large bottle of red wine beside it.

Gritting her teeth, she moved her body to sit by the table, lifting the lid of the food box, discovering the delicious dishes from the previous night still inside.

There must be poison in the wine.

This was Roland giving her the opportunity for a dignified end.

She swallowed, relaxed her mind, and devoured all the food and wine like a swirling storm.

Dizzy and with aching limbs, Angelina moved towards the bedside and saw the novel she hadn't finished reading placed on the table, her gaze a bit desolate.

Chapter 430: Pain! Pain! Pain! (Part 3)

I hope there's still a bit of time for her to finish reading before the ending.

Let this perfect love story accompany her on her journey.

Angelina tiptoed carefully, sat at the bedside, and began to read.

Her smile quickly froze, and she felt more and more pain.

The pain from her ankle joint was sharper than being cut by a sword; it was the kind of piercing pain that made her soul tremble.

Even more painful than this was the novel's plot.

Julius and Romulus eventually died due to a misunderstanding.

Their deaths shocked both families, and they chose to bury the two young people together.

What? So they weren’t buried together after a life-long companionship, but instead couldn’t be united in life and were reconciled in death?

Which idiot wrote this? Is it fun to bully people like this?

Angelina was infuriated. Life was already such a mess, why did reading a lousy novel have to involve such heartbreaking twists?

She stood up, excitedly, "Ow!" she bellowed, falling back onto the bed.

It hurt so much, but it didn’t feel like poison, it felt more like...

Gout?

Thinking about all the seafood she ate last night and the few bottles of dark beer she guzzled, she wanted to slap herself a few times.

Oh dear, where’s the doctor? Help!

I’m about to die; don’t let me suffer anymore!

...

Angelina’s cries for help alarmed the maid, and the servants in the yard scrambled to get her to the hospital. The doctor bled her half a pound, sparing her only when her lips and cheeks turned pale.

When Roland heard the news, he rushed over, looking at the pitiful Angelina, unable to associate this weak patient with the Shadow Sanctuary who challenged him to a duel to the death.

Even someone made of iron couldn’t withstand the double torment of illness and a quack doctor.

Roland glared at Angelina, mockingly instructing, "Just lie down and rest well. Once you're better, pack your things and leave, and remember to thank Sofia for me."

"Wait, what did you say?" Angelina was just a bit stubborn, not truly stupid. Listening to Roland's words and connecting it to the events of last night and today, she suddenly realized.

So Roland wasn't sending her "home" just in words but truly sending her home?

As Roland prepared to leave, she propped herself up and asked softly, "Roland, do you really not hate me?"

"Why should I hate you? The two countries are at war, and we are enemies on the battlefield. But outside the battlefield, do we have any deep-seated grievances?"

Seeing Roland about to leave, Angelina hurriedly stopped him, "Wait."

"What else?"

"Can I bring some books back?" Angelina's expectant eyes were mixed with unease.

Roland didn't turn back, but his lips couldn't help but curl into a slight smile.

He was troubled with finding a reason to send some books to Angelina for her to take back and spread, and here she was volunteering?

Roland looked back at Angelina, pretending to ponder with difficulty before "hesitantly" saying:

"Of course, but books on military and technology must be screened by me."

Angelina couldn’t help but laugh.

She wasn’t an idiot, she knew which books could be taken and which couldn’t.

"Don’t worry, I prefer literature, art, and ocean encyclopedias."

As Roland walked out of the hospital, he met the attending doctor who had been waiting for some time.

"Dr. Woma, find a way to keep her bedridden for a few more days, but don’t actually harm her."

Standing close to two meters tall and powerfully built, Dr. Woma had a somewhat sinister smile, and his long saber scar on his face looked particularly menacing.

"Lord Governor, rest assured about my work. Without my permission, no patient can leave the hospital."

Watching the menacing surgeon, Roland felt a slight chill down his spine. He glanced at Angelina’s hospital room and shrugged.

Sorry, I’m not trying to torture you, but I hope you read more books.

Using the power of knowledge to transform a fierce she-wolf into a literature-loving girl is also an accomplishment in spreading knowledge.

Using Sofia’s ring as a wedding ring and Sofia’s subordinates as tools to boost achievements, I often feel a bit despicable.

But Roland didn’t care.

For victory, he was willing to sacrifice everything.