Empress 461

Chapter 461: Friendship Rings with the Bell

"Me as Commander in Chief?"

Receiving Roland's appointment, Christine froze in place, somewhat at a loss.

Attached to this appointment was the framework document for the coalition army.

According to this framework document, the future elite troops of the Sussex Empire and Jin Yuan Kingdom would be under her unified command.

Excluding those long-standing veteran armies, at least a million troops would be under her command.

This doesn't include the new army about to be formed.

Roland only presented the requirements and framework, granting her the power to build and command the army.

Although the weighty trust moved her deeply, the ensuing pressure made her feel breathless.

What if she couldn't meet Roland's expectations?

Time waits for no one, and she has less than half a year.

The main force of the Wende Empire has been defeated, fortunately, it's winter now, and the Vladimir and other Three Kingdoms allied forces are moving slowly, unable to expand their victories, giving them more time.

Once the snow melts, the existence of the Wende Empire will enter a countdown.

After resolving the Wende Empire, the Holy Alliance led by the Vladimir Empire, Prudon Kingdom, and Tirol Kingdom will have a final showdown with the Freedom Alliance led by Sussex and Jin Yuan.

Even considering logistics and army recovery time, she has less than six months.

Fortunately, Roland hasn't burdened her with the logistics and equipment support; otherwise, she would have refused on the spot.

Roland's unspoken meaning was simple, leave military affairs to Christine, while he handles internal affairs, diplomacy, and logistical support.

Christine remained silent for a long time, hesitated repeatedly, and finally wrote the reply to Roland.

"At your command."

She didn't mention additional conditions or complain about the tight time and heavy task, just calmly accepted the order.

After accepting the order, Christine hurriedly left the operations command room and headed to the conference hall to immediately convene the senior officers near Val City to convey the order and express her determination.

While considering the army's combat power, factors like the number of troops, organizational ability, equipment, and logistics must be considered; the ability of the main general is crucial.

The same army in the hands of a renowned general versus a mediocre one can differ in combat power by dozens of times.

A truly famous general can make soldiers clearly understand why they fight, enforce orders strictly, and use combat power precisely to achieve victory at the smallest cost.

She is the renowned general in Roland's heart, the only one.

This trust deeply moves Christine but adds a mountain-like weight of pressure on her shoulders.

Originally, she just wanted to train an army to prepare for the Wende Empire's restoration by riding Roland's victorious momentum, but unexpectedly, she got the chance to command the army to defeat Sofia head-on.

With greater ability comes greater responsibility!

Christine thought silently, feeling her blood boiling, her delicate fair face blushing rose-red.

...

With greater ability comes greater responsibility?

Roland doesn't agree.

He believes more in another saying, with greater power comes greater responsibility.

When he was just a clerk at the post office, what responsibility did he have? Simply writing letters for guests, reassuring families, and expressing love to lovers.

After being chosen by Sif, within a few days, he became the private advisor to the Count.

In just a few days, how much could his ability have changed? Yet he had to guide the then-unidentified Empress to escape abroad and reclaim the throne as the Count's private advisor.

Unfortunately, being in high position now, his power rivals that of the Emperor, while his ability hasn't qualitatively changed much from previous years.

With increasing responsibility, he needs someone to share the pressure.

He's not a weightlifting champion; he can't bear the expectations of the two great countries, dozens of provinces, and over two hundred million people.

He unhesitatingly delegates power to professionals.

Law affairs to Alben, governance to William, military to Christine.

What does he do?

Of course, he gives important speeches, provides guiding opinions, maintains an inscrutable stance.

Otherwise, what else could he do, guide specific matters and be exposed as an outsider?

Roland is self-aware.

In any industry, there are professionals better than him; his advantage lies in transcending era recognition and knowledge from two worlds, several epochs, and many races.

If his team is a giant ship, he only steers it, while other matters...

Roland believes letting professionals do their jobs is better than directing which way the machine guns should move.

He doesn't micro-manage.

He prefers the post-victory strategy of drawing lines for a steady advance.

If micro-managing is needed to win, isn't it just wasted strategy?

Lying on the soft velvet cushion of West Palace, Roland enjoys the maid's massage service, casually flipping through the revised version of the Civil Code sent by Desmonds.

This revised Civil Code is based on the Civil Code designated by Carlo and contains amendments here and there.

Desmonds' amendments reveal solid legal grounding but also expose his lack of creativity and disconnect from the populace.

Roland sighed lightly, placed the long-winded revised Civil Code aside, and closed his eyes.

As he fell into deep thought, the massage force suddenly increased.

No need to turn around to know Alina was here.

Roland did not open his eyes.

Since Alina was playing the role of a maid, immediately discovering it might be a little impolite?

Realizing this, Roland comfortably reclined on Liberator Alina's soft thighs, enjoying the powerful massage service, feeling as comfortable as skiing on Snow Mountain Peak.

Alina's brow furrowed lightly, unsure what to do for a moment, her hand movements slowed slightly.

Chapter 462: Friendship Rises with the Chimes (Part 2)

"Serve wholeheartedly, or I'll have Miss Alina replace you!"

Roland ordered bluntly, akin to a lord ordering at a bathhouse.

Alina: "..."

Complaint to Alina? I am Alina!

Though she couldn't help but grumble inwardly, she obediently resumed her service.

Roland was someone she invited to help, sacrificing joyful moments with his newlywed wife to assist her.

Despite being a young lady from a noble family, she lacked much of the typical nobility arrogance.

Even if she had some, the past years of refuge had worn it down.

She could distinguish between priorities.

It's not just that Roland wanted a massage service; even if Roland wanted a few beauties to fill the empty nights without his wife, she would fully support.

Even if...

Whatever he wanted, she would fulfill it.

This was her way of hosting guests.

Roland enjoyed Alina's service, which was soft yet intense, gradually dissolving the exhaustion accumulated during the day.

Massage indeed required some force, yet those maids were reluctant to exert it, merely resulting in a faint fragrance without any merits.

Alina's massage service could earn full marks, though, unfortunately, it couldn't be enjoyed daily.

After all, she was a ruler, occasionally posing as a maid was fun, but doing so every day would be humiliating.

As Alina gently massaged his temples, Roland was overcome with fatigue and unexpectedly fell asleep.

Before dozing off, he couldn’t help but confess the truth from his hazy consciousness.

"This kind of service every day would be great."

Alina’s actions abruptly stiffened.

She truly had learned massage techniques from professional therapists. While practicing Stargazing Skill, she also practiced Body Techniques, requiring this skill.

She just didn’t expect Roland to fall asleep so quickly.

Clearly, he was tired enough not to recognize her.

A soft sigh slipped from her lips and scattered across the floor.

Seeing Roland sleeping soundly, she couldn’t bear to wake him up, so she maintained her kneeling position, allowing Roland to use her slim and smooth thighs as a pillow.

She was a Transcendent, and even maintaining this exhausting position for three days wouldn’t tire her.

Compared to ordinary people, Transcendents are exceptionally robust physically, hardly ever tiring unless battled to exhaustion.

If Roland was this tired, it was naturally not due to physical exertion but because of being mentally exhausted.

Heart Power is hard to quantify within the current power systems, but it indeed exists.

When mentally exhausted, no matter how well-fed or rested, and even if physical capacity is at full, a person still appears exhausted.

While Roland seemed to be carefree every day like a detached manager, in reality, he had to consider many things.

He bore Sussex on one shoulder, Jin Yuan on the other, seeking a balance between the two nations; he truly was tired.

Alina tenderly stroked Roland's handsome face, her gaze gradually softening.

She dared not disturb Roland's deep sleep; she picked up the revised Civil Code placed beside her, focusing on the highlighted comparison with the old code.

The old code was implemented by her father, a significant political achievement.

In her heart, Alina didn't wish for the old code to be altered beyond recognition, representing the complete overturning of her father's work.

Her father had already been physically overthrown by Marco once; she couldn't bear for him to be mentally overturned again.

If the person proposing the law revisions wasn't Roland, she would refuse without hesitation.

The reasons were ready-made.

The country had just emerged from turmoil, about to enter a period of recuperation, requiring relatively loose and stable laws.

But since the laws were proposed by Roland, he surely had his reasons for doing so.

Though not fully understanding, Alina chose to respect.

She reviewed the Desmonds' revision sections, looking at the modifications of a dozen articles and twenty-one new additions; her stern expression relaxed a bit.

Worthy of a legal expert, these changes and additions neither overturned her father's framework nor effectively enhanced it.

Though Roland hadn't expressed it, he should be supportive, right?

Alina let out a relieved sigh, laid down the Civil Code, rubbed her eyes, and glanced at the wall-mounted clock, realizing it was four in the morning.

The scene outside was dark, illuminated only by the soft glow of the Blue Moon...

No, ever since entering 1795, the glow of the Blue Moon grew increasingly dim, while the Red Moon as an accompanying satellite shone more prominently.

The geological structure of the Blue Moon and Red Moon is unique, reflecting drastically different colors.

Compared to the soft and tranquil blue, the accompanying satellite's red always seemed somewhat menacing.

Following a streak of red moonlight, Alina looked up, her brows furrowing tighter.

She was an Astrologer, with a habit of stargazing every night.

In watching the stars, an Astrologer's gaze would never ignore the moon.

She was most aware of the changes between the accompanying satellite and the Blue Moon.

As time progressed, the satellite grew larger from originally being a fraction of the Blue Moon to now almost a fifth of it, this change was simply an expansion.

The changes between the two moons made her increasingly worried.

These two moons weren't mere dead objects, there were divine judgments on the moon.

With the return of the day came not only the opportunity to break through Tier Six but also these lofty and arrogant judges.

Alina disliked these judges.

They were stubborn and inflexible, yet possessed great power, and were difficult to confront.

Thinking of the approaching decisive confrontation that determined her and Roland's life and death, Alina found it hard to be calm.

Her chaotic heartbeat alerted Roland.

Roland suddenly opened his eyes and stared at Alina.

He naturally knew he had slept on Alina's thighs.

The resilient and smooth texture made his sleep exceptionally sound, such a texture change brought by incredible power that ordinary maids could never provide.

Chapter 463: Friendship Rises with the Chimes (Part 3)

Roland knew this kind of enjoyment was rare, somewhat reluctant to sit up, he laughed at himself, "The dream is so real that Miss Liberator provided me with a knee pillow service."

"Not just a knee pillow, but also a massage."

Alina smiled slightly, rubbed her knees, and sat on the sofa beside him.

Roland’s performance was excellent just now, but she possessed keen eyes that, although unfamiliar with the Insight Skill, were equally outstanding in Insight Ability.

Roland was pretending.

Perhaps he truly didn’t recognize it at first, but upon waking, he certainly knew it wasn’t a dream.

He just used this explanation so neither side would feel too awkward.

Alina picked up the teacup, took a sip; the tea was already cold, giving a refreshing feeling.

"Comfortable?"

"Of course, it’s an unparalleled enjoyment, not only allowing me to completely relax but for a brief moment, even forget about the direction of home."

Perhaps influenced by the romantic atmosphere of the Jin Yuan Kingdom, Roland’s words became a bit slick.

Alina just smiled.

Such a genuine compliment.

Losing the desire for the Empress’s Palace, but only for a moment.

This kind of "insincere" praise, if used between lovers in a passionate romance, would mostly make the girl angrily stand up and leave.

Luckily, they weren’t.

They were just friends, which made it a very appropriate compliment.

Alina didn’t continue the topic but decided to check on Roland’s sleeping quarters every night, supervising and urging the maids to provide quality service, and personally demonstrating when maid service wasn’t excellent.

Of course, this was just mutual concern among friends.

Just enjoying a knee pillow, without doing anything outrageous, this was pure friendship.

Perhaps noticing the unsettling atmosphere in the room, or maybe thinking the Magic Lamp was on anyway, best not to waste it, Alina picked up the Civil Code placed beside her, shaking it in her hand.

"I’ve read Mr. Desmonds’ revised version, I think..."

About to give an opinion, Alina suddenly remembered this was Roland’s persistent work, resolutely held her tongue.

"Roland, what do you think of Desmonds’ proposals?"

"It’s like the foot wraps a female knight removes after chasing enemies for three days."

"What do you mean?"

"Smelly and long." Roland explained with a laugh.

Alina bit her lip, her voice slightly chilly, "I’m asking why you emphasized a female knight, don’t male knights have smelly foot wraps?"

"That’s something you’ll need to ask why people of old created such quips, maybe ancient Literary Scholars favored the toes of female knights."

Perhaps finding this topic a bit ambiguous, Alina instinctively tucked her feet back under her skirt, cleared her throat to steer the conversation back on track.

"So, your opinion?"

"My opinion is..."

It’s not as good as Emperor Napoleon’s Civil Code.

Roland silently thought to himself but didn’t rush to counter, instead smiled and asked, "You changed your surname to Bonaparte, is it to honor that Star Spirit Emperor Bonaparte?"

"Yes."

"How do you find his country’s legal system construction?"

"Based on historical records, the Star Spirit clan lived happily then, it can be deduced the laws were excellent at that time, but unfortunately those codes didn’t survive." Alina’s tone was full of regret.

"There are."

Roland took out another world’s Emperor Bonaparte’s Civil Code and placed it on the table.

"This is the Star Spirit Emperor’s Civil Code, also the most suitable code for our country."

He lied, but didn’t completely.

Because it really came from Emperor Bonaparte, and really was suitable.

It’s just from another world’s Bonaparte.

Chapter 464: Blank Check

This Civil Code is a patchwork monster crafted by Roland, based on the Napoleonic Code, with the addition of legal philosophies from people like Carlo and Desmonds.

It possesses progressive aspects without being too radical to implement; overall, it is a comprehensive body of law.

Alina understood its significance; after flipping through a few pages, her eyes lit up.

She found traces of her father’s code compilation in this Civil Code, as well as ideas frequently mentioned by Desmonds recently, and some discussions she had with Roland.

Even...

Some provisions enacted during Marco’s rule.

Alina couldn’t tolerate this; her voice trembled slightly as she bit her lip and asked, "You even included laws made by the rebel Marco?"

"Even if they are enemies, as long as there are merits, I am willing to learn," Roland responded frankly.

Alina was silent for a moment, took a deep breath, and said slowly, "Alright, I'll follow your lead."

She had called him, so she naturally had to trust him completely.

Although there was some discomfort in her heart, she decisively recognized Roland's idea.

A phrase her father once told her flashed through her mind: don't deny the virtues of the enemy because of differing standpoints, otherwise hatred will blind you.

If Marco was truly useless, how could he have caused her father to lose everything, and wield absolute power in the talent-rich Jin Yuan Kingdom to establish a dictatorship?

Denying Marco would mean denying all efforts in defeating him.

Her fingernails dug deeply into her palm, blood seeping through Alina's fingers, her breathing somewhat erratic.

Though she kept persuading herself to accept it, as soon as she recalled the tragic death of her father, she felt indescribable pain.

She thought quietly that if her father had encountered Roland as an assistant back then, it would have been so much better.

This code is incredibly detailed, encompassing everything from how to define "Jin Yuan People" to various civil and property rights legal interpretations and relevant provisions.

Alina naturally couldn't read it all; she merely skimmed through, and it was already dawn.

Closing the book and putting the code away, Alina hesitated for a moment but decided to be candid with Roland.

"Roland, I admit this law is meaningful, but this should be considered post-war. Our immediate priority now is to build a strong army."

"It’s not that I don’t trust Saintess Christine, but there are some matters you’ll need to take charge of."

Roland nodded with a smile, "I haven’t been idle, you know."

He raised the heavy code and said softly, "Do you think I’ve been idly drafting this law out of boredom or a desire to seize control?"

Alina was at a loss for words.

Of course, she wouldn’t think that, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that Roland was somewhat off-task.

In short, although drafting laws is important, its priority pales compared to forming an army to fight the Rurik People.

She did not directly oppose but the confusion in her eyes did not disappear.

"This is the additional cost of recruiting soldiers when the populace is weary of war, and also a promise to those about to die in battle."

Roland put the code down, speaking in a deep voice, "In the past decade, too much blood of the Jin Yuan People has been spilled. Tens of thousands died overthrowing the old royalty, tens of thousands establishing a new order, and nearly a million perished due to Marco’s turmoil and the civil war to overthrow him."

"These are not cold, hard numbers but living people. They died, leaving behind grieving families and war-weary friends and relatives."

"Have you ever thought about what justification we have for recruiting soldiers?"

Alina answered without hesitation, "To defend our homeland."

Roland shook his head slowly, "Ordinary people wouldn't think like that. They would only feel that Jin Yuan Kingdom belongs to the noble lords and officials, not to them."

"Especially after Marco's devastation, the people's trust in the government has almost disappeared. Your father certainly overthrew the Old Empire, but it also brought about Marco's misrule and the civil war. Don't expect this debt of gratitude to bind them for a lifetime."

"If the life post-imperial rule isn't better than before, what was the meaning of overthrowing the Emperor?"

Alina was at a loss for words.

She was somewhat at her wit's end.

She knew Roland wasn't wrong; although overthrowing the Empire and emancipating the shackles was indeed a great achievement for the country, it doesn't mean resting on laurels for life.

If you want the people to enthusiastically join the army and show support, dry slogans definitely won't work; there must be tangible benefits.

This code, which stipulates people's rights, represents the interests of everyone.

If you believe this code aligns with your interests, then stand up and defend it.

An incredibly simple truth.

This is also why Roland made more concessions in the code.

Seeing Alina hesitating to speak, Roland said calmly, "Alina, have you ever thought about a way out in the future, about the continuity of your family?"

"Ah?" Alina didn't expect Roland's thoughts to jump so vividly, momentarily stunned.

Her mind raced, beginning to ponder the deeper meaning of Roland's words.

She didn't assume Roland was preparing for retirement and future family matters, as few would retreat at the height of success.

Future retreat? Family continuity?

Could it be...

A bold idea flashed across her mind, casting a blush over her healthy face.

But wait, he already has Empress Sylph, what exactly is he thinking?

Alina had great confidence in her feminine charm until she met Sylph.

No comparison, completely incomparable.

How could she ever imagine Roland would choose her, unless he and Sylph faced a crisis in their relationship.

Thinking of how Roland suddenly appeared at Mont Blanc, racing with her against the avalanche with reckless abandon, agreeing so readily to help her govern the kingdom, her heart began to pound violently.

Chapter 465: Blank Check_2

Could it be...

Watching Alina’s rapidly changing expression, Roland was a bit confused.

Why is this person zoning out at a time like this? We’re discussing serious matters!

He coughed heavily in frustration and loudly reminded:

"Alina, a monarch’s rule eventually comes to an end, whether they voluntarily relinquish power gracefully or are forced out. We must be prepared in advance."

"Then, what should we do? Suppress any signs as soon as they appear?" Alina replied absently, not expecting Roland to actually be thinking of an exit strategy.

Roland: "..."

He couldn’t understand how such politically illogical words could come out of Alina’s mouth.

Just as he was about to straighten his face and scold her harshly, he saw her eyes filled with confusion and panic.

With a sigh in his heart, Roland gave up the idea of mercilessly interrogating Alina.

Forget it, that’s just women for you.

Their thoughts change faster than flipping a book.

Roland had no choice but to patiently explain to Alina the historical significance of launching this legal reform.

To get the war-weary people to support wars beyond their homeland, they need to see benefits.

The Sussex-like military merit system definitely won't work.

The warlike Jin Yuan people are almost all dead. Those who survived Marco's devastation are mostly slick and opportunistic, avoiding harm.

Recruiting them into the army is as difficult as mobilizing citizens to arm and defend Paris during WWII.

This codex is like an aphrodisiac to awaken their martial spirit.

No one can resist the temptation of benefits, unless it's not enough.

This codex provides a visible upward path for everyone, especially for the lower social classes.

No one wants to wallow in the mud forever, living in a daze and eventually dying without knowing why.

In this terrible era, even if they cower in the rear, most people's lifespans are only four or fifty years.

Sufficient benefits, along with proper propaganda, can at least incite some people to become agitated.

Roland doesn't want to create a large-scale army. In this era, without railways, a large army would first crush not the enemy, but its own logistics support system.

According to his estimates, even with home-field advantage, the Freedom Alliance's maximum support for combat troops would not exceed one million people.

This is also the limit of Christine’s commanding ability.

When approaching one million, the command system becomes bloated, orders are inconsistently conveyed, and the army’s combat effectiveness will drastically decrease.

To support an army of a million in battle, the number of auxiliary logistical personnel would amount to several million, requiring the entire state machinery to switch to wartime status, and the entire society to serve the war.

This extreme mobilization, draining everything, cannot be sustained for long.

Both Roland and Alina are well aware that 1795 marks the beginning of the war, and it could also be its end.

After Roland’s explanation, the gossip thoughts racing through Alina’s mind finally quieted down, and she began to seriously ponder the country’s future.

Understanding the importance of the codex, Alina quickly thought of another matter.

"Roland, have you considered that when the state machinery runs at full speed, the lives of the lower masses will become even harder, and some might be driven to desperation, they..."

Roland calmly responded, "Of course, I have. The small city residents are better off; their savings can sustain them for a while, so they wouldn’t easily cause unrest. The real hidden danger lies with the industrial workers and the self-reliant farmers from rural areas."

"Self-reliant farmers must bear more taxes during wartime, and greedy tax officials will increase their exploitation efforts. If you collect one extra pound of grain, they dare to demand three more from the farmers."

Alina nodded, sighing helplessly, "There’s no other choice. Fortunately, our Jin Yuan Kingdom is vast and fertile, so even if we collect three times as much, the farmers would still manage to survive."

"After the war, I will compensate them; for now, they'll just have to endure a bit longer."

Curiously, Roland asked, "How do you plan to compensate them in the future?"

"Exempt them from taxes for a year and provide grain subsidies based on the number of people. If we win, there's plenty of grain to give them. If we lose..."

She didn't spell out the outcome of losing; losing means death, and she couldn't be bothered to think so far ahead.

"I won't care what happens after I'm gone, let the flood come," she said, reasoning this is perfectly sensible.

Perhaps to strengthen her argument, Alina spoke confidently: "You've done this before, and it had great results."

Indeed, the effect was excellent, but I voluntarily exempted taxes rather than offering empty promises.

Roland, feeling a bit speechless, finally couldn't help but retort, "Alina, if you promise tax exemption and grain distribution after the war, can those who starved during the war climb up from the grave to eat that meal?"

Alina, flustered and unable to retort, her chest heaving with evident frustration, dared not talk back to Roland, so she bravely explained:

"The national granary can barely sustain the consumption of war for half a year. Even if we want to exempt taxes, it's not feasible. If farmers have grain, it would only..."

"Exempt taxes and purchase grain from them in cash and bonds, but it must be on a voluntary basis."

Roland offered a solution.

He explained the operation process of this procurement method in detail to Alina.

Tax exemption not only increases the goodwill of farmers but also prevents greedy tax officials from profiting in between, and can also purify the ranks of tax officials and civil servants.

Having been Roland’s former intelligence chief, Alina was very familiar with Roland’s methods.

With an existing template, this is merely a straightforward replication, and of course, she was not unfamiliar.

Having determined that agriculture tax would be exempted during the war, Alina’s newly relaxed nerves tensed up again.

"What exactly do you mean by this cash and bond procurement method you mentioned earlier?"

Chapter 466: Blank Check_3

"It’s simple. Even after exempting agricultural taxes, we still need a large amount of grain, but our funds have other uses. So, we need to buy a lot of grain, but also save costs."

Roland took out paper and pen and started calculating.

"If we buy grain entirely at market price with cash, we’ll go bankrupt before Sofia even attacks. Issuing empty checks isn’t an option either, as it would be like giving farmers IOUs for their grain."

"If we do that, the farmers won’t hate the tax collectors, they’ll hate us."

Despite the worries, Roland’s humorous words made Alina laugh out loud.

Since her father’s death, it had been a long time since she laughed so heartily, not even when she executed the rebel Marco and reclaimed power.

Perhaps it was Roland's presence that made her feel secure, or maybe her long-suppressed emotions needed release; once she started laughing, she couldn't stop.

Laughter is contagious, and although he didn't know why Alina suddenly laughed, her laughter was so beautiful that Roland couldn't help but laugh along.

He remembered when he first met Alina, the gallant captain, and it seemed like returning to the past, though one can never truly go back, nor can those three years be regained.

Before they knew it, they had crossed the threshold of twenty and were heading towards thirty. If their parents were still around, they would most likely be urging marriage and children.

Thankfully, they were both orphans.

With that thought, Roland's smile gradually froze, and his expression became a bit unnatural.

After a moment of silence, Roland cleared his throat and continued to introduce the hybrid acquisition scheme.

His plan was simple: grain purchases were divided into three schemes.

The first was full cash payment, at a price lower than the market but not too low.

The farmers might be somewhat reluctant, but the grace of Alina exempting agricultural taxes would lessen that small loss.

The second was partial cash and partial bond payment, at market price with a low-interest rate on the bonds.

The third was full bond payment, at a price slightly above market, with a higher bond interest rate than the second option.

From the farmers' viewpoint, the first scheme was a certain loss, but only a small one, which those seeking stability would choose.

The second scheme offered a small profit, provided Jin Yuan Kingdom won future wars.

The third scheme promised the most profit, but if Jin Yuan Kingdom lost, they lost everything, as no new government would repay the bonds of a defeated old one.

After hearing Roland's introduction, Alina pondered for a long time, then sighed softly, "I bet most people will choose the first scheme. Seems we'll need to prepare significant funds, hoping our already tight treasury can support our extravagance."

"Many will opt for the third scheme."

Roland said with a smile, "Even setting aside the benefit of tax exemption, the third scheme is the best choice."

"The first scheme is a pure loss, and an immediate one. The second seems stable but actually bears the same risk as the third with much less return. The third has the highest risk but the greatest reward."

Alina was slightly stunned but quickly understood Roland's point.

Though she understood, she couldn't help but shake her head, "Roland, I get what you mean, but can the farmers understand?"

"That's where we come in."

Roland laid out several pages on the table.

"Skits, comic dialogues, fast-paced storytelling—what are these?" Alina's eyes were a bit confused.

"You can think of them as rural versions of minstrel performances."

Roland pointed to the scripts for various art performances and said with a smile, "As long as we promote performances in rural areas nationwide, I believe the farmers will make the right choice."

Alina stared blankly at these scripts, frowning and shaking her head, "The language of these scripts is so vulgar; I cannot recognize them as a part of art."

This is the standard arrogance of old nobility of Jin Yuan.

According to hometown traditions, stubborn old nobles like Alina would be paraded through the streets with placards.

Fortunately, the times here haven't progressed so fast as to be as exaggerated.

Given Alina's upbringing, her lack of understanding was quite reasonable.

Roland naturally wouldn't argue with her about the difference between Xidai's white snow and countryside folks.

He offered no explanation, simply stood firm and unwavering.

"Please trust me."

This sentence ended the argument.

In the discussion stage, Alina could express any opinion, but in the decision-making stage, she supported Roland's decisions unconditionally, even if they seemed outrageous.

This was Roland's insistence and a condition for helping her.

After ending the discussion, Alina, who hadn’t slept all night, was beginning to feel a bit weary. She stood up to say goodbye to Roland.

Accompanying Roland to the doorway of the sleeping quarters, exchanging a few pleasantries before they both went on their way, Alina suddenly paused and casually asked, "Roland, have you felt homesick these days?"

Roland’s steps halted.

Of course, saying he didn’t miss home would be a lie, but saying he did might imply Alina hadn’t been a good host.

Roland shrugged, giving a high EQ response.

"Work is very busy, I have a lot to do; I’ll think about it when I have time."

After saying this, Roland left without looking back, unwilling to continue on the topic, feeling a chill down his spine.

Watching his rapidly departing back, a slight upward curve touched Alina’s lips.

Maybe she wasn’t just guessing—perhaps there indeed was some issue back in Roland’s home.

She disdained breaking up families, but if the other’s family self-destructed, she couldn’t be blamed for taking advantage.

Nightly massages and lap pillow service had to be arranged.

No other intentions; she simply couldn’t bear seeing Roland too tired.

Alina hurried into the office, noticing Madam Yilian waiting to present sorted intelligence reports.

After quickly skimming through the insignificant recent intelligence and casually burning the documents, Alina called the outgoing intelligence minister to stop.

"Madam Yilian, keep an eye on the frequency of letter exchanges between Roland and Empress Sylph lately. Remember, this isn't surveillance, just concern."

Chapter 467: Were the Letters Forged?

Sitting in the carriage heading to the Empress's Palace, Lisa's brow was furrowed, unable to conceal her inner anxiety.

It has been over a month since she last received a letter from Roland.

This is not normal.

Even if Roland is busy, he would at least write a simple letter to assure his safety.

What is he busy with that he can't be bothered to write even a single letter?

If he was just not writing to her, Lisa would only laugh at herself, but she heard that Roland hasn't written to Empress Sylph either.

Roland and Sif have just confirmed their relationship, how did they become so distant like an old married couple?

Lisa was genuinely feeling anxious.

Although Roland and Sif's engagement made her use alcohol to drown her sorrows to calm her turbulent heart, she knew this was part of the plan.

Only if Sif first accepts Roland, can she accept the inseparable bond between Roland and her.

However, recent situations seem to have changed somewhat.

She didn't know if Roland going to Jin Yuan Kingdom to help was part of the plan or an accident, but Roland's current situation definitely seems to be an accident.

Troubled by a bottleneck in her magic training, Lisa walked out of the laboratory to discuss strategies with Sylph.

Unknowingly, she had already placed herself on the same front line as Sif.

When Lisa stood at the door, Sif seemed unsurprised.

She rose to greet her, letting the maid bring tea and snacks for Lisa, inviting her to sit.

"Miss Lisa, long time no see. How have you been at the Magic Association?"

It certainly had been a long time.

They hadn't seen each other for almost two months.

Despite her anxious heart, Lisa maintained a smile, "Thanks to Your Majesty, I'm doing well."

Before Lisa could continue, Sif softly interrupted, "It's Sif, not Your Majesty."

Lisa's lips curved slightly, her initially gloomy mood improved somewhat.

Even though it was for Roland's sake, Sif indeed was willing to treat her with basic equality.

This was a positive start, one she certainly wouldn’t refuse.

"Alright, Miss Sif, I’m well. However, you seem quite busy."

The mountain of documents before Sif did not lie.

"It’s manageable. The Cabinet has done most of the work, I just need to sign. But recently, the matter of forming an allied army with Jin Yuan Kingdom has been quite complicated, inevitably requiring more attention."

Sif casually circled something on a document and set it aside.

Drawing circles was a signing method she learned from Roland.

Firstly, the signing speed is fast; secondly, drawing circles is also an attitude.

For some solutions, if she is very satisfied, she would give a positive endorsement like "Read, please execute immediately."

For other matters Sif had her own ideas about, she would write suggestions like "Read, suggest XX, please consider" on the document.

The word "please" showed respect to the Cabinet Minister, not an actual request. If the Emperor asks you to do something, you’d best do it immediately.

If someone remains indifferent, they would soon face Sif’s questioning.

Fortunately, there were no such insensible people in the Cabinet.

There was also recognition but not complete approval; when unable to provide constructive advice due to its professionalism, she used circled notes to remind the Cabinet Minister to consider carefully.

Documents with circled notes could be handled directly by content or slightly revised. By circling, Sif handed over the initiative to the Cabinet, leaving it to their discretion.

After finishing the document, Sif rang a bell to summon the Secretary of State, asking her to take the approved document back to the Cabinet for execution.

Watching the Secretary of State leave, Sif breathed a sigh of relief, her expression changing from stern to smiling.

"Now that the official business is done, it’s private time."

Sif sat across from Lisa, smiling as she asked, "Miss Lisa, because of Roland, we will be family in the future. You must have a reason for visiting, feel free to speak."

The talk of family made Lisa’s cheeks flush, but she knew Sif was referring to her becoming family as Roland’s sister.

"Sif, how have you and Roland been getting along recently? I haven’t received a letter from him in two months, and I’m a bit worried."

Unable to think of a courteous way to break the ice, Lisa straightforwardly expressed her concerns from a sister’s perspective.

"We’re doing well. But I haven’t received a family letter from him for over a month either. His last letter only casually asked about a few things, not much written, he’s probably really busy."

At this thought, Sif’s expression changed from sunny to cloudy.

Seeing Sif’s change in expression, Lisa’s spirits dampened as well.

Oh no, could it be that Roland has become infatuated with the charms of romantic girls in Jin Yuan Kingdom beyond redemption?

Although no one could resist Sif’s charm, men like novelty, and just having tasted the tenderness of a woman’s embrace, succumbing to outside temptations is also...

Not normal at all!

If Roland is indeed tempted, what would Sif think?

Seeing Sif’s somewhat panicked eyes, Lisa secretly regretted it, perhaps she shouldn’t have sought Sif, but rather discussed with Roland first.

She was surprised to find that in some aspects, she was more willing to stand with Sif than Roland.

Having come, there was no turning back, so Lisa could only resort to plan B.

"Sif, is there anything you’d like to send to Roland? I’m planning to visit Jin Yuan Kingdom soon. This guy hasn’t been in touch, I must go see."

Sif remained silent, just in silence.

Seeing her indifferent demeanor, Lisa felt a bit anxious, blurting out what was in her heart.

"Aren’t you really worried about him with other women in Jin Yuan..."

Lisa stopped mid-sentence, even a bit regretting being so direct.

Chapter 468: Were the Letters Forged? (Part 2)

"Go to bed?" Sif asked calmly.

Lisa almost fell to the ground.

That’s way too direct, isn’t it? Hearing such words from the esteemed mouth of an Empress felt somewhat strange.

Sif looked at Lisa calmly and asked softly, "Miss Lisa, have you and Roland ever?"

Lisa froze for several seconds before realizing what Sif was asking, and her already pink cheeks instantly turned crimson, her tongue almost knotting up in her mouth.

"Sif, what nonsense are you talking about? I’m Roland’s sister, we’re neighbors, friends, and family, but not the kind of relationship you’re thinking of!"

"You have no blood relation."

Sif looked at Lisa calmly, speaking nonchalantly: "Even if there was, it wouldn’t matter. Many royal families have had marriages with blood relations to ensure the purity of the bloodline."

"No, absolutely not!"

Lisa answered in a panic, her heart racing.

She clearly hadn’t crossed the line with Roland, so why did she feel nervous and flustered?

"I see, you like Roland, but you’ve never expressed it?" Sif suddenly realized.

Lisa almost fainted, nearly forgetting her purpose in seeking out Sif, dumbfounded as she tried to defend herself but found she couldn’t come up with a clear denial.

Stammering a bit, Lisa ultimately couldn’t utter a complete sentence.

"As long as he likes it, I don’t mind."

Sif’s voice was calm, but her words were progressively more explosive.

Lisa stared blankly at Sif.

This was indeed the outcome she desired, but when Sif actually spoke the words, it still seemed absurd to her.

Why wouldn’t she mind? Roland was Sif’s lover, who she was passionately in love with; could she really accept it?

Sif gestured for Lisa to sit down, speaking calmly, "Miss Lisa, the environment during one’s youth shapes a person’s understanding of the world."

"In the world I can see, prestigious men can have many partners, and women of high status can do the same if they wish. Loyalty in upper-class marriages is, rather, an outlier."

"Thank you for your honesty, Lisa. At least I know Roland didn’t have anyone before me... I’m quite happy."

Sif’s lips curved slightly, revealing a hint of a smile.

"As a reward for this loyalty, I allow him to do some not-so-loyal things, like having a non-blood-related sister, or perhaps a few lovers."

Huh?

Lisa’s head buzzed.

Sif’s words made sense; a person’s upbringing shapes their worldview. In her world, although her parents often quarreled, they were loyal to each other, as were Roland’s parents.

Perhaps this was the most beautiful aspect of civilian love.

But not every civilian remained faithful in love. Lisa had also seen many of her parents’ peers misbehaving outside their marriages.

Some frequented red-light districts, while others shared passionate nights with others’ wives.

Lisa was a bit confused about what Sif was truly thinking.

Of course, Sif understood why Lisa was bewildered; she smiled and said:

"Lisa, you are no longer a commoner now. You are an important member of the Magic Association, and you might become its next leader in the future. Even if not, as Anthony’s disciple, you will still hold a prestigious position."

"You should know that love is not the entirety of life. Or rather, the more weight love holds in one’s life, the duller that life becomes."

"Roland’s presence is my fortune; Roland’s affection is my happiness. But besides that, I hope to stand with him at the pinnacle. That is more meaningful than a mere romantic relationship."

Sif went to the window, looking at the busy people outside, and sighed softly: "If we can’t reach the end together, no matter how passionate the love, it’s imperfect."

Sif’s understanding of love aligns with the mindset of the strong.

For example, Sofia, when faced with emotional neglect from her husband, thinks not of seeking a caring partner but rather of freezing her emotions to become an indomitable force on her climb to the top.

Roland is an irreplaceable presence in Sif’s life, but it’s not love that matters; it’s companionship, trust, and growing together.

Looking at Sif’s slender and elegant figure, Lisa suddenly had an illusion, as if the Sif standing before her was no longer the helpless girl waiting for Roland’s rescue.

As she stood by the window, it was like she became part of the vibrant spring outside, becoming one with the burgeoning life.

Lisa sighed, smiling somewhat helplessly: "You’re so open-minded, it makes me seem a bit petty. Looks like there’s no need to go to Jin Yuan Kingdom."

"No, you must go to Jin Yuan."

Sif turned to look at Lisa, speaking gently: "I don’t want to fall behind Roland, nor do I want anything to hinder the wings that let him soar. Help me find out why he’s changed over these two months. If it’s something binding him, let me know, and I’ll handle it."

Sif didn’t say how she would handle it, but Lisa could more or less imagine.

If someone was causing Roland to indulge in complacency, Sif would likely dismantle that illusory dream herself.

"Understood!"

Receiving Sif’s acknowledgment made Lisa feel much better, even giving her the leisure to make a joke.

She exaggeratedly made a gesture of receiving an order, bringing more smile to Sif’s lips.

The two chatted a bit more, then Lisa seemed to think of something and suddenly asked:

"Sif, the last letter Roland sent you... can I take a look?"

"This?" Sif instinctively wanted to refuse, though devoid of sweet nothings, it was nonetheless a personal letter from Roland to her, one she was unwilling to share with outsiders.

Chapter 469: Is the Letter a Forgery? (3)

Alright, Lisa isn't an outsider, so let her take a look.

With extreme reluctance, Sif retrieved a delicate safe from under the desk and awkwardly found the key to insert into the lock.

Watching her awkwardness, Lisa almost couldn't hold back her laughter.

At least half of Sif's cold demeanor earlier was just an act.

A newlywed husband went abroad for work, surrounded by romantic and passionate Jin Yuan Maidens, who wouldn't worry?

It seems Sif is still perfectly normal.

Taking Roland's handwritten letter from Sif's hand, Lisa was a bit curious about what this guy had written.

The very first sentence made Lisa feel a bit sour.

The letter to her starts with "Sister Lisa," whereas the one to Sif begins with "Dear baby Sylph," the favoritism is too apparent.

Reading the letter with a heavy heart, Lisa was so angry she bit her lip, unable to say a word.

How can you say this is nothing written?

The letter is over a thousand words, with only about three hundred related to work, the rest expressing longing.

This isn't showing love, it's clearly flaunting it.

Forgetting your sister once you have a wife, is this what men are like?

Seeing Lisa's colorful expressions as she read, Sif became curious, "Miss Lisa, what did Roland write in the letter to you?"

"Nothing much, I've already burned it."

Watching Sif's skeptical look, Lisa gritted her teeth and reached into her pocket, summoning a flickering flame in her palm to burn the letter she carried.

To be fair, purely based on mastery of Flame Magic, she had surpassed Anthony, able to incinerate a letter in her pocket without any heat escaping, truly a master of destroying letters.

Sadly, this impressive trick was like showing off to no one who appreciated it.

Seeing the ashes in Lisa's palm, Sif wisely did not inquire further.

With Lisa's affection for Roland, how could she burn his letter?

Feeling the warmth of the ashes, only a fool wouldn't know it was freshly burned.

It was glaringly clear that the contents of Roland's letter to her were much more than to Lisa.

Unintentionally winning again, Sif felt quite cheerful.

However, with Lisa right across from her, she had to suppress her laughter.

Fortunately, she is a seasoned performer, unlikely to have an onstage blunder unless she can’t hold it in.

Seeing Sif’s struggle to stifle her laughter, Lisa felt uncomfortable but also somewhat relieved.

She never could compare to Sif, for Sif was Roland’s true beloved.

The beloved, gentle white moonlight in his arms, invincible.

Lisa was a little upset, yet found no way to vent her frustration, so she buried her head in continuing to read the letter, hoping to find something.

Persistence pays off, and she truly found something.

"Sif, this letter might be fake."

"What did you say, fake? That’s impossible, the handwriting is clearly Roland’s." Sif’s eyes began to narrow, daring to use such a letter to deceive her, she wouldn’t let it slide.

"Roland has a few habitual spelling errors that others wouldn’t know, look here, he always misses a letter in this word, but here, it’s complete."

Sif said nothing, directly moving towards the bookshelf.

There were original novel manuscripts written by Roland himself.

She pulled out a volume, carefully leafing through it, until she found the same word.

Sure enough, the spelling error was just as Lisa described.

Unwillingly, she continued to leaf through, finding another instance of the word with the same spelling error.

It was evident that Roland considered this spelling to be correct, as he consistently wrote it that way.

Missing one consonant doesn’t affect readability, but it does affect the mood.

Calmly placing the manuscript back on the shelf, Sif returned to the desk, casually picking up a pen, only to find it already deformed from her grip.

She held back and held back, but finally couldn’t hold it anymore.

"Miss Lisa, please set off for Jin Yuan immediately and find this person. I’ll personally deal with her."

Lisa had been waiting for this statement, nodded, and swiftly departed.

Watching Lisa leave, there was a bit more dejection in Sif’s eyes.

"Roland, where’s the real letter, would you actually write this way?"

Chapter 470: Blood, That’s Blood!

Sif was very aware that Roland was definitely not a cold and unfeeling person.

He could never abandon Sister Lisa, who accompanied him for many years despite having no blood relation.

With Lisa’s beauty and strength, it would be easy to find a good match if she wanted to marry, but she has always remained single.

Single, yet ambiguous in her relationship with Roland.

Even a blind person could see that their relationship is not ordinary.

Sif even long believed Roland would marry Lisa.

That was the result she least wanted to see.

Luckily, she won.

Perhaps the elf who looked similar in her dream was the reason she could win, but that's not important.

Victory is far more important than the reason for the victory.

She has already won, so she can be forgiving to the loser; she couldn't possibly ask Roland to drive Lisa away.

If she made such a request, regardless of whether Roland complied, she would lose miserably.

Her mother once said that if you treasure a relationship, never test it.

Defeating Sofia and surviving is what matters most.

Of course, she couldn't do nothing.

If switching the letters was done on Captain Alina's own accord, that would be fine; if Alina herself did it, she would take matters into her own hands.

Alina, was it you?

...

"Ah-choo!"

Alina, who was providing a lap pillow service for Roland, suddenly sneezed.

Roland, who was enjoying himself with closed eyes, abruptly sat up and stared at Alina.

"This kind of small matter doesn’t really need you to do it yourself; you need more rest."

"I’m okay, but those maids are clumsy, I don’t trust them."

Alina avoided Roland’s concerned gaze, feeling a strange warmth on her cheeks for some reason.

Could such a vast Jin Yuan Kingdom not find skilled massage masters and obedient maids?

Of course, they could.

If it wasn’t for Roland desiring the lap pillow and massage she provided, she would not be so idle.

He worked tirelessly for the recovery of Jin Yuan Kingdom, so this bit of enjoyment is indeed necessary.

Unfortunately, she subtly hinted multiple times to provide Roland with passionate, intimate maid companionship, but those were ruthlessly refused.

His relationship with Sif is truly great.

Just like a perfect flawless jade sculpture, Alina thought silently.

For some reason, she always felt the urge to smash this perfect sculpture.

She was startled by her thoughts and even recalled events from her childhood.

She once owned a very exquisite crystal angel statue.

She loved this angel statue dearly, hugging it to sleep every night, yet on a certain peaceful night, she couldn't restrain the impulse to shatter it fiercely.

The crisp sound rang through time, echoing in her ears.

Humans always have strange destruction impulses; most times they can be restrained, but there are moments when they can't be.

Alina was shocked by this absurd thought, her heart racing.

What was she thinking? Was she innately a destroyer or a bad girl?

Or was it simply jealousy of Sif?

No way, absolutely not!

Alina immediately dismissed this frightening idea.

She would rather admit to being a bad girl and a destroyer than admit to being jealous of Sif.

Seeing Alina's unpredictable expression, fluctuating between red and white, Roland knew she was once again in that mode where a girl's thoughts were unfathomable.

Seeing Alina’s emotions so unstable, Roland lost interest in enjoying the gentle lap pillow, yawning, he spoke lightly: "It’s getting late, I’m sleepy too."

"By the way, is there no letter from Hansa for me?"

"Yes, yes there is, all are official letters, Lady Elaine will have them organized for you tomorrow morning."

Alina murmured softly.

All are official letters?

Roland was filled with doubt, vaguely feeling something was amiss.

The letter he sent to Sif last was a standard family letter; he had even specially composed a poem expressing his longing.

Even though he and Sif had confirmed their marriage and taken a crucial step from youthfulness to maturity, they were still in the honeymoon phase, not just an old married couple, right?

Something must have gone wrong in some link.

Roland’s instinctive first reaction was that Alina withheld the letters, but he quickly dispelled this absurd thought and felt apologetic for suspecting Alina.

Her eyes were so clean, it certainly wasn’t her.

No one can have such a clear gaze after committing mischief.

She might have other thoughts but wouldn’t do something so trivial.

While Roland was lost in thoughts, a gentle voice came from the door, "Master, Lady Elaine has prepared night tea for you and the Prime Minister, may we bring it in now?"

The hands of the clock had just pointed to nine; the nightlife of West City was just beginning.

Alina opened her mouth but said nothing; she looked at Roland with a questioning gaze, leaving the choice to him.

After all, Roland had just said he was going to sleep, it would be impolite to make a rash decision.

Looking at Alina’s cautious demeanor, Roland felt inexplicably bitter.

Even when standing at the peak of power, controlling the life and death of millions, able to decide the continent’s situation, that spirited Captain Alina had disappeared.

Roland softly said, "Let them in, and bring a few more bottles of wine, and you join me for a drink. Oh, and wear the glasses from when we first met."

Alina paused for a moment, those glasses?

Though not lost, they had suffered slight damage in transit, so she kept them stored away.

Since Roland wanted them, she certainly wouldn’t refuse.

Alina stood up, smiling as she said, "Wait a moment, I’ll go find them, they should still be around."

She wasn’t looking for the glasses, but was going to put on a light night makeup and bring a few bottles of strong liquor instead.

Though without reason, she always felt that Roland wasn’t in a very good mood today.

At times like these, a friend’s company and strong liquor are the best companions for relieving worries.