Empress 561

Chapter 561: The Empress’s Handwritten Letter

Summer Palace.

Sofia sat quietly by the window facing the sea, her gaze drifting out through the window to the far-off frozen sea.

The Battle of White Mountain had been over for two weeks, yet it was still as vivid as if it happened yesterday.

As she dazedly held her teacup, the Deep Blue Ice Spirit silently appeared.

"Master, your human servant has arrived."

"Which servant?" Sofia instinctively asked casually, then laughed, realizing that such a complicated question was a bit out of the Ice Spirit’s scope.

She waved her snow-white hand, signaling the Ice Spirit to retreat.

"Let her in."

The Ice Spirit looked at Sofia’s back, slightly puzzled, as the aura about the Empress felt somewhat unfamiliar to her.

"Quickly go then."

Sofia’s urging voice rang out, and the Ice Spirit swiftly disappeared with a "whoosh" sound.

It quickly dispelled the strange doubts.

The master is the master, as long as her soul remains unchanged, she will forever be the master.

A moment later, Angelina appeared.

She sat across from Sofia, troubled by the large pile of documents she held.

"Your Majesty, there are many matters recently, and I'm getting a headache."

"Unfortunately, this pain is just about to be transferred to me." Sofia smiled, putting down her teacup and glancing at the files that covered half the tea table.

Angelina lowered her head slightly embarrassed, softly mumbling: "I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't disturb you, but there are things I truly don't dare to decide on my own."

Seeing Angelina's genuine remorse, Sofia's tone softened considerably.

"No need to apologize, this is my duty. You've gone to great lengths."

Sofia picked up the first document, immediately feeling Angelina's headache.

This document was a formal joint request from the Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom.

It was a strange yet important document.

The two countries, as allies of the Holy Alliance, requested the Vladimir Empire to jointly take strong measures to prevent rumors of the Wende Empire's restoration from spreading.

"Your Majesty, rumors stop with the wise, we truly should dispel them alongside our allies."

"What if it's not just rumors?" Sofia calmly countered.

Sofia's words didn't surprise Angelina.

She had witnessed firsthand Christine guarding Sofia under the Ginkgo Tree, and also saw Sofia's transformation from Roland's enemy to ally.

Since they were allies, with Roland's personality, he naturally had to speak for Christine.

The Wende Empire was Christine's secular homeland, and she surely wanted to aid her country's restoration.

However, digesting territory is easy, but regurgitating it is hard.

How to convince the two allies to accept reality?

Using force, not only would they offend both nations, but it would also dishearten those observing countries.

Having the two major powers of the Holy Alliance follow your lead, only to forcefully disgorge the acquired land, was worse than never having eaten it at all.

Sofia indeed had a bit of a headache.

These two allies each had their own ambitions, were not entirely honest, and even attempted to profit during Suvorov's passing, playing the spectators during the battle at Val City, allowing the Freedom Alliance Army to drive straight in against Vladimir Empire's elite forces.

But Sofia didn't have much reason to blame her allies.

During the battle of Frank Castle, it was Angelina who urged Prudon Kingdom to seize the moment and catch Roland off guard.

Prudon Kingdom paid a huge price, but it resulted in a horrific explosion and a scorched earth of desolation.

Angelina was involved too.

Thus she could not loudy accuse her allies of being untrustworthy.

The partition of the Wende Empire was the basis of forming the alliance by the Three Kingdoms. If they regurgitated the Wende Empire, the Prudon Kingdom would become the biggest laughingstock of the war.

Both emotionally and logically, the Vladimir Empire must provide them an explanation.

Moreover, the war fervor within Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom had already been stirred up, with even a nationwide recruitment having taken place.

Would they be willing to give up the occupied lands? No way.

Sofia chuckled, these two countries even resorted to using bayonets and artillery to compel the locals in the occupied areas to learn the Odin language, which is a clear exhibition of their ambition.

Unresolvable, absolutely unresolvable.

Sofia’s brilliance mainly shines during battles.

Her genuine diplomatic capability was probably akin to "I propose to partition Val City State," "I propose to partition the Wende Empire," with "who approves and who opposes" kind of level.

Before the Battle of White Mountain, Sofia might have put up a strong front, but after it, her thoughts changed considerably.

If it works, it works, if it doesn’t, then it doesn’t.

She didn’t have clever diplomatic skills, and neither did Angelina, who even contemplated summoning a snowstorm during holiday ceremonies in other nation’s capitals.

But Roland did, and he had plenty.

Currently, Roland belonged to everyone.

Roland was not only Sussex’s Caesar but also the Prime Minister of the Jin Yuan Republic, and moreover, the Prime Minister of the Vladimir Empire.

He could carry the surname York, Bonaparte, or Vladimir.

"Hand this matter over to the Prime Minister, our newly appointed Duke of Kazan, Saint Laurent Bonaparte York Vladimir."

Angelina nodded gently, internally muttering without a word.

Her Majesty the Empress unhesitatingly placed her surname last, which was the most significant position, but undoubtedly in Roland’s heart, York would have the most important place.

Of course, if the Empress actually suggested it, Roland would comply obediently.

After the single sword stroke that cleaved White Mountain and wiped out the Judges’ panel, any urge to openly oppose Sofia would be considered the world’s most foolish notion.

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This is also why, despite their ability to mobilize an army of a million, the two allies have no choice but to respect Sofia.

You may disregard Sofia's opinions, but you cannot disregard Sofia's sword.

Angelina brought many documents, and Sofia only skimmed through them before issuing unified instructions, asking the Cardinal Minister to make appropriate arrangements.

Of course, she didn't completely shirk her responsibilities; she picked up her pen and wrote a personal letter, very courteously inviting Roland to attend the tea party.

The time was set for Sunday.

How Roland would arrive at the Summer Palace by Sunday was Roland's problem.

Seeing this handwritten letter, Angelina breathed a sigh of relief, her smile returning to her face, adding a bit of shine to her slightly darkened circles from fatigue.

After further consulting Sofia on urgent matters that required swift handling, Angelina carefully tucked the personal letter into her bosom and took her leave.

Sofia never turned back, merely gazed silently at the frozen sea surface.

An excellent port is an obsession of the Rurik People; the northern bear has an almost obsessive yearning for the vast ocean.

Unfortunately, they have none.

The northern port freezes for at least four months in winter, and its capacity for throughput is limited during the thawing period.

The southern port requires passage through two straits controlled by the Nubian Kingdom, which is also inconvenient.

Aside from this, there are several small exclave ports, all of which require passage through other countries for large-scale transactions, making it very troublesome.

This war, her insistence on partitioning the Wende Empire also had the aim of seizing a port.

However, Roland's insistence on supporting the restoration of the Wende Empire annoyed her somewhat.

Sofia stood up, walked slowly to the window, opened it, and let the cold wind, mixed with snowflakes, drift inside.

It was another winter dusk with snow flying everywhere.

If it were her in the past, she would surely have loved this kind of weather, but after the Battle of White Mountain, her special attachment to snow dissipated with that astounding sword strike.

What was cut was not only the arrogant Judges but also the path she once walked.

It was a wonderful and innocent era; she once had three companions, each choosing the path of Feng Rao, Light, and Nature, while she chose Frosty Winter.

The austerity of winter matched well with her personality of enjoying solitary time.

In those years, to suppress the negative emotions accumulated during cultivation, she would sleep for a while under the Polar Glacier every winter.

The opportunity to ascend to the Divine Domain beckoned to them, and they agreed to linger a bit longer on the Material Plane.

The departure of the Ascenders would significantly impact the Material Plane; if Ascenders could use the Power of Faith to reinforce the Material Plane before leaving, they could minimize the damage to the Material Plane.

Theia was, after all, their homeland, and Sofia thought it would be good for them to ascend to the Divine Domain, leaving something for their homeland before departing.

They agreed to jointly create thirty-two Divine Artifacts to fortify their homeland's defenses.

These thirty-two Divine Artifacts would construct a strong Plane Wall, preventing the invasion of external demons.

The newly created Plane Wall fortified by the thirty-two artifacts would not only hinder external demons but also make it nearly impossible for them to return to their homeland.

Sofia decided to travel every corner of her homeland before leaving.

She was the youngest among the four Goddess candidates, much younger than the other three, so she was still full of nostalgia for her homeland.

One snowy winter day, as usual, she went to the Polar Glacier to search for materials to forge Divine Artifacts and hibernate for a few weeks.

The other three knew her habits and didn't interfere with her.

They each went to different parts of the world to gather materials.

This should have been an unremarkable winter season, an ordinary busy day before they left their homeland.

However, when Sofia awoke, she couldn't find the other three.

After desperately searching, she looked at the Plane Wall with a backdoor left open and instantly understood.

She had been abandoned.

The Theia Plane had been abandoned.

The three Goddesses never intended to do anything for their homeland. The whole notion of ascending to divinity first to lead later ascendancy was never in their plans; it was all just Sofia's wishful thinking.

They had been planning to leave her behind and secretly head to the Divine Domain all along.

If it were just that, Sofia would have been saddened but not blamed them, everyone having different ideas, moving on separate paths from here.

However, they destroyed the Divine Artifacts, left vulnerabilities in the Plane Wall, creating a backdoor for them to return during the Plane's annihilation and rebirth.

Their intentions were clear.

They didn't want to share with future generations; they wanted everything for themselves.

If it were just that, Sofia would have been contemptuous but not overly angry.

After all, people are selfish, and gods are no exception.

Making choices most beneficial for themselves doesn't seem wrong.

However, the thoughts of the three Goddesses were even more malicious; they wanted to consume not only the benefits of ascending but everything from their homeland.

They left a backdoor for themselves to return and harvest when the Material Plane was annihilating and being reborn.

What they wanted was to consume the entire Plane.

Including Sofia, who missed the ticket to ascend to divinity.

Sofia opened her right hand, leaving only a sword hilt in her palm, as the Ice Attribute Divine Artifact Bright Blue Fury vanished with that sword strike.

Also disappearing was all the Ice Attribute power within her.

She had tried many times.

She attempted to complete the set of thirty-two Divine Artifacts, repair the Plane Wall, to prevent their return, but while Divine Artifacts were feasible to create, the damaged Plane Wall could not be repaired.

This backdoor also became the means through which the Divine Punishment Legion later descended.

Though costly, as long as the price was paid, the Divine Punishment Legion would arrive as promised.

With the departure of the three Goddesses, Sofia's kindness and gentleness completely died; she only wanted to protect her homeland and, incidentally, punish the deserters.

She wielded the sharp blade, ruthlessly removing the opposition, ultimately establishing an unprecedented unified Empire at the end of the Age of Gods.

On the human stage, she had no opponents, except for the Divine Punishment Legion.

She owned the whole world but had no trustworthy companions; in the ultimate Divine Punishment War, she faced the tidal wave of the Divine Punishment Legion alone.

She detonated the Divine Artifact Azure Rainbow, perishing together with the Divine Punishment Legion, and her soul entered the Netherworld, undergoing countless cycles of reincarnation.

It was not until the Sixth Era that she awakened her memories once again.

Sofia’s lips slightly curved upward, allowing the sea breeze to lift her hair, the ends brushing her cheeks, the flaxen strands stroking her face, sending tingling sensations.

Her once ocean blue hair returned to its original color, and her blue eyes changed back to a pale gold.

She seemed to return to the carefree presence of being with her parents.

Or to those endless moments shared with her three unrelated "sisters."

But she knew well, that times could not return.

The three "sisters" had become implacable foes, her parents had turned to dust in history, even if she could cross the Nether River she would be assigned a new soul, no longer her kin.

Perhaps this is where destruction breeds new life.

Sofia sighed softly, drawing back her neck, leaving the window where the cold wind blew directly.

It had been a long time since she felt this kind of weakness.

This sense of smallness and void gave her a long-lost thrill of joy from becoming slightly stronger.

Sofia suddenly felt like laughing.

The world’s strongest believe her to be the only Tier Four superpower, further deeming she holds the strength rivaling the Holy Sanctuary.

Those who participated in the Battle of White Mountain would never muster the idea of challenging her with force.

They would never guess that she is now the weakest among the sixty survivors of the Battle of White Mountain.

If someone were to break into the Summer Palace now, they would have a perfect opportunity to kill her while she’s at her weakest.

Yet they dare not.

After such a world-shaking sword strike, none dared draw their blade against her.

Sofia took a fur coat from the coat rack, wrapped herself, gazing at the encroaching nightfall, feeling the layered warmth the bear fur brought, she suddenly felt a bit curious.

What was Roland up to?

She certainly didn’t expect that Roland was tirelessly creating life.

As agreed, he should have reported to Saint Rurik Palace long ago, but Sif wouldn’t let him go.

Unless...

"You can’t leave unless you leave a pure-blooded heir for the York Clan."

Sif wore a solemn expression, dragging Roland into the bedroom, relentlessly working to ensure the continuation of the family.

Outside the window, the Blue Moon hung in the sky, the accompanying satellite dimly glowing.

Inside, moonlight flowed like water, and mischievous little spirits frolicked in the Life Garden...

Chapter 563: That’s Mine, All Mine!

Winter Palace.

This magnificent palace, located in the bustling district of the city, was once the bedroom of the former Emperor of the Vladimir Empire. However, after the previous Emperor "caught a cold" and passed away, this palace temporarily lost its master.

The new Empress Sofia moved to the Summer Palace on the mountain, and this Winter Palace, which had better conditions in all aspects, was instead put aside.

Although it was put aside, after all, it was an important asset of the Imperial Family, and daily maintenance and upkeep still had to be carried out according to the standards of the Imperial Palace.

At least hundreds of maids and guards were stationed here, ensuring the normal operation of this palace under the command of the Chief Steward, waiting for the new owner’s arrival.

Everything about this palace is good, just a bit deserted, clearly in a bustling urban area, yet it somehow gives off the feeling of being in a remote suburb.

But this is also fine; the maids and guards stationed here work shifts, with not a low salary, living quite well.

Just as the guard at the entrance was yawning lazily, the sound of horse hooves rang out.

He froze for a moment, instinctively looked up toward the main road, seeing a carriage bearing the Imperial Family’s emblem slowly approaching.

He was stunned for a few seconds, instantly realizing that an important person had arrived.

He was about to step up to stop the carriage and ask questions when the Guard Captain next to him smacked him away.

The Guard Captain stood straight in a posture the young guardsman had never seen, with a textbook standard of saluting.

Watching the carriage enter the Winter Palace, the young guardsman couldn’t help but touch his badly slapped face, murmuring quietly, "Captain, whose carriage is this, why didn’t you ask?"

"Shut up you."

The Guard Captain glared at him angrily, remained silent for a moment, then slowly said, "I don’t know who is sitting in the carriage, but the driver is General Sakhalin."

"You mean Her Majesty’s most trusted general, the Blade of Destruction, Lord Sakhalin?"

The young guardsman inhaled sharply, looking at the carriage leaving far away, his mind full of questions.

Who could wield such influence to have General Sakhalin personally drive the carriage?

The young guardsman trembled slightly, thinking of a person.

A carriage with the Imperial Family’s emblem, the Grand General personally driving—there is only one person with such prestige in the whole Empire, Her Majesty the Empress.

No wonder the Captain was angry; obstructing the Empress’s carriage was practically courting death.

The young guardsman, feeling embarrassed, lowered his head and was about to thank the Captain when he saw the Captain once again salute in a standard position.

This time he wised up and followed suit without waiting for the Captain’s call.

The same Imperial carriage, but this time the driver had changed.

It was Miss Angelina, the Prime Minister and the Empress’s most favored minister.

This Prime Minister, known by the moniker Grip of the Frosty Winter, looked stern, casually sitting in the driver’s seat, and nodded slightly in salutation.

Watching the second carriage enter the Winter Palace, the young guardsman finally couldn’t help but ask, "Captain, who is in this second carriage?"

"How should I know?"

The Guard Captain glared at him in exasperation, "Stand your post!"

Watching the second carriage disappear at the end of his sight, the Guard Captain sighed lightly in his heart. He had a premonition that the good days of slacking off while on job and collecting a salary might be over.

Her Majesty the Empress had not returned to the Winter Palace in many years. Her sudden return suggested she intended to stay there for the long haul.

Serving the Emperor indeed provided opportunities to distinguish oneself, but the degree of toil would also multiply.

The Guard Captain sighed inwardly; had he been in his twenties, he would have seized this rare opportunity. However, now in his forties, with grandchildren already starting to read and write, what else could he pursue?

Unlike the melancholy of the Guard Captain, the young guardsman’s eyes were ablaze with fiery anticipation.

Although initially flustered, he quickly realized that the Empress’s return to the Winter Palace, where she hadn’t lived for years, signaled an important political development.

If Her Majesty were to reside long-term at the Winter Palace, those closest to her, like themselves, would have the chance to prove themselves.

Unlike some of the older, more jaded officials around him, the young Plushenko was full of hope for the future. He didn’t want to rot in the Winter Palace like the Captain, wandering aimlessly for a lifetime.

A strong curiosity tormented Plushenko: who was sitting in the other carriage?

...

"Master Roland, this is the famous Scorching Sun Plaza. Do you see that fountain? It’s the largest fountain on the entire Rodinia Continent."

Sahalin looked at the fountain, which was not spraying water, remained silent for a moment, shrugged, and added in a tone almost self-deprecating, "If it were spraying, that is."

Very well, really very well. The palace fountain was actually dry; where had the annual maintenance fees gone? It seemed someone was going to lose their head.

The Chief Steward was one, and the financial officer couldn’t escape either.

These people must be held accountable!

It was such a disgrace, how would the newly-arrived Roland perceive this? Would he think the Rurik people were all like this?

Seeing Sahalin’s somewhat grim expression, Roland could roughly guess what was going on.

When the Emperor is not at the palace, all kinds of demons and monsters would inevitably emerge.

As long as there’s enough interest, people would engage in embezzlement even if the consequence was being flayed and straw-stuffed.

In the past, the White Rose Knight Order had only a few hundred members left, with an annual budget of only several thousand Su Pounds, yet it still gave rise to parasitic figures like Watton and Stanley.

The maintenance fund for the Winter Palace was higher than that of the White Rose Knight Order; it would indeed be odd if there were no parasites.

This was the classic case of "the darkest place is under the candlestick."

For well-known reasons, Sofia did not like this cage-like palace.

After bidding farewell to her husband (the former Emperor), who "caught a cold" and passed away here, she moved out to the Summer Palace.

Chapter 564: That’s Mine, All Mine! (Part 2)

She certainly did not want to mention that this was where she had once been trapped in an empty boudoir, and where her ex-husband had been strangled, so in theory, this was still the Emperor’s palace, and the Summer Palace was just a secondary residence.

Since it was nominally still the Emperor’s residence, it had to be well-maintained.

But because Sofia didn’t like it, the external officials didn’t dare approach this palace, so it became a place to harbor filth and corruption.

Understanding this, Sahalin felt a bit overwhelmed and hurriedly waved over a maid, gave some instructions, and then continued the tour with Roland.

"This place..."

Sahalin’s expression grew increasingly ugly, and he said coldly, "This is where Leonardo of Talia’s ’Holy Son Painting’ was once displayed."

"Perhaps because no one appreciated it, the Chief Steward stored it away."

Roland smiled and offered Sahalin a way out.

Anyway, this was an internal affair of the Vladimir Empire; what did it have to do with him?

Although his status as Cardinal Minister was far above that of the Prime Minister, theoretically on par with the Vice Emperor, he knew his place well.

He was here to fulfill a contract.

Working for Sofia for five years, contributing both labor and effort, but he knew who to prioritize.

Even working for three countries, there were still distinctions to be made.

The Queen of Sussex was his most beloved wife, so this was his homeland.

The Empress of the Jin Yuan Republic was his future wife, so it was his second homeland.

Vladimir Empire? Completely unfamiliar, even an enemy before.

If it weren’t for Sofia’s terrifyingly spectacular sword, Roland would never have signed this sell-out contract.

Now that he was here, he certainly had to do his job well. Although his moral standards were somewhat flexible, he understood the principle of not provoking an undefeatable enemy.

Vladimir Empire, just a job.

Roland’s understanding slightly improved Sahalin’s mood, but he still silently noted those who secretly undermined the Imperial Family.

Just you wait, this matter must be reported to Her Majesty the Empress.

Damn mice, none of you will escape!

Sahalin cast a grateful glance at Roland and continued walking towards the banquet hall with him.

Along the way, there were many very precious artworks and statues.

Sahalin no longer dared to continue with introductions and used the universal excuse of "not letting Her Majesty wait for us" to skip the tour and head straight to the banquet hall.

Because they hurriedly skipped the scheduled tour, they arrived a bit early, and the banquet hall was still being prepared for the welcome dinner, so the two had no choice but to have tea in a nearby lounge.

"Last time in Val City..."

"A few days ago at White Mountain..."

Perhaps finding the atmosphere a bit awkward, both were about to engage in some small talk, only to coincidentally start speaking at the same time.

After a few seconds of daze, they burst into laughter together, relieving much of the awkward atmosphere.

Though Sahalin felt somewhat discontent with Roland, he dared not question Sofia's decision and, considering Roland as a future superior, had to lower his stance.

He smiled and said, "Lord Roland, I just recalled the time we first met outside the square and arm-wrestled. So many years have passed, yet I can no longer comprehend your strength."

Sahalin and Roland had only interacted twice, once in the contest at Val City and the other during the Battle of White Mountain.

The Battle of White Mountain was Roland's shining moment, which Sahalin did not wish to mention, so he brought up their initial contest.

Though he suffered a loss that time, at least back then, his raw strength overwhelmed Roland, only being fooled by Roland's cunning.

Roland naturally understood this little thought.

Roland certainly didn't hold it against him and completely understood Sahalin's feelings.

From another perspective, for the world's largest country not to find even a single versatile talent internally and to have Her Majesty the Empress hire from abroad was somewhat embarrassing.

As a high-ranking imperial official, it would be odd for Sahalin not to feel some irritation.

Roland even considered this a good sign. Attitude was key; if the Winter Palace's stay-behind team was so lifeless and idle, who could he count on?

Sahalin cared about face, and Roland was more than willing to give it.

"General Sahalin, I always remember that matter. Your grip was really strong; after returning, I realized the tiger’s mouth split, and it took a long time to recover."

"Actually, I lost that time; I just used a trick."

Roland indeed was not the match in terms of brute strength, but it wasn’t that severe.

He was merely giving Sahalin face.

With that, Sahalin felt a bit embarrassed and quickly shifted the topic to discuss the Battle of White Mountain.

During the Battle of White Mountain, even though they were at the Flower Sea Battlefield and the outer battlefield, facing differently ranked opponents, at least they were all victors.

Their path of transcendence was not the type of secluded cultivation in deep mountains. Sahalin needed to continue achieving glory in the army, while Roland had to spread teachings in more places.

The Battle of White Mountain spanned three Return Days, and the next one would be a long wait, giving them plenty of time.

Time is the most magical force.

After all, now is the first year of the Seventh Era, so there’s no need to rush.

The two were chatting happily, unknowingly moving from the Battle of White Mountain to post-war aftermath talks.

Sahalin spoke to Roland about the demands of two allies, sincerely seeking Roland’s advice.

Roland pondered for a moment and said slowly, "Your two allies of the Vladimir Empire..."

Before he could finish, a cold voice came from outside the door.

"Lord Roland, it is our Vladimir Empire, not yours."

Sofia had just arrived and happened to hear Roland’s habitual phrase, promptly correcting it.

Chapter 565: That’s Mine, All Mine! (Part 3)

The half-opened door of the lounge slowly swung open, and standing at the entrance was Angelina.

She looked at Roland with a smiling face and said, "Honored Duke, the welcoming banquet is ready, the Empress is waiting for you in the dining room."

She wanted to find some awkwardness or embarrassment on Roland’s face.

Unfortunately, she failed.

Roland seemed as if nothing ever happened earlier, and even had the mind to invite Sahalin along.

In the dining room.

A long dining table was set up.

Sofia sat at the head of the long dining table, with Roland’s seat arranged opposite her, and Angelina and Sahalin sat nearby on the side.

The distance was indeed a bit far, even somewhat rejecting, but Roland and the others weren’t surprised.

Sofia had always been like this.

It would be difficult for everyone to accept if she suddenly became enthusiastic.

Roland wasn't dissatisfied with Sofia's cold attitude.

In fact, Sofia's attitude was far better than he imagined. She could have sent everyone away with one astonishing sword stroke, enjoying the spoils alone, but she didn't.

She could have also broken the agreement and forced Roland to beg for mercy under the pressure of the sword, but she didn't.

She fulfilled her promise by inviting Roland to serve as Cardinal Minister, giving him a wealthy territory and the title of Duke. Instead, Roland was busy with family matters at home, delaying his appointment.

Fortunately, after breaking through to Tier Five, his gunmanship improved rapidly, finally sowing precious seeds of life in Sif's fertile garden.

The Elf Race's gestation period is a bit longer, roughly twelve months.

Thinking about becoming a father early next year, Roland's mood naturally changed.

His manner of speaking was gentler than before, and his smiles were noticeably more frequent.

Actually, working for Sofia wasn't bad.

The boss was capable, the company's foundation was strong, and although colleagues weren't entirely amicable, the boss's support made interaction feasible.

The only problem was the distance from home, taking a trip home was over two thousand kilometers.

Thinking about this, Roland suddenly found the tender shark fins he was about to eat less appealing.

Sofia, who was tasting caviar, caught a glimpse of Roland’s forlorn expression and gently said:

"Cardinal, if you have worries, feel free to express them."

Roland made no attempt to conceal his thoughts, only speaking softly: "I miss my wife."

Angelina kept giving Roland meaningful glances, but it didn’t stop the words.

One could say missing home, or being unaccustomed to the food, but saying directly that one misses their wife seemed impolite.

Mentioning these things in front of a woman who had never been loved by her husband and even turned against him mercilessly—does he even know how to talk?

Sahalin kept his head down, not daring to speak.

The Empress’s temper was generally bad, but she treated ministers fairly, usually not losing her temper.

Unless someone poked at her sore spot.

Sofia, just about to scoop up a spoonful of caviar, paused in mid-air.

The room’s temperature seemed to drop, yet it might have just been an illusion.

Roland vaguely felt Sofia seemed upset, but then again, she might not be.

As he pondered what Sofia was thinking, a calm and indifferent voice floated over.

"That’s simple, why not start a family here too? Angelina, privately ask which girl Roland fancies, and help him with the proposal. Since she’s the Cardinal’s new wife, you must choose wisely."

Roland: "..."

Wait, what’s Sofia’s logic here? When a staff member complains about being far from home and missing their wife, any normal boss would promise more vacation time—who arranges for another wife?

Although he internally ranted, it did indeed seem like Sofia’s way of handling things.

Helpless, he raised his glass, smiled, and shook his head, "Thank you for the Empress’s grace, but my requirements for a wife are high; she must be powerful, exceedingly beautiful, and able to share my journey. Forgive my frankness..."

"I understand, you’re talking about Angelina, right?" Sofia straightforwardly asked.

"This child I’ve raised since childhood, she’s outstanding, no less than your wife, lover, or sister. What do you think?"

Sofia’s eyes were clear, like the azure sky; she was serious.

Sahalin, like a bear, lowered his head and gnawed angrily at the pork, pretending to be deaf and mute.

Angelina was stunned by Sofia’s sudden suggestion.

It took a while before she jumped up as if burned.

"Empress, what are you talking about? I’ve never thought of marriage; I want to stay beside you forever."

Seeing the situation spiraling out of control, Roland quickly stood up to state his position.

"Empress, marriage should be based on feelings. A marriage without feelings is destined for tragedy. Miss Angelina has her own life, you..."

Midway through his sentence, Roland regretted it.

He wished he could give himself two hard slaps.

Misdirected topics again, speaking of a marriage without feelings in front of Sofia was asking for trouble.

Angelina was also petrified.

Roland had already touched Sofia’s sore spot more than once today. Was he here for work or a duel?

She even forgot she was supposed to be part of the bargaining chip.

The atmosphere on-site was beyond tense; just when everyone thought Sofia was about to explode, she slowly set down her cutlery, showing a hint of a smile.

"You’re right, a marriage without feelings is unfortunate; I feel it deeply."

She smiled with genuine ease because she had truly let go.

Compared to her glorious past and the fierce battles she faced in the future, her apathetic ex-husband was as insignificant as a buzzing mosquito.

It once bothered her, but it was over.

After the Battle of White Mountain, how could such a minor issue disturb her?

Sofia could laugh, but Roland and the others dared not echo her. Her self-deprecation was magnanimous, but them joining would mean risking their lives.

"Cardinal, I was just joking earlier. I know your feelings for Sif, and I have sent you gifts. When are you planning to hold the formal wedding?"

"Wait for the peace negotiations to end; work comes first." Roland wiped his sweat and replied with a smile.

"Then let’s set it for late March, and hold it here. You are the Duke of Kazan and the Cardinal Minister, the Empire’s foremost minister, and as your sovereign, I am obliged to prepare a grand wedding for you."

Seeing Roland’s hesitant expression, Sofia asked with a smile, "Cardinal, if you have any requests, feel free to make them."

Roland wanted to say he wished to hold the wedding in the Flower Sea of White Mountain, but he could only swallow the words.

"No, I’m just wondering where the wedding chamber will be, and if there’s a wedding leave?"

"Of course there’s wedding leave. According to Imperial law, civil servants can take a week’s wedding leave. Cardinal, as the foremost minister of the Empire, you should set an example."

Sofia’s words were gentle, yet left no room for negotiation.

A week it shall be, it’s enough.

A poet from his hometown once said that if affection can last long, there’s no need to embrace every night.

Even though the wedding can’t be held in the Flower Sea, one can still enjoy the honeymoon there.

Seeing Roland accept the arrangement, Sofia nodded with satisfaction.

She pointed to the imposing building outside the window, smiling as she said, "This was once my residence and the sleeping quarters of past Emperors, isn't it grand?"

"It's the perfect blend of elegant artistic vibe and the bold charm of the Northern Territory. Sometimes I also wished to own a palace like this."

Pleasant words are easy to say; Roland wasn't troubled by this.

However, Sofia's next sentence once again rendered Roland speechless.

"Since you like it, it's yours."

Sofia raised her glass, smiling as she concluded the matter, "Angelina, you'll handle the transfer formalities. For Roland's wedding, make extra efforts. Let them prepare according to imperial wedding standards. After all, the Cardinal's wife is a nation's Empress, it cannot be disrespectful."

Angelina hurriedly agreed.

Though it sounded absurd, it was reasonable when considering Sofia sending people to prepare Roland's wedding.

Roland had no parents or family, and a sovereign caring for a minister's life seemed rational.

The banquet ended in an atmosphere of "joy" and "harmony"; everyone was quite satisfied.

Roland, who unexplainably acquired the Winter Palace, watched Sofia and the others leave in their carriage, and barely had time to relax when a sudden thought struck him.

Wait, the Winter Palace is now mine, those parasites embezzled from my stuff!

That’s my money! My artwork!

Chapter 566: Unimpeded Path to Ascension to Divinity

The carriage stopped at the mountain road leading to the Summer Palace.

This mountain road was originally passable for carriages, but Sofia did not like being disturbed, so she had someone destroy most of the road surface, leaving only a width sufficient for pedestrians.

Sofia and Angelina were walking on the mountain road, with Angelina consciously trailing half a step behind.

Angelina never thought there was anything wrong with this.

Sofia is not only the supreme Emperor of the world’s greatest nation but also stands at the pinnacle of power in the entire world.

She does not know that Sofia has abandoned her previous power and is still exploring a new path to strength, with her hard power even slightly weaker than Angelina’s.

Even if she knew, she wouldn’t have any thoughts about it; she’d just move to the Summer Palace to protect Sofia closely.

Sofia seemed in a good mood and even took the initiative to talk about some matters.

"Angelina, do you have any objections to my arrangements?"

Angelina was startled, and her face turned slightly pale.

Of course, she knew what Sofia was talking about, referring to the sudden proposal at the welcoming banquet to arrange a new wife for Roland.

She originally thought Sofia was joking but did not expect her to bring it up again.

Angelina’s mind went blank, and she didn’t even know how to respond.

Sofia did not force her to answer, only smiled and said, "A wise person once said, only with a home can one settle down with peace of mind. To make Roland feel at ease at work, he must have a sense of belonging."

Angelina wanted to remind Sofia that although Roland’s moral baseline is flexible, his feelings for Sif are beyond doubt, and finding a girl superior to Sif is too difficult.

She doesn’t think she can compare to Sif. In terms of status, beauty, and even strength, Sif undoubtedly tops her in every way.

Replacing a perfect score with ninety points, this is called...

She recalled a business term Roland once said, something like consumption downgrade?

There were more words on the tip of her tongue, but she dared not speak them.

Looking across the world, only Sofia herself could compete with Sif.

This was something she dared not say.

Seeing Angelina hesitating to speak, Sofia assumed she was unhappy because she hadn’t been informed beforehand. She smiled and explained:

"There’s no need to worry; Roland would never dare accept such a condition, so my real offer is to give him a Winter Palace."

"But that’s the resting place of successive Emperors!" Angelina couldn’t help but remind her.

"Successive Emperors?"

Sofia said calmly, "If I don’t die, I’ll be the last Emperor of the Empire. If I do die, these things won’t matter."

Angelina was instantly silent.

Sofia was right; high-level Transcendents possess lifespans beyond ordinary humans.

With Sofia’s strength, living until the final day of return is undoubtedly achievable. Without descendants, she could only remain the Emperor perpetually.

Since she dislikes the Winter Palace, the palace can only remain idle, and giving it to Roland as a gift was indeed a good choice.

Angelina nodded without speaking.

The Winter Palace is a sanctuary in the hearts of the Rurik people, and as Her Majesty the Empress grants Roland a treasury of art, she also imposes pressure on him.

If he doesn’t achieve anything, the Rurik people will surely be unsatisfied.

Sofia stopped speaking, only quickening her pace, while Angelina obediently followed behind.

Since she became Sofia’s personal guard at the age of fourteen, she has always followed Sofia in silence, long accustomed to it.

At the gate of the Summer Palace, Sofia suddenly stopped, and Angelina understood that the Empress did not want her to follow further, wisely taking her leave.

However, Sofia called her back.

"Angie, you've been following me for nearly ten years, right?"

"Ten years and thirteen days," Angelina answered offhandedly.

"You were originally sent to be my personal maid, yet the first task we did together was to seize Imperial Authority with me. In hindsight, it's truly remarkable."

"Your Majesty, I..."

"You're twenty-four this year, and at an age suitable for marriage. If you don't like Roland, do you have an ideal partner in mind? I'll decide for you."

"Your Majesty, I am loyally devoted to you, with no divided loyalties!" Angelina felt somewhat panicked.

Angie was her name when she served as a maid to Sofia. Since entering the Shadow Sanctuary, Sofia rarely used that name. Not knowing what Sofia meant, she could only express her sentiments.

Sofia smiled slightly, her voice softening a few degrees, completely devoid of her usual chill, more like an elder sister showing concern for a naive younger sister.

Her gentle gaze gave Angelina some comfort, but Sofia's words still caused her anxiety.

"Angie, I am fully aware of your loyalty. Family life does not conflict with devotion to me. Don't you want your descendants to inherit your title?"

"Your Majesty, I do not."

Angelina bravely met Sofia’s gaze, her tone especially earnest.

"Your Majesty, I may have had some thoughts before, but after witnessing your earth-shattering sword, I suddenly feel that the love between men and women is meaningless."

"Romance and marriage will not bring me happiness. I yearn to grow stronger, to someday be as powerful as you."

Angelina bit her lip and said, "I know I will never catch up with your footsteps, but I at least want to be on the right path."

"You want to gain immense power?" Sofia was somewhat surprised; she hadn’t expected Angelina’s determination to pursue strength to be so resolute.

She smiled and said, "Ambition is a good thing, but the path of becoming stronger doesn’t have to be lonely; look at Roland and Sif, aren’t they doing well? They can even withstand my killing blow."

Chapter 567: Unimpeded Path to Ascension to Divinity (Part 2)

Angelina resolutely shook her head, "I’m very clumsy and can’t manage too much. You’ve always been nurturing my political, diplomatic, and military abilities, but I’m far inferior to Roland. If I can’t focus, I’m afraid I’ll achieve nothing."

Sofia stared into Angelina’s eyes, with a piercing gaze; usually, Angelina wouldn’t dare look straight at her, but this time she was particularly stubborn, meeting her gaze without yielding, showing her determination.

The cold wind passed between them, lifting the ends of Angelina’s hair.

Her pale face was already covered in sweat, and her clothes were soaked through, showing the immense pressure she was under.

This was the first time in ten years of following Sofia that she had defied the Empress’s arrangement.

If it were half a year ago, if the Empress had arranged for her to marry Roland, she would have only considered what dress to wear at the wedding, without any other thoughts.

But now, she could not do it.

That sword strike was too beautiful, too dazzling to the point of taking her breath away, making her life different ever since. Mortal enjoyments could no longer move her in the slightest.

If she couldn’t replicate Sofia’s peerless strike, she wouldn’t die in peace.

Defying Sofia’s arrangement gave her a faint sense of guilt, but she truly could not do it.

Rather than reluctantly agreeing, she would rather face the Empress’s direct wrath.

Sofia walked to Angelina, reached into her pocket but recalled she never carried a handkerchief, so she had to wipe the sweat from Angelina’s forehead with her sleeve.

"Seeing how nervous you are, it seems working by my side is indeed not easy."

Sofia said, slightly self-deprecating.

Angelina didn’t dare to respond; it’s inappropriate to continue talking when the leader criticizes themselves.

At times like this, you just need to listen.

Sofia pondered for a moment, who knows what she was thinking, Angelina felt a bit uneasy, but she gritted her teeth and persisted.

She was not lying.

That sword, which seemed capable of cleaving the entire world, not only split a huge fissure on the Peak of White Mountain but also cleaved the old era from the new epoch and killed the drifting Angelina.

Her life now had an unshakable goal.

Sofia acknowledged her persistence and calmly said, "Angelina, I have chosen a more difficult and distant path, leaving the star path to the Frosty Winter Goddess open for you. Are you interested?"

Angelina’s pupils shrank suddenly; she could hardly believe her eyes.

She instinctively thought Sofia was testing her, after all, the whole world knew Sofia was best at manipulating ice, was the dominator of the extreme cold, and the most suitable star path for ascension to divinity was Frosty Winter.

Nobody would be mad enough to want to compete with Sofia on this path.

Her chance to qualify for the Divine Domain was very high. Yet she voluntarily gave up the easiest path to ascension.

This was beyond comprehension, and it scared Angelina. She quickly knelt to plead but was held by Sofia and couldn’t kneel.

"Angelina, do you want to become the Frosty Winter Goddess?"

Sofia’s gaze was gentle, her voice full of temptation.

Although she’s currently only Tier Four, and Angelina is only Tier Six, there wasn’t the slightest doubt in her tone, as simple as eating or drinking.

Angelina was infected by her confidence, her eyes welled up and she nodded firmly.

In the instant of lowering her head, tears condensed into ice and fell to the ground.

Sofia’s voice sounded again, "Angelina, the further a seeker progresses on the Frosty Winter star path, the further they are from mortal emotions. Have you thought it through?"

"I will never regret it!" Angelina’s gaze was firm as if pledging allegiance.

"Good, follow me. I’ll first share the cultivation insights before the Holy Sanctuary with you, and then help you reforged the Bright Blue Fury."

Angelina was the person Sofia trusted the most, and she naturally knew the origin of Bright Blue Fury.

The ice attribute divine artifact perfectly matched the seeker of Frosty Winter star path.

Although this divine artifact was blown apart, leaving only the hilt, it was not a problem; the divine artifact’s core was in the hilt, and the blade could be repaired.

...

Winter Palace.

Roland inspected and received this renowned palace accompanied by Sahalin.

This palace, along with Sussex Empire’s Sheffield Palace, Jin Yuan Kingdom’s West Palace, Tirol Kingdom’s Hot Spring Palace, and Prudon Kingdom’s Triumph Palace, was known as the five great palaces of Rodinia.

Among these five palaces, the West Palace and Winter Palace were the largest in scale, with the highest value in art collections.

Roland’s current wealth and status were nothing like the past when he had to celebrate buying a house with one hundred pounds on Belphar Street as a youth.

If Sofia gave him an estate, he wouldn’t care at all, but this was the Winter Palace.

This was a top treasure trove with tens of thousands of art treasures. How could Roland not be tempted?

Thinking of these parasites daring to put their dirty hands in his pocket, Roland’s intent to kill grew stronger.

Sahalin toured Roland around, and before leaving, he lowered his voice, "The Winter Palace’s Chief Steward Barov is the late Empress Dowager’s cousin, and the Empress Dowager was one of the few who treated Her Majesty well in the court."

"The list of Winter Palace’s collections should have a backup in the Imperial Archives. I’ll go there later to find it for you."

"No need."

Roland said calmly, "If Barov doesn’t even have the ability to remove the list, how dare he make a move on the Winter Palace? He’s simply confident that Sofia wouldn’t punish him for this matter, which is why he’s so rampant."

Sahalin frowned slightly; Roland calling Her Majesty the Empress by name somewhat violated the etiquette of a subject, but considering Roland’s identity was more like a guest, not a Rurik, he had to feign ignorance.

Chapter 568: Unimpeded Path to Ascension to Divinity (Part 3)

Seeing Roland was angry but still thinking clearly, he was somewhat curious and tentatively asked:

"What are you planning to do? Continue chasing it down? Actually, what Barov took..."

"I have my own way."

Roland interrupted Sahalin and calmly said, "I'll report for work tomorrow, it's getting late now, I won't see you off."

Seeing Roland's determined attitude, Sahalin did not insist further and took his leave.

He had no personal friendship with Roland and even some private grievances. Although he considered the bigger picture and wouldn't oppose Roland over past trivial matters, he still harbored a bit of a spectator's mindset.

Did Her Majesty the Empress gift the Winter Palace to Roland as a real gift or a test?

He was somewhat curious.

After sending Sahalin off, Roland did not return to the main sleeping palace but chose a slightly remote residence as his dwelling.

Back at his residence, he immediately ignited the Magic Lamp, spread out paper and pen, and began to brew his emotions.

Just as he was writing vigorously, a knock sounded at the door.

"Master Roland, are you there?" A trembling elderly voice came from outside the door.

"Is it Barov? Please come in." Roland did not raise his head, speaking calmly, while his pen continued uninterrupted.

Soon, the Chief Steward Barov stood at the door, smiling warmly, his forehead full of wrinkles, but outwardly showing no evidence of someone daring to resell Imperial Family property.

"Barov, what do you want?" Roland did not raise his head and casually asked.

"Master, Her Majesty has said that you are now the owner of the Winter Palace, instructing me to follow your orders. Please move to the Mirror Palace to rest, as it is the residence of the Winter Palace master."

Roland put down the pen in his hand, looked up at Barov, and calmly said:

"That’s unnecessary. I am merely temporarily replacing Her Majesty Sofia in managing this place. She will return to reside here in the future."

The implications of these words were vast, as Barov’s complexion clearly changed, so much so that he did not dare to make eye contact with Roland.

His brain began to spin rapidly.

Sofia, since seizing power, had never lived here again; she loathed this cage.

What did Roland mean by his words? Had Sofia forgotten past pains, or was it...

Barov thought of a frightening possibility, his hands nervously clutching and unclutching.

He thought of all possibilities but did not consider Roland was making things up.

In the Rurik People’s stereotypical impression, nobody dared joke about Sofia, let alone fabricate imperial edicts which could lead to expulsion.

But Roland wasn’t a Rurik person, he dared.

Anyway, Sofia wouldn’t expose his lie, and since Sofia wouldn’t expose it, it became truth.

As for when Sofia might move back, that would depend on her mood; would Barov dare to proactively ask?

The old steward originally just wanted to spar a bit with Roland, but unexpectedly was facing Sofia, and he was momentarily frightened.

He hesitated for a time and slowly said, "It has been many years since Her Majesty visited, it would be Winter Palace's honor for her to return."

Seeing Barov didn't doubt, Roland seemingly mentioned a trivial matter casually, "Barov, I am not too familiar with the Winter Palace, but I noticed the fountain is old and broken, and other things. You wouldn't want Her Majesty the Empress to return and be furious, would you?"

"What do you mean?" Barov asked shocked, looking towards Roland, trembling in his voice.

"I don't care what method you use, within a month, fully restore the Winter Palace to the state it was in when Her Majesty left. I mean completely restored."

Barov froze.

He stood there dazed, momentarily unsure how to respond.

Roland ignored him further, simply motioned with a wave for him to leave.

Barov, struck by Roland's set of combo punches, was left dizzy, unable to fathom his true intentions, and reluctantly departed.

Watching him leave, Roland continued his desk work.

Tonight he must complete a plan, outlining an imperial future development blueprint.

Tomorrow’s Cabinet meeting, he wants to make Cabinet members understand, he is serious about building the Empire.

He never believed Barov would return what was eaten.

After all, he is a relative of the Dowager, and the Dowager is Sofia’s last softness in the court.

But does it matter if Sofia doesn’t want to argue?

Now the Winter Palace is his territory.

If he didn’t take initiative, it was considered kind enough, but someone dared to reach into his pocket?

If he tolerated this, others might think he is a great benefactor.

Roland wrote the Empire’s basic situation upfront, and added "Under Her Majesty the Empress’s wise leadership, our country has won a series of brilliant victories in the Rodinia war" as an introduction, finally picking up the pen to write about a soul-touching pain point.

Though the Empire seems thriving, the nation’s fortune hinges entirely on Sofia.

Without Sofia’s hold, Vladimir Empire’s internal problems alone could tear the vast empire apart, let alone wage war.

Sofia invited Roland precisely to problem-solve, and of course, he went straight to the heart.

Receiving benefits requires reciprocation; he now has Sofia’s Duke’s Domain and a Winter Palace, plus comradeship forged in the Battle of White Mountain, this favor he committed to repaying.

Outsiders often see problems from different angles; Roland summarized Vladimir Empire's issues quite clearly.

Unbalanced development.

Regional development imbalance, the Empire's metropolis's prosperity and remote areas' backwardness appear as two different worlds.

This problem exists in Sussex and Jin Yuan too, but not as severely.

Vladimir Empire's rural and remote areas even linger in tribal times; in this era where vile feudalism is nearing its end, many places in the Empire still practice slavery.

Chapter 569: Unimpeded Path to Ascension to Divinity (Part 4)

Unequal development among ethnic groups. The conflicts between the Rurik People and the Tatars, Grassland People, Black River People persist. Greater Rurikism makes other ethnicities feel a lack of belonging to the Empire, resembling mercenaries more than citizens.

...

Identifying problems is easy; Roland quickly organized several dozen issues troubling the Empire—political, economic, military, educational, agriculture and industry—writing them down by category.

He rubbed his wrist and fell into deep thought.

Finding problems is simple, but how to solve them?

He began searching for inspiration from another world.

While in contemplation, his right hand unconsciously scribbled on the blank paper. When he awoke from his thoughts, he was startled to find a sickle and half a hammer drawn on the paper.

Roland stared at the familiar yet strange symbol for a long time, his facial expression changing slightly, and quickly tore the paper into pieces.

His breathing was somewhat hurried but soon calmed down.

The step was too big.

Currently, the Vladimir Empire's imperial authority is stable, but its industrial foundation is weak; some things are merely wishful thinking.

Let's be realistic; at the very least, end slavery within the Empire first.

There are still tens of millions of serfs living in deep suffering, and many tribes failed in tribal mergers have been reduced to slave laborers.

These people know only their masters, not even aware of the Empire and the Empress.

They have no property; all they can lose are their shackles, which gives them immense fighting power.

Once these people are liberated, the Empire will be completely transformed.

Roland hesitated for a long time, but still decided to write this down.

Although this policy will certainly offend the large landowners and slave owners in the Cabinet, without the courage to face the issues directly, how can change occur?

He must be worthy of this reward.

Roland thought of the welcoming banquet during the day; although Sofia was, as always, arbitrarily authoritative, full of arrogance and tyranny, at least she sincerely wanted to introduce him to a new wife.

She even wanted to introduce her most trusted confidante, Angelina, to him.

While such kindness cannot be accepted, it must be appreciated.

Roland burned the midnight oil, finally drafting the blueprint for the Empire's development plan.

As he gazed at the dawn spreading in the east, he breathed out a sigh, safely storing the lengthy document that spanned dozens of pages.

It's still early before starting work; going to sleep now would only make him more tired, so he stood up and walked over to the window.

Outside the window, the cleaning servants had already begun their work.

These servants are also pitiable; head servants such as Barov may benefit from overseeing the Winter Palace, but the lives of these bottom-tier individuals surely aren't easy.

Not only do they have to work, but their wages are likely to be reduced and embezzled.

Roland recalled the past days of the White Rose Knight Order, thinking of Warden and Stanley.

A sudden flash of insight occurred to him about the solution.

Ever since the White Rose Knight Order incident, Stanley faded from public view and became active in the business circle under another identity.

He could use his connection with Stanley and the Sassan merchants to understand Barov's fencing channels, and after securing concrete evidence, tackle the problem from the bottom-tier servants, ensuring Barov meets his downfall with clarity.

Embezzling palace treasures and selling them in large amounts is a capital crime in any country.

Feeling delighted upon spotting the breaking point, Roland returned to his desk, found a beautiful letter paper, caressed the paper's texture, and was surprised to discover it was actually a magic tool.

Though unclear of its purpose, Roland still picked up the letter paper and began writing.

"Dear Sylph, I am well here...

Thinking of you... all.

——Your beloved Roland."

Thinking about Sif and the adorable little elf in her belly, he decisively added the plural form after "you."

Roland shook the bell, a young man resembling a knight appeared at the door.

This was Tom, the young general who escorted him to take office.

Roland felt assured about his efficiency.

"Help me send a family letter; I need to go to work now."

Casually handing the family letter to Tom, Roland hummed a cheerful tune as he walked toward the administrative hall.

A new day begins.

Chapter 570: A Letter Home

"Is this a family letter?"

Sofia looked at the letter paper with suddenly appearing handwriting, overwhelmed with emotions.

No magic tool would appear without reason, and the paper Roland used was also a divine artifact.

Assisting divine artifact [Endless Letter].

No matter how many times it's used, the core of the divine artifact allows the letter to restore itself in place.

Moreover, the content of the letter can connect with each other in a short time.

The Endless Letter is a very romantic divine artifact.

No matter how far apart, even in the depths of the sea or the sky, as long as words are written on the letter, the other side can quickly know.

For lovers in love, this is a true divine artifact.

Besides being used for romance, the Endless Letter is also an assisting divine artifact that allows communication over vast distances, delivering information.

The battlefield situation changes quickly, and the distance between the front-line commander and the rear base is often thousands of miles, making communication very difficult.

With this Endless Letter, confidence can cross mountains and seas.

This divine artifact has no direct combat power and seems inconspicuous, yet it is highly functional.

However, this divine artifact was long buried and never used.

This was part of Sofia's dowry when she left her family; at the time, the family didn't know it was a divine artifact, so it was treated as a magic tool.

Although there was no affection between her and her husband Ivan IV, as it was purely a political marriage, Sofia still shared the divine artifact with her husband.

But she hid the divine nature of the Endless Letter, only saying that it could be used to contact anytime.

Sofia's goodwill was met with Ivan IV's indifferent disregard.

The Endless Letter was buried at the bottom of the bookshelf, never used.

After Sofia left the Winter Palace, she gradually forgot about this divine artifact, until Roland wrote on the other side of the letter for her to notice it.

She originally didn't want to pry into Roland's family letters, but...

She had to know if Roland had any ill intent.

Although she believed that Roland would not be shortsighted, she couldn't resist picking up the letter.

Curiosity is human nature.

In her subconscious, Roland would eagerly express his longing to Sif, maybe even complain about not being used to life at Saint Rurik Palace.

Yet this family letter had none of that content.

Roland calmly reassured Sif of his well-being, and then described the work and life over here.

The leader (Sofia) was not too enthusiastic but still cared for him, arranging the best living place.

Colleagues (Sahalin, Angelina) were very reliable, and although the work here had some difficulties, they were not substantial and could be resolved.

Sofia looked at the letter, almost suspecting she was seeing things.

She closed her eyes, opened them again, and the content hadn’t changed a bit.

She seemed to see a minor language highly similar to Sussex.

After a moment of astonishment, she understood the letter.

The highest level of reassurance isn’t "I’m all good here", but "although it’s not as good as home, the conditions are decent, can score eighty out of a hundred".

Slight embellishment built on objective facts to maintain peace.

So that’s it, Sofia thought with a sudden realization.

A well-calculated decoration that wouldn’t make Sif too worried, yet wouldn’t be overly embellished to be seen through by Sif.

Is this the way normal couples get along?

Sofia’s gaze was somewhat vacant, her thoughts drifting far away.

After who knows how long, she smiled and shook her head, no longer seeking trouble for herself.

Even gods can't be omniscient or omnipotent, why should she be entangled?

Somehow, Sofia thought of the former Light Sister, now the Goddess of Light, Tiya.

She used to be Poseidon's lover, yet she stabbed Poseidon fiercely.

Before she fell asleep, besides the four goddess candidates, Sea Emperor Poseidon also qualified to ascend to the divine domain.

Poseidon's rank was even higher than the three goddesses and hers, with boundless potential.

His love story with Tiya was once a romantic tale.

However, after Sofia awoke from her winter sleep, the three goddesses ascended to the divine domain, closing the passage, while leaving a backdoor return path.

They had calculated everything clearly.

Sofia initially thought the missing Poseidon had also colluded with them, intentionally isolating her, leaving one less person to share the fruits.

Later, when she made a fuss on the seafloor, she discovered that various ocean races were mourning Poseidon.

She finally understood he was also a victim.

Pushed off the pedestal, losing his ocean energy core, Poseidon eternally lost the chance of ascension to divinity.

These past stories left Sofia's mood somewhat downcast.

After all, she was not a god; she still had a mortal's joys and sorrows, unable to perfectly control emotions.

To soothe her feelings, she continued to open Roland's family letter.

Bitter pasts made one sorrowful; a little sweet candy to balance it out is reasonable.

Roland wrote every word very plainly, somewhat like an account book, lacking the brilliance of a writing contest champion, yet to Sofia, plain is the best writing.

No words of love between the lines, yet emotions were poured within.

Sif is truly fortunate to have such a devoted love.

Sofia sighed lightly in her heart, a bit melancholic.

Roland racked his brains to make Sif feel at ease, even carefully considering how much to embellish, Sif she...

She must know too.

Sofia soon came to terms; Roland understood Sif, so how could Sif not understand him?

She undoubtedly knew this was a reassurance letter, also knowing Roland feared she'd worry, so how would she respond to Roland?

Sofia's curiosity was ignited, then quickly extinguished.

Of course, Sif couldn't reply on the letter's written side; Sofia was destined not to see her reply.