

Perish 111

Chapter 111: Capturing Sarabia

The walkway on the city wall was filled with shouts and screams, with middle-aged and elderly civilians, mostly without armor, moving along the parapets. Each showed high levels of tension; some picked up the few remaining wooden and stone blocks from the ground and hurled them fiercely down the city, while others used iron forks to push the wooden ladders away with all their might...

The prolonged and intense fighting had exhausted them, making their reactions sluggish. Occasionally, some were struck by javelins flying through the air, screaming as they fell. Those nearby showed no visible sorrow or fear, as if they had grown accustomed to it. Civilians would carry the screaming wounded down from the city walls...

On the other side of the parapets sat a neat row of fully armed soldiers. They watched their compatriots fight continuously with complex expressions, hands tightly gripping shields and long spears...

In the center of the walkway, several bonfires blazed, with large copper pots filled with water brewing overhead...

"Is the water boiling yet?" shouted a middle-aged man with gray hair, clad in Centurion armor, in a sharp tone.

"Almost! Just about to boil!" the civilians responded quickly.

"No need to wait any longer. Pour it out now! We can't let those filthy bastards dig at our walls like rats! After it's poured, continue to boil more!" The Centurion, after issuing his orders, yelled at others, "What are you standing there for? Pour oil down and burn these cursed rats!"

"Andoaux, we're out of oil!"

"Oh, damn it!" The Centurion frustratedly punched the battlement.

"Captain Andoaux!" a City Guard Officer shouted. "I've gathered another group of soldiers for you!"

The Centurion finally turned his head, his sharp gaze sweeping over Albazus and his group, then said, "At least you've done something useful. I need as many soldiers as possible to stop the enemy from getting onto the walls. Go gather more for me!"

The City Guard Officer, seeing the dire situation on the battlements, did not hesitate and replied immediately, "I'll do my best!"

The Centurion walked up to Albazus and his men, gesturing sharply: "Divide into two groups from here. Those on the right, head over to that side and report to that Centurion. Those on the left, rest against the wall and save your strength. When the enemy attacks, follow my command to fight. Do you understand?!"

Since Albazus's men were all directed to the left, they didn't respond immediately, but instinctively looked at Albazus for cues, making their voices faint.

The Centurion named Andoaux looked at Albazus in confusion and sternly asked again, "Do you understand?!"

"Understood, understood," Albazus replied with a smile, explaining: "Captain, they are all part of my caravan. We come from Ladim and will try our best to follow your orders."

"Not try, you must!" Andoaux demanded sternly. "If the city falls, you won't escape either. You'll likely become prisoners of the rebel army!"

"I understand. We will follow your orders," Albazus corrected himself.

Andoaux was still somewhat dissatisfied, but he merely snorted before turning away to supervise others in defending the city.

Albazus watched him indifferently, calculating how, when the brothers arrived, they must first eliminate this city-defending Commander to disrupt the enemy's defense.

As he planned how to launch a surprise attack, he suddenly felt a tremor beneath his feet.

Not far away, someone cried out in alarm: "Oh no! The city wall... it's cracked!"

"Retreat quickly! Fall back!!..."

Amidst a cacophony of screams, there came a "rumbling" crash, and the city wall not far from Albazus suddenly collapsed, sending up clouds of dust into the sky...

When the dust cleared, a large breach appeared in the southern city wall. The people on the collapsed section and those below were buried in the rubble, including the Centurion Albazus wanted to take out.

The collapse of Canosa City's wall was mainly due to years of neglect, with the fierce battle serving as a catalyst. Additionally, Maximus, heeding the advice of Spukala, the deputy commander of the engineering team, sent many soldiers to hide under the wall, each holding a shield in one hand and a Crane Head Shovel in the other, constantly digging into the city wall. (Due to years of disrepair, the exterior bricks of the wall were loose and widened, making them easy to dig out), all of which played a part.

The stunning sight stunned the entire battlefield. But after a brief stillness, the rebel soldiers below the city broke into cheers and surged toward the breach like a tide, while the guards on the battlements screamed in terror, fleeing frantically into the city...

The city had fallen.

When the rebel army refused Canosa's envoy and declared their intent to storm the city, the Canossa people sensed the city was indefensible. However, they didn't anticipate it happening so quickly. Though the people in the city were extremely panicked, many had long prepared escape plans, especially the Canosa Nobles, who had early on fled to the northern part of the city, the only area not surrounded by the rebel army. Here, there was a river port ready for a quick escape by river, with ships long prepped for departure...

More Canossa citizens flocked to the river port, desperate to flee. In their haste, they even fought over the ships, with curses, cries, and screams filling the air, making the port extremely chaotic...

The rebel army seemed to overlook this place, leading to an increasing number of Canossa people seeking refuge at the river port, but as the number of ships dwindled, those arriving late at the river port fell into despair.

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At that moment, someone stepped forward and told the crowd that he had found another way to escape the city. Since the enemy was busy looting after entering the city, the breach in the east wall was unguarded. They could reach there through secluded alleys and then escape.

The Canossa people saw hope and immediately took action. As he said, they successfully escaped outside the city, but were soon discovered by the enemy who entered the city afterward, forcing them to flee desperately eastward along the riverbank...

With the enemy constantly trailing behind, the Canossa people fled day and night. They passed through a village in Canne, once the place where Hannibal from Carthage annihilated eighty thousand Roman Army soldiers. Hearing of the rebel army's arrival, the villagers fled with them. The fleeing group grew larger but was never caught by the enemy. When they reached the mouth of the Ophidus River, the enemy finally gave up the pursuit and retreated...

The fortunate Canossa people were not cheering. Exhausted and hungry, they urgently needed a place to rest. Not far from the river mouth was a large town closely connected with Canosa — it was Sarabia.

Sarabia was the second largest port town in the Apulia region after Bari, but in fact, its geographical location was far superior to Bari.

To the east was the Adriatic Sea, and to the south, the Ophidus River. Inland towns near the river, like Canosa, transported grain to Sarabia by river, selling it through maritime trade. To the north lay a large lake with navigable waterways, reaching another coastal town to the north — Sipotum, enabling merchant ships to conveniently transport a variety of fruits and premium sheep from the Galgano Peninsula to Sarabia, and further selling them throughout the Mediterranean. Moreover, Sarabia had a coastal road directly connecting to Bari to the south... Hence, Sarabia was a key hub for both land and water transportation in the Apulia region.

The fleeing Canossa people crossed the floating bridge at the mouth of the Ophidus River and arrived under Sarabia City.

The Canossa people who had previously escaped by boat had already entered Sarabia City, informing the Sarabian of Canosa City's fall. After confirming there was no trace of the rebel army nearby, the Sarabian warmly welcomed the fleeing Canossa people into the city. However, due to the large number of refugees and their haste, Sarabia could only temporarily settle them in the square.

Late at night, when the Sarabian were all in dreamland, the rebel soldiers embedded among the refugees began to take action.

They were a hundred elite soldiers from the first and second divisions of Maximus, hailing from Ladim and Campania, and accompanied by some elderly, women, and children from the logistics department, enabling them to easily pass unnoticed.

At this time, they drew out short swords hidden in their luggage and, guided by their team officer, followed the route scouted during the day straight to the south city gate of Sarabia.

Although discovered by patrols that were added due to the rebel army's invasion, the swift actions of the rebel soldiers quickly eliminated the few City Guards, opened the city gate, and held their ground at the gate.

Having feigned retreat during the day, the Maximus Army quietly returned at night and ambushed outside the city, rushing to the city gate upon receiving the signal.

Meanwhile, the Sarabia City Guard, hastily summoned, arrived near the south city gate only to encounter fierce attacks from the rebel army, and quickly crumbled.

After the rebel army entered the city, they did not rush to capture the entire city. Instead, they quickly split their forces, with one group seizing the Governor Mansion first, another group hurrying to blockade the port and prohibit ships from entering or leaving, and a few soldiers securing each city gate.

Initially, there was some resistance within the city, but the Sarabian, having lived in peace for a long time, lacked fighting spirit. As the subsequent rebel forces entered the city, the fighting quickly subsided.

Once Maximus saw the army occupying the entire city, he dispatched soldiers to shout down each alleyway, ordering the Sarabian to stay indoors and not wander outside. Any violations would be immediately executed.

The terrified and uneasy Sarabian obediently followed the orders.

Maximus also sent a brigade to surround the square, quelling the disturbance among the Canossa refugees camped there with force.

By this point, the entire Sarabia City had returned to tranquility and order.

By morning, after a brief rest, the rebel soldiers had a simple breakfast. Maximus gave further orders: for the first and second brigades to launch an attack on Sarabia's affluent district.

The Sarabian nobles and rich people, hidden in their mansions, only then realized they had been deceived. Hastily organizing their servants for resistance, how could they ever be a match for the rebel soldiers? Before long, one by one, the luxurious houses were breached, with the nobles either captured or killed, almost none escaped.

Regardless, they would ultimately be executed, their heads hung in the square, with notices below detailing their crimes. For any city noble of this era in Italy, they were invariably guilty of one among the three major sins: land seizure, oppression of the poor, or slave abuse.

Initially, Maximus might have harbored some mercy upon arriving in this era. However, after more than half a year of tempering, now a leader of thousands, responsible for their lives and deaths, he approached matters more rationally and coldly, weighing pros and cons first.

He knew well that the friends of the rebel army were the suffering slaves (not all slaves, as many would desperately protect their masters) and the landless, resentful impoverished Italians. The high-standing nobles and unscrupulous rich were the enemies of the rebel army. Exposing their crimes and executing

them would not only boost morale but also attract more slaves and landless impoverished people to join the ranks.

Additionally, the Maximus Army currently did not produce, and the consumption of nearly ten thousand people was enormous. How to replenish supplies?

Of course, mainly through plundering, but why plunder from the less wealthy mass of civilians, risking resistance, when one could eliminate the wealth-laden, despised nobles and directly claim their assets? Maximus had reaped such benefits during his time in Pompey.

Furthermore, there was another advantage. Though Sarabia's nobles did not own large estates, they were not short of slaves, family tutors, personal maids, chefs, gardeners, coachmen, carpenters, accountants, stewards... A wealthy noble generally maintained numerous slaves with various skills to meet household and social needs.

Moreover, many Sarabian nobles engaged in commerce and certain industries, thus possessing slaves with specific handicraft skills, referred to Maximus was searching for.

These slaves differed from serfs living in harsh conditions. Their lives were relatively privileged, and many had close relationships with their masters, lacking a sense of rebellion. Now, Maximus' attitude towards these skilled slaves was to incorporate them all into the army, regardless of willingness, unlike in the beginning when he adhered to volunteerism. He believed that in this revolutionary crucible, they would eventually assimilate.

Under the concentrated attacks of the rebel army, the fight against the Sarabia nobles concluded swiftly.

Flanitnus arrived at the Governor Mansion to report the battle situation to Maximus: "...In the first and second divisions, there were two deaths, four seriously wounded, and 13 lightly injured... During last night's battle, we had no soldier deaths but 24 injuries."

"It seems those henchmen kept by the wealthy are even fiercer than the town's Guard." A trace of severity flashed in Maximus' eyes. "As for those lapdogs daring to resist, they are to be executed just like those wealthy, leaving none alive!"

"Yes." Flanitnus nodded, now with much more respect towards Maximus than before, and added, "We have confiscated a large amount of materials from these wealthy mansions, already sealed, just waiting for you, leader, to dispatch someone for inspection—"

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"Did anyone take it privately?" Maximus interjected.

Flanitnus hesitated slightly, and the Military Judge Sidonius immediately said coldly, "Yes, there are a total of three people, all from the same squad, who have been caught. I plan to publicly administer the rod punishment during dinner to alert the entire army! Moreover, the centurion of that squad has shown poor leadership, and I recommend reprimanding him and removing him from his position!"

"Alright, do as you suggested." Maximus nodded approvingly, then turned his eyes seriously to Flanitnus, "Since we have established military law, it must be strictly enforced. Do not fear complaints from the soldiers. Even if they want to leave, I will not stop them. Removing those with weak resolve will only make our unit more cohesive and disciplined. Besides, we are not short of manpower now; there are countless slaves and commoners outside willing to join our ranks!"

"The leader is right. Our soldiers come from all over the Mediterranean, and if we tolerate these violators of military discipline even slightly, the army could fall into chaos."

Quintus sternly reminded, "Look at Spartacus. Originally, his troops had good discipline, but then those southern people came. He allowed them to form their own troops and agreed to let them follow his forces. However, these southerners had no military discipline and plundered everywhere, corrupting the soldiers of Spartacus's army. Now he is completely unable to control his army. I foresee more trouble for him in the future..."

Maximus felt the same, but Flanitnus did not want to listen to Quintus's chatter and hurriedly said, "Besides the seized goods, we have captured over 600 slaves from these rich men's estates and more than 100 of their family members, mainly women and children. I wonder how you plan to deal with them, leader?"

Maximus thought for a moment, then called out, "Volenus! Volenus! Volenus!!..."

"Leader, what is it?" The administrative officer of the Maximus Army, who was examining the Sarabia town documents, stood up hastily, knocking over the wooden chair behind him.

"What has got you so engrossed?" Maximus asked curiously first.

"Leader, I was looking at the records of trade taxes collected in Sarabia over the past two years." Volenus, holding a stack of papyrus, said excitedly, "Though Sarabia City is not large, last year's trade taxes amounted to nearly two thousand Gold Aureus (the most valuable Roman currency, made of gold)! But that's not the main point. More importantly, there's a weapon workshop in Sarabia City!"

This remark moved everyone present.

Maximus hastily asked again, "Are you sure it's a weapon workshop and not a blacksmith's shop?"

Every town has blacksmiths, who forge iron and make farm tools, but it's difficult to manufacture a full set of weapons independently. However, a weapon workshop is a factory dedicated to manufacturing weaponry and is generally not small in scale.

"It's not a blacksmith's shop; it's a weapon workshop!" Volenus said with certainty while handing over the papyrus in his hand, pointing to a line, "Leader, look here; this weapon workshop called Ilacus sold 100 square shields and short swords, and 30 sets of legion armor to the southern military port Brindisi last year... And this weapon workshop also smelts iron ore..."

"Ilacus?..." Maximus found the name somewhat familiar, and immediately recalled, "Isn't this person a big noble of Sarabia City? It's said that his family was one of the city's founders and now has close ties with Rome. Based on what we learned beforehand, we have listed him as a top must-execute noble. Do we know his current situation?"

This question was obviously directed at Flanitnus, and Flanitnus immediately answered, "He has already been killed. It was during the attack on his estate that our soldiers suffered the greatest casualties."

"Since he's dead, let's take over this weapon workshop and everyone inside..." Maximus said while carefully reviewing the tax records of this weapon workshop in his hand. Suddenly, his eyes focused,

"This record shows that this weapon workshop imported iron ore from Noricum... Is this Noricum the place north of the Northern Italy Province, west of Pannonia?"

For Maximus's question, those present looked at each other, unable to provide an answer.

"The leader is right; this Noricum is in the place you mentioned." A voice came from outside the door, and then Capito walked in, "This region, controlled by the Noric Gaul Tribe, is rich in iron ore, and its quality is much better than that within Italy. Many years ago, the Roman Senate reached an agreement with the Noric people. Their iron ore production, except for personal use, must be procured by Rome..."

Capito said earnestly, "Ever since the other city-state citizens of Italy became Roman citizens over a decade ago, they too have had the right to purchase Noricum's iron ore. From the Noricum mountains, the iron ore is transported to Aquileia City, then shipped across the Adriatic Sea to here, refined into iron ingots, and manufactured into weapons, then sold to Brindisi, distributed to Roman soldiers about to head into battle..."

This trade route is conveniently transported, saving costs. It must be said, the owner of this weapon workshop has foresight. Given a few more years of development, he could certainly become a major merchant supplying weapons to the Roman army."

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"Even if his vision is good, it's useless. In the end, it all belongs to us." Quintus couldn't help but interject.

Maximus coughed lightly and asked, "Are the Norics allied with Rome?"

Capito thought for a moment and replied, "The two sides have friendly relations but are not considered allies. Because of several painful memories in the past, Romans are not interested in the areas north of the Alps, and the Norics are already a strong tribe up north and do not need help from Rome."

Currently, Romans inherently fear the Gallian Barbarians, but in the future, the Gauls will fear the Romans... By the way, in what year did Julius Caesar become the Governor of Gaul? ... Maximus was lost in thought when he suddenly heard Quintus say, "Leader, even we ordinary Romans don't know much about the Norics, yet you do. That's impressive!"

Quintus was praising, but his eyes showed curiosity and inquiry. Through their interaction over time, he had discovered that this young leader, although born a house slave, had shown abilities and insights that amazed him.

Maximus smiled slightly and casually said, "My father was Illyrian. As a child, I heard him say he was born south of the Dev River, not too far from the Norics' territory."

After speaking, without waiting for Quintus to ask further, he turned to Capito: "I originally thought you'd arrive tomorrow or the day after, but here you are today."

"After capturing Sarabia City, there would inevitably be a large amount of seized supplies. It is my duty to inventory and take care of them, so I rode ahead. The other personnel and supplies are being led by Acronis and Gaius. Now that the middle and lower reaches of the Ophidus River are under our and Attutmus's control, they should arrive smoothly."

Although Capito had the semblance of abandoning the main force and shirking leadership responsibilities, his proactive work attitude was commendable. Maximus decided not to criticize him and changed the subject, asking, "I sent someone to inform Pigeris earlier to come here quickly. Did you see him on the way?"

"I came with him, but after entering the city, he went straight east."

Maximus frowned: "He went east? What's he doing over there?"

Capito shrugged, indicating he didn't know.

At that moment, Pigeris pushed the door open and exclaimed, "Leader Maximus, I'm here! I just went to check the port. Sarabia's port is much bigger than Pompey's, and they have integrated the city with the port, with the market set inside the port. I think their trade must be much more prosperous than Pompey's!"

Seeing his excited expression, Maximus felt his slight resentment dissipate completely.

He glanced at his side, at Administrative Officer Wallerius, Warehouse Supervisor Capito, Military Officer Frantinus, Staff Officer Quintus, and Military Judge Sedonius, and said aloud, "We already discussed designating Sarabia as our foothold in Southern Italy.

In Pompey, because there were other leaders' armies, our management wasn't good, but Sarabia belongs solely to us, and we must quickly organize it well to better help us strengthen our power! Now that you're all here, I'll assign tasks to you."

Everyone perked up, their eyes intensely focused on Maximus.

"Capito, you'll head to the wealthy district to inventory and receive the seized supplies. Then, take over the weapon workshop and ensure it continues operating normally!"

Capito straightforwardly said, "Leader, I'm alone right now. Could you assign a few of your attendants as my assistants to complete the tasks you've given me quickly?"

By now, the leaders of the rebel army understood Maximus's attendants. Despite their youth, they were all literate and capable.

"Sure." Maximus agreed without hesitation and then shouted back, "Magus, get a few lads and go with Capito to the wealthy district and follow his arrangements. However, the money extracted needs to be managed as it was before."

"Yes, Leader!" Magus stamped his foot and saluted, extremely excited.

Capito had no objection, since Magus had been managing the army's treasury for several months without any mishaps, earning everyone's trust.

"Wallerius, take your men to the wealthy district too. Investigate and register the slaves, then assign them to different tasks: who goes to the warehouse, who to the kitchen, who to the engineering team..."

Maximus paused and continued, "And about the wealthy families Frantinus mentioned, review them, give them some travel expenses, and drive them out of the city."

Finishing these words, Wallerius, Frantinus, Quintus, Capito, and the others breathed a sigh of relief. They once were Roman citizens, although now against Rome, they still did not wish their army to harm defenseless women and children.

"Frantinus, go to the wealthy district as well and quickly arrange the camps for each brigade. Oh, by the way, the supply team might not reach here tonight, so today's dinner will be your and Wallerius's responsibility. Try to make it hearty for the soldiers, as we've won a victory, and it deserves a simple celebration."

"Understood, Leader!" the two responded in unison.

"And—" Maximus looked at Frantinus and said, "With Canosa and Sarabia captured successively, more people will come to join us. When recruiting soldiers, your Military Affairs Department should take care to recruit more slaves and non-Italian poor people."

I just went through some of the Sarabia residents' records; besides slaves, most of the laborers at the port are paupers from Illyria and Epirus across the Adriatic Sea seeking a livelihood. I think other coastal towns here may have the same situation as Sarabia, so you should recruit more of them."

"Greeks have to pay provincial taxes; Illyria and Epirus are mountainous with barren land, so it's normal for people from there to escape. They're naturally fierce and indeed good material for soldiers." Quintus asked thoughtfully, "But, Leader, you require us to recruit fewer Southern Italians because they're more attached to their homes?"

Maximus did not shy away from the question. He looked at Frantinus, Quintus, Capito, Sedonius, and others, his expression serious, and said, "Previously, some of our troops included paupers from the south, and they indeed exhibited this tendency. You've all spent years in the Roman army, so you should know how powerful Roman military strength is. We're currently able to develop relatively easily because the Roman Army's main forces are outside Italy."

Once the Roman Senate redirects these forces to concentrate on us, I don't believe our entire rebel army can withstand them. At that point, we'll have no choice but to leave the confined southern region and move elsewhere...

But if most of our troops consist of southern paupers who do not want to leave their homes, what then? Should we choose to stay and be surrounded by the Roman Army? Or simply abandon them, leaving and greatly reducing our military strength? Or force them to come with us, ultimately causing internal conflict? ... Anyway, none of these scenarios is good! So, we should prepare in advance!"

Chapter 115: Ports and Markets

Maximus's calm analysis of the military situation did not surprise Quintus and the others, as he had mentioned it before and gained their agreement. Naturally, his words once again garnered everyone's attention.

Flanitus said somewhat reluctantly, "Leader, if these poor people from the south want to join us and we always refuse to accept them, this might not be too good."

"It's not that we won't take any," Maximus had already considered. "Those with special talents and who can read and write, we certainly shouldn't miss. As for the others, we can recommend them to Attutmus or Spartacus, as they have no such restrictions and are eager to have as many join as possible."

"Understood, I will act according to your instructions," responded Flanitus.

Maximus, recalling something, added, "Volenus, just like before, send your men to join the Military Affairs Department in recruiting soldiers, selecting useful ones to be allocated to other departments."

"Yes, Leader," Volenus respectfully replied.

"Pigeris, I urgently called you here this time to have you quickly take charge of Sarabia Port's affairs, just as you did in Pompeii—"

Before Maximus finished speaking, Pigeris eagerly interrupted, "No problem, I will ensure the port is promptly made available for our army's use and operates even better than Pompeii Port!"

With a solemn expression, Maximus reminded, "This time, not many merchants are trapped in the port. Many merchants in Sarabia, seeing the situation wasn't favorable after the exiled population of Canossa entered the city, set sail early and left, leaving few ships docked in the port. The difficulties you face are far greater than in Pompeii!"

"Leader, rest assured, I will make the port thrive!" Pigeris confidently said.

"Excellent!" Maximus showed a hint of a smile and said, "Aside from Roman merchants and ships, I can allow you to make promises to other merchants; as long as their ships come to trade in my Sarabia, first, no trade tax will be levied, and second, their safety and that of their goods will be ensured within my army's control. Other details... you can discuss with them thoroughly and then report to me for approval."

"But even just this first point is enough to tempt many merchants," Pigeris said happily.

Why did Pigeris say this? Because after the Marci War, the Italian people all became Roman citizens, and Rome could no longer levy direct taxes on Italian people, but trade taxes still had to be collected. This tax mainly targeted all merchant ships entering Italian ports, levying a 5% trade tax based on the value of the goods carried by the ships.

And there are only a few real trade ports on Italy's east coast, with many merchant ships transiting through Sarabia Port. If Sarabia doesn't levy taxes, it saves them quite a bit of money. If the goods landed can be transported inland to Italian towns by land without losses through the territory controlled by Maximus's army, it's even more appealing to merchants.

"This time, it's not just about trading with these merchants; you have other tasks to do," Maximus said slowly, looking at him. "Next, we will recruit soldiers, and the port's labor force will surely decrease greatly. Soldiers need to intensify their training, and I won't allow us, like in Pompeii, to have to frequently send the army to help unload goods at the port."

"But... but if the port lacks labor, the ships can't be unloaded!"

"Don't worry yet," Maximus gestured, "when these port workers join the army, they will naturally be relocated to live in the barracks, so the places where they originally lived... relocate the fleeing Canossa people there to work as dock laborers, so the city's plaza can be cleared and order better restored."

"Leader, order is restored in the city, but how could these Canossa refugees willingly work as dock laborers?"

"They fled here originally hoping to rely on the Sarabians, but now the Sarabians can't even fend for themselves and can't help them. When people are starving, they are willing to do anything."

Pigeris seemed to be in thought, but he then shouted out, "There are probably quite a few of these Canossa refugees, and if they cause any trouble, I alone can't handle it—"

"Don't worry, I will have Camillus lead his Third Battalion soldiers to guard the port. You two have been old partners, and I'm confident that you will cooperate very well here in Sarabia too."

Pigeris breathed a sigh of relief, but then his heart tightened again as Maximus continued, "Moreover, you have another task—"

"What? Another task?!"

"Among the Sarabian nobles we executed this time, most were merchants, and their shops are concentrated within the port. You are to take them over and start operations again."

Pigeris's eyes glinted and he immediately shouted, "Leader, you have given me so many tasks; I can't handle them alone. You must assign me people, enough people to manage!"

"That's no problem. Among the hundreds of slaves in the wealthy district are surely quite a few who have managed businesses for these Sarabian nobles. Volenus, pick them out and give them to Pigeris."

"Yes, Leader."

But Pigeris still wasn't satisfied and said, "Leader, I still need more people, those who can actually help me manage the port, my own subordinates!"