

Winter 461

Chapter 461: The Emperor Has Disappeared?! (Part 2)

"Lambert..." Louis smiled, his voice hoarse yet gentle, "You're alive too."

Lambert was momentarily stunned, then quickly smiled.

He knelt on one knee, reaching out to hold Louis's arm, fearing his body was too weak to sit steadily.

"Don't be so tense, I... just slept for how long?" Louis softly asked.

Lambert hesitated for a moment, "Five full days."

"Five... days?" Louis's eyes widened, "You mean I was unconscious for five whole days?"

"Yes." Lambert looked at him with a complex expression, "We all thought you were just exhausted. The doctor checked and said it was just overexertion, with no external injuries. But... no one can explain why you slept for so long."

Louis was silent for a few seconds.

Indeed mysterious, that torrent of memories lasted only minutes in his consciousness, and the illusion was even more fragmented, seemingly just a few fleeting moments.

Yet he had slept for a full five days...

"My lord?" Lambert asked.

"It's nothing, maybe just too tired." Louis shook his head, but his eyes were clearer than ever.

"The doctor just came by again, and although you have no internal injuries, it's best to rest for another day," Lambert's tone eased a bit, "Emily is also on her way, it'll take about five or six days."

"She's coming?" Louis was a bit surprised.

"Of course she is." Lambert nodded, "Once the war ended and knowing you were unconscious, Lady Emily immediately set out."

Louis paused, feeling mixed emotions.

He certainly wasn't dead, even becoming stronger.

But only he knows, that crimson fog really entered his mind.

If not for the Primordial Heart, perhaps he'd have already turned into a puppet of anger like Titus.

"Lambert." He suddenly asked, "Now... how is the war?"

Lambert slowly nodded: "It's over. The moment Titus died, the entire battlefield quieted down. All Point Giants, Barbarian Soldiers, even Magical Beasts, collapsed like broken puppets.

Now we're just clearing the battlefield, burning remains, handling corpses, and... rescuing those soldiers who went mad but didn't die."

"We... won." Lambert softly said.

"We... won." Louis softly repeated.

Outside came hurried footsteps, a man in a gray-blue medical robe quickly entered the room.

The doctor did not say much, cautiously placing his hand on Louis's pulse, then approached his chest, listening to the heartbeat.

A moment later, he took a dark golden bronze stone from a box, lightly pressing it on Louis's forehead.

It was a Fighting Energy Reaction Stone, able to sense any uncontrollable fighting energy fluctuations within a Knight's body.

"...Strange."

"What is it?" Lambert immediately became tense.

"No, it's not bad." The doctor quickly gestured, "It's just... although your pulse and breathing are weak, they are extremely stable.

The flow of fighting energy within is smooth, showing no abnormalities. By all means, someone like you shouldn't have been unconscious for five days."

"What do you mean then?" Louis asked.

"...I can't quite determine." The doctor lowered his head, "If you say severely injured, no. If you say fighting energy imbalance, no."

"It's alright, since you've confirmed I'm fine, you may leave." Louis waved his hand.

"Yes." The doctor bowed and exited.

"Lambert." Louis turned with a slightly tired tone, "Help me get some hot food, then... I want to go to the washroom."

"My lord, your body..."

"I can still walk." Louis gritted his teeth, standing with somewhat unsteady steps, but he managed not to fall, "Awakening from a five-day slumber should at least warrant a face wash, right?"

Lambert sighed, silently moving forward to assist him, leading him toward the inner hall's washroom.

"I'll wait outside, call for me if you need anything." Lambert said softly, then gently closed the door.

Once the door was closed, Louis stabilized himself next to the sink, slightly panting before looking up at the copper mirror directly ahead.

The reflection in the mirror showed his pale face, faint blue beneath his eyes, lips nearly devoid of color, appearing as a noble young man recovering from illness.

"...Is this it?" He gazed at his reflection, lightly furrowing his brow.

No blood vines clinging, nor angry flowers blooming.

His skin bore no cracks, his bones had not mutated, even his breath fluctuations were suppressed by the Primordial Heart to nearly invisibility.

Even he almost suspected those events were merely a dream.

However, not being controlled is undoubtedly a good thing, as for any hidden side-effects within himself, he's left to resolve later.

Louis lowered his head, submerging his face into the icy washbasin, as the cold water slid down his cheeks, seeming to wash away the five days of stupor in a single breath.

But what he truly cared about was never the face.

"The washroom certainly isn't for washing faces," he muttered softly.

After confirming Lambert hadn't intruded, he subtly waved his right hand.

In the next moment, the air seemed to slightly condense, as a translucent blue interface appeared centrally, like water's surface, shimmering with flowing light patterns.

A faint blue light stream flowed gently along the screen's edge, following which a series of information rushed out like a flood breaking through a dam, rapidly occupying the entire screen's view.

Massaging his still somewhat heavy forehead, Louis read while mocking himself: "Offline for five days and only sixteen updates... seems nothing major happened?"

[Daily intelligence updates completed.]

[1: Post-war stability in the Red Tide Territory, good military and civilian conditions, under Bradley's leadership, preparations for spring plowing have begun.]

[2: An adult Ice Vein Giant Snake has appeared on the northern edge of the Storm Plateau, ending its hibernation state.]

[3: Frost Halberd City's post-disaster epidemic risk has emerged, causing unrest among civilians due to grain distribution.]

[4: The Southeast Province's grain prices have risen again, leading to the third wave of panic buying frenzy.]

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The intelligence scrolled rapidly, and Louis reviewed them one by one.

Most of the intelligence didn't count as bad news, mostly relevant news triggered by the war.

Some discussed the progress of repairing food supply lines, others mentioned outbreaks of various diseases.

One entry stated that his nearly collapsing forge star's seventh mine pit had finally restored initial production.

"Seems Bradley's doing well... At least spring plowing is in motion," he nodded lightly, lips curling slightly.

Just as he was about to relax his shoulders, suddenly a piece of intelligence popped up.

[12: Governor of the North, Duke Edmund severely overextended life essence in the Battle of the Bone-Burying Canyon, with only 183 days of remaining lifespan left.]

The font on the screen seemed to carry a chill, and Louis's fingers froze mid-air.

He was silent for a full five seconds, his lips parched, not quite knowing where to start.

In that battle, Edmund thrice bore the brunt of the Angry Crown Giant's charges, using his flesh to withstand divine court pollution.

Although he possesses the body of a Peak Knight, he is ultimately human.

He didn't fail to think of the cost, only half a year of life left, making him somewhat sad given the Duke has helped him so much.

"Old injuries linger, past sixty, already near life's end... enduring until now is certainly an anomaly."

Louis slowly sat against the wall: "But with the Duke's death, my Red Tide Territory in the Northern Territory will have no backing..."

Before he could contemplate further, another piece of intelligence, even more shocking, followed.

[14: Ironblood Empire's Emperor, Ernst August missing, last seen five days ago at Imperial Capital's Old Dragon Castle.]

[15: The First Legion, Dragon Blood Legion, Emperor's Personal Guard, all disappeared with the Emperor.]

[16: Imperial Capital's situation is turbulent, the regent council has yet to release a statement, public opinion under control.]

"What, what?" Louis's frail body practically sprang up from the ground.

Emperor, First Legion, Dragon Blood Legion, even Imperial Guard vanished?!

"This isn't a vacation," his throat dry, "This is vanishing from the world."

His mind immediately conjured numerous possibilities: civil unrest, coup, disaster, forbidden relic awakens, even some supernatural catastrophe stirring awake...

Chapter 462: Entrusting an Orphan

"The Emperor of the Empire has disappeared?" Louis stared intently at those lines of intelligence, the muscles by his eyes twitching slightly.

Then, due to the weakness from a long sleep, he almost couldn't stand straight, his shoulder slumped, nearly hitting the bronze mirror.

"Thud."

A soft sound echoed in the washroom, not loud.

But Lambert, outside the door, heard the noise immediately and became alert: "My Lord? What happened to you?"

"It's nothing." Louis mustered a bit of strength to reply.

He leaned against the sink, took a deep breath, and waved away the intelligence panel.

The blue semi-transparent screen faded like ripples, returning the washroom to silence.

"Before knowing the truth, I can't make judgments based on a few pieces of intelligence." He murmured, "Just remember it for now."

A moment later, Louis adjusted his disheveled collar and pushed the door open to leave.

Lambert, who was waiting outside, came up to him immediately upon seeing him come out: "You... you don't look well."

"Isn't that obvious?" Louis rolled his eyes, though his tone carried a familiar lightness, "I've been unconscious for five days, not looking bad would be strange."

"Indeed, the doctor said it was just exhaustion, nothing internal. But being out this long... is a bit strange." Lambert said worriedly.

"I know you're concerned." Louis patted Lambert's armored arm, his tone weary, "But my waking up means I'm not dead, nor am I dying."

"Let's eat, I haven't eaten in a few days, and it feels like my soul has hollowed out."

Soon, the food from the kitchen was laid out on the temporarily arranged long table.

After all, even during this special time right after the Northern war, who would dare to slight Louis?

Golden dishes, silver-rimmed bone spoons, half-cooked venison, white beans drizzled with herb sauce, and a pot of light malt spirit.

For most disaster-stricken people, these are luxuries from paradise, but for a Lord, they are reasonable and necessary.

Louis, while chewing on the meat, casually instructed, "Please have someone inform Duke Edmund that I will personally visit later to express my gratitude."

"...Yes."

"Also, tell the doctor to stop lingering at the door. I'm not a corpse now." He bit off a corner of the crispy edge, "Besides, I know my body best."

Lambert smiled wryly but continued to stand steadfastly at his side and slightly behind, not daring to relax in the slightest.

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The heavy door at the end of the corridor slowly opened in the cold wind, Lambert whispered to the guards and then stepped back, leaving Louis to step into the study alone.

The door closed behind him, sealing off the chill from outside.

Instead of paintings, the walls were adorned with rolled-up battle maps and a profusion of military and political documents, the red ink and pen strokes overlapping in a mottled array.

The air was thick with the rich scent of spirits and the astringency of herbs, the bitterness almost sweet.

Duke Edmund, Governor of the North, sat behind the desk, draped in a plain gray robe, devoid of noble adornments, his long hair tied at the back with just a hemp rope.

His right hand supported a wooden staff wrapped in white cloth, veins like vines beneath his pale skin, pulsing like some form of countdown.

Even though he had prepared himself, Louis was still taken aback.

The man who once dominated the wind and snow, subduing three armies with a roar, now seemed only to have a hollow shell burned by the flames of war.

"You look more spirited than I imagined." Edmund lifted his eyes, forcing a smile, "I thought you might be unconscious for a week."

"Thanks to you, just a bit tired," Louis replied with a steady tone.

"That's good."

Edmund slowly poured a cup of wine for each of them, the action much slower than usual, almost spilling it as he gripped the jug.

Once Louis accepted the drink, he got straight to the point, "The doctor says I have half a year to live."

The wine cup trembled lightly in the firelight.

Louis' movement paused, and his brows unconsciously furrowed.

Though he already knew through the Daily Intelligence System before coming, he had to act as if he had just learned.

He was silent for a few moments, taking a sip without speaking.

Edmund picked up his cup, his gaze passing over the flames to fall on Louis, seeming to look through his facade of composure, trying to see his inner thoughts.

He spoke in a low voice, like carrying the fatigue of a thousand miles of wind and snow: "After the war, everything is in ruins, and I... can no longer hold on. I want to know, what are your thoughts on its future?"

The flames flickered incessantly, casting shadows on Louis' face.

He didn't respond immediately, as if seriously pondering, or choosing the right words.

A moment later, he spoke softly, "I'm still young, not one with the talent to achieve great things. Such a question, forgive me, is hard to answer carelessly."

Edmund stared at him for two breaths, then suddenly smiled: "You don't need to act for me."

His tone resembled an elder seeing through the tricks of a youngster.

"What you did during the Red Tide, not everyone could. During the plague, you stabilized the order of the territory. During the winter disaster, you opened the granaries to aid the people, and restructured the military. Before the invasion of the Barbarian Race, you reorganized the Red Tide Knights, and at the critical moment, personally went to the front lines, changing the outcome with fewer than two hundred men."

He put down the wine cup, his fingers lightly tapping the rim, "It's not that you can't think about it, you just don't want to say it."

Louis smiled slightly, unperturbed: "If I said it was all due to luck, the Duke probably wouldn't believe me."

"Of course not." Edmund sighed, fatigue mingled with a trace of relief in his eyes, "The Northern Territory doesn't lack knights, doesn't lack nobility, it lacks someone like you, who is clear-headed and can be ruthless."

"...If the Northern Territory really were entrusted to me," Louis paused, speaking seriously, "I would treat it with caution, first restoring the people's livelihoods..."

Chapter 463: Entrusting the Orphan (Part 2)

Edmund raised an eyebrow, "So, are you willing?"

Louis paused and said, "Willing to work for the Northern Territory, but that doesn't mean I'm willing to stand on the frontline."

I'm not native to the Northern Territory, and I'm a direct descendant of the Calvin Family. If the Duke truly wants to hand over the Governorship to me, I'm afraid not only the Northern Territory, but even the Imperial Capital would be unsettled."

Edmund was noncommittal, "The Governorship of the North... is not something I can give to just anyone."

Louis slightly raised his eyebrows, something stirred in his heart.

Edmund put down his wine glass and said slowly, "But now, the situation is different. The Emperor is missing."

Louis's expression shook, his brows furrowed, showing the appropriate amount of shock, "You said... what?"

"The news just came through the Gale Bird, not many people know yet. But... I trust you."

Louis's face turned solemn, remaining silent.

"This matter can no longer be concealed. His Majesty, along with the First Legion, the Dragon Blood Legion, and the Imperial Guard... all disappeared without a trace."

Edmund's voice was hoarse, as if recounting the collapse of a massive structure.

"By now, the Imperial Capital must already be in chaos," he continued, "The Noble Council is vying for power, the military is in disarray, there is no appointed successor... I'm afraid it will be chaotic for several years."

Louis's expression grew heavier, as though the weight of this news pressed down on him, making it hard to breathe.

After a while, he asked softly, "Then... what about us in the Northern Territory?"

"That's exactly what I wanted to talk about." Edmund looked straight into his eyes, his gaze piercing through the firelight and growing especially sharp.

"They will fight among themselves for years. The Northern Territory, being on the fringes and of little importance, by then, the Imperial Capital won't be able to manage. If I die, they won't have the right to immediately appoint a new Governor.

At most, they'll set up a Northern Reconstruction Affairs Council, just an empty title. What you need to do is to establish yourself firmly amidst this situation, grasp the real power of the Northern Territory.

I'll make sure all those still loyal to me will support you. Just take this authority, don't worry about anything else."

Louis opened his mouth as if to say something, but was interrupted by Edmund raising his hand.

"Don't decline," Edmund's tone was firm, his eyes carrying a kind of calmness between life and death, "I've seen too many nobles, knights, commanders... but you are the one with the greatest ability to govern."

He slowly stood up, leaning on a wooden staff and taking a couple of steps, as if suppressing some emotion within his heart.

"I didn't choose you just for the Northern Territory."

His voice suddenly softened, like an old man recounting past events.

"My children... my eldest son died in battle, my second son is just one year old, my eldest daughter married to the Southern Territory and hasn't returned for twelve years, we've become strangers. My most beloved youngest daughter is now your wife."

Louis was shocked inside, but said nothing.

"My branch of the family... is almost withered, and the rest of the Edmund Clan has no promising members." Edmund's voice had a trace of tiredness, along with a decisive calmness, "I want to preserve not just the Northern Territory, but also the spark of the Edmund family."

He turned around, gazing at Louis.

"So, I'm temporarily handing over the position of Lord of the North to you. This is a gamble, I bet you can hold it."

The room was silent, with only the crackling of the fire as a whisper.

At this moment, however, Louis's mind had already begun to race rapidly.

It was time to evaluate this game of power.

Edmund was critically ill, the Empire was shaken, the Emperor missing, the legions in chaos... the entire situation had entered a "grey period of rising power."

He had the Daily Intelligence System to glimpse the future and the foundation of the Red Tide to stabilize the rear.

And the Northern Territory was now waiting, whoever could grasp the opportunity for vitality would hold the future.

But this path was by no means smooth.

The Third and Ninth Legions of the Empire remained, their military power hard to shake, the Sixth Prince Astha was eyeing intently, the Southern Pioneer Nobles were also aggressive, the shadows of the Old Northern vassals had not dispersed, each held schemes, none were benevolent.

"Can I really handle all this?" Louis whispered in his heart.

But this voice did not linger long before it was replaced by a deeper thought: You are a transmigrator, if you can't handle this situation, how can you hope to become a God?

He chuckled self-deprecatingly in his heart, the brief hesitation like ice breaking, revealing the fiery flow beneath.

Louis finally spoke, his tone firm, "If you trust me, then I will not disgrace this trust."

Edmund gazed at him, a hint of relief floating in his eyes.

"Good." He raised his glass, lightly clinking it, the two cups producing a crisp sound.

"For as long as I have time left, I'll protect you as long as I can; how far you go depends on your own ability."

Louis nodded silently, raising his head to drink the strong liquor in his cup.

At that moment, he finally took up this baton of fate, and the destiny of the Northern Territory was rewritten from here.

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The early spring nights in Frost Halberd City still carried a chill, but the inner hall deep within the Governor's Mansion was lit warmly, like embers after a snowfall.

It was the tenth day after the war had ended, and Louis did not return to the Red Tide immediately, but stayed in Frost Halberd City.

Officially for recuperation, but in reality participating in something more complex than battle—the future trajectory of the Northern Territory.

Duke Edmund's health was deteriorating every day, yet he did not slow down one bit, calling Louis into the study almost daily.

Sometimes to drink, sometimes to take medicinal tea, sometimes wearing a wolf fur cloak, leaning on the sofa with eyes closed to give instructions.

He deliberately or inadvertently brought Louis into the center of Northern Territory affairs.

"The Frost Feather Knight Order over there... you have to keep an eye on it, the deputy commander is loyal, but his vision isn't broad enough."

"Don't rely entirely on the Empire for grain transportation routes, open a path through the old roads of Redrock and Sever Peak; after the locust disaster, that area is actually safer."

"These few, I will allow you to meet individually, they are reliable."

As he spoke, he introduced Louis, one by one, to the old subordinates and vassal nobles he had accumulated over his lifetime, like an elderly mafia godfather entrusting his empire to his successor.

Louis always agreed with a smile, but inside, he felt the weight of trust that carried a poignant sense of "entrusting one's legacy."

Before the reconstruction meetings, Duke Edmund did not call all his subordinates at once, but with extreme caution, summoned them in batches, separately.

At night, in his study, he called in his core generals, the nobles of the Old North, and vassals one by one, personally informing them of his decision to "entrust the North to Louis."

Most had long been aware of the Duke's severe injury, so although the news was filled with grief, they raised no objections.

In their eyes, although Louis was young, his achievements over the past few years were clear, and the governance of the Red Tide had a good reputation.

More importantly, they generally believed this was only a temporary entrustment.

Once young Edmond grew up, power would ultimately return to the Duke's line.

Of course, not everyone was convinced.

Some families remaining from the Old North, superficially bowed in agreement but harbored discontent deep down.

They were suspicious of this Southern noble's child, "After the Duke's death, the North will descend into chaos, then will be our true opportunity."

These thoughts, of course, were well hidden.

But on that half-transparent blue screen, everything had already been laid bare.

Louis recorded them all, who could be used, who could not, was now clear.

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Several days later, Emily finally arrived in Frost Halberd City.

She wore a thick cloak, her face slightly flushed, yet couldn't quite conceal the slight bulge in her abdomen.

"You hurried over like this, are you mad?" Edmund frowned, his words harsh but full of concern.

Emily gently held her father's emaciated hand, "I couldn't rest easy without seeing you."

That night the family gathered around the table.

The young son Isaac nestled in his mother's arms, yawning.

Lady Irina personally served the soup pot, chiding Emily for her fatigue, and refilled Louis's bowl three times.

The firelight cast a warm and soft glow on everyone's faces.

This was the most peaceful and warm night Edmund had experienced in years.

He didn't even prepare for the Northern Reconstruction Meeting personally, leaving all the arrangements to Louis.

Chapter 464: Make the Northern Territory Great Again

The council hall of Frost Halberd City is like the heart of a wounded beast, beating slowly amidst the embers of war.

This hall, serving as the political center of the Northern Territory, has a deep gray dome, resembling dense clouds looming overhead.

The walls are adorned with the silver eagle banners of the Edmund Clan, standing alongside the Empire's golden dragon banners, symbolizing an order yet precariously fragile.

Duke Edmund, draped in a gray robe, leans half-heartedly against his chair, his pale fingers gripping a wooden staff tightly.

Though he remains authoritative, his physical appearance can no longer conceal the signs of death.

Sitting to his right is Louis Calvin, clad in a Red Tide cloak.

He wears a smile, his gaze falling on each attendee warmly, as if using that tranquility to quell the unease in the room.

The meeting has yet to begin, but the air is already heavy as lead.

Everyone knows today marks a pivotal moment in the Northern Territory's power shift.

Edmund slowly stands with the aid of his staff, his voice not loud yet everyone listens intently:
"Gentlemen, thank you for still being here."

His gaze sweeps across those seated: there are representatives of the old Northern nobility with graying hair, the weary-looking Gareth from the military department, the watchful Inspector Mei Si from the shadows, the reserved southern pioneer nobles, and the Six Prince Astha, with prominent dark circles under his eyes...

"This war... nearly annihilated the Northern Territory. The monster legion led by Titus was an unprecedented calamity.

We have lost so much, more than thirty families have been erased from Northern history, our warriors died in bloodshed, civilians lay dead in the streets."

Edmund lowers his head, sighing softly: "As for the Imperial Capital... the promised disaster relief support will gradually arrive, but more resources and reinforcements still require His Majesty the Emperor's decision."

He shifts his tone, bringing forth a grim truth: "Yet now the Emperor has been missing for several days."

With these words, the entire council hall of Frost Halberd seems swept by a chill, plunging into an instant of dead silence.

In the days that followed, most of these high-ranking officials were already aware of this news, originally bearing unease, now spoken by Edmund himself, they involuntarily held their breaths.

The reaction from the Imperial Capital's representatives was the most evident, for they knew, should the Emperor truly be missing, these "power parasites" might suddenly fall into oblivion overnight.

In contrast, the native Northern nobility responded with much more indifference.

After all, the Northern Territory has always been distant from the Imperial Capital, they are more concerned with whether the land can be restored, their kin survive, and their fiefs endure.

As for the Six Prince Astha, sitting at the first position on the left, his face turned pale.

He is not a central figure in the royal power struggle, on the contrary, he is one of those princes dispatched to the borders and forgotten.

Becoming the Lord of the North, was merely because His Majesty wanted him as an example to silence others.

He knows his strength is insufficient to seize power in the chaos, but if the Emperor were still alive, he could at least rely on "royal blood" to gain some resources and barely maintain his position.

If the new Emperor, who truly holds power, dislikes or even resents him, what comes next would not simply be a loss of favor, but perhaps retribution.

Even a single decree abolishing his pioneer title would be enough for him to lose all resources, military power, and foothold overnight.

Moreover, alone and unaided in the Northern Territory, should he get caught in a political whirlpool...

He lowers his eyelashes, struggling to conceal the unrest within, yet his pale complexion reveals the inner turmoil.

"Of course." Edmund, noticing the atmosphere, suddenly smiles as if to ease the mood, "Perhaps His Majesty is merely on a journey and has not yet returned, no need to worry excessively."

He doesn't dwell further but tilts his head slightly: "Now, let our young hero chair this meeting. He knows the specifics of the post-war situation better than I."

Called by name, Louis immediately rises from his seat, and with a composed expression, bows respectfully: "As you command, Duke."

On one side of the long conference table, several old nobles exchange glances.

They do not hear the word "succession," yet they all grasp this ceremonial act symbolizing a transfer of power.

The young lord is already beginning to try to take the reins.

Louis does not return to his seat, with a wave of his hand his attendant promptly unfurls a simplified map covering the Northern Territory.

"First," his voice exudes a steady authority, "is the food issue."

On the gray and white map, over seventy red-marked symbols indicate locations of granaries.

"Currently, there are seventy-six granaries usable within the Northern Territory, verified to hold less than twenty percent of winter food reserves compared to pre-disaster levels.

This implies that with current reserves alone, spring cultivation is difficult to initiate, and disaster victims cannot all survive."

As these words fall, low discussions begin to spread among the seating area.

"The relief grain promised by the Imperial Capital has only arrived at thirty percent so far. As for whether the rest will arrive on time and in full," Louis pauses slightly, glancing at the finance and logistics officials seated at the back, "I am not optimistic."

"Therefore, I propose that Red Tide and Frost Halberd first allocate surplus grains, prioritizing relief for the seventeen most affected old vassal territories."

Just as he finishes speaking, another round of commotion erupts, for no one is truly certain who the most heavily impacted are.

Louis then adds with a touch of modesty in his tone: "I am also willing, with Red Tide at the forefront, to provide an additional eight thousand tons of stored grain for allocation across the territory."

With Louis' words concluded, the conference hall falls silent again.

"Red Tide is to provide an extra eight thousand tons of surplus grain for allocation across the territory." This pronouncement strikes intensely at every participant's heart.

Chapter 465: Make the Northern Territory Great Again_2

They had long known that Red Tide Territory's grain supply was adequate, as it was one of the few regions in the Northern Territory untouched by disaster, but they didn't expect Louis to be so generous in offering such a large portion of stored grain all at once.

Eight thousand tons was no insignificant amount.

The wealthiest of the old vassals in the Northern Territory now had barely over a thousand tons in their warehouses, with some territories having completely empty storerooms.

After Louis explained the grain allocation plan, fearing misunderstanding, he added, "These eight thousand tons comprise two-thirds of Red Tide Territory's current grain reserves."

His tone carried a hint of resignation, as if he were truly struggling to take out his last reserves.

Of course, he knew better than anyone present that this so-called "concession" of eight thousand tons was just the tip of the iceberg.

The foundation of Red Tide's grain abundance lay with Mai Lang Territory.

That miraculous large field, during last year's autumn harvest, had nearly covered two years' worth of grain for Red Tide Territory.

Moreover, to maintain internal conservation awareness in Red Tide, he had ordered early on the promotion of "The Grain-Saving Order" and "Ban on Luxurious Food," so there was basically more than enough.

By releasing a bit now, he could win hearts, stabilize the situation, and exchange for power.

Most crucially, it wouldn't harm the roots at all.

Yet the other Lords did not object to Louis's words.

The Northern People understood well that this land was historically difficult to cultivate, with a harsh climate and barren soil, and any change in the weather could lead to crop failure.

After the disaster, the land became even more devastated, so even when Louis claimed "this is two-thirds of the stored grain," no one doubted him.

"I am not seeking credit," Louis added a sentence, "I just want everyone to understand we are all doing our utmost."

He squeezed out a tear, resembling a young man truly gritting his teeth for the Northern Territory, seemingly caught in a difficult situation.

But those truly sitting on the chessboard of power had minds surging.

They knew this was crying poor and setting a price.

This young Lord, using limited stored grain, was crafting an impression of extreme concession, winning hearts while suppressing doubts.

Even the old foxes of the nobility, who saw through his intentions, remained silent.

Because he played his hand perfectly.

Currently, the Northern Territory is most in need of grain, and he held the key.

Whether they liked it or not, they had to offer loyalty or compromise to acquire even a seed of hope.

One old noble of the Northern Territory was the first to applaud, speaking in a deep voice, "In such times, His Highness Louis is still willing to open his wallet, truly the fortune of the Northern Territory."

Then more applause followed.

In fact, before the meeting, Louis had already secretly coordinated with several key nobles on the grain allocation plan and power promises.

They knew they would receive preferential treatment on the "grain line," and today's applause was just part of the script.

The room was filled with praise, and the situation instantly reversed.

Even Duke Edmund nodded slowly, his gaze softened, clearly he bet on the right person.

With this demonstration of public sentiment, the subsequent meeting went smoothly.

Although the council members harbored individual thoughts, the overall situation was set; no one wanted to be seen as the one disrupting order.

The following topics, though numerous, were swiftly advanced:

Regarding post-war resource allocation, each vassal is allotted resources based on the extent of disaster impact and contributions to military efforts.

Frost Halberd City's physician group jointly establishes the Northern Territory's post-disaster health affairs bureau, responsible for epidemic control and refugee management.

Red Tide Territory is willing to open its borders first, setting up seven settlement points, prioritizing refugee absorption.

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Louis's performance throughout the reconstruction meeting was nearly flawless.

He neither acted arrogantly nor hesitantly.

Whenever military or political matters were involved, he backed them with detailed data, wielded calm and meticulous analyses, secretly securing benefits for his faction.

"I suggest prioritizing the distribution of spring agricultural materials to the seventeen old vassal territories with a high post-disaster return rate, the first batch of seeds and iron farming tools can be allocated by Frost Halberd."

"Regarding the epidemic issue, we've consulted with Frost Halberd City's physicians and recommend establishing quarantine zones on the outskirts of ruins and setting up three temporary medical camps."

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Every sentence was impeccable. Every proposal allowed the nobles to retain their face while quietly transferring real power to his hands.

What's more, he never showed any hint of arrogance, maintaining a consistently calm tone.

He was like a proper mediator, not a dictatorial authority.

Even the nobles who had received his promises astutely voiced support and guided public opinion towards him.

Any potential doubts or oppositions were dissolved within Louis's rhetoric.

Though he lacked the title of Governor and had not even been formally appointed to any Northern Territory official position.

Yet at this moment, everyone in the meeting room understood: this meeting was led by him.

And the Northern Territory's next direction would be decided by him.

Even the usually picky finance representative Kafei'er had to write in the records: "Young, steady, and capable of governance."

Sitting quietly at the head seat, Duke Edmund observed everything, his gaze full of satisfaction.

He didn't need to point anything out because, at this moment, in everyone's heart, that young man, with a composed presence, had become the de facto "successor of the Northern Territory."

As the meeting neared its end, the fire in the fireplace had gradually settled, and the night in Frost Halberd City grew deeper.

By some point, all gazes had gathered on the young Lord of Red Tide.

Louis slowly stood up, looking around.

He still wore a gentle smile, his demeanor steady, seemingly unaware of the invisible flow of power that had already drifted to his feet in this hall.

"I... am still young," he began, his voice low, yet exceptionally clear in the silence, "There's much I need guidance on from you, elders and gentlemen."

A single humble remark made some of the older nobles nod in praise, while others sneered, seeing him as disingenuous.

"But since the meeting is hosted by me today," Louis ignored them and continued, "let me summarize, proposing three directions, as a preliminary tone for our Northern reconstruction."

Louis extended one finger: "First, protect the territory. Although the Northern Territory is far from the Imperial Capital, this land is not abandoned. No matter what the Empire's future holds, we mustn't be chaotic ourselves. It's every Lord's duty to guard the territory and people."

Many nodded instinctively.

"Second, livelihood." Louis paused, his tone softened: "With spring sowing approaching, we're lacking seeds and farming tools, there are too many refugees, and epidemics have started to spread... If these issues aren't resolved, survival becomes problematic, let alone reconstruction?"

I suggest immediately drafting plans in each territory, proportionately applying for disaster relief resources, all distribution will be jointly reviewed by the reconstruction meeting."

Some whispered, but there were no objections, for most Lords were struggling even to protect their territories, much less qualify to question?

"Third, unity." Louis's tone suddenly softened, yet it carried more weight than the previous two points.

"Currently, the Northern Territory is complex under unstable Empire resources and unpredictable Royal future... My only request is for you all to cooperate with meeting dispatches, temporarily submitting to unified coordination, preventing a divided collapse."

Upon these words, expressions varied among the audience; Louis was clearly planning to consolidate power, yet no objections arose.

Louis raised his glass, surveying every noble, general, and envoy present; the humble eyes of a young noble now held the responsibility of an inheritor.

He slowly said, "The Northern Territory is our shared Northern Territory."

His voice, though low, resonated in the meeting hall for a long time.

"Now it's on the brink of collapse, yet you and I still stand. From today onward, battle flags will sweep through the ruins, plows will tread over scorched earth, oaths will pierce through the winds and snow."

He raised his glass high, his gaze sincere and intense: "Let us, together, make the Northern Territory great again."

As the words dropped, for a moment, there was silence around.

In the next second, applause erupted, layer upon layer.

Some were truly moved, others swept by the momentum, but all silently acknowledged one fact:

This young Lord of Red Tide had already ascended to the true power core of the Northern Territory.

Duke Edmund also gently raised his glass, watching him, as if seeing off the new captain leading the Northern Territory's course.

Chapter 466: The Imperial Capital Trembles

At the Blue Jade Pavilion at the end of the noble district, Eleanor Calvin leaned back on the soft chair behind the sandalwood screen, gently swirling the wine glass in her hand.

The amber Imperial pear wine reflected shimmering waves in the crystal glass, illuminating indifferent brows and eyes.

She was listening to someone quietly discuss the Northern Territory.

"Is it true that the young Lord from the Calvin Clan has gone to the Burial Gorge?"

"Did he personally lead the troops, or did he send the Knight Order? Can he really turn the tide in such a battle?"

"Ha, who knows? News from the Northern Territory always arrives as slow and unreliable as a frozen river."

She didn't speak, only slightly curled her lips to reveal a faint, elusive smile.

That was her nephew, the Duke's least noticed eighth son, exiled to the Northern Territory, where he forcibly carved out a piece of land, and now seemingly scored another great achievement.

Even recently, he became a frequent topic in the Imperial Capital's noble circles.

This Louis Calvin, truly a... troublesome yet interesting presence.

Eleanor lowered her gaze, looking at the unsealed letter on the desk.

She had half-written it, planning to send it to the Northern Territory immediately after the battle, to remind her brother Duke Calvin.

It's time to leverage that "heroic" son for another contribution to the family, even if only to share some military glory in the Noble Council.

Just then, a series of hurried and unsettling footsteps broke her contemplation.

"Madam... A message from the Ministry of Military Affairs... His Majesty has been missing for five days since leaving the Imperial Capital."

A buzzing filled Eleanor's mind: "...What?"

"Moreover, the three legions accompanying His Majesty have also vanished into thin air."

She stood up, though her movements were slow: "Is it an official announcement?"

"No... It leaked from the Ministry of Military Affairs, and the whole Imperial Capital knows."

Eleanor slowly inhaled.

The battlefield, the family, her nephew's military exploits, the Northern Territory's fate, the next round of Dragon Throne Council seats, the fiscal reform act soon to be announced by the Empire...

All of this, seemed scattered by a whirlwind at this moment.

The Emperor has disappeared.

An existence that has held the reins at the pinnacle of the Empire for decades is missing.

Even worse, it wasn't just him who left, but he also took away his three sharpest spears.

The First Legion is the Imperial Capital's local garrison, the Imperial City's direct troops, permanently stationed outside the Forbidden City's outer circle, the fastest-reacting elite legion within the Empire.

Its commander and deputy commander are both royal direct lineage, guarding the last barrier of the Imperial Capital.

And the Imperial Guard, the Emperor's personal guard unit, though small in size, has the most Extraordinary Knights.

It's the legendary "blade of the king" that "a thousand can defeat ten thousand."

And the soul of the Empire—the Dragon Blood Legion, with extremely stringent selection standards, only sons of the Eight Great Clans in the Imperial Capital qualify, others require "three generations of military merit" lineage.

It is not only a symbol of strength but also a political hostage, used by the Emperor to bind the hearts of all nobles.

They have all vanished.

It wasn't one or two knights, not scouts, but the Emperor and his governing colleagues disappearing in thin air.

In mere hours, the core of the Empire seemed to have its spine withdrawn.

The major ministers closed doors in silence, the only things visible were knights constantly leaving the city and more Gale Birds dispatching.

And in the noble mansion district of the Imperial Capital, candles never ceased throughout the night.

Eleanor Calvin, draped in a black satin robe, stood under the eave of the Blue Jade Pavilion, gazing at the rare moonless night in the Imperial Capital, coldness spreading down her spine.

She could no longer carry out the initial plans of today.

After all, no matter how fierce the battle in the Northern Territory, it pales in comparison to the fear of His Majesty and the three legions simultaneously going missing.

Eleanor ordered to prepare a carriage, urgently returning to the Kite Tower estate located in the seventh council district, the Calvin Clan's most central intelligence hub in the Imperial Capital.

.....

The night rain in the Imperial Capital fell like curtains.

Eleanor stood before the candle-stained message desk, inhaling deeply, suppressing the meticulous agitation while writing the letter.

She had organized all the intelligence, the secret letter contained no redundant words, only a brief three pages, converging the most crucial truths of the current Imperial Capital.

"His Majesty's disappearance isn't just turmoil. It's a precursor to the collapse of the Empire's core."

She narrowed her eyes slightly, recalling the past three days, her subordinates spread one pile of secret messages after another on the desk.

No fancy means, only the most traditional ears and eyes.

All from spies, insiders, and servants in noble mansions and official offices across the Imperial Capital.

The superficial opulence of the court and council hall, in reality, was like a frozen lake in deep winter, calm yet could crumble entirely with one stone.

Just like her judgment in the letter to her brother Duke Calvin:

The Emperor's disappearance this time is unlikely to be "foreign invaders," but some sort of forbidden magic.

And the collective disappearance of the three legions symbolizes the Emperor's remaining "iron fist" losing power, the entire upper echelon of the Imperial Capital lost its final fear bond.

In other words, no one can control anyone now.

If a regent candidate isn't established soon, the Empire will inevitably plunge into fissure.

With the summary of Calvin Clan's intelligence network, the Empire's upper nobility already shows clear "four faction divisions":

The apprehensive faction, like the Navin Clan, has begun secretly transferring assets to the Jade Federation, and transporting direct family through sea routes.

The conservative faction, the council's new noble group, appeals "The Imperial Power isn't vacant, wait for the Sacred Judgement," essentially stalling for time, avoiding igniting conflicts.

Chapter 467: Imperial Capital in Turmoil (Part 2)

The restless faction, like the remnants of the Kadari and the Roland family, are in secret meetings and recruiting soldiers. They have waited too long for this moment.

The indifferent faction, controlling the economic lifeblood: the business associations, the treasury department, the Imperial Capital's foreign trade office... They are silent, but they are watching, watching who will be the next center.

She wrote in the letter with meticulous handwriting:

They are all waiting for the one who can first step onto the stage and present a new Emperor or proclaim themselves as Regent King.

And this is the gamble about to change the entire Empire's fate.

At the end of the letter, she wrote specific action suggestions: The Duke must immediately privately notify all distant Calvin relatives to be vigilant about the sweeping impact of the "royal succession dispute" among the old nobility.

After finishing the secret letter, she ignited the seal wax, pressing the family crest stamp down fiercely.

The rain stopped.

She looked up at the palace roof, where dawn's light emerged. A drop of cold dew fell on her fingertip, like some mysterious omen.

"Oh Emperor..." she murmured, "if you have truly disappeared, then next, it's time for us to take the stage."

.....

The night was deep, the wind passed through the iron-leaved trees, lifting a corner of the study's curtain, carrying strands of frosty evening breeze.

Duke Calvin sat behind the desk, expression grave.

Before him was a letter from the Imperial Capital.

"Emperor Ernst August lost contact on his return from Northern Tour, with three legions accompanying him, now all without news..."

The entire study fell into a terrifying silence, only the occasional crackling of the firewood in the fireplace could be heard.

"A heaven-sent opportunity or a catastrophic annihilation..." Calvin raised his eyes and calmly uttered to himself, then he folded the letter again and sealed it in a gray cloth bag.

Duke Calvin stood before the fireplace, staring at the flames for a long time, then slowly walked to the map.

He gazed at the wall map covering the entire Empire, his eyes stopping on the red dot representing the Imperial Capital, sneering: "If it's true... heh."

Then his fingers moved towards the Southeast Province border: "But if it's false, then any actions would be rebellious and family exterminating."

At this moment, he made up his mind.

"Do not take a stance, do not make a statement, do not contact anyone. Order the patrol regiment to seal the borders, guard both internally and externally. Southeast Province, even if losing the Imperial Capital, must ensure self-preservation."

He sat down, personally picking up the pen, writing the first order letter, stamping it with the Calvin Family's seal.

"The Empire's ship is about to sink? I still need to choose which mast it will be." He pondered for a long time, and then called for someone again: "Draft the strategy for 'Suggesting the Crown Prince be made Regent.'"

"This Prince has a gentle personality, no military power, no authority, indeed the best puppet. By making the first move, sending the letter into the Imperial Hall, let the council circle see our Calvin family's loyalty."

He paused for half a moment, then instructed: "But do not deliver it immediately. Wait until the Imperial Capital is completely turbulent before presenting it, precisely to stabilize people's hearts."

Almost simultaneously, a Gale Bird carrying the Red Tide seal landed on the main manor's mailbox.

When the personal guard chief brought the letter into the study, Duke Calvin was still looking at that secret letter from the Imperial Capital.

"...A letter from the Northern Territory?"

He frowned slightly, accepting the letter, the candlelight reflecting on the seal wax's Red Tide Sun pattern.

Unsealing the letter, he glanced over it.

"Grave Gorge... reinforcements counterattack... massive defeat of the Barbarian army... main force returned."

His fingers tightened, slightly crumpling the paper. Several breaths later, he raised his head, his expression inscrutable.

Finally, his gaze stopped at the familiar yet emotionless signature, "Louis Calvin, Red Tide Lord."

After reading the entire letter, he didn't immediately speak, instead bowing his head in contemplation, as if sinking into the calm, unruffled letter.

Several breaths later, he lightly, lowly sighed.

"...That child has ultimately stepped out of the chessboard I set."

This letter only mentioned in passing the "Grave Gorge Battle," the surprise attack of reinforcements, the reversal of the battle situation, the Northern Alliance Army's narrow escape, and subsequent support requests.

All were articulated with rational phrasing, and formulaic personal greetings meant for a son to send to a father, without any trace of emotional fluctuation.

Over the years, the letters have become increasingly cold, as if he were merely a superior, a family backstage, rather than a father.

His emotions were complex, his thoughts intertwined and tangled:

As the patriarch, he had successfully wagered on the Northern Territory, now holding the discourse power to "develop the Northern Territory."

Making the Calvin Clan's position in the Northern Empire increasingly prominent.

But Louis never showed any affection of "a son towards a father."

His letters carried a cold tone, orderly and precise, filled with requests for battle situation reports and resource coordination, like reporting to a superior, not a father-son conversation.

Moreover, the aide he sent to Red Tide has long been unable to intervene in core affairs, even Bradley, the old servant, has recently been vague in his language, avoiding key points.

This subtle shift in loyalty left him deeply uneasy.

Red Tide has now become a "tower of ambiguity" to him; he cannot see its internal structure, nor know its true strength.

And he had an idea he hadn't shared with anyone: if he could somehow summon him back to the Southeast, under complete Calvin family control, not only would it consolidate the Northern Territory, but also ensure the family's survival for a century.

But he knew, this wasn't easy.

His eldest son, Gaius, originally thought to be the best candidate for the next clan leader, serving as Deputy Corps Commander of the Dragon Blood Legion, talented and adept in both military and politics, yet since the insect disaster in the Northern Territory he was severely injured and fell into a coma, his fate uncertain.

The place the Emperor arranged for his recuperation is also mysterious, now the Emperor is missing, Gaius is feared to be in grave danger.

Louis became the only offspring still "shining brightly."

He closed his eyes, pondering for a long time before slowly opening them, murmuring to himself: "...Perhaps, he should indeed return, but not now."

He picked up the quill, beginning to write new orders on the letter paper.

Dispatch a new trade envoy to Red Tide as soon as possible, ostensibly to negotiate trade routes, but actually to investigate the true power structure.

The technical personnel Louis needs can be sent to him, but intelligence personnel must be embedded within.

Additional chips may be infused, but whether he truly wishes to pass the patriarch position to Louis, must be carefully observed.

.....

The air in the Imperial Capital, on the fifteenth day after Emperor Ernst August's "disappearance," had already completely changed.

As if an invisible hand had suddenly pushed away the sword of Damocles hanging over all aristocrats' heads.

The originally incontrovertible pressure abruptly failed, leaving behind an expanse of heart-racing emptiness.

On the surface, the Imperial Capital is still singing and dancing, nobles still chattering in the halls, but every polite exchange hides probing and blade-like sharpness.

The Emperor's offspring are like beasts smelling blood.

The Second Prince and Fourth Prince are secretly contacting old allies, rumors of the Third Prince's death are reoccurring, muddling the situation.

Several Princesses are also reaching out to their maternal clans and allies, planning for self-preservation.

Yet everyone knows: if the Emperor truly returns, today's every small move could lead to family annihilation.

So everyone pretends to be cautious, while secretly flowing like a torrent.

"The Empire cannot be without a ruler for a day." This is the sentence everyone in the Council Hall keeps saying.

Hence after a short and intense game, all sides miraculously reached a certain tacit understanding:

Push the frail and sickly, utterly powerless Crown Prince to the forefront as the temporary Regent King.

He has no military power, no political allies, and no independent will.

Precisely because of this, he is the most perfect puppet.

Yet the real power quickly slipped into the "Dragon Throne Meeting."

An assembly formed by representatives of major families and high officials of the Imperial Capital, initially meant for the Emperor to manipulate the great nobility, now transformed to let the great nobility manipulate the Emperor.

Thus the Empire temporarily maintained superficial order.

Decrees continued to be issued, the court continued its banquets, citizens within the city continued to believe "His Majesty is severely ill, temporarily regented by the Crown Prince."

However, all aristocrats know: this is merely a thin veil; the waves beneath the sea are frantically surging.

Every family, every royal offspring is waiting for that ultimate answer:

Will the Emperor return, or disappear completely?

And in this subtle intermission, any slightest movement could ignite the spark leading to a decade of turmoil.

Chapter 468: Inheritance

"Of course, next we have the granddaughter of the old Duke of the Brel family and the heir of West Ridge Fort coming to visit, saying they've brought cheese and home-crafted red wine," the attendant quietly reminded him.

"Keep the cheese for the banquet, let them take the red wine back themselves," Louis wearily pressed his temple, his tone not showing much fluctuation, "How many more groups are there?"

"There are six groups today... fourteen groups tomorrow."

"Fourteen?" He raised his eyebrows, "They're nearly eating me into poverty,"

The attendant tried hard to hold back a laugh, "Everyone thinks you're the Northern Territory's most promising Lord, wanting to catch up and pay their respects."

In fact, ever since the news from the reconstruction meeting that the Count intended to pass the position to Louis, the mansion in Frost Halberd City became suddenly lively.

Nobility with various surnames, like cats smelling fish, all flocked over.

Some brought aged parchment maps, claiming they were strategic secrets they were willing to share with Red Tide.

Some carried two jars of strong wine, grinning and saying they are there to honor the greatest hero of the Northern Territory.

There were even those who brought their blushing daughters to pay a visit.

Of course, they hadn't forgotten to make their words impeccable.

"Come in admiration to see this young hero who saved the Northern Territory on the battlefield."

"Hope that in the future, our North Bay and Red Tide can strengthen grain trade cooperation."

"Heard Red Tide Territory is building roads? I have a few craftsmen skilled in road construction..."

Even the titles became particularly meticulous: "His Highness, the Lord of the Red Tide," "The future Northern Guardian," "The ideal heir to the Duke's seat."

Of course, Louis knew that if anything unexpected happened, these "friends" would quickly change camps.

Even the old Baron who praised him as possessing the grandeur of a conqueror last night would sign a joint petition in a secret chamber, requesting to weaken Louis's over-centralization of power.

Not to mention when young Edmond with pure blood grows up, they wouldn't even mention "future Lord of the North Louis."

They would say: "Thank you for helping the Northern Territory during our difficulties, now return to your Red Tide Territory."

So he didn't accept their friendship now, nor did he give them any promises.

Over time, as the nobility saw him unmoved, fewer came.

Yet heaven still sent him an unexpected guest.

"The Sixth Prince has arrived," Lambert reported as expressionless as ever.

Louis nodded lightly, draped his cloak, and as he walked into the living room, the figure was already standing by the fireplace for warmth.

Astha August, the Empire's Sixth Prince. No battle accomplishments, no real power, not even any remarkable features.

Some privately referred to him as the royal surplus, acknowledged in the family genealogy, but no one truly expected him to inherit anything.

He turned around, his face immediately adopting a standard smile: "Ah, Lord Louis."

"Your Highness Prince," Louis nodded in return, polite in posture, yet without much emotion.

This was their second meeting.

The first was at the Northern Territory reconstruction meeting two years ago, where Astha initiated a conversation with commendation, saying he was "remarkably accomplished for his age, truly admirable."

Yet unexpectedly, two years had passed, and their statuses somewhat reversed.

Louis Calvin, twenty-two years old, the Red Tide Lord of the Northern Territory, effectively governing the southeast of the Northern Territory, even the future North Lord.

While he remained the "extra" Prince standing in the same place.

After they sat down, the atmosphere momentarily plunged into a silence colder than Frost Halberd City.

Astha was the first to speak, "Speaking of which, although we both hail from the Knights Academy, we've never truly crossed paths."

"Indeed, I was about to graduate when you enrolled," Louis responded courteously.

"Back then, I often heard our mentors mention your batch, saying it was very steady... understated," Astha lightly coughed, trying to change the subject, "I recall you didn't seem much inclined to participate in tactical drills back then?"

"...Indeed," Louis smiled slightly, his tone gentle, "I spent most of my time in the library."

Astha nodded, suddenly seeming to remember something: "In fact, last winter I originally planned to visit Red Tide Territory... heard you're making some, um, institutional attempts over there."

"Welcome to visit anytime," Louis's tone was courteous.

"It's a pity winter came early," Astha chuckled, muttering lowly, "This Northern snow always catches one off guard."

"Indeed," Louis maintained that courteous smile, "If you decide to proceed next time, please let me know in advance; I'll arrange a reception."

The atmosphere was quite awkward, and the two fell into a brief silence again.

Astha's gaze fluctuated slightly, a few times wanting to speak but stopping.

Clearly before coming, he intended to say something, perhaps ask Louis to support the transfer of a group of personnel, or to send some material aid...

But, as the words reached his mouth, looking at this man five years his junior, slowly gathering the authority of the Northern Territory on his shoulders, an odd sense of shame suddenly arose in his heart.

"Why say these things," he self-mockingly thought.

"By the way." Astha abruptly shifted the topic, "It's been particularly cold in Frost Halberd City lately, is Madam doing well?"

"Thank you for your concern, Emily is three months pregnant and stable," Louis replied neither humbly nor arrogantly.

"Congratulations... this is a moment worth remembering," the Prince smiled and nodded but didn't know how to continue the conversation.

Louis also didn't say another word.

He didn't dislike this Prince, but he was clear he couldn't offer him support, form an alliance, or make any vague promises about "working together in the future."

Chapter 469: Inheritance (Part 2)

After several minutes of awkward small talk, the Prince took his leave.

As he walked out of the hall, he glanced back at the figure, suddenly feeling like he had achieved nothing.

The moment the Sixth Prince left, the atmosphere finally relaxed, after all, it had just been too awkward.

Louis stretched lazily, gazing at the sky outside the window, murmuring, "Frost Halberd City, I've stayed in this city long enough."

Lambert, as if already prepared, immediately handed over a cup of hot red tea: "Exactly half a month, My Lord."

"Maybe one more day," Louis took the cup, leaning back in his chair, "It's been long enough. It's time to go home."

"Spring plowing, the establishment of a new mining area, post-war reconstruction progress, now relying only on letters to convey orders. You know, these aren't something Bradley can personally monitor for me."

Lambert nodded, knowing well the importance of the Red Tide Territory to Louis.

Louis stood up, donned his cloak: "Let's go. It's time to say the final farewell to the Governor."

The Governor's Mansion remained quiet, only with doctors and servants bustling about.

In the council hall, the old Duke Edmund sat on the high-backed chair, in front of him the latest batch of post-war damage statistics and supply applications.

"You're here." He saw Louis, his eyes slightly moved.

"My Lord, I must take my leave." Louis said straightforwardly.

Edmund nodded slightly, gesturing for him to sit, then said, "I originally wanted you to stay. To make the New Frost Halberd City a hub, take up my unfinished responsibilities, and consolidate the Northern Territory."

He didn't emphasize his tone, nor did he use words like "command."

Even though he is still the Governor of the Northern Territory, he understands that this young man before him is no longer a subordinate waiting for command.

"I know." Louis looked at him calmly, "But I cannot."

"Reason."

"The entire Northern Territory is shattered, water conservancy, transportation, granaries all broken down, relying only on Empire allocations is insufficient for reconstruction. If I directly take over the Northern Territory now, it will only drag myself into the mire." Louis paused, "I must return to the Red Tide Territory. Start from the Southeast, concentrate resources for development."

"You wish to establish a new order?" Edmund spoke softly.

"I wish to establish a self-sustaining polity." Louis replied calmly, "A base that can truly support the entire Northern Territory."

Silence spread between the two for several moments.

"...Do you know." He suddenly spoke softly, "Our Edmund Family has been rooted in this land for three hundred years."

"Back then, Frost Halberd was just a winter hunting camp. My grandfather told me, his grandfather, dug the first well in this valley, cooked porridge, and fed an entire territory."

He paused, a hint of fatigue appearing in his eyes: "But in my generation, fought six wars, three insect plagues, one insect plague, directly ravaged the Northern Territory. This city, can't even defend a decent gate tower anymore."

Louis stood silently, listening to him finish, not daring to interrupt.

For the first time, he saw this old general, incisive in council, cold as a blade in the military formation, show such apparent fatigue.

"Of course I know you're right." Edmund turned to look at him, his tone calmed, "From strategic location, resource allocation, to labor density and order foundation, the Red Tide Territory is the most suitable starting point for reconstruction.

But I still want... still wish to see Frost Halberd City lit brightly again one day, do you understand this thought, Louis?"

"..." Louis stood up straight, slowly spoke: "I understand, Duke. Though I don't have that ability yet, nor can I undertake the responsibility of reconstruction for the entire Northern Territory."

"But I assure you." He looked into those old eyes, speaking each word clearly.

"One day, I will definitely rebuild Frost Halberd City. Not as a subsidiary of Red Tide, but as the true heart of this Northern Territory."

Silent for a moment, Edmund suddenly smiled, his smile somewhat bitter, yet somewhat relieved.

He gazed out at the snow-covered towers, "You are right, this city is not the future, I was being sentimental."

"I hope you don't resent me for being selfish." Louis spoke softly.

"Resent?" The Duke coughed a few times, his tone even carried a hint of laughter, "I do not fear your selfishness. I fear you're not ruthless enough."

"Since you're returning to the Red Tide Territory." He turned, his gaze steady on Louis, "Take the Broken Blade Knight Order back with you."

Louis was stunned, yet to react, he heard him continue: "After I die, there are still the Cold Iron Knight Order, the Silver Fang Knight Order. Totaling close to five thousand knights, will also be under your command."

Louis froze, seemingly not understanding for a moment.

That wasn't some ragtag army, but the elite among the Northern Army's powers, mastering these three corps would make him the undisputed first in the Northern Territory.

"...My Lord Duke, this." He instinctively clenched his fists, incredulous.

Edmund merely gazed deeply at him, his eyes penetratingly sharp: "I don't have much time left. Little Isaac is still young, Alina isn't skilled in political maneuvering. Once I'm gone, the entire family would be torn apart."

His tone nearly a whisper: "I hope you won't let them down."

The firelight reflecting, Louis's gaze gradually deepened, his chest feeling as if weighed down by something heavy.

First surprise, then a surge of indescribable emotion.

"I understand. My Lord Duke, please rest assured." Louis stood up, kneeling on one knee, his voice steady and strong: "The day Little Isaac grows up, I will return these three knight orders intact to his hands.

For he is the true heir to the Northern Territory. In the name of the Dragon Ancestor, I swear here."

"I believe you."

Edmund's hand trembled slightly, yet firmly pressed on the table, as if suppressing the last trace of hesitation.

This was a gamble, wagering the entire Edmund Family, but he chose to trust the young man before him.

.....

In the twilight, before the council hall of Frost Halberd City.

Duke Edmund stood on the steps, cloaked heavily, still holding onto his usual dignity.

Yet under the candlelight, that sturdiness could no longer hide his frailty, like an ancient castle on the brink of collapse, struggling to maintain its last shred of dignity.

"Let's go." He looked at Louis, then turned to Emily, his voice steady yet hoarse.

Emily gazed at her father, her eyes moist.

But her father just gently reached out, patting her shoulder: "You are already someone's wife and about to become a mother. Frost Halberd City is no longer suitable to nurture new life, go back."

She bit her lip, finally lowering her head: "I understand, father."

As the carriage slowly exited the city gate, the wheels rumbled over the gravel.

Emily looked back, the distant tower standing solitary, her father's figure gradually fading into the twilight.

Louis reached out, holding her cold fingers, softly said: "Don't worry... we'll often return."

Emily gently nodded, tears streaming down, but remained silent.

She didn't know, her husband's heart was heavier than hers at that moment.

Louis didn't tell her, the Duke had only half a year left to live.

So this farewell was not only temporary, but perhaps the last meeting between father and daughter.

Louis and Emily sat side by side in the heavy carriage.

The compartment, upon Edmund's orders, was laid with soft rugs, the curtains half drawn, outside light penetrating with a hint of red.

Emily quietly leaned on her husband's shoulder, her hand resting on her still flat belly, her gaze passing through the gap to the outside.

Seeing the knight formations marching in unison along the long street.

At the forefront were two hundred elite knights of the Red Tide Territory itself.

Behind them the orderly iron current of the Broken Blade Knight Order, over a thousand knights, their armor reflecting cold light in the morning light, resembling a forest of steel.

The Red Tide's red banners flapped high, fluttering fiercely, burning like flames in the wind.

The hooves thundered, wheels rolled slowly, the entire formation resembling a giant red dragon, winding out of Frost Halberd City, heading towards the Red Tide Territory.

Chapter 470: The Sun of the Northern Territory

The dawn pierced through the clouds, scattering over the earth.

Frost Halberd City gradually receded, as the carriage slowly made its way out of the valley under the layers of knight escorts.

In the distance, flags waved, with Red Tide's red banner like blazing flames, fluttering fiercely in the cold morning wind.

Inside the carriage, it was warm and tranquil.

Emily leaned against a cushion, her hand lightly covering her lower abdomen, eyes closed in rest.

Louis sat next to her, his palm gently clasped with hers, appearing outwardly serene with his eyes closed, as if he were also resting.

In truth, his mind had never truly quieted, organizing the gains from this war.

Louis was not a narcissistic person, but at this moment he had to admit, this aid to the Battle of Frost Halberd had garnered him far more than expected.

Duke Edmund not only entrusted him with the Northern Territory's future in public but also let him take charge at the reconstruction meetings, be it epidemic prevention or the allocation of provisions.

Not to mention acquiring the Broken Blade Knight Order.

This was the elite ace of Frost Halberd City, over a thousand knights like an iron torrent, now lined up behind their carriage, treading the earth, protecting him and Emily as they returned to Red Tide.

And among the Duke's promises were also Cold Iron and Silver Fang, totaling over three thousand awaiting transfer.

With these knights added to his own current knights, there were a total of five thousand knights.

Right now, in the entire Northern Territory, only he possessed such military strength.

There were also the rewards from the Imperial Capital, which he had to wait for until the political situation stabilized. Louis believed that with the dual operation of the Edmund and Calvin Clans, his reward would definitely not be insignificant.

Of course, in this battle, Louis gained more than just power; he also enhanced his own strength.

Although the Burning Pain Vine Court invasion was proactive, it was purified through the Primordial Heart and integrated into himself.

Body enhancement, potential burst, magic power reconstruction...

The most crucial point was that, so far, there were no side effects; he wasn't entangled in vines, nor did he lose control or go berserk.

And, Louis had already felt that as his magic increased, these abilities would become stronger.

He still remembered that moment on the battlefield when Titus fought fourteen Transcendent Knights alone; maybe one day he could be just as formidable.

However, these were all deserved; after all, he had stopped Titus from sweeping across the entire Northern Territory.

If the Barbarian race had successfully enraged the entire Northern Territory and invaded other provinces south of it, without the Emperor or the three critical legions, with the nobility fighting their own battles, the entire Empire might not have held.

"Round it off... Did I save the world?"

Of course, Louis only thought about this in his mind; it was too juvenile.

But he couldn't help but laugh internally.

Emily looked up at him, sensing something: "Did you just laugh?"

"...No." Louis coughed lightly: "Just thinking... there's still a lot to do next. For instance, how to use this victory to expand my territory and influence."

Emily had already recovered from the grief of farewell, speaking with interest, "Then tell me about it."

Without hesitation, Louis said, "Although the demise of the Barbarian race was an unexpected disaster, this crisis made the Northern Territory unusually free of enemies.

The remaining Barbarians no longer pose a threat; the savage shadow that loomed over the Northern Territory for hundreds of years has dramatically ended.

Unless a natural disaster on the scale of the Nest descends once more, the Northern Territory will enter a true period of peace.

Moreover, with the Imperial Capital currently amid a power vacuum, unable to attend to this remote wilderness, this is a tremendous opportunity. If I can rise to the occasion..."

Emily leaned against Louis's shoulder, feeling his fingers rhythmically tapping on her leg as if pondering something.

He looked up at him, a subtle sharpness on his youthful face.

"...Then what are you planning to do next?" she asked softly.

Louis pondered for a moment, then opened his palm as if unveiling a map of the future: "I want to turn Red Tide Territory into the true number one city in all of the Northern Territory."

Emily was slightly taken aback.

"I plan to reorganize the layout of Red Tide Main City; Government Hall, schools, barracks, workshops, central market... none of these can be absent.

Red Tide is just the beginning. Mai Lang Territory, as the agricultural center, cultivating wheat, raising horses, and breeding cattle should also undergo a large-scale expansion and update.

As for Star Forging Territory... it's obviously not just mining, I plan to add alchemy workshops, large furnaces, metallurgy subplants, turning it into the industrial hub of the entire Northern Territory."

"Are you talking about city integration?" Emily responded softly.

"Exactly, and the three locations shouldn't rely merely on caravans. I also plan to build roads that link them together." At this point, Louis suddenly seemed to think of something, smiling as he said, "To become wealthy, first build roads."

Emily chuckled, "Luckily, you're talking about roads, not walls."

"Walls have to be built too, and not just city walls." Louis raised his eyebrows.

"I don't only want three cities but more. A port city must be established along the coast to connect trade routes to the South and the Imperial Capital. Between Star Forging and Red Tide, another craftsman city will be built to centrally manage skills and labor."

"That's a lot of cities to build," Emily said softly, yet her tone revealed no concern, only reassurance.

"Someday, the Northern Province will become one of the strongest provinces in the Empire." Louis spoke firmly, "I want to show the Empire's nobility that even what they call a border wilderness can be orderly and have a future."

Emily watched him speak eloquently, her heartbeat quickening slightly.