

Beast Master 811

Chapter 811 Day Out

Karl's procession blended in well with the crowd today. Many of the Guilds were out in large groups, shopping, dining, or gathering around the castle in preparation for the Lord's Speech.

They had ten minutes until it was scheduled to start, but already many of the ranking city officials were gathered on a large balcony facing the main south gate to the castle.

Why they had chosen to have the main gates facing the ocean, the most likely invasion point, was a mystery to Karl. But it did make things convenient, as there was a large square with a statue of the founder of the city, a grizzled Orcish Shaman whose name had long since been erased from the placard by time.

Karl felt the flood of power as the Lord joined the others on the balcony, and he realized that he had greatly underestimated the true might of that Demon when he was fighting above the city.

Now that he was standing next to the Totem Ranked Governor and District Officials, it was clear that he was more than one Rank above them. However, trying to gauge his power was a bit like staring at the sun. Blinding to the point that details were impossible to discern from the lowly viewpoint of an Overlord.

The Lord cleared his throat and began his speech.

"Thank you all for gathering to celebrate the four hundred and seventh anniversary of my wedding.

It has been quite the eventful year, with the birth of triplets to my family, and the resultant baby boom that has left the midwives of the city scrambling. But it has also been a year of innovation, of growth, and of valiant battles.

I recognize many faces here from the defence of the city against the Bomgon fleet. A battle that saw the least damage done by any full invasion in the last century.

There were heroes made that day, and many managed to break through their limits and raise to a new Rank. Unfortunately, not all has been positive. For the first time in three years, we had a Guild War that spread to the city. I have been informed that the aftermath of the battle of the two Hosts has already been repaired, but I do expect everyone in the city to be better behaved in the future."

He paused, and Karl felt the Lord's eyes on him. He bowed slightly, and the Lord relented, then continued his speech.

"Our most glorious Drodh Nation has celebrated ten percent more weddings this year than last year, a noteworthy accomplishment not only in the Capital, but through the entire land.

Now, I will return to my blushing bride, and let the City Ministers speak."

Karl got the feeling that it was an exceptionally short speech for the Lord. The Governor looked shocked, and then annoyed, as someone passed him a whole stack of prepared notes as the Lord sat down to bounce a small black demon baby on his knee.

The child was tiny, like a human newborn, despite the size of the parents. It was also winged, though they flapped feebly, not yet strong enough to take flight. Childproofing a house had to be a whole other type of challenge when your toddler could fly.

The crowd was doing their best not to laugh as the Governor went through the Lord's heartfelt speech, while Madam Shin, the Governor's wife, tried not to laugh at the saccharin sweet gushing love expressed in the speech that was intended for someone else entirely.

But that woman loved to see her husband squirm in his new armour, and she was enjoying all the praise as if he had intended to say that all to her.

The Governor switched speeches and began his own address, going over a number of things about the city, along with a few more sweet words for his wife, and thanks for the new armour that he was wearing.

Most of the city already seemed to know that Karl had made it, as the crowd turned to look at his group when the mention of having received a newly commissioned armour set was made.

Karl's sensitive ears picked up a lot of speculation about just what that would have cost, and then a few more were wondering if it was now possible to commission something similar in Overlord Rank, as Karl had advanced.

The thought was ridiculous to them. Custom ordered Epic Grade, Overlord Rank armour was worth more than most minor Noble families' generational wealth. You either inherited it or you never got it. Simply buying a set was preposterous unless your family had a Totem or many Overlords.

There were vendors moving through the crowd selling sweets, and the ladies were openly feeding chocolates to their partners. Karl couldn't help but laugh when Ophelia started feeding chocolates to Lotus and Mick. It was the exact opposite of the other situations in the crowd, with physically larger, embarrassed demons reluctantly taking bites.

Lotus had no shame about her love of sweets. She was even happily licking the chocolate off Ophelia's furred fingers, which was making the demons around them blush and giggle.

Mick was a bit more restrained, and blushing furiously as Ophelia fed her chocolates. But they hadn't bought too many, as they had more plans, and they were off to the boardwalk to watch the debutante shows.

If the flamboyant and festive air at the castle was anything to go by, then they were in for a treat. The Demons were going all out for the event, and the streets looked like a fashion show.

Making their way across the business district was no easy feat, so Karl led them south to the docks instead. They had a barbecue going, and his group could stop in there and visit some of the sailors before he took the ladies to check out their fresh new demonic eye candy at the boardwalk.

But as it turned out, they didn't need to go that far. The sailors had their own version, and all the young Dock hands were in their very best, with skin oiled and scales polished as they strutted around the docks to whistles and cheers of appreciation from what Karl strongly suspected were the working girls of the sprawl.

The ladies of Karl's group quickly joined in on the fun, and bought up long strings of cheap glass beads to toss around the necks of the young men.

There was plentiful rum flowing from kegs at every corner, and Karl led them to a corner where the same smoke pit as during the battle was set up.

"Butcher, good to see you again. I'll take whatever you're serving, for the whole Guild group." Karl greeted the portly Demon.

"Oh, congratulations on making Overlord. It's good to see you again, War Champion. Are you sure that you don't want to join them? You're still a young man." The Demon joked.

Karl laughed and tilted his head towards where a young man was being escorted into the back room of a shop by two young ladies in questionable outfits.

"I think that I would insult someone when I had to turn down the most festive of festivities."

The butcher laughed. "Well, youngsters will be youngsters. You can go to the boardwalk if you like, but really, the ladies will likely have more fun here on the docks."

That was definitely true. It was only a little after noon and already the Demons were playing a drinking game where you flipped a full shot glass from your horn to your mouth without spilling it.

In theory. Whoever drank the most of the shot won. And took another shot.

There was also music playing, as whatever bards and musically talented demons the ships had on board had set up an impromptu jam session. That had the people dancing and generally going wild.

Before long, Lotus had dragged Mick up on one of the pier pillars to sing with her, a drinking tune that seemed to be primarily the word 'shots' that every sailor knew.

The combination of rhythmic foot thumping and trumpets made a steady beat as the crowd sang along and thousands of sailors drink from bottles of Rum. Karl could see people closer to the boardwalk giving the crowd at the docks disgusted looks at the lewd lyrics, then confused stares as they realized that it was a Green Dragon Priestess and a Vampire in a Lolita dress with a parasol leading the chant.

Something wasn't right with the sailors, they were certain. Many of the Noble young ladies were tempted to come over and check out the scene, but the rowdy party was causing their parents to glare at them every time that they turned in a vaguely southerly direction.

The song changed and the stomping changed to a new rhythm that was slower and somehow more sensual, but still accompanied by trumpets and a saxophone, which made for a very strange experience to Karl's foreign musical tastes.

But soon enough, he found himself dancing with Dana in his arms, dragged into the crowd and drinking Rum from the bottle as they laughed and spun in the crowd.

They were pleasantly drunk and making new friends among the sailors when a rather horrified looking official in a castle uniform made his way to the dock and caught Karl's attention.

"Overlord Karl? Do you think that I could pull you away from your revelry for a few moments?" The Demon asked.

Karl nodded, and moved to the edge of the crowd, where Dana was handed a kebab and a fresh bottle of rum.

The official cleared his throat. "You have been formally invited, along with your plus one, to the Lord's private Garden Party. Can we expect your attendance?" "How long do we have?" Karl asked, already feeling his constitution burning the alcohol from his system.

"One hour before the first guests begin to arrive, two hours before the party starts." The official explained, looking a bit embarrassed.

He had likely intended to find Karl much earlier but hadn't expected him to be on the docks with his whole Guild.

"What is the dress code?" Karl asked. They were already dressed up pretty fancily, as it was a party day.

"Your current attire will do. It's a semi casual event, but most dress to impress." The official explained, hoping that Karl would understand the meaning behind his words.

The Lord had invited him directly, which was a huge honour. But the demon was a bit worried that Karl was already drunk enough that he might not appreciate the nuance.

Fortunately, Rae had them covered, and she had prepared extra fancy matching outfits in black and white silk to match the fur of their transformed bodies.

Dana was certain that she was going to hate whatever idea Rae had come up with, but the flowing dress was beautiful black silk with white embroidery all over it, creating a vine pattern. It fit like a glove, and it highlighted the white and red jewellery with elbow length sleeves. Karl was forced to change from his casino goon look into a white suit over a black base layer. He had minimal black embroidery on his suit, just a spider web pattern at the collar and cuffs. But she had made up for it with all the spiderweb pattern woven into the tie.

Karl briefly explained the situation to the others, then summoned the Lamia bodyguards to watch over the group and ensure that Lotus didn't get abducted by strangers with candy, before he led Dana off for some last-minute grooming. There was a beautician not far from the docks, and on their way to the castle gates.

They had been partying for hours. A little perfume and a change of clothes might make them smell better, but their fur could use a little brush and polish before meeting new people.

Fortunately, the staff at the salon understood immediately that they were going to a formal event, and not just looking for the sort of festive decorations that many of the party goers were getting.

By the time that they were fully brushed with some sort of pleasant smelling fur conditioner and redressed, it was time that the guests should have been arriving at the Castle.

Time to see how many of the local celebrity chasers knew who they were.

Chapter 813 VIP

There was a short line of VIP guests waiting to get into the Castle for the Garden Party when Karl and Dana arrived. The staff wanted each of them to walk the red carpet as a couple so that the crowd had time to get a good look at them. That slowed progress, but the cheers of the crowd when they recognized someone were deafening.

They were all turning on their Titles and Guild Tags, so Karl did the same and quietly warned Dana to do the same if she could.

{Former Lord of Bunga City} Karl {Grand War Champion of the Darklight Host}

Dana {Battle Mage of the Darklight Host}

Having names and titles active would make it much easier to meet new people inside the party as well. Everyone there was an Overlord or the guest of one, which meant that most of them operated businesses or owned large amounts of property.

But not only that. Some of the people in front of him were visiting Nobles, City Lords from other cities in Drodh, and even a few ship Captains, going by their titles.

Karl's turn came, and he looped his arm for Dana to take as they casually strolled down the red carpet.

Dana was recognized by very few, as she had not been transformed for the battle at the docks, but many recognized Karl, and they were telling the others. Having the titles active gave them a good idea who Dana was, so the crowd just assumed that she was active on a different side of the battlefield than where they had been.

As they got closer to the front, they reached the most devoted visitors, the ones who hadn't left after the speeches.

"It's the Healing Tree's Guard." Someone called, and a massive roar of approval spread through the Demons, drowning out the other noise in the crowd.

The residents on the west side of the river weren't aware, but Lotus was a huge celebrity in the slums and the sprawl. In the Stone Chapel district near the Guild House, it was the shop that the Darklight Host was better known for. Karl reached the gates with Dana, and the Guard bowed politely.

There was a green mana Jade ring on his hand, and a smile on his face. But Karl noticed that the other guard had red and white mana jade earrings hanging from her ears, and her shockingly white hair pulled back to show them off.

Someone had gone all out to impress her, and she was very proud of the gift.

"Thank you. Enjoy your afternoon." Karl replied as they ushered him through the door.

"Certainly, Overlord. The Lord will be looking for you soon, if it is possible for you to be somewhere visible." The female guard replied.

Karl led Dana into the gardens, following the line of Guards toward the open space on the north side of the grounds. Hundreds of Overlords and Totems were already gathered, and the aura of power was oppressive, nearing overwhelming.

Now, he could understand why they made it an Overlord Rank event. With all the political posturing and business deals in progress, tensions were high under the smiles and the Demons were leaking power constantly.

Karl noticed as a Naga man smirked and shifted to highlight his hip with his hand on a sword. For a split second, Karl thought that it might be an aggressive act, brazen as that might be.

Then he recognized the blade. It was one of the two Overlord Ranked weapons that the Darklight Host had put up at auction, and must have sold this morning before the day's festivities started.

Karl quickly checked the man's titles. "Looking quite fashionable, Prince Gabil. You seem to have had a great victory at this morning's auction. The poison effect on that blade turned out to be particularly potent." He greeted the Naga Prince.

"Oh, might you have been one of my competitors for this masterpiece?" Prince Gabil asked.

Karl shook his head. "Quite the opposite, it was my Guild that put it up for sale. It is most excellent to see that it has found a good home with a proud owner."

That attracted a number of the other Overlords over.

"Branch Leader, I don't suppose that your artisans will be putting other similar articles up for sale next month, will they?" One of the ladies, a lithe but athletic Orc, asked excitedly. Karl shrugged. "I can't say for certain. Overlord Ranked items only get created when the artisan is feeling inspired. So, while it is likely that we will have items at the auction, I can't say what they will be."

The Orc nodded in understanding. "That makes sense. I work for a merchant group as head of security, and my boss is somewhat upset that he lost out on all the best items today."

From the smug looks of the others, Karl suspected that was no accident. At the very least, they were not upset that her boss had been shut out of the prized treasures of the Auction House.

They were not given much time to speak before an immensely powerful aura approached, and the group spread to allow the Lord to approach Karl directly.

"The War Champion of the Darklight Host. What a fascinating thing, to have been granted such a title and a legendary Guild Name by the system." The Lord declared, speaking slowly.

Karl bowed to the Lord, while Dana dipped into a curtsy.

"Indeed it is. Though, many of the advantages were not apparent until I had a proper Guild House. Truly, I have been blessed by the World Dragon." Karl agreed.

The Lord frowned. "I see. So, you were truly granted this Guild title by the Gods?"

Karl nodded. "The first time I fought a city defence, I was granted the status of War Champion of the Darklight Host."

That took everyone by surprise. It wasn't just someone who had found a workaround in the naming restrictions. He really was a member of the legendary Guild.

"Please remain after the Party, I will send for you. We have much to speak about." The Lord insisted, then he was off to chat with other guests.

Chapter 814 Called Inside

Having been directly addressed by the Lord made Karl and Dana immensely popular at the party, and within minutes they had met dozens of new people from all over the Dragon Isles.

The locals seemed to have mostly retreated, as they could meet him again later. Nobody wanted to make some foreign Prince or Princess wait to meet the celebrity of the hour, and Karl's popularity also dragged the most obnoxious away from them.

But the effect soon faded, as the Lord was still making his rounds, meeting new people who had done something noteworthy during the last year while he was distracted. Butlers wandered the gardens, and once the crowd had dispersed a little, a second group of well-wishers gathered around Karl.

"Lord Karl, I don't believe that we have met. But Midwife Musa informed us that you were the source of the fertility charm that has been so effective for the local Nobility. We have to thank you." An Oni Demon woman greeted Karl with a reverent look that put Dana on edge.

"No need to thank me, I was paid quite well for my services. Congratulations on the upcoming arrivals to your family." Karl replied with a faint smile.

The Demoness smiled. "Yes, it will be good to have children around the house again. I'm afraid all of my others are long since grown and moved out. The downsides of excessive longevity."

The man beside her chuckled. "It will be somewhat awkward at family gatherings for the next few years, I suspect. Our daughter-in-law and granddaughter are also customers of the Midwife."

Dana couldn't help but laugh a little at the thought, and the handsome Demon smirked at her. "Yes, I am certain that it will only get worse once they are teens and getting closer to the Triplet Princes' choosing year. But that is still a few years in the future, and it's not the first time we've been through this in the last hundred years. The Lord and his wife are quite amorous, even after four centuries."

That made most of the nearby demons laugh. Every twenty or thirty years, the Lord's wife would begin demanding more children, as she had gone too long without any in her home. Most men would suggest that she volunteer at an Orphanage, or other place that works with children. But the Lord has preferred to simply give her more of her own.

During the first century, they had dozens. Then it began to slow down, and many had assumed that would be the end of things, but since then, it has become a reliable event for new Royals to be born to every generation.

The garden party began to wind down late into the evening, though many couples had left early to enjoy a romantic dinner together either in the Castle or elsewhere.

Dana had opted to eat on one of the patios overlooking the garden, where she could see so much of the crowd's social interaction. The dynamics between factions fascinated her, as many of them clearly despised each other, but none of them would dare to start trouble here.

The Lord's butler came as they were finishing dessert, and waited to escort them inside for whatever meeting the Lord had required. Karl suspected that it had something to do with the Guild War, as Hawk had damaged the city's public property. But that seemed like a small matter, as restitution had been paid and the damage repaired the same day.

They were led directly to the Lord's home wing, not to an office, which Karl hoped was a good sign. Nobody wanted to get blood on their carpets with kids in the house. It would end up everywhere.

Before the butler could even introduce them, the Lord was motioning for them to take a seat across from him and his wife.

"Welcome, Overlord Karl. And you must be the one known as the Dana Mage." He greeted them.

Dana stared at him in confusion, while Karl laughed quietly to himself.

"Is that not right? I listened in on the thoughts of the Thunderbird called Hawk, and that was how he referred to you. Never mind. Your name is Dana anyhow, so it's close enough."

[Hahaha, they probably think we're all clerics because they got their intelligence from Hawk, and he calls everyone brother and sister, except for you, Dana and Ophelia.] Cara laughed in Karl's mind as the Lord continued.

"Shortly after you arrived in Drodh, I was made aware that you would be coming to my territory, and warned that you were exiled for becoming quite the troublemaker. But it appears that my old friend from the Dragon Church misunderstood your nature.

Now, it would have been courteous if they had asked, or perhaps not dropped you in my capital city. But that is an issue between me and the Totems of your home Continent. I actually called you here today for a much more mundane matter. Namely, to inform you that I will not tolerate a disruption of trade agreements between Drodh and foreign powers.

The guards did not stop you because there is no law about selling powerful magical items. However, there are agreements in place about exporting said items that the merchants have been conveniently overlooking.

Now, a war over trade would be a significant drain on resources, so I am hoping that we can come to a peaceful agreement that doesn't involve shutting down the most lovely shop near the gates. You have been the talk of the City Guard for weeks now, after all."

Karl nodded in understanding. "The merchants that have been coming once a week to buy out my entire stock. I can understand the concern. If you wish, I would be happy to put a purchase limit on everything, unless there is an approved domestic vendor token I can check."

The Lord considered that for a moment. "That sounds like a hassle. It is far too easy to forge, steal or sell such a token. Instead, I propose that the city will bulk purchase everything Royal Rank and above that you wish to sell, apart from noncombat potions and items, which are not regulated as military goods.

I will order them to give a fair market price for them, and in exchange, I expect to hear of no more problems from the Darklight Host Guild House.

No loading ships up with magical rings and calling Pirates to ambush them, no having Overlord Ranked fire skills used to raze civilian residences to the ground, and if possible, prevent the Guards from purchasing mind-altering drugs from the Nature Cleric while they are on duty."

Karl chuckled at that last bit, and Dana looked horrified. The Lord's wife thumped him on the shoulder. "We haven't heard that they were, but it's best to put it out there in advance. I am well aware of how the Green Dragon and her Disciples are."

Chapter 815 Restrictions

Karl thought about any possible issues that might arise from this arrangement before asking questions.

"The Overlord Ranked masterpieces that we produce. Would you like them as well, or should they still be sent to the auction? And we currently have some apprentices from Lared Academy learning Runic Arts during the semester break. That doesn't violate any agreements, does it?" He asked carefully.

The Lord waved his hand. "They're fine. Even if you teach them the basics of Runesmithing, the Duke of Lared won't let them mass produce weapons. It's part of our arrangement.

But the Overlord Ranked weapons are a unique challenge, I do admit. While they're not a strategic national treasure like a Totem Ranked staff or blade would be, they're still very high on the danger scale.

Both of the items that sold at the auction today are going to other Islands, well away from us. But the only way to ensure a fair market value is to auction them. So, I am willing to compromise. If I do not want the item making it to the open market, I will purchase it from the auction house before it reaches the auction block. No need to get your own hands dirty.

However, that does lead me to an important question. Will you be producing large quantities of Overlord Ranked items?"

Karl shook his head. "One or two a month was the plan. So that our master craftsman doesn't feel that the employment agreement is a financial loss to him, when he was planning to go inland and set up his own shop. The apprentices can turn out enough Ascended and Commander Rank items to keep the shop running at a profit.

Well, for now. Not having inventory of the same standard at the shop for sale will put a significant damper on business."

That made the Lady of Drodh laugh. A single Commander Rank ring would pay an average shop's employees for the month.

The Lord looked contemplative. "I see how that could be an issue. Custom orders, not more than two sets of accessories or one set of weapons and armour per customer per month, would be acceptable to the Kingdom. Even if they are Overlord Ranked, it is fine."

Karl nodded in acceptance. That would be a bit of a pain, but they could work with it. It wasn't like he could win a fight with the Lord of Drodh or otherwise force him to change his mind. "Wonderful. I will have the butler draw up the agreement." The Lord decided. While the men seemed content to wait, the Lady of Drodh had different ideas.

"As you are here, would you be averse to doing a small favour for me? You see, I could use a few little upgrades made to the nursery." She asked, knowing that Karl was a Runemaster.

"Not at all. What did you have in mind?" Karl asked.

"Young Demons grow best in an extremely high mana environment. I am told that your items are capable of storing mana and self recharging. Would it be possible to put that sort of enchantment on a nursery?" She asked.

"Turn a nursery into a training room, with dense mana condensing on every surface? I would think it should be possible. Even if it's not everything you might have hoped, I should be able to raise the mana level to two or three times what it is in the rest of the city." Karl cautiously agreed.

"Oh, that would be wonderful. You know, mana is essential to the childhood development of Demons, but it's so hard to find a nanny who has the rare skills and the gentle touch to maximize their potential. Without that early start, it can take centuries to catch up." The Lady dragged Karl out by his hands, leaving Dana facing the Lord of Drodh. The unintentional pressure of his aura had sobered her up instantly after they entered, but unlike Karl, who Dana was certain was missing whatever portion of his brain was responsible for determining threat levels, she was keenly aware of how dangerous this Demon was.

But the Lord was smiling, and ordered another tray brought out.

"Fruit juice and finger sandwiches. They will take some time, my wife doesn't stop until she gets what she wants. Now, I'm sure that you have a fun background story as well. How did you end up leaving your home continent with a Dragon Cursed man like that?"

Dana was confused by the phrase. "Dragon Cursed?"

The Lord smiled at her. "It's a phrase we use for other species who have a bit too much favour of the old gods.

They tend to die of stupidity at a very young age, and if my aura sight isn't lying you should both be coming up on your seventeenth birthdays, yet you are a Monarch-Ranked Human. That sort of thing doesn't happen accidentally. More likely, it happened by proximity to him."

Dana smirked at him. "You know, Karl is a human as well. Or at least I'm reasonably sure he was at one point."

The Drodh Lord shrugged. "I never knew him then, but I can say for certain that he isn't now. At this point, I would wager that both the Naga Queen and the Void Badger have a stronger genetic relationship with humanity."

With those words, Cara came out to sit on Dana's lap. If they were talking about her, she was certainly allowed to have juice.

She gestured with her nose, and Dana poured her a small glass. The Lord cocked his head to the side with a curious look. "That Void Badger has wings."

Cara extended them as she finished her drink, and Dana nodded. "Yes, she is a Winged Void Badger. Is there another kind here?"

Lord Drodh nodded. "Yes. In fact, the wingless kind is much more common. I've never personally seen a Void Badger with Wings. Even without them, they're already a menace to society. Tell me, does this one have [Void Shift] as part of her skills to escape confinement?"

Dana shook her head, while Cara looked intrigued. She hadn't known that was an option.

Why didn't she get that option?

Karl was slacking.

"No, her specialties are [Disintegration] and [Nullification]." Dana explained.

The Lord looked shocked. "Anti-magic? That is just insidious."

Cara nodded happily, and the old Demon smiled.

"It seems that she is well aware of the fact. Once she reaches Overlord Rank, she would most likely be able to shut down entire armies and naval fleets with a thought. Overlord Ranked Nullification would leave them dead in the water.

Perhaps I need to find one for my darling wife? She hates it when the boys play pranks on her, and this one appears to be quite well socialized."

Cara gave Dana a warning look, daring her to say otherwise.

"Yes, definitely well socialized. You should see how gently she cuddles our Nature Priestess."

Cara nodded. The Dana Mage knew what answers to give.

Chapter 816 Nursery

Karl looked around the nursery, which was decorated all in pastel blues and greys, and examined the current layout to determine how and where he was going to place the Runework that the Lady of Drodh wanted.

Watching over his shoulder, with her aura completely restrained, the Lady of Drodh gave off the image of the perfect gentle and sweet wife, but Karl knew that she was a Mythic Rank or higher ancient Demon.

Still, the way that she could hide her aura made her feel completely motherly. Or perhaps it was the other way around? Perhaps she could hide her aura because she was already motherly? She clearly loved being one.

"How often does this room get renovated? I could paint the runes on, or I could carve them. The answer depends on how much you value aesthetics and how often you paint the walls. Painting over the runes either way could cause them to deactivate. Though that's much less likely to happen with carved runes." Karl explained.

The Lady frowned. "I like to change it twice a year. But some parts of the room tend to remain the same. The ceiling is rarely touched, and those crown mouldings are relics from before my time. Please don't damage those."

If they were from before her time, that meant they were over four hundred years old. She had been married longer than that, and presumably this castle had been their home since then.

Karl would have to look into the history of Drodh more deeply than Little Butterfly's plays. Or get Remi some books on it. She would read through them all soon enough.

Karl nodded. "Why don't I make you a custom item instead? It will take a bit of time, but it will be much more likely to survive a renovation and last until the boys' foundation is established."

The Lady shook her head. "The Nobles watch too closely at our every move. If you're seen coming and going again after the party, or we receive a gift from you that they don't know about, they will question every milestone the boys make, and my babies will never have any peace."

Karl nodded in understanding. Then he got a great idea. "Do you have a painting easel?" He asked.

The Lady looked confused, but led Karl to another room. It was filled with inks, papers and assorted artistic supplies.

"This will do wonderfully." Karl explained, then took a bit of Monarch Ranked silk from Rae's space and cut it to size for one of the blank Canvas. He tested the size, then lay it on the table and picked up an ink brush.

The actual runes for the spell were not complex. Just defining the space to increase mana absorption in, and increasing the mana density, with a modification to specify it should gather the mana externally and not need to be refilled.

First, he wrote the runes for the effect in four spots around what would be the edges of the painting, then turned the silk sheet over and wrote the rune for "Good Fortune in love" in a fanciful calligraphic style that wouldn't activate as a spell.

Rae's Silk would take Monarch Ranked effects without any issues, and possibly more. But Monarch Rank was more than enough for this, as he wasn't trying to drown them in mana, just increase the level in the room enough that they would grow to their peak.

"What does that large rune on the front mean?" The Lady asked as Karl began to empower the ones around the edge.

"It means lucky in love. I figured that with as strong as your relationship is, you would want the same for your boys." Karl explained.

"Oh, a secondary effect?" Karl shook his head. "Technically no. But if they're powerful, they've got a good shot at love anyhow. I can add it to a token or something if you'd like, but luck is a fickle thing."

Lady Drodh shook her head. "No, I think that will make a wonderful cover for your magical painting. Nobody will question why I would want a 'luck in love' item for their room, and the maids are unlikely to notice that the mana density in that one room is higher than the rest of the house. The auras of multiple children will muddle the feeling."

Karl finished the work and then mounted the silk, hiding the actual active runes. Unless someone stole the painting and dismounted it, they would never know that there was more to it. Presuming that they couldn't see the magic of the Runes anyhow. Some Demons were sure to have the ability.

The Lady smoothed back her long black hair and nodded in satisfaction. Then she went to the far side of the room and got a picture frame for that particular size of painting. Mounted in a gold frame, the black ink on white silk looked immensely classy, worthy of an exhibition piece, if you were the sort to enjoy calligraphy. Which she was, and so the painting was whisked away the moment that it was securely mounted. She put it above the lone window in the room, up out of reach of childish hands or close scrutiny. As soon as it was placed, the mana in the room began to increase. It only took a few seconds to change, but when it was finished, the mana in the nursery where the boys were sleeping was definitely higher, and he could feel not only their bodies but his own absorbing more mana than usual.

It was like a passive mana regeneration buff, but it was also refilling the mana in his beast spaces, which were close to reaching their limits until the beasts broke through to Overlord.

Karl could feel Hawk's quiet determination to take back his spot as the first on the team to advance to Overlord, and decided that he would have to make something like this for the Guild House as well. Even if it only worked on beasts and Demons, who could naturally advance, that was still half the residents of the house.

Chapter 817 Hiding Presents

Karl returned to the main room, where he found that Dana and the city Lord were sipping juice and eating sandwiches, while discussing the details of wind magic theory.

They had moved past their initial awkwardness, and once they realized that they both shared a passion for magic, they had become completely engrossed.

So, Karl and the Lady of Drodh did not disturb them, and the Lady decided to take him to another room for an additional surprise.

"You have extensive knowledge of Runes, is that correct? Can you create a ward that will tell me who keeps breaking in to ruin my surprises? This is where I keep my presents for future events, and someone keeps letting the knowledge reach my husband." She whispered.

"Are you certain that he isn't just reading the minds of the servants to find out in advance?" Karl asked.

"No, I tested that. I deliberately let a few of them know, then had an enchantment placed on them to see if they were contacting my husband. It's not my closest confidants. So he has to be finding out some other way." She insisted.

She would notice if he was reading her mind, given her Rank. But after four hundred years, he might just know her so well that he could guess her next move every time.

That said, it was not hard to create a ward.

Karl took out a copper coin and pressed it flat with his fingers. Then he rolled the edges smooth and stuck a claw through it to make a hole for hanging the ward.

The simple rune for detecting presence was added, and intentionally left at the Awakened Rank, with the bronze Runes closely matching the copper of the coin.

Then he took out a piece of metal from a damaged Giant's ring that Hawk had tossed aside as hopeless, and rolled it into a ball. With the magic faded, the soft metal was easy to work, and the metal in Karl's veins was harder than the ring. This one, he brought all the way up to Commander Rank, and engraved it to turn red and buzz when it detected a magical effect on the target area.

"Alright. We have two steps to this one. The first is the alarm. It's not loud, but if your hearing is good, you'll be able to detect it from the sitting room. It's at Commander Rank, so anyone who uses a spell to search the room will find it.

The copper disc is the actual detection charm, and when you activate it, the disc will tell you the next person to enter this room. Once it is used, you will have to recharge it again, just a trickle of power will do." Karl explained.

Lady Drodh clapped happily as she activated the spell and placed it in an unused drawer.

"That will do perfectly. Nobody will suspect that I added two new layers to the defences of the gift room. Now, I suppose that we should likely go rescue your friend. My husband has been studying the more obscure arcane arts for nearly five centuries now, and once you get him started, he will never stop."

Karl smiled, more concerned that he would somehow get roped into their conversation. Dana knew that he could make spell books or transfer skills, so if they were really into their conversation, it was bound to be revealed that he could demonstrate the intricacies of many of the spells she was describing.

And sure enough, when they got back, the Lord of Drodh had an expectant look on his face.

"I am told that you have a wide area strategic level attack spell known as Annihilation? Or Apocalypse or something? What sort of bribe would it take to get you to teach me that spell?"

It's so rare that I come across a spell that I don't know. I am skilled with a Water Element version of your duplicating tornados, so that's not entirely new. But such a rare combined spell is like nothing I have ever encountered, apart from a few Divine Beasts' innate skills."

Technically, it was a Racial Skill of Remi, but there was no harm in trying.

"Alright. Open your mind and let me show you." Karl agreed.

{Pack Master Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Apocalypse] will be transferred to the disobedient brat Nicholas.

The Lord of Drodh stared at the System Message for nearly a minute, trying to determine what it was insinuating.

Then, he recalled a day during his youth. His first trip into a System Relic, when he had grabbed both prize options at the same time and refused to let go until the instance punished him and kicked him out.

Why he recalled it now, over six centuries later, when the memory was long buried, had to be related to the System, and he knew that the current message was as well.

Fine, he would always be a disobedient brat in the minds of the Gods.

But there were two wands, and he had two hands.

Even now, he fought with two magical weapons. It had become his signature style.

The Lord of Drodh sat silent as he contemplated all the ways that the spell could be used, altered, and upgraded. Then he briefly pondered the implications of an attack spell with a range that was absolutely enormous at his current Rank.

As Dana had said, if you used a spell like this with [Portal] it was a mutually assured destruction tactic, and one that he hoped none of the other leaders ever thought up on their own.

Whoever had come up with this tactic was an insidious genius, but the Lord was glad that they hadn't publicized the idea. So, until someone actually used it, [Apocalypse Portal] would be a secret weapon.

Now, Dana had meant [Meteor Storm] when she was describing the effect, but he had forgotten the name, and Karl just happened to know a spell by the one he mentioned. So, it all worked out in the end, but in a much grander fashion than anyone had intended.

The Lord was so pleased with the new knowledge that it never even occurred to him to question how Karl had transferred the knowledge.

Chapter 818 Fireworks

That seemed to end their meeting with the Lord, as the man was already beginning to sketch magical circles and notes in a small book before his wife even called for the Butler to escort Karl and Dana back to the Garden Party.

Few would notice that they had disappeared for so long, as there were many other important people to meet, and going off to a private meeting room wasn't uncommon when there were business deals to finalize.

Soon, it was becoming dark, and a quiet announcement was made by the serving staff that the fireworks would start soon.

{Everyone, the fireworks are going to start soon, get yourself into a good position with a clear view of the Castle. The staff say they're launched from the tower.} Karl warned.

{You're not coming?} Lotus replied.

{We're still at the Garden Party. I don't think that we can make it to you in time.}

The staff began to bring out reclined chairs for the guests to lay on and look up at the fireworks without straining their necks. They were immediately popular with the younger couples, and some of the older ones, who chose to share a seat for the show.

Karl did the same, pulling Dana back so that she was lying halfway on top of him and looking up at the night sky, which was rapidly fading to black as the city of Drodh turned off all unnecessary lights for the evening.

That would make it a pain for some to get back home tonight, but they would certainly get the best view of the fireworks.

The Lord went all out on the show as well. The first set of explosions lit the air exactly on the hour, as promised, and Karl noticed that while there were conventional fireworks in the mix, about half of the show was actually magical lights, creating a backdrop for the setting.

The reason for that was actually quite obvious. The explosions of the fireworks could be felt from the ground, and the sound was part of the whole experience. The magical lights didn't have that, so casting them in time with the actual fireworks didn't detract from the overall experience.

The show went on for half an hour, and then the sky went dark and silent as the magical lamps that lined the streets of Drodh came back on, marking the end of the festivities.

Karl led Dana out of the Castle and out into the city streets, which were filled with revellers and drunks. Karl was briefly concerned about the ladies, then realized that Thor was with them. If something had happened, he would have already known.

So, Karl was not surprised when he arrived back at the house to the smell of popcorn and caramel.

The kitchen staff was mixing up a batch of snack mix for the night. Popcorn, caramel and peanuts, all mixed in a huge bowl.

"What do we have as a show tonight?" Karl asked as he paused at the base of the staircase.

"I don't know yet. Little Butterfly won't tell Thor, but there are actors on the stage, waiting for us."

Karl followed Dana up the stairs, playfully batting at her tail, and then walked down the ramp that had been added outside the tower window by the butterfly, making it easier to get to the city below without wings.

When Karl got down to their chosen seat for the night, a pile of cushions with a large blue blanket, he looked down at the stage and frowned in confusion.

He knew all these people, they were the group that had accompanied him on the first outing he had taken from the Academy.

But there was no way that the Butterfly could know about that. He hadn't thought about it in ages, and the butterfly certainly hadn't been there. Nor did it have any time element skills that Karl was aware of.

But there was one possibility. It might not be that the butterfly wouldn't tell Thor about the play, but that Thor and the butterfly had been working together to prepare this one, and Thor was making excuses not to tell the others.

It didn't take Dana long to recognize them as well. She couldn't help but laugh at how young and nervous they all looked. They had all been somewhat terrified on their first trip out of the Academy.

A floating cart delivered the vats of caramel peanut popcorn to every group's seating area, arrayed in a semicircle, so they could all still talk to each other if they wished.

"Do you know what we're going to watch?" Tessa asked once she noticed that Thor was doing a terrible job of hiding his excitement.

At that point, the kitchen staff entered with their own popcorn mix, and the actors began to move.

"Welcome to the first episode in our new series of plays. Here begins the Saga of Thor the Honourable, and his good friend Karl."

"Hey!" Thor called to the stage, only to have an image of a much smaller Thor appear and stick out its tongue at him.

"Oh, this should be fun. Lord Thor was so adorable when he was little. Is this his first group outing? Did you have a cute little sword then? Or did you stay in Cerro form?" Loros asked.

Lotus giggled. "Cerro is his natural form. He only learned a humanoid transformation much later, when he was already at Monarch Rank."

Karl had forgotten how excited and adorable Thor was when he was little. The play started with them getting off the train, and Thor was crashing through the underbrush, running back and forth between Karl and somewhere in the distance.

At the time, he was only a bit taller than a large dog, not even chest high on Karl, who looked exceedingly young to the gathered viewers.

"Oh, Dana is there too! So cute!" Dana leaned over to whisper to Karl. "I swear that we didn't look that young when we arrived at the Academy."

Karl shrugged. "Let's call it creative liberty. But they did a pretty good job on Thor. I wonder if they will have Rae in the show."

Indeed, they did. The show ran through their entire journey in the course of three hours, ending with the epic battle against the Drakes, which brought thunderous applause from the watchers.

"Thank you for watching us through to the end. Soon, we will have a second episode ready for your viewing pleasure." The image of young Karl declared, then the stage went dark.

Chapter 819 Mara

Karl got up and showered the next morning, then went to the front yard to watch the sun come up.

But just as he was about to sit on the porch swing, he noticed that there was someone in the blanket on it. He knew this person, Karl was certain of it.

It was the little girl from the trash weapon's wholesaler by the dungeon.

Karl picked the tiny lizardfolk girl up and carried her inside, shushing the curious Mick, who was setting up for the day in the front room.

He put her in a bed on the second floor, and left her asleep. When she woke up, someone could ask her what brought her to the Darklight Host Guild House in the middle of the night. They hadn't come back until after the fireworks, and there was no way that he would have missed her presence in the dark, when Soul Sight was so much more active.

Moirra and Dala, the two female teachers from the Lared Capital Academy, were waiting outside the room when Karl had finished tucking her in.

"A friend of yours?" Moira asked.

Karl shook his head. "She's a shop attendant at a wholesaler by the dungeon. I'm not sure what she's doing here at such an early hour, but she didn't appear to be injured when I brought her in. Well, I suppose that's a given, as there is a healing totem effect on the yard, and she had likely been there for hours. But we can find out what she needed when she's awake."

The teachers nodded, and Dala looked around the room. "Is Miss Remi awake? I would like to get started on the Alchemy lessons early today."

Karl mentally searched for her, and found her in the illusionary space.

"She's already in her lab. You can go meet her there now. I will meet Moira and Mash back right here after breakfast. We will start the day with theory, and then there are some changes to how we will be doing business that I need to go over with everyone.

But Davis isn't here yet, and we're nearly out of stock anyhow."

Davis came in only minutes later, as Karl was getting settled in at the table to eat.

"You're early." Karl noted.

"Mother is being insufferable this morning. The holiday got her all worked up about grandchildren, and now she's pushing me to get married. She even set up a date for me with the daughter of her friend last night.

A Seraphim, if you can believe it. I can't imagine how she thought that was going to end well." The Appraiser muttered.

A Seraphim, if you can believe it. I can't imagine how she thought that was going to end well." The Appraiser muttered.

"Well, if your mothers can be friends, I don't see why it can't work." Three suggested, gesturing with the spatula she was using to stir eggs.

"My mother isn't a Fallen Angel, my father is. My mother is a Fox Demon." Davis explained.

Lotus looked up from her food. "What's the problem? Have you seen our tabards with the black and white wings? Maybe you'll get a cute kid with one of each colour?"

All of the demons stopped to stare at her.

"What? Did I say something strange? It would be adorable."

Davis smiled at the oblivious cleric. "There are larger issues than aesthetics. You see, our species are literally eternal enemies. We have been at war since time started, and even now, it's only a ceasefire between Seraphim and the Dark Angels. Even touching each other causes our magic to react, preparing us for battle.

In extreme cases, it can even cause physical pain."

Lotus frowned. "Well, that's just sucky. What fun is a girlfriend with big, fluffy wings you can't even bury your face in when you hug her?"

Davis laughed softly. "Oh, that doesn't stop them. You see, the Seraphim are all warped in the mind. Even if the contact is physically painful, they like it. They actually enjoy causing and enduring pain. That's just creepy."

Mick set down her suspiciously red juice and smirked at him.

"Oh? I hear that it's a pretty common thing among Demons."

Davis actually blushed when she said that, and the Vampire doubled down on the teasing of her workplace mentor.

"Or is that the problem? Maybe you like it a bit too much? Or you like watching it?"

Davis thumped her on the head, and the Vampire's teasing turned to full-blown laughter.

"I get it, no more teasing about your love life. Everyone knows that the Seraphim are weird. But you still have to deal with them when they come in. They like stealthily blessing themselves so that it burns Vampires when they shake hands."

Soft footsteps alerted them all that their guest was awake, and seconds later, a very embarrassed young Gecko type lizard girl came down to the shop.

"I'm so sorry, I fell asleep on your porch. I came for some healing, and there was a blanket, just sitting there." She mumbled.

"Oh, are you alright now? We can have the cleric look you over." Karl suggested.

The girl smiled at him.

"I'm good now, thank you. But I have a thing. I forgot the word." She paused a moment, rummaging through a small bag at her side. Then she pulled out a piece of paper with very rough handwriting on it.

[Mara

Shoppe assis asusta... helperr - wholesale weapons and armour]

Karl paused to smile as he realized that the shop name was the first thing she spelled right other than her own name. Then he continued reading.

[4 years working]

Then the rest was just pictures of how she counted the price of items, exchanging them one by one for coins.

"Oh, a job application. Did something happen to your shop? I thought the area by the dungeon survived the attack?" Karl asked.

Mara nodded. "It did. Dad lost it gambling yesterday, and now I don't know where he went. But I heard that your Guild House only has two people in the shop, and I have experience.

I can count to eight, and I never forget an item price."

Karl pretended to consider it, then smiled.

"Well, do you mind doing a different job for us? Caretaker Jo needs an assistant, there is only one of her."

Mara nodded her head happily. "I can do that. But I want a hand print paper."

"A contract? We can sign a work contract. Come sit at the table and I will write one up." Karl agreed.

Mara took a seat, and One put a plate of pancakes in front of her.

The girl froze and stared at the food, drooling at the smell.

"They're for you. Eat breakfast, you've got lots of work to do today."

Karl wrote the contract while Mara grabbed a pancake and stuffed it in her mouth as if afraid someone would steal it. Then promptly began to choke.

Tessa took the rest of the pancake away and thumped her on the back, then gave Mara a glass of water while she cut the pancake into bite - sized bits.

"Eat slowly, work doesn't start for another hour." Tessa chided her, then put a bit of syrup on the diced pile of pancake.

Karl finished writing, and Tessa took the short contract to show their new hire.

"Alright, here are the terms Karl offers. A room at the Guild House, with three meals a day plus snacks. Three silver coins a week in wages, and a new uniform."

Mara looked shocked. "Did you really mean to say silver coins every week, not copper?"

Tessa nodded. It's right here. "Three silver coins a week. That's what new apprentice cleaners get in most of the city."

To Mara, that was huge. A silver coin at a time was as much as her dad gave her, and he wouldn't even pay that every month if he had been drinking.

"I will take it. I can't wait to have a uniform. Will it be cute?"

Caretaker Jo chuckled quietly. Naturally, it would be a simple black dress with a white apron like hers, but the lizard girl would be cute in anything.

Chapter 820 Solutions

Now that everyone was gathered, plus one new addition, Karl began to explain the situation to the rest of the Guild.

"Alright, I will start with the core of the issue, then we can find solutions.

The Lord of Drodh has decided that letting us bulk sell Royal and Monarch Ranked items with combat buffs is encouraging merchants to violate trade agreements and weapons embargoes.

So, he is going to buy all the ones that we want to sell directly. The Overlord Ranked items we don't sell in bulk, and he has agreed to allow them to continue going to auction. We can keep selling Commander Rank items, noncombat items and potions. We can also do custom orders, one per customer per month. That didn't violate the agreements.

So, the question is: What are we going to make?"

Karl paused to let everyone mull over this new information. They had been making combat enhancements for so long, that they hadn't even considered doing something else unless the demand dropped.

But the advanced combat enchantments were the entire reason that two of the teachers from Lared Capital Academy were here. If they stopped making them entirely, it would stunt their growth in the field of Runic Weaponry.

Davis, ever the professional store manager, frowned. "So, you're thinking of changing the lineup of items in the shop completely?"

Karl shook his head. "The case with weapons will have to change. But we can keep the accessories case the same if we change the enchantments to be noncombat buffs.

Then we put up a sign that we take custom orders, and refer them to the Castle for purchase of the rest." Davis nodded. "At least there is a guard station right outside. They'll be able to tell customers where to find the rest of the items, but this is quite the hit to our business. Who demanded this?"

Karl sighed. "The Lord himself. I wasn't really in a position to tell him to pound sand."

That made the Fallen Angel smile. "But I would have paid good money to see you try.

Alright, we can work with this. We will inform them that the combat items have been made part of the strategic reserve and will be at the auction or available through the Castle store rooms. Then we can fill the shelves with day to day sort of magical items to show off the workers' creativity. But what about the apprentice works?"

Karl shrugged. "He said that Commander Rank and under is no big deal. We can sell what we like at that power level. But the first thing that I am going to do is upgrade the workshop a bit for higher mana density. It might allow Loros to break through soon, and it will make items easier to enchant for everyone."

That got everyone's attention, but nobody followed as Karl headed to the workshop, they were all busy planning their next projects, now that there had been a change in the way that they had to do business.

The Runic Alchemy team, made up of Dala, Derek and Remi, had it easy. They would just keep making whatever seemed interesting for the day, as potions weren't a combat item unless it was a poison or explosive.

Ashbringer also wasn't concerned. He didn't really care about selling the items he made, he just enjoyed making them. Even if they sat in a box at the edge of the workshop for a year, it wouldn't bother him. The income from selling two Overlord Rank blades this month was enough for him to buy materials for his personal projects and keep working the forge through the rest of the year. Plus, this workspace came with the protection of the Gargoyles, so nobody would dare to interrupt him or make demands on his time the way that they would be doing at a smaller personal workshop.

Karl only took a moment to inscribe the runes on the inside of the wall above the door, and nodded in satisfaction as he felt the mana gathering in the workshop. That should be more than enough for their needs, and then he would do the same on the second floor, so that the workspace there had plenty of mana available for Runecrafting.

He didn't want to put it over the whole house, though. At least not on the first floor, where people would notice it more easily. This was a present for his Guild members and their guests.

Well, Karl said 'his' guild members, but he wasn't actually a Guild Leader. In fact, it was unclear if the Darklight Host did, or even could, have a leader. He was a War Champion, and nominally in charge of this branch, as he had a {Branch Administrator} authority in his list of Guild Titles. But he was not a Guild Leader.

They were still discussing the possibilities when Karl came back inside to add Runes to the second floor. This time, the runes were set to encompass the whole second and third floor of the house, so that even while asleep, the members would benefit from the extra energy gains.

Karl returned to the kitchen and grabbed a freshly baked croissant while he waited for the others to finish discussing the day's plan.

Eventually, Davis finished taking notes and nodded.

"We have a plan for the next week. Instead of combat items, we intend to have you teach the others the sort of compound runes that will lead to increased skill aptitude. Compared to pure combat power, I believe that everyone here agrees that not only is that knowledge more valuable, but it will also be highly profitable.

We won't put the higher ranked items on sale until we have cleared it with the Castle's personnel. But everyone does want to know the answers." He explained on behalf of the group.

"Alright. And that will let us sell items made by Loros as well. Even Ascended Rank crafting accessories will be valuable within the community. Every bit counts."

Remi was furiously making notes and throwing them in her space for Karl, as she had many ideas on this topic, but hadn't expected it to come up so soon, so she hadn't prepared.

[Thanks Remi. I will work these into the lesson plans. You know, once I have actually made one.]

Remi laughed, knowing that Karl had no actual plan, and likely wouldn't even when he was teaching the lesson.