

I! Cleaner 481

Chapter 481: Dinner Appointment

"Toot..."

With a loud and prolonged whistle, two sets of gigantic steam-emitting winches operate in unison, opening the night gate of the Kingdom's canal. Dozens of cargo ships from the outer rivers, along with the dawn's glow on the horizon, sail into the Kingdom's port.

As the sun breaks through the dawn and leaps off the ground, its unstoppable radiance dispels the remnants of the dim night sky, and the Kingdom, having slept under a million nightmare corpses, finally begins to awaken bit by bit.

"Hmm..."

As the sunlight crosses the tower bridge over the canal, sweeps past the spire of the clock tower, and slips into the palace's windows, the woman lying on the desk trembles lightly, gently drawn out of her slumber by the warm sunlight.

Did I... fall asleep?

Awakening from sleep, the princess stretches her slightly stiff body, then sits hugging her knees on the spacious chair, gazing somewhat dazedly at the desk in front of her.

She remembers last night before nightfall, she brought all the execution documents for the tax reform, proposals for expanding citizen voting rights, and selection orders for military officers of the third rank back to her bedroom, preparing for a night-long battle by lamplight.

But just as she struck off the stall tax concerning small craftsmen and wrote two rebuttal opinions, a sudden inexplicable drowsiness overwhelmed her mind, and then she knew nothing...

Well... maybe not entirely nothing.

After rubbing her somewhat numb face, recalling the strange dream she had after falling asleep last night, a slight smile curled at the princess's mouth.

In the dream, she finished all the paperwork and then at the council meeting a few days later, her words were sharp and cutting, causing the Finance Minister to faint on the spot, and she directly handed over the Ministry of Finance.

Then she took the opportunity to win over the council, settled the Old Nobility trying to stab her, and grabbed control of all seventeen major departments of the Kingdom, starting sweeping reforms.

Eventually, the Kingdom slowly became stronger, and in the dream, she also ascended the throne, married Joshua off across the sea to a monkey, made Leon a prince, and gave birth to an entire soccer team... ahem... In short, it was quite a good dream.

Taking a sip of the now-cold coffee, the princess, in a good mood, got up from her seat, held up the coffee cup, and walked to the bedroom window, voluntarily basking in the sunlight streaming through the window.

Although she accidentally fell asleep, failing to handle those documents in time, the result didn't seem too bad. For someone often plagued by nightmares, this kind of light-hearted yet somewhat absurd dream was quite a rare experience.

"Princess Veronica!"

Just as the princess was bathing in the warm morning sun, enjoying her rare moment of leisure, the bedroom door was suddenly knocked, and the voice of the night-duty maid came anxiously from outside.

"I'm Lily, who was on duty last night. Sorry, Your Highness, I... I seemed to have fallen asleep as soon as night fell yesterday..."

"It's okay."

After finishing the bitter black coffee in the cup, Princess Veronica put down the cup, stretched lazily, and said calmly,

"I also slept very early last night. If there was something to be done, I would have awakened you, but remember, when it's your turn for night duty next time, be sure to get more rest during the day."

"Thank you, Your Highness, I'll remember that."

Hearing she hadn't delayed the princess's matters, the maid outside the door secretly breathed a sigh of relief and then eagerly reported,

"Your Highness, according to the original itinerary, after breakfast, you'll meet with the president of the Kingdom Business Association. If it's finished within two hours, you also need to meet with a few newly elected parliament members from different districts, and after lunch, there's the envoy from the Black Forest Duchy... Shall I call a maid to help you freshen up?"

"..."

A shame, finding a rare moment of leisure... but right now, business is pressing, and with the council about to reconvene in a few days, it's not the time to enjoy leisure.

After hearing the pressured inquiry from the maid, the princess sighed softly and rubbed her temples, saying,

"A bit later then... what about the afternoon? How is the afternoon itinerary arranged? What's the earliest it can be cleared up by the afternoon?"

"Well... afraid not in the afternoon."

The maid outside the door carefully reminded,

"Your Highness, your schedule today is quite tight, going all the way until eight o'clock in the evening, even dinner is pushed back to after nine-thirty... But if you really need some free time, I could try to rearrange it for you by postponing the meeting with the Minister of Defense to tomorrow afternoon."

Postpone it to tomorrow afternoon... and that would push back tomorrow afternoon's matters as well, right?

Besides, the selection of military officers can't be delayed, considering Leon always wants to annul the marriage contract with her. To be safe, it's best to accomplish all tasks while this union remains relatively stable, lest unexpected complications arise...

"Never mind, no need to change, just follow the original itinerary!"

After weighing the importance of matters, Princess Veronica furrowed her brow in thought and then instructed,

"Do this, I'll skip dinner today, leave me free time after nine o'clock."

"Your Highness?"

Hearing the princess's words, the maid outside the door was slightly stunned, and then proposed with concern,

"I should rearrange the schedule for you because your stomach problems haven't improved, it's really unsuitable..."

"You've misunderstood."

Interrupting the maid, the princess chuckled and said,

"I'm not skipping dinner, I'm just not returning to the palace. Please help me invite the... invite the Duke of Lionheart for dinner."

It would be best if he picks the location. If he has no preference, then make a reservation at one of the two restaurants I frequently visit, in any of the ordinary boxes by the river with plenty of open spots."

"Okay, I'll arrange it right away!"

"Go ahead."

After the maid left as instructed, the princess returned to her desk and continued her work. Behind her, on the shelf, a tin doll with a half-shattered cheek quietly blinked its green glass eyes.

...

The sun rises and falls from east to west.

After making a round in the misty sky above the Kingdom, the radiantly bright morning sun sank below the horizon once again.

Immediately, the tall streetlights on the roadside lit up one after another, casting a shallow glow over the dreary night. A plain, unmarked carriage glided through the night opened by the streetlamps, ultimately halting in front of a restaurant on Joyful Street in the canal district.

"Your Grace, we have arrived."

As she politely opened the carriage door, the short-haired, chestnut-haired maid beamingly said to Leon,

"You can go directly to Box 7, Princess Veronica and the meeting with the Prime Minister just concluded, she'll arrive in no more than fifteen minutes, please wait a moment."

Chapter 482: Fair Arms

"Okay."

Leon nodded in response to show that he understood, then got up and alighted from the carriage.

At the lady official's request, he donned a cloak and hood, concealing most of his face, and then entered a roadside restaurant named "Golden Herbs," where he found the private booth the princess had reserved in advance.

Seriously... even having a meal has to be so clandestine, like an underground party rendezvous...

After silently mocking the princess's peculiar dining style, the ravenous Leon took off his cloak and sat in the obviously meticulously prepared booth, patiently waiting for his dining partner to arrive.

However, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes... a full forty minutes passed, and the princess who claimed she'd definitely arrive within fifteen minutes was nowhere in sight.

And having slept an entire day since returning home that morning, with his last meal still being lunch yesterday, Leon was truly so hungry his eyes were almost turning green.

Perhaps I should order something to eat first...

Unable to wait any longer, Leon asked the waiter for a menu, planning to order something to fill his stomach. Yet upon seeing the prices on the menu, he decisively abandoned the idea of ordering, opting instead for two glasses of plain water.

No choice, although being a Cleaner is considered a "high-paying career," he wasn't unable to afford it, but he had only received two months' salary so far, and after paying rent, tuition fees, furnishing his home, purchasing medicine for Anna's health adjustment, and cigarettes for the unlucky black goat...

After tallying up all these expenses, the remaining balance wasn't substantial, and with Anna, who managed his accounts, sent away by him from the capital, if he ordered and the princess didn't show up, he'd have a hard time getting by before Anna returned next week.

...

Seriously... I just repelled an Evil God attempting to invade the mortal realm yesterday, and I can't even bring myself to have a good meal. I need to request another fieldwork allowance from the director.

Pinching his empty and pathetic wallet, Leon couldn't help but shake his head. Just as he stood up to leave the booth and find a more affordable place to fill his stomach, hurried footsteps sounded outside the booth.

"Leon?"

Pushing the booth door open in haste and seeing Leon still there, the travel-worn princess immediately breathed a sigh of relief, then apologetically said:

"Something just came up and delayed me. I'm sorry, did you wait long?"

"It's alright, probably a few more hours before I starve to death..."

Responding with a hint of annoyance, Leon glanced at the weary-faced princess, whose elbow was slightly bleeding, hesitated a bit, then asked in surprise:

"Weren't you meeting with the Prime Minister? How did you end up in such a mess?"

"Because someone set me up..."

Upon hearing Leon's question, the princess gave a bitter smile, then said helplessly:

"Recently, the Minister of Defense and I have been promoting the selection and replacement of military officers, attempting to gradually replace those positions filled through family connections within the ranks of officers and sergeants.

The proposal concerning this selection order was supposed to be presented at the upcoming parliamentary session, but someone leaked it prematurely, and not just this issue was leaked, but also my schedule today.

Then, those officers worried about being replaced, incited by certain individuals, banded together to block me outside the Prime Minister's residence. The patrolling guards must've been informed as well, as nobody stopped them along the way.

After blocking the residence, they threw stones inside and nearly broke through the guards to rush in. I barely managed to escape, and it's during that time my arm got injured."

Ah, no wonder even a meal feels like sneaking around - it seems the princess's life isn't easy either...

Glancing at the panting, sweat-glistened forehead and blood-dripping elbow of the princess in front of him, Leon's resentment eased a bit, then he retrieved the [Plague-Infected Blood Band] from the Mirror World and said with slightly sympathetic eyes:

"Judging by your wound, it'll probably leave a scar. Would you like me to help treat it?"

"Yes! Of course, please do!"

After checking Leon's expression, Princess Veronica smirked, then sat beside Leon with a gleeful glint, rolling up her sleeve to expose her fair arm, leaning her wounded elbow towards him, she said in a sweet voice:

"Leon, I'm glad you're here~"

"..."

I feel like you're trying to set me up again...

Watching the princess gazing at him fondly, eyes seemingly twinkling with stars, Leon felt a slight paralysis on his scalp. Then he grumbled:

"Stop pretending! If you rushed here from the Prime Minister's residence, it takes at least twenty minutes; there's surely enough time to treat the wound and bandage it, right?"

"Well, I was eager to see you~"

Not embarrassed by being caught feigning sadness, the princess continued to hold up her pale arm with a smiling gaze, responding:

"Both of us are usually so busy, it's rare to have some free time. Naturally, if we can hurry, let's hurry, and take advantage of the break to gather as much as possible; otherwise, how will we maintain our marital relationship?"

"..."

No... I haven't even married, where do we have a marital relationship from? Did you get it from Heaven's Bank with a loan?

Leon rolled his eyes at her remark, then grabbed the pale arm waving before him, intending to wrap it with the [Plague-Infected Blood Band].

Yet as the soft, cool feeling of the princess's delicate arm found its way into his hands, almost like an exquisite coolness wrapped in water, he paused slightly and unconsciously gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Mmm..."

Apparently, his action tugged at the wound, and Princess Veronica let out a soft hum, furrowing her beautiful brows ever so slightly.

Upon realizing what he'd done, Leon's face flushed faintly red, and he began hurriedly wrapping the bandage, even accidentally winding it around his fingertip a little in his haste.

"All done."

After hastily activating the [Plague-Infected Blood Band]'s effect to heal the princess's arm wound, Leon slightly avoided his gaze and unwound the bandage. However, the fair arm didn't retract, instead suddenly lifted, brushing softly against the corner of his lips.

"?"

Feeling the warmth and softness at the corner of his lips, Leon paused in confusion, quickly pushing aside the arm before frowning and glaring back.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing~"

Noticing Leon's slightly reddened ears, Princess Veronica blinked and covered her mouth with her hand, her eyes curving into crescent moons as she chuckled:

"You were staring so intently earlier; I thought you liked it~"

"I'm not interested!"

"You even gave it a squeeze."

"..."

"Would you like to squeeze again? You may continue if you wish~ I don't mind~"

"..."

"If you don't speak up, I'll assume you..."

"Order the food already! I'm starving!"

"Alright, alright, I'll follow your lead~"

After pushing the menu stand over and seeing the princess's half-smiling face, Leon wished desperately for a crack in the ground to open up so he could crawl right in and never emerge again.

Darn! Seriously... why couldn't I control my hand just now!

Haha, I got you!

Seeing Leon, who was full of resentment when she first arrived and now instinctively turning his head, not daring to meet her gaze, Princess Veronica smiled triumphantly. She then lowered her sleeve to cover her arm and elegantly picked up the menu standing at the side of the table.

Teasing has come to a natural pause, as continuous teasing is unwarranted. Though the little man has a tender face, his temper isn't mild, and if overdone like last time, he tends to retaliate~

Chapter 483: If It Were Me...

"Red wine eel, duck confit, apple pie, onion soup, potato stew... Hmm... and two more caramel custards, please!"

After calling in the waiter waiting outside and rattling off a list of dishes as if reciting cherished treasures, the Princess handed the menu to Leon, smiling:

"Though the names sound quite ordinary, the dishes at this place are really excellent. I strongly recommend you try them... Is there anything else you're particularly interested in?"

"No, that's enough."

After glancing at the prices elegantly written on the menu, Leon, whose teeth nearly ached, shook his head and said:

"You've already ordered plenty. Let's just have these... By the way, what's the occasion today? Why did you suddenly invite me to dinner?"

"Of course, it's because I miss you~"

In response to Leon's question, the Princess who had taken the seat opposite blinked her eyes, leaned forward slightly, and with her ample chest gently pressing against the table, rested her chin in her hand and said with a playful smile:

"When a couple is madly in love, they want to stick together every moment, and I'm no exception~"

"..."

Leaning back in his chair to avoid her slightly, Leon rubbed his temple wearily and said:

"Can't you just talk properly...?"

"Sure~"

Upon hearing Leon's request, the Princess's bright smile faded slightly, her graceful spine was instantly straightened, her swan-like neck raised, and she said in a calm and dignified tone:

"Your Highness, I order you in the name of the First Princess Veronica not to compete with me for my favorite red wine eel, and when the apple pie is served, you must cut it into small pieces and feed me with a fork, do you understand?"

"..."

Never mind I said anything at all...

Realizing it was futile to say more as he'd only end up being teased repeatedly, Leon had to proactively change the subject, saying:

"What are you planning to do about the Ministry of the Military? So many people oppose you, they've even publicly stormed the Prime Minister's residence and thrown stones at you. Are you still going to push forward with that selection decree?"

Upon hearing Leon's question, Princess Veronica was a bit startled. She then put away the humor in her eyes and replied softly:

"Of course, I'll keep pushing. Why wouldn't I do the right thing? Even purging junior officers isn't enough. Once this round of selections is done, I'll even target senior officers!"

The Kingdom's Ministry of the Military has been in decay for far too long. Changing just some mid- to low-level officers isn't enough to alter the situation. If I don't seize this opportunity to inject some fresh, dynamic blood, any reforms by me and the Defense Minister will only be superficial patch-ups."

You're going to target even higher ranks?

Seeing the peculiar gleam in the Princess's eyes, Leon couldn't help but ponder along her line of reasoning.

The Kingdom's military structure is quite complex if you delve into it, but broadly speaking, it can be viewed as a hierarchy of marshal, general, colonel, captain, and soldier, just like the administrative system of governance, administration, documentation, assistance, and general affairs.

If a marshal is the head of the military, and a general is its backbone, then the colonel, captain, and soldier levels are the flesh and sinews.

The Princess wants to use Parliament to purge those semi-hereditary lower officer cadres, which is pretty much akin to ripping flesh from bone. Naturally, the vested interests within the military won't remain unresponsive. In fact, it's likely the officer protest at the Prime Minister's residence was silently endorsed.

"Are you sure you can pull it off?"

Curiosity piqued by the Princess's response, Leon, despite his growling stomach, inquired with interest:

"Although Parliament also wishes to limit noble power, your selection decree essentially strikes at the core of the nobility. They will certainly fight back fiercely. Do you think the Prime Minister and the Lower House will support you?"

"Indeed, they won't. Most MPs of the Lower House are profit-driven, neither willing nor able to meddle with the military. When it comes to interests with no direct benefit to them, they'll side with whoever offers the better perks."

After responding to Leon's question, the Princess curiously countered:

"Leon, do you have an interest in these political trades?"

"Not really interested, per se. It just happened to come up, so I thought I'd ask."

Is that so?

Seeing Leon's expression, the Princess couldn't help but slightly raise her eyebrows.

You think you're switching to a serious topic to avoid my teasing, so I'll follow the seriousness, don't you? Well, you've got it wrong.

"Alright then, since there's some time before our food arrives, I'll also indulge you with some insights."

Having a sly premonition of Leon's intention, the Princess blinked playfully before lowering her head slightly, feigning a gentle sob, and said:

"Thanks to my dear Prince, the military is currently under my command. So of course, I have to seize this opportunity to accomplish something.

In case I fail to win back a certain little man's affections and he decides he doesn't want me anymore, at least I would've left behind a reformed military department, not entirely wasted being bullied by him for so many days~"

"..."

Upon hearing the Princess's words, Leon couldn't help but twitch at the corner of his mouth. He then pointed at his nose and said:

"Me... bully you? Can you touch your conscience before making such claims?"

"Let me try."

With an amused blink, the Princess lightly pressed her hand over her heart, causing a surge of swelling waves, and with a gentle sigh, she said:

"Too thick, can't feel it."

"..."

"Are you staring at me like that because you want to help me find my conscience?"

"I won't!"

"Oh~"

Watching Leon opposite slightly close his eyes in embarrassment, unsure of where to look, Princess Veronica couldn't help but let out a light laugh. However, to avoid Leon becoming angry out of embarrassment, she sat up straight again and began speaking earnestly:

"In any case, I am determined to push the selection decree forward.

Out of the 37 generals in the Kingdom, 31 are of noble birth, and more than half of the colonels are also nobles. To them, military orders might not be as effective as their family head's commands.

Only by replacing a significant portion of these individuals and ensuring the smooth conveyance of military orders can I truly take control of the military. Subsequently, I'll use this to pressure Parliament and make the Lower House and other noble-dominated departments make concessions... Leon, what do you think?"

"I think... it's pretty good."

Somehow sensing that the Princess wasn't truly asking about political affairs but more about his "conscience" about her, Leon maintained a straight face, trying to steer the conversation back, and said:

"Power comes from the barrel of a gun. Strengthening hold on the military before implementing other reforms is indeed a wise approach."

Oh?

A little surprised by Leon's comments, the Princess's beautiful eyes shifted slightly before nodding:

"Your remark is quite... hmm...when I first approached the Defense Minister, it was also motivated by such considerations... Leon, let me ask you this: if you were this Princess, what would you do?"

What would I do?

Looking at the Princess leaning slightly forward, her gaze filled with hopeful anticipation for an answer, Leon instinctively glanced at her bosom and then quirked his mouth, saying:

"If it were me, I would rally a troop of guards to storm the royal palace, forcing your dad to immediately hand over the throne. Anyone daring to object would be hanged... Oh, and your brother would be shipped across the sea and made to marry a bunch of female monkeys!"

"..."

Chapter 484: A Reform Destined to Fail

Narrow-minded man~

Upon hearing Leon's answer, knowing the reason he said that was to retaliate for her earlier "teasing," the princess couldn't help but glare at him in feigned annoyance.

"Stop messing around, I genuinely want to hear your opinion."

Putting away any thoughts of "flirtatious banter," Princess Veronica straightened up and said earnestly:

"What you said just now was interesting. Although it was a bit blunt, it indeed captured the essence of power. You haven't been involved in politics, but you don't seem dull to these matters. In fact, there's a kind of... um... very unusual sharpness.

So, if possible, could you talk to me about your thoughts? For example, what do you think about the things I've been doing these past few years, from your perspective?"

What do I think?

Looking at the princess across from him, who was genuinely eager to hear his thoughts, Leon pondered for a moment, then replied somewhat insincerely:

"What you've been doing... is great. At least you're always doing the right things, and indeed many people's lives have improved because of your efforts."

Is that really what you want to say?

Sensing something else in Leon's somewhat perfunctory "praise," Princess Veronica looked into his eyes and then cautiously asked:

"Leon, do you... not agree with what I've been doing?"

"I do agree. What you're doing can indeed make the Kingdom better."

Considering that he was still relying on her to pay for this meal, Leon thought carefully and said as tactfully as possible:

"But your goal is probably not just to make the Kingdom a little better. You've put so much effort into dealing with the military for something more, right?"

"Hmm..."

Princess Veronica hesitated upon hearing this, feeling the topic might not be quite appropriate, but after looking at Leon across from her, she seriously admitted:

"I do want more. I don't just want to be the next Queen of the Kingdom, but the best Queen!

You know, Joshua doesn't have the talent necessary to be a good King. If he becomes King, the entire Kingdom will fall into the hands of the Finance Minister and the Queen, and all my efforts for over six years will be in vain. I absolutely cannot let that happen!

Leon, although you might not believe it, I don't have a strong desire for power. What I truly hope for is for the Kingdom to become strong and maintain that strength, so that tragedies like the War of Defense never repeat on this land again."

"I've never doubted that."

Indeed, you are not someone with a strong desire for power. To you, power is more like a tool to achieve your goals. What you are truly pursuing is something else.

Having seen the essence of the princess's soul, Leon nodded, indicating his willingness to believe her words. However, after seeing the clarity and determination in her eyes, he couldn't help but gently remind:

"But I think your reforms might be very hard to succeed.

Even if there are some results, they're unlikely to reach the kind of outcome you hope for. The final situation will most likely differ greatly from the result you want... Are you mentally prepared for that?"

"..."

The things I'm doing... might likely end in failure?

After hearing Leon's words, Princess Veronica slightly pursed her lips. However, she didn't immediately argue back but instead looked into Leon's eyes and softly asked:

"Can you tell me why you feel that way?"

"..."

Am I starving so much that I've lost my mind? She's a princess, after all, and I'm actually saying these things to her...

Seeing the stubbornness in her eyes, clearly not willing to relent without an answer, Leon couldn't help but feel a hint of regret.

Regarding the princess's so-called reforms, he did feel they were unlikely to succeed. In fact, he had thought so even earlier than today.

Yet he was only partially knowledgeable, so not very certain about this idea; plus, though the princess's reforms had issues, they did indeed improve the lives of ordinary people in the Kingdom;

Moreover, he and she didn't have a deeply established "relationship," so discussing this seemed somewhat presumptuous, and thus he had never mentioned these things.

However, he had just caught a glimpse of her "ten-thousand-men-I-go-forth" essence from her eyes, and feeling reluctant to see her dreams shattered in the future, he instinctively shifted the conversation toward this topic.

Since I'm already here... might as well say something?

...

"Actually, right now it's just a thought, not necessarily the correct one."

Slightly raising his head to meet the princess's calm gaze, Leon gently said:

"Take it with a grain of salt. If you find what I say makes some sense, perhaps consider it.

But if you think what I'm saying doesn't make much sense, then simply forget it and continue doing what you want to do, because no matter what, what you're doing now is not wrong."

After setting the stage for himself, Leon didn't directly express his views but instead posed a question:

"Your Highness, if you were to simply categorize the political forces of the Kingdom based on their camps, what might it look like?"

"In terms of camps..."

Princess Veronica thought for a moment and then responded:

"The ones represented by me and the Minister of Defense should be considered the reformist faction; those promoted by the Lower House, the Prime Minister and the cabinet officials he appoints, along with some of the new nobility risen through commerce, they should be considered the parliamentary faction;

Finally, the Old Nobility holding the Upper House, along with the remaining new nobility, collectively count as the noble faction.

Currently, there are mainly these three factions, but with Joshua having the support of the Finance Minister and the Queen, constantly wooing the nobility, it barely counts as a half-faction."

So it's the reformist faction, parliamentary faction, noble faction... hmm... and a marry-the-monkey faction!

"Not much different from what I learned before."

Nodding towards the princess, Leon continued to ask:

"Then, can you tell me, these three and a half factions, whose interests do they specifically represent? Whom are they speaking for?"

Whose interests specifically?

Upon hearing Leon's question, Princess Veronica frowned slightly, not quite understanding the point of his question, but still answered truthfully:

"As the leader of the reformist faction, I'm backed by the royal family, naturally representing the royal family; the Old Nobility represents themselves, while the parliament represents mainly the interests of big merchants; the remaining Joshua, although also representing the royal family, differs somewhat in 'meaning' from me;

I represent those who wish to suppress the nobility, trying to reclaim power for the royal family, whereas Joshua represents those royal family members who have familial ties but value the original family, leaning towards 'coexistence.'"

"Are you sure?"

"What?"

"I mean, are you certain you represent the royal family's interests? Are you really speaking for the royal family?"

"..."

?!!!

Chapter 485: A Word to Destabilize the Nation?

"It seems you should understand what I'm trying to say now..."

Seeing the princess's sudden startle and her involuntary clenching of her fists, Leon sighed and said:

"Just like you summarized earlier, you and your reformist faction represent a royal family that 'wants to reclaim power,' rather than one 'that wants to strengthen the Kingdom, so ordinary people are no longer suffering.'

For the royal family and even the King, the 'reforms' you are advocating are not the ultimate goal; they are merely a means to reclaim power. The reformist faction you represent is actually not speaking for the royal family."

"..."

Upon hearing Leon's summary, Princess Veronica instinctively wanted to refute, but after considering the situation of the royal family, she couldn't help but press her lips tightly.

Indeed... What I want has never been what the royal family wants.

Even among the reforms I push forward, many cut into the royal family's flesh, so although my greatest "power" comes from the support of the royal family, I have never truly been a spokesperson for the royal family.

"Moreover, among the four factions currently in the capital, the distinction between your reformist faction and the other three factions is very significant."

Seeing the princess' lips turning a bit pale from pressing her lips tightly, Leon hesitantly reminded:

"Whether it's the noble faction or the parliamentary faction, they all speak for their respective classes and fight for the interests of their backing powers; only your reformist faction is different.

Your greatest support comes from the royal family, but what you want to promote and fight for greatly conflicts with the royal family's interests, even completely contradicts them, so your 'base,' in reality, isn't as stable as the other three factions.

Nothing has gone wrong yet because your main goal in the past has always been to reclaim the power seized by the Old Nobility, along with regulating commercial activities to avoid the parliament passing some outrageous proposals.

This aligns with the royal family's idea of reclaiming power. After all, your identity is that of a princess, and the piece of the power cake you take is equivalent to entering the royal family's mouth, so the royal family has always supported you, but..."

"But it will be different from now on, right?"

Leaning powerlessly against the back of the chair, Princess Veronica, pale-faced, said:

"Father... The royal family's tolerance of me only extends to those insignificant parts; once I attempt to fully implement reforms, begin to divide the cake in the royal family's hands, the support for me will immediately stop.

This is truly... I originally thought those measures could revive the stagnant Kingdom, even make it increasingly strong, such beneficial things for the entire royal family, naturally they'd also be willing to support me, but... I was too naïve..."

"Not necessarily, after all, I'm merely guessing out of thin air."

Seeing her somewhat lost look, Leon couldn't help but open his mouth to comfort:

"The measures you're promoting could potentially enlarge the Kingdom's cake, and the royal family might still support you; these things may not necessarily happen."

"It's not may not, it's definitely going to happen."

Her beautiful eyes closed slightly, leaning powerlessly against the back of the chair, the princess bitterly smiled and said:

"Before you appeared, even though I was well aware of Joshua's incompetence, Father... He was always trying to marry me off, and all the targets chosen were people from other kingdoms.

I used to think he was preparing to marry me off far away when I hit a wall with my reforms, and the conflicts between the Kingdom's factions intensified, to quell disputes and stabilize the chaotic situation, but now it seems he probably thought even 'earlier'."

After thinking about the documents I brought home yesterday, Princess Veronica said with complex eyes:

"If I'm not mistaken, Father should be patiently waiting now.

He's waiting for me to implement the selection order, complete the military overhaul, suppress the Old Nobility's influence in the military; waiting for me to propose the expansion of citizen voting rights at the parliament meeting in a few days, slowly diminishing the power in the hands of big merchants and the Prime Minister.

And after I've done these two things, helping him eliminate the noble and parliament hindrances, he just needs to casually find a distant kingdom to marry off his troublesome daughter with unrealistic dreams, and then everything remaining won't be a problem."

"..."

"Haha, no family ties, only interests, this really is the style of the royal family."

Glancing at the silent Leon opposite, Princess Veronica self-deprecatingly smiled and said:

"Clearly, just completing the marriage alliance with you could thoroughly advance the reforms, but I went to Father several times, and he ultimately gave no direct statement, instead showing some ambiguous intentions.

I originally thought he wanted to put Joshua on the king's throne, so he didn't want me to hold too much power, giving Joshua a chance to struggle, but what I didn't expect was he never really considered me as his daughter, I am just a tool to sweep away obstacles!"

"..."

...

Ah this... It seems I've stirred up trouble...

Seeing the princess's fair neck reveal faint greenish veins and an abnormal flush on her cheeks, Leon couldn't help but open his mouth, wanting to comfort her but not knowing what to say, he could only dryly say:

"Um... Do you want to eat something first?"

"Sorry, I don't think I can eat."

The princess, who had always maintained a stable emotion, this time rarely showed her fragility, pale-faced and gave a bitter smile before directly standing up, stumbling towards the door.

Noticing her emotional instability, Leon quickly reached out to support her, then couldn't help but inquire:

"Where are you going?"

"I..."

Princess Veronica, holding her arm by Leon, gritted her teeth, then took a deep breath, pushed Leon's hand away, and pursed her lips:

"I need to go back and finish what I have to do..."

What you have to do... What do you mean by what you have to do?

Hearing her answer, Leon's heart couldn't help but suddenly skip a beat.

Given your current mental state, the so-called "what you have to do," won't it be what I mentioned earlier, gathering a team of guards to storm the palace, forcing your father to relinquish the throne immediately, and hanging anyone who dares oppose?

Ah this... I was merely chatting about politics with you while waiting for a meal, how did it turn into a bloody coup?

"Uh... Do you want to think about it a bit more?"

Seeing the princess's eyes filled with three parts resentment, six parts unwillingness, and one part inescapable sorrow, Leon hurriedly held her back, somewhat incoherently trying to dissuade:

"I'm not against you fighting for your own justice, but shouldn't you prepare more?"

If you charge into the palace now, what if you're unprepared and lose to the palace guards, and get countered by your father? You should at least plan for a few more days!"

"You... What nonsense are you talking!"

Hearing Leon's words, even filled with anger, Princess Veronica still couldn't help but pause her expression, then stomped her feet forcefully and glared back in frustration.

"Regardless, he's still my father, he wants to marry me off, not harm me! How could I possibly do something like that!"

"Oh, that's how it is..."

"..."

After taking a long breath, releasing her grip on his arm and sitting back down again, Leon saw Princess Veronica's lips slightly move.

Why do I feel... you seem a little disappointed that I didn't act impulsively just now?

Chapter 486: Do You Want to Think About It?

Realizing that the Princess didn't have any intention of "storming into the capital" and directly forcing the old King to abdicate, Leon couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief, then asked:

"Since you don't plan to storm the palace, what exactly are the 'things you have to do' that you mentioned just now?"

"I meant the officer replacement order and the bill to expand citizens' suffrage... Why did you think I was going to storm the palace with people?"

After causing a bit of a fuss with Leon, the Princess's agitated emotions calmed down a bit. She then sat back in her seat, explaining with a complex expression:

"Like you said before, no matter what the final result is, what I'm doing right now is not wrong. After all, by replacing those unqualified officers who climbed the ranks just due to their background, only then can the corrupt military breathe a little;

And right now, most of the parliament members have a business background. Even those who aren't from a business background have received business sponsorship before being elected. Only by expanding citizens' suffrage can we dilute the excessive influence of businessmen in parliament... These are things that need to be done, they can't just be stopped."

So, even knowing that you've been played by the old King, are you still going to see this through to the end?

After looking at the Princess with some admiration, Leon probed and asked:

"And then? What are you planning to do next?"

And then...

Hearing Leon's question, Princess Veronica couldn't help but bite her lip again, then said helplessly:

"Take it one step at a time... Leon, my mind is a mess right now. I've thought countless times over the years about what to do if reforms can't be implemented or if issues arise during the process.

But I really never thought about what to do if my father... if the royal family suddenly turned against me, I still need some time to think about it carefully... Anyway, thanks for the reminder."

Saying this, the Princess, whose emotions had stabilized a lot, first looked at Leon with gratitude, then sighed with a slightly lonely expression:

"I used to think that as long as I did well enough and found a feasible new path for the Kingdom, my father would trustfully pass the throne to me. After all, although he has objections to my ideas, he's always been supportive.

But now it seems, maybe I was out of the game from the beginning, his chosen successor has always been Joshua. After all, if you lack skills, you can learn, and if you can't learn, you can delegate to someone capable.

And my 'problem' seems to be bigger. For him and the entire royal family, I'm somewhat... how should I say it..."

"You've betrayed your class origin, or to be blunt, your stance isn't aligned with the royal family."

"Yes... that's about it..."

Hearing Leon's words, the Princess couldn't help but instinctively adjust her ample figure, moving to the edge of the chair, then nodded helplessly:

"Yes, that's the idea. To the royal family, I'm a maverick who betrayed them... But just say the first half next time, I'll probably understand what you mean... Also, class..."

After carefully pondering the word, the Princess couldn't help but blink, then commented with a hint of admiration in her eyes:

"Like steps dividing levels, arranged one step at a time upwards, clearly distinct from each other, almost impossible to cross without external force... The word you summarized really fits the current Kingdom remarkably well."

"..."

Like steps dividing levels...

Hearing the Princess's words, Leon was slightly taken aback.

In his past life, he had heard that word many times, but mostly just listened in confusion, using it muddily. It was truly the first time he pondered its inherent meaning.

Looking at the insightful Princess, who grasped its meaning upon the first hearing, Leon fell silent for a moment, then probingly asked:

"So... would you reconsider?"

"???"

Upon hearing Leon's question, the Princess blinked in confusion.

"Reconsider what?"

"Go back and storm the palace with people, force your father to give up the position, then..."

"You... I'm feeling terrible right now, can you please not joke about it!"

Hearing Leon's words, the Princess said with a mix of exasperation and amusement:

"The only organized garrison in the Capital is the palace guard, and the only one with the authority to deploy troops in the Capital is the King, not even the Queen can do it, even the guards by my side are sent by them, so who do you want me to take to attack the palace?"

Moreover, the Kingdom is governed by the entire royal family. What people recognize is the soldiers the royal family can mobilize, the wealth the royal family owns, and those sitting within the seventeen departments who are willing to listen to the royal family's orders and hold large amounts of the Kingdom's affairs, not that throne-representing chair.

Even if I could conjure up an army and seize the throne, it doesn't guarantee taking over these soldiers, wealth, and power, and the nobles would oppose me instantly.

Don't be fooled by the current struggle between nobility and the royal family, if I really broke the rules, the Upper House would immediately convene a meeting to declare my throne invalid and nominate Joshua or another royal member to assume power.

And those stability-pursuing merchant members of the Lower House wouldn't endorse a queen who rose to power by breaking the rules... In short, if I really stormed the palace, everything would truly be over."

"Not necessarily."

Patently listening to the Princess, Leon thought for a moment, then calmly analyzed:

"People are creatures of habit, the old King has been ill for the past six years, during which many of the Kingdom's affairs have mostly been handled by you, and he only shows up occasionally.

The royalist officials within the seventeen major departments say they are loyal to the royal family, but in reality, they've been following your orders for the past six years. Some are even like the ministers of the military department, outright appointed by you, they've already gotten used to following your commands.

So your advantage is much greater than you think. As long as you can stabilize the situation, these royalist officials may not stand against you, most will choose to wait and see, or even actively offer allegiance."

"???"

Regarding the soldiers, that's even less of a problem. As long as you can implement the officer replacement order, even if you can only change three-tenths of the mid-to-low level officers, your influence in the military department would be greatly amplified. If you can temporarily stabilize the situation, you might even garner unimaginable support.

After all, on one side is an old rule that disregards talent for lineage, suppressing them for life, while on the other side is a chance to rise up, even intending to give them more under a new queen... The choice isn't a hard one, right?"

"Leon?!"

Watching Leon analyze the possibilities with burning eyes, the Princess found herself suddenly astonished and incredulous, exclaiming:

"Do you know what you're saying?!"

Chapter 487: All Set and Ready

"Of course, I know what I'm talking about."

Faced with Princess Veronica's questioning, Leon blinked, and then continued speaking:

"And I haven't finished my words. Besides the officer elimination order, aren't you also preparing to propose the bill to expand citizen suffrage at the parliament meeting the day after tomorrow?"

This proposal, apart from diluting the merchants' influence and preventing them from excessively profiting from the royal family and nobility, also practically expands the power of parliament, giving more groups the opportunity to speak up.

I've read the newspapers. In the policies you've been implementing these past years, you've been strongly supporting the energy industry, reducing taxes for small craftsmen, subsidizing farmers, and recently even regulating the minimum hourly wage of factories. Therefore, big merchants do not support you much, but it's uncertain for other groups.

I don't know how you see it, but I think that once the bill to expand suffrage is passed, a newly formed parliament not entirely controlled by merchants might be very welcoming to a new queen who has been striving for their interests."

"..."

Could it really be seen this way?

Watching Princess Veronica's slightly parted rosy lips and her expression full of amazement, Leon remarked meaningfully:

"Actually, after hearing you talk about the officer elimination order and the proposal to expand suffrage, I even thought you were already preparing to ask the old king to abdicate.

After all, the royal family will not truly support you, but the mid-to-lower ranks of the military and the new parliamentarians representing craftsmen, farmers, and workers can only choose to support you to stabilize their newly acquired positions and power.

So, as long as you wait a bit longer and push these two matters through completely, the mid-to-lower ranks of the military and the new parliamentarians coming in after the expansion of suffrage will be fully tied to your chariot... To be honest, are you really not doing this on purpose?"

"I... I really never thought of this..."

After hearing Leon's words with her mouth open, Princess Veronica said with a somewhat bewildered look in her eyes:

"The purpose of my restructuring of the military was because the military held by the old nobility was too corrupted, leaving the kingdom's armament in disarray, and expanding suffrage was because there were too many merchant-born legislators, and the proposals in the past two years have been too biased... This... this..."

"This proves that you chose the kingdom, and the kingdom, in turn, chose you."

After defining this coincidence, Leon stared into the princess's eyes, adjusted his emblem accordingly, and earnestly advised:

"Whether intentional or not, what you've steadfastly been doing over these years has indeed given you returns, becoming your strongest support!

So, you don't need to feel uneasy, nor should you have any mental pressure. After all, you're not an ambitious person seeking power; you've simply done the right thing."

"..."

I just... did the right thing?

Troubled by Leon's words and repeating this sentence twice in her heart, the princess unconsciously clenched the corner of her clothes with her palm, then bit her lower lip and shook her head, saying:

"The mid-to-lower-ranking military officers and the new parliamentarians, they... although they certainly are strong supporters, they are only supporters. They haven't truly grasped power, while for the past few hundred years, the royal family and the nobility have led everything in the kingdom. They will never tolerate such behavior."

If I really did so, it would be fine if it succeeds. But if it doesn't, the entire kingdom would certainly fall into chaos, and after the Icefield Kingdom just went through a harsh winter, once the weather warms up and they take advantage of the kingdom's internal unrest..."

"There will be no chaos."

Leon shook his head and then pointed at himself, saying:

"Did you forget? I'm the biggest old nobility! You're worried the Upper House might declare your throne invalid, but as the Duke of Lionheart, I'm the vice president of the Upper House.

Moreover, if necessary, I also have a good relationship with the last member of the Bauhinia Family. I could probably secure her support, which means that the president and vice president of the Upper House are now both on your side!"

"It's not the same!"

Facing Leon's suggestion, the princess, for some reason breathing a bit rapidly, hurriedly shook her head and said:

"After the Ryan Blood Night, many key figures of the Ryan Family perished, and Bauhinia has only Miss Emma left. The current Twin Pillars of the kingdom no longer hold the same status.

Although according to the foundational laws, as long as your two families have people remaining, the seats of president and vice president must be retained, but when it truly comes down to it, you two can't decide the Upper House's judgment."

"That doesn't matter. According to the kingdom's laws, when both the president and vice president concur, it's equivalent to direct approval in the Upper House. If it can't pass, then it means there's a problem with the Upper House itself."

Having thought long about this issue, Leon said without blinking:

"If the Upper House goes against the will of both speakers and forcibly invalidates your throne, you can simply declare the Upper House's judgment invalid under the kingdom's laws, can't you?"

"Huh?"

"My point is, don't play by their rules. At times like these, everyone should fight their own battles."

Leon looked directly into the princess's eyes and, with heartfelt sincerity, explained:

"You don't need to make the Upper House acknowledge your throne. You just need a reasonable argument to start dragging and bickering with the Upper House, making sure they can't justly declare your throne invalid, and that's considered a goal met."

After all, as long as your throne isn't declared invalid, you are still the titular queen. The Upper House doesn't have the power to muster forces and drive you out of the palace, while with the support of mid-to-lower-ranking officers, you can instead mobilize forces to surround the Upper House... After all, aren't they the ones who broke the law?"

"..."

Ah, could this... really be possible?

Seeing Princess Veronica, her thoughts not entirely open yet and still thinking of "playing by the rules," Leon, his eyes gleaming, couldn't help but remind:

"You've already said it, the only stationed troops in the entire capital are at the palace, the rest are all outside; even if the guards of the noble manors are elite, facing an organized army with heavy weapons, what kind of waves can they raise?"

To be straightforward, under the current circumstances, if you don't care about legitimacy, you wouldn't even need to surround the Upper House, because even with the power of the old nobility, inside the capital, it's just one squad of guards.

Just mobilize two squads; one to blockade the manors on Redwood Avenue to prevent people from coming out, and the other to block Louthier Arcade, pile up some random things along the riverway, and then the Upper House is effectively dissolved on the spot.

After all, to have a say in the Upper House, one must at least be a viscount, and there are only so many nobles above viscount in the whole capital, all living on those two streets. If you trap their entire families, are you still worried they won't listen to you?

To be even more blunt, you only want to succeed your father, you're not intending to take the lives of those old nobles. Given their loyalty to the royal family, do you think they would risk their entire families' lives in a deadlock against someone who can mobilize troops?"

Chapter 488: All That's Needed Is a Nod

"..."

Indeed, considering the nobility's level of loyalty to the royal family... no, such a thing never existed in the first place, it's not even something that requires a "level" to describe.

As long as one isn't foolish enough to declare the abolishment of all nobility directly, and their core interests remain untouched, they will surely play dead without hesitation. If the situation becomes sufficiently clear, it's even possible they might directly switch sides...

After pondering over Leon's words for a while, the princess couldn't help but bite her lower lip. Her plump legs beneath the long dress unconsciously came together and twisted tightly, an inexplicable tension rising within her.

"I admit, it's not impossible indeed..."

Taking a deep breath, the princess, almost completely persuaded by Leon, pressed her fingernail into her palm forcefully, then said with pursed lips:

"But what you are saying happens after success. Right now, there's only one army in the entire royal capital. I simply don't have the manpower to storm the palace, and what's more, he's my father, I really don't wish to..."

"You can have the ideas, and you can have the manpower too."

Interrupting the princess, Leon closed his mouth, took out the slightly trembling black goat from the mirror world, and then held the princess's hand, directly communicating through the soul:

'It's safer to speak like this... Remember the rebels who raided the Boarding Tower before?'

???

Upon hearing Leon's words, the princess's hand subconsciously tightened slightly, then she said with some surprise:

'You mean? You have a connection with those rebels?'

'I've had some contact with them a few times...'

Considering what he's prepared to do, which is absolutely taboo with the Clean-up Bureau, Leon did not directly admit it, instead vaguely bypassing the topic, making a straightforward proposal:

'On the rebel side, there are a few hundred members who have received basic military training and can use simple weapons, and there are even a few exceptional item holders. So if you wish, I can help you make contact.

But in exchange, once everything is over, you must issue an amnesty order for those regular members, absolving some of their crimes, and accept those who have not committed too many extreme acts.

Additionally, once our Virgo sub-branch people arrive and capture those exceptional item holders, you must also pardon their death sentences and agree for them to join the Clean-up Bureau.'

'...'

Isn't your service a bit too thorough?

Looking at the Leon in front of her who not only provided "revolt guidance," but also put effort into her psychological construction, even offering people, resources, and plans, arranging everything meticulously from start to finish, the princess really felt a bit on edge.

'How are you so skilled at this?!'

Grabbing Leon's palm forcefully, biting her lip, the princess stared into his eyes and said a bit exasperatedly:

'What you've just mentioned, it can't possibly be thought through in just a day or two. You must have been pondering this for quite some time, right? Why would you think about these things for no reason?'

'How could I not think about them? I even feel that what I'm doing now is far from enough!'

Grasping the princess's hand firmly to stop her from further scratching, Leon took a deep breath, his expression calm, and said:

'Haven't you investigated my file? If you look carefully, you will know that before I joined the Clean-up Bureau, my family was genuinely out of options.

However, in the documents you saw, it probably only states that Anna was critically ill and hospitalized, and I chose to join the Clean-up Bureau to save her. But you would never know what this simple description truly means to me.'

Recalling the future that the King of Nightmares displayed through his crown, the one he feared most in his heart, Leon's eyes dimmed slightly as he narrated that past for the first time actively.

'More than four months ago, the military's Consolation Officer came for a revisit, determined that I had come of age, and in accordance with the new rules, stopped the military dependent pension early. After that, Anna felt that the family couldn't hold on any longer, so she secretly stopped taking her medicine...'

...

Was there such a thing back then?

As Leon recounted, hearing about that struggling small family, which had been grappling for years and still nearly pushed to the brink, the princess's hands could not help but subconsciously tighten more and more, her delicate palms even unknowingly damp with sweat.

She had seen Leon's sister, a gentle and beautiful girl who, when she smiled, liked to tilt her chin forward a little.

However, appearing well-mannered and gentle, Anna, who always wore a faint smile, was under such pressure from life that she could propose such a cruel request, truly tugging at her heartstrings and causing her to subconsciously lighten her breathing.

Once Leon finished recounting his experiences, she finally exhaled a long breath, then grasped Leon's hand, her eyes full of remorse, and said:

'I'm sorry... If I could have done a little better, even just a bit earlier, your family wouldn't have to suffer such things. Luckily, you joined the Clean-up Bureau, or else...'

'Yes, fortunately, I joined the Clean-up Bureau, but how many Leon's have the opportunity to join the Clean-up Bureau?'

Watching the princess's suddenly pale face, Leon's gaze was calm as he continued:

'By joining the Clean-up Bureau, I temporarily freed my family from an unfortunate future. But for those "Leon's" who have no Clean-up Bureau to join, they can only drag their sister's body at night and secretly throw it into the sewage river to exchange for the pension that should never have been stopped, and there are even more "Leon's" who don't even have the opportunity to do this.'

'Leon... I... I'm sorry...'

Remembering the role she played in all this, the princess couldn't help but bite her lip until it turned white, lowering her head for the first time, unable to meet Leon's eyes.

'I'm sorry, truly sorry! If I hadn't investigated the military and driven them to urgently cover their losses, your family wouldn't have...'

'No, you're not wrong.'

Leon shook his head and said:

'You've always been doing the right thing. The wrong ones are not the ones like you who want to investigate the military, but those who created the deficits and then targeted the military dependant pensions.

Moreover, since you're not wrong, it must be something else that's wrong... Veronica, you asked me why I would think about these things, and this is the reason! I want to change those wrong things!'

Gripping the princess's slightly moist palm tightly, he pulled her a little towards him, then stared into her slightly evasive eyes, seriously stating:

'I know you haven't made up your mind to do this yet, and asking you to disregard the bond between father and daughter and use force to seize your father's throne is rather challenging for you, but I sincerely hope you will seriously consider my proposal!

This stagnant Kingdom still has countless Anna's who are sick, countless Leon's with nowhere to join, waiting for a change that can save their lives!'

'Leon... I...'

'I don't know how to be a King, nor am I capable of being this savior, but you can!'

Reflecting on these short three years of life, with a fiery feeling in his heart, Leon released the princess's hand, then gently lifted her chin, turning her face towards him, staring into her uneasy eyes, and said each word with firm conviction:

"Veronica, changing all of this only requires you to nod!"

Chapter 489: The Three Goats Confer and Are Summoned

Finally... finally...

Watching Leon reach out to hold the princess's face and forcefully invite her to "do big things" together, the Black Goat couldn't help but hold its breath, a hint of excited flush appearing on its sheep face.

Finally got to wait for this moment!!!

This kid is too cautious, doesn't act rashly when not confident. I originally thought I'd have to endure for another three, five, or seven years, until he became powerful enough to see him driven by his own desires, starting to wantonly unleash his anger on this world.

Unexpectedly, after joining the Clean-up Bureau, just two months of working diligently, he could no longer contain the flames in his heart and began making a move on this human Kingdom!

And once he uses this silly woman in front of him as a springboard to obtain the ability to act recklessly, the rage that has been fermenting in his heart for over two months, and finally ignited by the King of Nightmares, will completely sweep everything away!

Just the slightest reverie about that beautiful future was enough to make the Black Goat, which had been suffocated for a long time, tremble with excitement.

At that time, just extracting a small portion of nourishment from his rampaging fury will be enough for me to transform, and I will finally...

"I will finally succeed!"

Amid the stunned expression of the Black Goat, a voice full of joy burst violently into its soul.

"Wonderful! This is truly wonderful!"

Through the eyes of the Black Goat, feeling the surging desires, it was as if it witnessed the seeds it had painstakingly planted for a long time finally breaking through the dark soil, tentatively protruding tender green buds; the Heart of Ambition couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"This ultimate ambition will surely bring ultimate power, and ultimate power will also give birth to ultimate arrogance! Once he completely controls the entire Kingdom, this greed that swells to the extreme will surely aid me to return to the pinnacle!"

"..."

Aren't I the first one to arrive here? Who the hell are you to babble here?

Unexpectedly, there were others... demons even crazier than itself, the Black Goat was instantly furious, yet just as it was about to unleash a tirade in the soul against the Heart of Ambition, another extremely excited voice rang out.

"This is greed! I feel the endless greed! This desire to dominate everything, making the entire Kingdom conform to him..."

"Are you blind? This is obviously endless ambition!"

"But I clearly see..."

"Bullshit! You two blind demons don't even have eyes, and you think you can see shit! This is absolutely the rampaging wrath that destroys everything!"

"Ha, who do you think you are? I am the strongest, so if I say it's arrogance, it is arrogance!"

"I think, it does not matter whose eyes they are, after all, with this endless greed as nourishment, your eyes will eventually become mine."

"Get lost! Do not come inside! Get out of my head!"

...

As the three demonic spirits were quarreling over Leon, starting to mock and curse each other, the princess, who was also troubled by Leon's question, was looking a bit helpless as she softly pleaded:

"Leon, I really don't know what to do. Your words are a bit... a bit too sudden. Can you give me more time to think it over?"

"Of course, since this matter should be led by you, the final decision must respect your will."

Looking at Princess Veronica's eyes, understanding that this was the current limit, Leon did not continue to press, but nodded and withdrew his hand from her face.

"Thank you..."

As the burning palm left her cheek, Princess Veronica involuntarily let out a breath, then couldn't help biting her lower lip and softly inquired:

"Leon, I...I didn't nod just now, would you be very disappointed in me?"

Leon was silent for a moment upon hearing this, then shook his head and said:

"I am disappointed, but not in you, since you were never obligated to do this."

In fact, you only need to go back and make a clear stance, indicating a willingness to give up those proposals that could harm the royal family's interests and dilute the King's power, and there is a significant chance of inheriting the throne without taking such risks.

It is rather me who is constantly exploiting your kindness, trying to force you to agree to my suggestion, so no matter what you decide in the end, I can understand."

Can understand... but not necessarily agree?

After catching the implied meaning in Leon's words, Princess Veronica pursed her lips once more, then said with a complicated look:

"Leon... whether it's known to the Kingdom or the Clean-up Bureau, the outcome for you wouldn't be too good. Aren't you worried that I would betray you?"

Leon looked at her upon hearing this, fingers pressing against the Black Goat beside him below the table, then said seriously:

"Would you?"

"No."

Using the soul vision of the Black Goat, Leon looked at the essence of the princess and nodded, saying:

"Then I'm not worried."

"..."

Seeing Leon choose to trust her after just getting her verbal promise, Princess Veronica felt a slight warmth in her heart, then said softly with gentle eyes:

"Leon, may I ask you one last question?"

"Go ahead."

"I want to know why you think I will change this country after becoming queen?"

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing this, Leon was slightly taken aback, then responded by asking:

"Aren't you already changing this country?"

Chapter 490: The Three Goats Confer and Are Summoned

Am I... already changing this Kingdom?

Upon hearing Leon's response, Princess Veronica also froze slightly, then subconsciously tightened her fist.

Yes, although the stagnant water hasn't been completely broken yet, just like Leon said before, I've always been doing the right thing!

Even Leon is willing to take great risks to share his thoughts with me, which stems from his recognition of my efforts, so all these things I've been doing over the years haven't been in vain. Perhaps... I've truly let some people see the light.

"Thank you..."

Filled with a profound sense of affirmation from Leon's response, the princess took a deep breath, relying on the remaining shreds of her rationality, barely restraining herself from agreeing on the spot.

"I will leave first. As for your proposal... I will definitely consider it carefully."

Leaving behind these words, feeling her heart burning, she quickly walked out of the private room and left the restaurant, hurriedly stepping into the slightly chilly night breeze of the royal capital.

Leon, who couldn't stop her in time, stood up, intent on following her out, but was politely and unavoidably stopped by the waiter standing by the door.

"Excuse me, sir."

With a sympathetic glance at the abandoned Leon, the well-dressed waiter steeled himself, smiling courteously:

"The dishes you ordered are already being prepared. Is there anything else you need?"

"..."

What do I need... I need you to call back the one who's supposed to pay the bill!

Looking at the waiter in front of him, who was examining him with a wary look as if afraid he might skip out on the bill, Leon's lips opened and closed slightly, but in the end, he couldn't bring himself to call the princess back to pay.

"Well, um..."

However, after thinking about the prices on the menu, the recent financially strained leader of the rebellious faction awkwardly coughed before tentatively suggesting:

"Are there any dishes that haven't been made yet? After all, my... lady companion had to go home due to an emergency, and I can't finish so much food by myself. Can a few of them be canceled?"

"I'm sorry, but all the dishes have already been prepared. However, I can hurry them up for you."

"Alright then..."

...

What was I here for again?

As Leon sat in front of a table full of sumptuous dishes, painfully consuming the most expensive meal of his life, the princess, riding in the carriage, suddenly remembered her original plan amidst the growling reminders from her stomach.

Wait a minute?

Today, I only wanted to invite Leon for a meal to slightly foster our relationship, to prevent him from constantly thinking about canceling the engagement. How did it turn from ordering dishes and chatting for a bit to a sudden change in conversation, discussing an armed coup to suppress the nobility and seize the throne?

Moreover, I don't think we even got to eat...

Pressing her growling stomach, recalling the bizarre development just now, the princess couldn't help but blink helplessly.

Really... every time I'm alone with Leon, something is bound to go wrong.

We went to watch a play and got attacked by anomalies, turning the play into acting. Later, when I visited to strengthen our relationship, I over-teased him, ending up being thrown on his couch for a night.

And today is the most absurd. I only wanted a simple meal invitation, and to ask him to appear at the upcoming parliamentary meeting to help advance my proposal. But I was nearly convinced to directly instigate an armed usurpation...

No matter what purpose I have, after encountering Leon, things peculiarly deviate from the original plan, taking me down a new path I never anticipated, leading to an outcome completely unrelated to the initial intention.

A strange man... hmm... but that doesn't seem so bad.

Thinking this, for some reason, Princess Veronica suddenly raised her hand, gently touching her left cheek.

Just a few minutes ago, a startlingly warm palm, not allowing any refusal, was holding it, asking me to answer his question directly.

Who would have thought that the little man who couldn't withstand my light teasing actually had such a domineering side...

Imitating Leon's action, attempting several times to hold her cheek, but failing to recapture that peculiar yet not unlikable feeling, the princess had to let her hand drop, leaning against the carriage's wall, trying her best to clear her chaotic thoughts, starting to ponder Leon's proposal.

If I refuse Leon, after the parliament ends the day after tomorrow, it won't take long before Father, as King, demands the annulment of my engagement with Leon, planning to marry me off far away.

Then, not only will I lose Le... lose the efforts of many years, but I'll also lose the chance to completely change the Kingdom, watching countless "Leons" and "Annas" continue to struggle in painful lives.

But if I choose to agree to Leon's proposal, it would mean severing the last bit of father-daughter relationship, and knowing Father's stubborn character, he'd likely never speak another word to me until his death.

Moreover, Father has been King for nearly twenty years, and his esteem is considerable. To ensure the Kingdom's stability, I must put him under house arrest. Given the Old Nobility's inevitable backlash following reform implementation, this period might last over ten years, maybe even longer.

Father has been ill for six years and his health has always been poor. If put under house arrest and dealt with anger, he might not survive until the situation stabilizes, the day the house arrest ends...

What should I choose?

Returning to the palace by carriage, full of indecision, the princess walked into her bedroom, stood before the shelves beside the table, and zoned out.

Atop the shelves was a line of somewhat old-fashioned, yet evidently often wiped photo frames. The largest picture was of a young, healthy couple with a girl full of laughter in her eyes.

Though the photo was a bit old and quite faded in the light, careful examination would still make the girl's features discernible, along with her heartfelt laughter.

The girl in the photo wore a flower crown of wildflowers and sat on a swing made from planks and vines, swinging high into the sky, her carefree eyes so clear, devoid of any later guile or pretension.

Behind the girl was a young man with deeply grooved tear ducts beside his nose, but his smile was gentle. He was posed to push, arms extended, energetically pushing the girl's swing into the high air.

Not far from this father-daughter duo, a young woman, caught half-body in the frame, was sitting on a chair beside the swing, her eyes full of warmth as she watched her husband and daughter play.

"Father... Mother..."

Gently touching the old photo, the princess slightly clenched her fist, moving her gaze down a level.

A metal doll with a half-broken cheek smiled quietly, almost mournfully, leaning on the shelf. Its two emerald glass eyes gazed at her timidly, carrying a trace of inexplicable grievance.

"..."

Six years ago in Cornwall City... the ruined factory at the street's end... the beautiful syrup spilling onto the ground... the survivors hiding in the warehouse... the little girl hugging the doll and looking at me timidly... the aerial fuel bombs... the ignited syrup... the turbulent orange-yellow sea of flames...

Upon seeing the metal doll, with eyes the same color as the girl's, six years' worth of nightmares surged uncontrollably into the princess's heart once more.

Gently stroking the burn marks on the doll's arm, thinking of Leon's expression while recounting his past, the princess involuntarily bit her lip again.

"Knock, knock knock."

As the intense internal struggle waged within the princess, a knock sounded on the door.

"Your Highness."

Upon receiving the princess's permission, two ladies-in-waiting opened the door and entered, respectfully stating:

"His Majesty knows you have returned and would like you to come over and discuss the situation after this afternoon's meeting with the Prime Minister."