

I! Cleaner 541

Chapter 541: Prayer Wheel

Do you want Leon to use the Prayer Wheel once?

After hearing the request of the Red-haired Director, Mr. Taurus's expression paused slightly, and a trace of hesitation appeared on his face.

Noticing the change in Mr. Taurus's expression, Leon couldn't help but raise his eyebrows slightly, feeling a curious interest in this "Prayer Wheel."

If Aquarius is the father of the female reporter, then Mr. Taurus is like the mother to our director, taking extraordinary care of her. Given their relationship, even for a precious abnormal object, Mr. Taurus would agree without a second thought.

And now, the director is not even asking for something for herself, just to borrow the "Prayer Wheel," yet Mr. Taurus hesitates. This "Prayer Wheel" must be quite remarkable!

...

"Olivia."

Under Leon's curious gaze, Mr. Taurus hesitated for a moment before finally speaking instead of agreeing directly:

"If I convince Director Sagittarius to lend out the Prayer Wheel, how do you intend to use it?"

"Of course, we would only make the most basic wish!"

Seeing Mr. Taurus's attitude soften, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but be slightly pleased, patting her chest as she promised:

"Isn't Leon in need of a suitable abnormal object? I plan to let him spin the material wheel once to find him a suitable abnormal object, and we won't touch the higher-level Floating Life Wheel or Fate Wheel!"

Just the most basic material wheel?

After hearing the Red-haired Director's promise, Mr. Taurus's expression relaxed slightly, but after glancing at Leon, he still said with some concern:

"But you... sorry, this might sound harsh, but each of you harbors regrets in your hearts. If the Prayer Wheel is handed over to you entirely, I'm not sure if you can resist the temptation to use it."

"You're underestimating me!"

The Red-haired Director retorted, feeling a bit indignant:

"Leon's will might be a bit weak, but I'm the Director of the Zodiac Branch Office, haven't I been through enough over the years? Even a True God specializing in souls couldn't shake my will; it is firm!"

"..."

Yeah, right! A True God might not shake your will, but a good bottle of wine might!

Watching the Red-haired Director's confident face, Mr. Taurus couldn't help but move his lips, then involuntarily glanced at the Red-haired Director's lips, and finally, couldn't help but glance at Leon.

Seeing where Mr. Taurus's gaze landed, Leon suddenly felt uneasy, realizing she was thinking of the director's birthday when they tried to bypass Mr. Taurus's Word Spirit with their tongue... er... and ended up drinking a mouthful of chili oil. He could only return an awkward smile.

"Let's drop it..."

Recalling the trouble-making drunk duo traits of Leon and the director, Mr. Taurus immediately squashed the idea of trusting them this once, resolutely refusing:

"The Prayer Wheel is too significant for you two to have. The bureau is busy, and if you two mess around, no one will clean up your mess.

As for Leon's abnormal object... I haven't discussed with Director Sagittarius about the task of investigating the Crolock Kingdom yet, it might take some time to settle, you can wait, I will look for a suitable abnormal object... that's it, I have things to do!"

Worried that the Red-haired Director would continue her persistence, after refusing her request, Mr. Taurus didn't wait for her to protest and directly turned off the Celestial Globe Mirror, forcibly ending the communication.

What a pity... we almost convinced her!

Seeing that the persistence didn't succeed, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but sigh in disappointment, and before Leon could ask, she directly explained:

"The Prayer Wheel I wanted to borrow for you is abnormal object number 005, one of the most important trump cards in the bureau... uh... to put it simply, it's a kind of omnipotent wishing machine, capable of fulfilling almost every wish of the user."

An omnipotent wishing machine? The Clean-up Bureau actually has such a thing?

Hearing this, Leon couldn't help but ask curiously:

"Director, can the Prayer Wheel really fulfill any wish? Is it that powerful?"

"It can 'almost' fulfill all wishes."

Correcting Leon's statement, the Red-haired Director explained:

"Strictly speaking, the Prayer Wheel doesn't directly fulfill all your wishes. Instead, after you make a wish, it 'tells' you how to achieve that wish.

Theoretically, no matter how outrageous the wish, as long as there is even the slightest possibility of realization, it can tell you how to achieve it by spinning the Prayer Wheel, ensuring success if followed."

My goodness, even if it doesn't directly fulfill wishes, the fact that it always provides the correct answer is already quite game-breaking.

After pondering the meaning of this, Leon couldn't help but click his tongue and say:

"So, it's like a natural 'All-knower' that always provides an answer?"

"Not entirely all-knowing."

The Red-haired Director shook her head:

"If you want a suitable abnormal object, simply with that thought, spinning the outermost material wheel will reveal its location; if you aim to become the king of a country, then you must spin the Floating Life Wheel and ask how to become king.

In short, the wishes and questions you propose cannot be overly ambiguous or bizarre and must fit within the scope of its seventeen wheels for the Prayer Wheel to respond."

"That's still quite impressive, though."

Leon couldn't help but exclaim:

"Just being able to always provide the correct answer makes it unsurpassed... By the way, Director, since it's so powerful, why doesn't the bureau use it more often instead of sealing it away?"

"Regarding that, when I first learned about the Prayer Wheel's existence, I asked Mr. Taurus the same question."

Frowning as she recalled, the Red-haired Director answered:

"At that time, Mr. Taurus told me that the 'correctness' of this item is relative, and journeying along the 'correct' path doesn't always lead to the best result, and excessive reliance on it is not wise."

"?"

"Let me explain it this way."

The Red-haired Director hesitated a bit as she organized her words, stating:

"Suppose you returned to when the Clean-up Bureau was newly established and constantly harassed by Outer Gods, and you asked the Prayer Wheel how to protect humanity, it would tell you to construct a 'Watcher's Palace.'

With the 'Watcher's Palace,' those True God-level beings are kept out of the present world, thus ensuring human safety. However, as a consequence, the overall strength of the Clean-up Bureau begins to decline.

At its peak, even without the support of the Star Palace, the twelve directors had Pillar God-level power, causing Outer Gods to flee in fear, trembling at the mention of the Clean-up Bureau's name.

But with the protection of the 'Watcher's Palace,' the probability of abnormal appearances drastically reduces, the intensity of battles with Outer Gods plummets, and the new generation faces too easy a situation, leading to extremely slow strength gains.

Once the older generation is gone, if their successors are too weak, incapable of reaching even a Pillar God-level, let alone True God-level, any breach in the 'Watcher's Palace' allowing Pillar God-level entities to descend would mean only destruction for humanity."

"..."

Seeing Leon enter contemplation, frowning by the side, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but sigh:

"Looking back at the Prayer Wheel, while its answers do fulfill your wish to protect humanity, it could lead to premature extinction for a species that could have survived naturally because of your protection.

Therefore, although the Prayer Wheel can always provide correct answers and your wish can always be fulfilled, the ultimate outcome may not be what you desire, which is why it remains sealed."

Chapter 542: Vacation Time~

Can it truly fulfill wishes, yet not lead to a good outcome?

After listening to the director's information about the [Wish Compass], Leon, amidst the prompt of "your resistance to the abnormal object has greatly increased," frowned in contemplation.

According to the director's description, using the [Wish Compass] doesn't seem to come with a cost, but none of the abnormal objects I've encountered are like that. With such a powerful effect, an abnormal object should have an equally impressive price.

Therefore, if using the [Wish Compass] indeed doesn't require any cost, perhaps the "not necessarily beautiful" result it yields is the price to be paid.

This thing... seems a bit eerie...

"By the way, Director."

After memorizing the information about the [Wish Compass], Leon couldn't help but ask:

"You seem to know a lot about the [Wish Compass]. Have you used it before?"

"I... sort of used it..."

Upon hearing this, the red-haired director hesitated, then pressed his lips together and responded somewhat succinctly:

"At the time, the Ophiuchus Sub-bureau rebelled, forcing the bureau into a tight spot. So the bureau used the [Wish Compass] once, wanting to know if there was a way to quell the Serpentarius' rebellion. After that... I was the one who executed that method."

"I see..."

Seeing the red-haired director's mood drop, Leon, who inadvertently stepped on a landmine, quickly shifted the topic:

"Well... regarding the incident where the royal palace was attacked by an abnormal object earlier, will the bureau send down investigators? When will the investigator arrive this time?"

"Hard to say."

After hearing Leon's words, the red-haired director glanced at him, then responded:

"The investigators responsible for the Kingdom on behalf of the bureau have basically all been offended by our people, and none of them want to take on the task of investigating us."

Among the two willing to come, Camus was proven to be a fake identity of the Aquarius Director, and the remaining female investigator, who was cursed twice by the black goat, is familiar with Camus and currently under investigation, so no one will be coming for a while."

"..."

Wow... this is even possible?

Although the purpose was only to change the topic, upon hearing the red-haired director's answer, Leon couldn't help but express his speechlessness:

"Does this mean that the matter of me rescuing the princess will simply be glossed over? The bureau won't even investigate?"

"As you said, you were just there to save someone in this incident."

The red-haired director smiled and said:

"If it were like Ryan's bloody night, where there were a large number of targeted casualties, and there was suspicion of a cleaner illegally using an abnormal object, the bureau would definitely send someone to investigate to the end, and those investigators would have no choice but to come.

However, the result of the palace being attacked, besides dozens of guards being injured, did not result in any deaths, and the royal family members were not in any danger. So, although the matter is significant, the priority for investigation by the bureau is actually not that high."

When you think of it like that, it does make sense...

After listening to the director's analysis, Leon couldn't help but nod in agreement.

For the Kingdom of Lutung, the princess ascending through a coup is undoubtedly major, but for the Clean-up Bureau, who sits on the throne is not that important. What matters is whether the bloodline of the Royal Family of Travistock is uninterrupted.

Since there are no issues with the bloodline of the palace members, for the Clean-up Bureau, there really isn't much that needs serious investigation. If it didn't involve the royal family, a random report from me might have sufficed.

Hmm... this information is worth noting; it might come in handy for future rebellions.

"Leon."

Just as Leon was gauging the red lines of the Clean-up Bureau, following their response, the red-haired director softly called him, then said:

"Would you like to take a vacation in the coming days?"

"Huh?"

"Haven't you taken on the investigation task to the Crolock Kingdom?"

Seeing Leon's somewhat puzzled expression, the red-haired director smiled and reminded him:

"Even if you can take the Sky Clipper, this overseas task won't be brief; you might not come back for a while.

Moreover, Mr. Taurus over there also needs a few days to prepare, and considering the discussions with the Scorpio Branch, it might even drag on for a week. So, I thought, why not take advantage of this gap and give you a few days off to spend some time with your family."

That's true...

After hearing the red-haired director's reminder, Leon realized that he hasn't been home much lately, and since he's going abroad soon, he indeed should spend more time with his family.

"Thank you, Director!"

Gratefully glancing at the red-haired director, Leon asked:

"So, should I start my vacation tomorrow?"

"Today, or rather, right now."

Returning to his desk and sitting down, the red-haired director glanced at the newspaper on the table, then frowned slightly. Continuing to read while not lifting her head, she said:

"Oh... by the way, here's another thing. Emma's daughter has regained her body and can leave Treasure Flower Manor.

Before going on a mission yesterday, she wanted me to help enroll that child in Bridge Public School so she could accompany your younger siblings and not be at home alone all the time. If you're available these two days, could you help handle her school enrollment?"

Little Ellie can attend school now?

Recalling the shy-eyed, always wearing a large sun hat, softly speaking, sweet little girl, Leon couldn't help but smile upon hearing the red-haired director's words.

"Sure, no problem at all!"

"Indeed, if you handle it, there will surely be no issue."

Flipping through the Royal Mail News in her hands and glancing at the headline news, the red-haired director couldn't help but smirk and said with a bittersweet sigh:

"For an administrative officer like me, there are probably ten or eight of us in the police department, and even more in the entire Kingdom, not even a hundred but at least eighty, not noticeable at all!

But the honorable prince is different; things that seem difficult for small officials like me, the prince probably only needs to give an order, and someone will eagerly handle them. It's really enviable.

Hmm, but compared to power, scorching hot as it may be, the most enviable thing about the prince is that he has a good wife, harmonious and loving, truly envy-inducing~"

"..."

Oh, come on... what's that about?

Suddenly roasted out of nowhere, Leon frowned slightly, puzzled, and asked:

"What are you trying to say?"

"Oh, nothing really."

Opening the newspaper's inner pages, turning the headline towards Leon, the red-haired director took a sip of tea and said with a chuckle:

"Just reading the news and having some reflections."

Reading the news?

Blinking in confusion, Leon glanced at the newspaper in her hands following the movement of the red-haired director.

Royal Mail News: "Kingdom of Saio's Royal Marriage Rejected, Princess: 'My Heart Has Been Devoured by the Lion'"

"..."

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Chapter 543: Renovation

New Industry News: "Rumor of the Princess's Upcoming Marriage Causes Royal Capital's Decoration Prices to Skyrocket"

Financial Times: "Princess's Stable Relationship; Ryan Armaments Counseled for Long-Term Hold"

The Sun News: "Exclusive Interview - Princess: The Best Partner is a Soul Friend"

Dance Entertainment News: "New Show at Central Cross Theatre—I Fell in Love with a Lion"

"..."

What the... is all this?

Though he had already mentally prepared himself, after getting off the bus, Leon couldn't help but feel a toothache as he walked home and saw the promotional posters at the newsstand.

Ever since the "Palace Incident," Princess Veronica had been busy stabilizing the situation, working hard to suppress the old nobility and trying to smoothly take power from the old King, so busy that her feet could hardly touch the ground, leaving no time to bother Leon.

But even though she wasn't there in person, her people were constantly "confessing their love" while working, seizing every chance to chat about it, and hiring people to spread news, frantically hyping up the romance.

Even though in the past week they hadn't even seen each other once, it was as if they were in a scandalous love affair, making the majority of the Royal Capital believe they were about to marry...

It's just absurd.

Letting out an extremely disdainful 'tsk', Leon turned the corner towards Happy Apartments, where an old burly man who hadn't been seen for a while emerged from the small garden beside the building, holding his exceedingly long garden shears.

"Good evening."

Leon politely greeted the old man and then walked into the apartment lobby under the man's watchful eyes.

After two months of back and forth, and experiences of being bound with wool and hung out overnight whenever he laid a hand on Leon, the old man's not-so-bright mind finally managed to remember the new rules of Happy Apartments—

No bad guys allowed in, but a certain "wicked little demon" is the only exception, free to come and go as he pleases.

Even though he still worried about the residents' safety, occasionally passing behind Leon or hiding outside his window at night with shiny garden shears, he hadn't directly laid a hand on him anymore.

"Hmm?"

Seeing Leon entering the building through the large window of the manager's office, the manager lady stopped knitting her wool, raised her head, and asked in surprise:

"Why are you back so early today? You usually don't come home until nighttime!"

"Haha, today's circumstances are special... This is a gift for you."

Opening the small window of the manager's office, Leon handed over a set of deluxe yarn he bought on the way, smiling as he explained:

"Recently, work has been going well, and I'm about to go on a business trip for a while, so the bureau gave me a few days off to relax, and spend time with family... By the way, where are Anna and the others?"

"They should be back soon."

The manager lady took the yarn in surprise, saying:

"It's school dismissal time, Anna should have picked up the two kids and is on her way back... Oh dear, this yarn isn't cheap! I can't accept it!"

"It's actually not that expensive, just a little gift, please accept it."

Returning the yarn offered by the manager lady, Leon expressed sincere gratitude:

"My job keeps me busy, often away from home, so Anna has to take care of William and Melanie by herself, and you and Uncle John have helped a lot with that, I remember all these acts of kindness.

Compared to the care you and Uncle John have given our family, this is just a small token, it wasn't even specially bought, just something I saw on the way back that I thought you might like... Oh, and there's something for Uncle John too."

While talking, Leon reached into his cufflinks to take out two large whetstones and a packet of select flower seeds from his mirrored world, pushing them back with the yarn, insisting earnestly:

"Aunt Mary, please accept them, the pay from the Clean-up Bureau is quite good, these are really nothing to me."

"Well... okay then."

Seeing Leon's insistence, the manager lady did not continue to refuse; instead, she accepted the yarn packets, planning to knit two pairs of gloves and hats for the Ryan family's two children to repay the favor.

After accepting the gifts, as if suddenly remembering something, she voiced a bit worriedly:

"By the way, city officials came by recently, saying they're preparing to renovate Happy Apartments and expand its area, did you know about this?"

Renovating Happy Apartments?

Hearing the manager lady's question, Leon couldn't help but be slightly stunned.

Indeed... though it's meticulously managed by the manager lady and the old man, the predecessor of Happy Apartments was after all a Charitable Asylum from over ninety years ago, making it essentially a century-old building now.

According to the Kingdom's "Building Repair Law," any mid to high-rise building facing the street in the Royal Capital should be inspected every ten years, repainted, and extensively renovated every fifty years, and it seems that Happy Apartments is due for such a renovation.

However, there are always counters to policies, wherever they may be an inviolable truth.

Although the Kingdom's regulations are meticulously crafted, both inspections and renovations require money and manpower.

Given the Kingdom's recent financial constraints, even cutting down the pensions for military families, the municipal department is naturally reluctant to undertake such labor-intensive and unprofitable tasks, and only buildings in the affluent and noble areas might receive proper maintenance.

After all, if a building collapses and injures someone, it's the contractor's responsibility, and the municipal department at most is guilty of negligent maintenance; considering the truly limited funds, of eating off the project's leftovers is already the limit.

But if such regulations were strictly enforced, conducting street-wide inspections and renovations frequently, not only promotions but maintaining even a modest career might be at risk for the person in charge, as they'd presumably be relegated to scrubbing toilets at the municipal office for the rest of their career.

So forget painting and renovating, even the once-every-decade inspections rarely happened, with staff barely glancing around, frivolously filling out repair claims, and pocketing some maintenance funds to finish the task.

While the municipal department was inactive, the residents couldn't disregard it, since their safety was their concern, thus Happy Apartments' renovations over the years had been funded and managed by the manager lady, leaving both her and the old man working for nearly a century without significant savings.

However, with their meager salaries, they only managed the most basic maintenance, leaving many parts of Happy Apartments extremely worn-out, barely maintaining functionality, with even the banisters in the stairwell missing several segments.

If the old man's impressive repair skills, honed over nearly a century, weren't in play, the continued existence of the Happy Apartments might even be in question.

...

"This is great news!"

Recalling the condition of Happy Apartments, Leon expressed his congratulations with pleasant surprise:

"The apartments really need some repairs. If the municipal department is willing to handle the renovation, you and Uncle John will have much less to worry about."

"That certainly is the case..."

The manager lady nodded in agreement but couldn't help voicing some concerns:

"But John and I are essentially part of this apartment, if the Happy Apartments are renovated and expanded... will we still have a place here?"

Chapter 544: Change

"..."

Upon hearing the caretaker lady's concern, Leon finally snapped back to the reality that the situation with Happiness Apartments was not as straightforward as it seemed.

The caretaker couple were too "human-like," which caused Leon to always treat them as particularly kind neighbors, somewhat neglecting their "non-human" essence.

The birth of Happiness Apartments was not only due to the seed of abnormality provided by the Aquarius Director but also stemmed from the gratitude and remembrance of those within the Charitable Asylum over ninety years ago, for the old couple who had helped them, and their heartfelt hope for the couple's continued existence.

Therefore, as an abnormal object, although the two were administrators and even received salaries from the city council, in reality, they were "vassals" of the building, not actual human beings, unable to exist independently of the apartment.

Moreover, abnormal objects themselves are not indestructible.

Like Leon's Witch's Broom, once broken, it never reacted again. If the city council were merely conducting maintenance, it probably wouldn't affect the old couple's existence. But if there was a large-scale renovation or expansion, the situation would become uncertain.

"I can't say for sure..."

Understanding the crux of the matter, Leon's expression became serious, and after contemplating for a moment, he proposed:

"How about this, I can submit a report to the Clean-up Bureau in the name of protecting the continuity of the abnormal object, to stop this renovation, and then ask for a large amount of funding, allowing you to decide what to do, so you don't have to worry about any issues."

"Hmm..."

However, what Leon hadn't expected was that after hearing his proposal, the caretaker lady hesitated a bit and ultimately shook her head and refused:

"Let's just have the apartment renovated normally. Rather than stopping the renovation and expansion, the old man and I would prefer for you to ensure that they don't evict the tenants after expansion and don't raise the rent here."

"That definitely won't happen."

Although Leon didn't like to use the privileges brought by his noble status, given a reasonable request like this, he naturally had no reason to refuse and directly nodded in agreement.

But then, he hesitated slightly and reminded:

"However, are you sure it's okay? I can't determine if this expansion counts as maintenance or damage to Happiness Apartments itself. If the outcome leans more toward damage, you and Uncle John might indeed disappear!"

"No problem."

Hearing Leon agree to her promise, the caretaker lady smiled reassuredly and explained:

"This place indeed needs a good renovation. There's a significant missing section of handrails on the stairs, and every time your two little ones run around the building, I'm on edge, worried they'll fall off the stairs while playing."

Moreover, Hannah and a few other families living here are planning to have children in the coming years. We can't let those children continue to live in such unsafe conditions, can we?"

"Aunt Mary, these two matters are not conflicting."

Leon insisted:

"Based on my understanding of abnormal objects, if the city council isn't leading it but you are in charge of the renovation, you should be able to ensure the impact is minimized. This way, even if there's a major renovation, it likely won't affect your continued existence."

"Let's not."

The caretaker lady pondered for a while before shaking her head, gently refusing with a kind expression:

"We can only manage some repairs, we don't have the capability to expand the building. But the city council folks said they've already coordinated with the surrounding buildings and even acquired the abandoned factory at the back, planning to expand Happiness Apartments eight to nine times.

Besides continuing to offer cheap rental housing, they seem to be preparing to reopen the former Charitable Asylum to take in children who've lost parents in the old city, providing some basic education and teaching vocational skills.

They said this is the new decree from the Princess because children represent the future of a country, so where conditions allow, the financial budget would prioritize education and childcare, with substantial annual funding allocations."

As she spoke, the caretaker lady seemed to have fully accepted the situation, initially smiled apologetically, and then expressed her happiness amid Leon's silence:

"I've never been too concerned about these decrees, so I don't quite understand what they say, but I think, as long as more homeless children can be taken care of, it's always a good thing, so let's do it however we should!"

"But if there really is expansion, the possibility of you disappearing with Happiness Apartments will be very high."

Leon considered and insisted:

"Here's what could be done, I can notify them to skip the Happiness Apartments area during expansion, focusing elsewhere, so both can remain intact."

"Let's not."

Seeing Leon's determination to preserve Happiness Apartments, the caretaker lady thought for a moment before knitting a circle of the yarn in her hands, then smiled kindly and declined:

"Happiness Apartments faces the street directly, if we skip this building, the future Charitable Asylum and the apartment would either need to bypass or open a new alley from the back, which would be quite troublesome.

Besides, the old man and I have lived long enough. Including life before and after death, I've lived for over a hundred and fifty years, even the city council folks who issued us our paychecks have died of old age, so there's no need to keep clinging!"

"But..."

"Thank you, dear, I know you don't want us to disappear, but we've really made up our minds."

Seeing Leon about to say more, the caretaker lady gently explained:

"Originally, we wanted to survive to take care of those evicted children, and once they all... left, we'd feel that the good people in the Royal Capital weren't living easy lives, so we thought to help if we could.

But we two, weren't anything remarkable in life, nor capable after death, couldn't do much, only helping out wherever we saw difficulty.

Now, with rare good news, once the new Charitable Asylum is built, this remaining building and patch of land can help more people, we are already content with no regrets."

"Alright then..."

It was unexpected that the Princess's ascension would impact the sustainability of Happiness Apartments. Seeing the caretaker lady's serene face post-discussion, Leon nodded and chose to respect their personal wishes.

Yet, respect aside, some things still need to be attempted.

Noting the subtle anticipation on the caretaker lady's face for the completion of the new Charitable Asylum, Leon tentatively suggested:

"Here's what I can do. I won't stop them from expanding Happiness Apartments, but can attempt to minimize changes to the original structure wherever possible, to see if your essence can be preserved.

Also, I somewhat understand the secret technique used by the Aquarius Director for your creation, perhaps when the city council begins construction, I might try using the secret technique to bond you two with the new Charitable Asylum... How would that be?"

Bond us with the new Charitable Asylum?

Upon hearing Leon's words, the caretaker lady hesitated slightly, but still expressed concern:

"But won't this affect..."

"It won't."

Leon shook his head:

"Consider it like taking on a part-time job, besides supervising Happiness Apartments, also being administrators and gardeners for the new Charitable Asylum!"

Pausing slightly, Leon then spoke to the caretaker lady, whose face showed signs of doubt:

"Aunt Mary, surely you wouldn't want to vanish before witnessing the new Charitable Asylum open, right?"

Chapter 545: The Trolley Problem

"Then... let's try to live a few more years..."

Faced with Leon's Japanese-style question, the administrator lady hesitated for a while but couldn't resist the temptation of personally witnessing the establishment of the New Poverty Relief Institute and finally agreed to Leon's proposal.

However, even so, she couldn't help but advise:

"But don't be too deliberate. My husband and I have lived long enough, and we're very satisfied. There's no need to go to great lengths for us."

"Yeah, yeah, definitely not."

After hearing the administrator lady's words, Leon smiled on the surface, but in his heart, he had made up his mind. When the New Poverty Relief Institute starts, he must find a way to preserve this elderly couple as much as possible.

If they really feel they've lived enough and want to rest forever, there's no reason for him to stop them. But now it's obvious they still have some concerns, they just don't want their presence to affect the establishment of the New Poverty Relief Institute. So, he definitely needs to do some "behind-the-scenes manipulation."

While Leon, who was acting "two-faced," was contemplating how to be a power broker and quietly preserve Happy Apartments, three familiar footsteps came from outside the door.

Soon after, Anna, with a slightly darkened complexion, appeared outside the apartment door, holding William, looking calm, with her left hand and Melanie, full of despair, with her right.

"Anna, slow down, slow down, okay?"

Melanie, whose ear was red, clearly twisted hard by someone, begged pitifully with a crying face:

"It's not even five o'clock yet, we don't need to rush home, do we? Also, I saw Grandpa John fixing the fence in the little garden, why don't you go help him first?"

"Melanie, you should just accept your fate."

Before the dark-faced Anna could answer, William, with an equally red ear, spoke calmly:

"As far as I understand Anna, we can't escape a beating today. If she lets out her anger immediately, we might get a few less hits, but if she holds it in a bit longer, who knows what will happen."

"..."

Darn... I barely got a two-day break, and as soon as I got back, it's all chaos...

Seeing his siblings in such a tense situation outside the door, Leon's lips twitched slightly, and then he went up with a hint of helplessness to ask:

"Anna... what trouble did they get into this time?"

"Eh?"

Hearing Leon's voice, Anna, who was wrestling with their sister, trying not to go home, suddenly looked up in surprise and somewhat delightedly said:

"How come you're..."

"Big brother!!!"

Before Anna could finish her sentence, Melanie, who was unwilling to step onto the stairs just a moment ago, suddenly shot forward and dashed into the hall, skillfully hiding behind Leon and grabbing his trouser leg.

"Big brother, you don't look well!"

Seeing her savior appearing, Melanie's previously despairing face instantly blossomed into a bright smile, as she eagerly said to Leon while winking at him:

"Are you too tired from work? Shall I give you a shoulder massage? Or maybe tell you a story?"

"We'll see..."

Seeing his little sister being exceptionally well-behaved, Leon knowingly patted her little head and gave her a helpless smile.

"In our family, we listen to your sister Anna. We have to hear what she has to say before I know if I'm tired and need a shoulder rub."

"It's not that exaggerated..."

Hearing Leon's words, Anna's cheeks slightly flushed, and she teasingly complained while twisting Melanie's little ear half a turn in the latter's despairing gaze, using her signature sister move.

"Just wait till we get home!"

Issuing a tactical threat to her little sister, whom she pulled out from behind Leon, Anna first greeted the administrator lady, then turned to Leon with curiosity, saying:

"How come you're home so early today?"

"Hmm... I've been working overtime a lot lately, so the office gave me a few days off."

Without mentioning the business trip to Crolock Kingdom, Leon made up an excuse and then, while picking up his still-calm brother and walking toward the stairwell, he curiously asked:

"Let's not talk about me. What exactly did they do this time to make you so angry?"

"Big brother, that's prejudiced."

Upon hearing Leon's inquiry, William straightened his little face and replied seriously:

"Though Melanie and I are a bit naughty, we aren't just troublemakers."

"So you haven't caused trouble lately?"

"We have."

"..."

"Big brother, don't misunderstand."

Seeing Leon's speechless expression, William quickly explained earnestly:

"While we did cause trouble, Anna is not angry because of that. She's angry because of our poor academic performance. It's an intellectual issue, not our fault."

"You dare say that!"

Hearing William's explanation, Anna immediately turned red with anger and gently pinched him, unable to help but complain to Leon:

"Brother! You don't know how infuriating they are!"

In this exam, the last question in arithmetic was like this: Due to the long waiting time for the public carriage, the Department of Transportation plans to increase the number of carriages on Bridge Street, but due to limited funding, only two new carriages can be allocated.

Given that there were originally four carriages on Bridge Street, each operating 18 hours a day, and each carriage can return to the starting point for new passengers after 3 hours, how should they be arranged to best solve the waiting issue?"

How should they be arranged to solve the waiting problem?

After hearing Anna's words, Leon pondered on the math problem for a moment.

With limited funding, the Department of Transportation can only allocate 2 new carriages, plus the original 4 means 6 carriages. Each runs a circuit in 3 hours, and the total operating time is 18 hours a day, meaning each carriage can run 6 trips, totaling 36 trips.

If calculated this way, 18 hours for 36 trips means one trip every half hour... wait!

At this point, Leon suddenly realized that this seemingly simple problem had a very insidious trap.

Although it seems every carriage can run 6 trips in 18 hours, in reality, these 6 are not departing simultaneously in the morning but are staggered, so in fact, only one carriage can complete 6 trips daily.

"Hmm... For kids, this is indeed pretty challenging."

Frowning slightly, Leon said in confusion:

"William and others are transfer students and missed a lot compared to other children. It's perfectly normal they couldn't answer it. Is there a need to be so upset?"

"I'm not upset because he couldn't answer it, I'm upset because he did!"

Anna replied angrily:

"William's solution was to first deliver a speech on the street, criticizing the Transportation Department for misusing funds and stirring up discontent among Bridge Street residents to pressure the managers, then demand an audit of the carriage company's accounts to check for overspending.

After finding faults between the Transportation Department and the carriage company, he suggested going to a councilor to report them, threatening him with affecting the district votes to propose additional funding.

Once the proposal was on the agenda, it would involve raising funds for tabloid campaigns questioning if the underfunded Transportation Department was overly corrupt, or even colluding with councilors, leveraging public opinion to prevent them from voting against it, thus passing the proposal for more carriages. That way, there would never be a shortage of carriages!"

Chapter 546: A Historic Meeting?

"..."

Goodness, you really know how to solve problems.

After listening to his brother's genius-level problem-solving process, Leon's mouth twitched uncontrollably like it had a spasm.

If you can't figure out how to arrange the carriages, just jump out of the problem and study how to increase the number of carriages. Then you can arrange them however you like, right?

This problem-solving approach... how to say it... is very William.

His brother's mind seems never to be confined by any constraints, always ignoring those confusing details and cutting straight to the core of the issue.

No matter what the problem or question is, solve it if you can, and if not, solve the person who made it. Whether the process goes off track is not within his consideration range; just tell him if the problem is solved, and that's all that matters.

...

"Well... it's not exactly wrong."

Seeing Anna grinding her teeth in anger, Leon had to comfort:

"Although the solution method is a bit off, the flexible thinking is commendable. We shouldn't... uh... rush to stifle their potential... and they are still young, after all. Once they grow older, they might not scribble impulsively."

They won't scribble impulsively, but they might start acting outright!

Facing his apparently lenient brother who couldn't bear to punish the kids, Anna couldn't help but stomp her foot, then said rather angrily:

"And what about Melanie?"

Melanie didn't get it right either?

Upon hearing Anna's words, Leon, who was about to unlock the door, couldn't help but turn around, somewhat surprised:

"Isn't Melanie good at math? I remember the teacher praised her as a genius. Didn't she answer this question?"

"She answered it correctly, and her test paper was full marks."

Anna replied helplessly:

"She didn't even write out the process; she glanced at it and wrote down the answer. She finished the two-hour test in 5 minutes, then started helping others cheat for a fee, even developing a kind of... a kind of code, knocking answers with the pen on the desk.

In her exam room, apart from William who failed, every other kid got full marks in math. This brat made 9 Silver Wheels of pocket money by helping others cheat!"

"..."

"Moreover, to avoid being caught, she lent all the money out as soon as the exam ended. She signed contracts with 9 kids in the class, agreeing they will repay with snacks and toys over the next year, and she didn't even forget to calculate 4% interest!"

Ah, this... is far more severe than William's case, even his brother can't protect her here, so better take the punishment!

After hearing Melanie's equally outrageous actions, Leon, having entered the house, put William down, looked back at Melanie, and said helplessly:

"Big brother got off work early today, so I'm not very tired. How about skipping the shoulder massage?"

"Please, Big Brother!"

Seeing Leon was ready to let it slide, Melanie's face crumpled, and she said tearfully:

"My pocket money got deducted too much, so I thought I'd earn some snacks... I know I was wrong, I promise this is the last time I'll help anyone cheat, I swear I won't do it again, if I do, let Anna smash my butt!"

"No need for 'if', I'll smash your butt this time!"

"Waaaah!"

"..."

This holiday is really lively...

Watching Anna, with Melanie draped over her knees, smacking her butt, Leon couldn't help but shake his head. After Anna gave about a dozen smacks, he spoke:

"By the way, Emma's daughter will be attending Bridge Public School soon too."

"Little Ellie?"

Upon hearing Leon's words, Anna stopped her actions, put away her anger, and exclaimed with surprise:

"I thought she was unwell and needed plenty of rest? She can go to school now?"

"Yeah, little Ellie is almost fully recovered."

Giving Melanie a quick wink to signal her to run when she could, Leon replied:

"You know, she hasn't really interacted with kids of her age before, and she's quite timid. So I thought of placing her in the same class as Melanie and William."

With two familiar friends around, Ellie should be able to integrate into the class more quickly. Plus, having William and Melanie to look after her, we don't need to worry about her being bullied."

"..."

Isn't it only about not being bullied?

Upon hearing Leon's words, Anna couldn't help but glance at him.

With these two Demon Lords of Mayhem watching over, forget being bullied by peers; if little Ellie wanted to bully the teacher, it probably wouldn't be too hard.

For such a well-behaved child, the most dangerous peers are precisely these two little devils at home. It feels like hanging out with these two brats might lead her astray quite a bit.

"Brother."

Reaching this point, Anna couldn't help but call out to Leon, then inquired curiously:

"Are you telling me this so I can mention it to the school when dropping Melanie and the others off?"

"No need, I'll go with you tomorrow."

Leon shook his head, then, a little apologetically, said:

"I'm telling you this because I hope you can take care of another child. I hope little Ellie can also come and live here."

"Huh?"

Anna blinked in disbelief:

"Brother? You want little Ellie to live with us?"

"Yes."

Leon nodded:

"You know, Emma's job is the same as mine, even busier. She often can't make it home.

Little Ellie had no other choice before, so she had to stay by herself at the estate. Now that she can go out, staying alone in that empty mansion would be too lonely...

Hmm? Your expression seems a bit strange. Is there a problem with taking in another child?"

"Not really... Little Ellie is a good kid, I certainly don't mind her living with us, it's just..."

Anna shook her head slightly, hesitant, then continued:

"Brother, have you talked about this with Veronica?"

"?"

"I mean..."

Seeing Leon frowning, seemingly not grasping her question, Anna sighed, shoed Melanie and William back into the room, then whispered with a flushed face:

"Aren't you about to get married to Veronica? But there's also something between you and Emma, aren't you worried about conflicts between them?"

???

"Never mind the conflicts... Who said I'm getting married?"

"Huh? Aren't you?"

Anna blinked, puzzled:

"That's what the newspapers say. Also, Veronica came by yesterday; she asked me if I'd be her bridesmaid."

"What? She came by yesterday?"

"Yes, indeed."

Anna commented as Leon reacted, surprised:

"She said she was here to discuss the wedding with you. Although she didn't find you, she hired a new doctor for me, bought new clothes for Melanie, and even gifted William a whole set of books... Oh, by the way!"

At that point, Anna seemed to recall something, her expression turning curious:

"When Veronica came yesterday, William was doing his homework. After seeing his history homework, she first couldn't help but laugh for a while, then pondered over it for a long time, and finally borrowed a few of his old assignments, saying she wanted to look at them at home."

Borrowed a few old assignments?

Upon hearing Anna's words, Leon frowned in confusion.

Veronica is so busy, why would she be interested in a grade schooler's homework? Even if she... wait?! William's old assignments? Isn't it "Pan-Continent Unification Plan"?!

Chapter 547: Kingdom Conquest

The night was deep, with most of the Royal Capital already peacefully sinking into the darkness.

Although lamps weren't considered a luxury, for most citizens of the Royal Capital, if not for working under the lights, burning oil and lighting lamps pointlessly was undeniably quite a disgraceful waste.

Only the wealthy living in the Upper City, on places like Redwood Avenue and Louthier Arcade, would light their lamps all night long for some brightness, regardless of the cost.

And among the few "light zones" in the Royal Capital, the place with the most lamps was naturally the palace, at the heart of the Royal Capital.

However, after the palace quietly changed masters, most of those perpetually lit lamps were ordered to be turned off by the new master, with only one window still illuminated in the sleeping quarters at the rear of the palace.

Phew... Finally, almost done with the busy work.

After handling the desk work, the princess, known as the first night owl of the Royal Capital, stretched lazily like a cat, working out her sore muscles. Yet she didn't turn off the lights to sleep as usual, but instead took out a crumpled notebook from the shelf behind her, and quietly began to flip through it at the desk.

The writing in the notebook looked a bit crooked, but rather than saying the handwriting was ugly, it was more like it was drawn with feet sliding on the ice, with even straight lines written somewhat unstably. Thus, the chubby round fonts were filled with the unique innocence and charm of children.

However, though the handwriting seemed innocent, the contents of the notebook were far from naive, instead holding a rather sharp sense.

"The first step of the plan is to overthrow the royal family and completely unify the Kingdom!"

Looking at the royal family emblem marked with a red cross on William's old notebook, Princess Veronica couldn't help but slightly curl her lips.

Unlike the scribbles beside it, the royal family emblem, labeled "Target" on the notebook, was drawn rather meticulously, one could tell it was traced over the pattern by placing the homework paper on top and drawing precisely along the exposed lines.

Below the crossed-out royal family emblem was a brief map of the Kingdom's surrounding geography, similarly traced over a map.

"Then at all costs, make allies with the nobles here, find a way to secure this place!"

On the brief map, the location likely representing the Ruhr District of the Kingdom of Heisen was heavily circled, with a black doodle next to it, unclear what it was.

Hmm... blind guess, it might be a coal block.

Recalling the intelligence on the Ruhr District, the princess pulled a discarded document from the desk, flipping over to write 'Ruhr District - Coal' on the back.

Remembering the Ruhr District is the largest coal-producing area in Heisen Kingdom, this is likely a mineral marker, but the word "coal" seems to be taught in third-grade public school. The child probably didn't know how to write this word, so drew a black coal block as a representation.

"After securing the 'black, burning warmly, slightly hard to bite thing,' choose the coldest winter and completely sever the paths northward from the Kingdom of Heisen and Ryan County!"

On the traced brief map, six of the seven main roads leading north were crossed out, only the road in Ryan County remained intact, and beside this remaining main road, two crossed...

Handled toothpicks? Long daggers? Or two long swords? It should represent conflict, right?

Instinctively drawing a question mark on the discarded document paper, the princess painstakingly tried to decipher the skewed annotations in the notebook.

"The Northern Kingdom is very cold in winter, needs to burn things to keep warm, ports by the sea make ice cream for several months, so if the roads are severed, they can only burn the stored things."

Make ice cream for several months... probably means freezing for months, seems like he hasn't learned the spelling for this term.

Translating William's homework, copying it onto the back of the discarded document, the princess referred to her understanding of the Kingdom of Ashito, adding a few potentially effective solutions targeting the Northern Kingdom, then stared at the old homework, lost in thought.

What this child wrote, though seemingly filled with child's play, had an amazingly broad perspective.

As the Ice Plains Nation located at the world's farthest north, the Northern Kingdom Ashito almost every few years would venture south, harassing its neighboring countries, but never daring to touch the Black Forest Duchy, solely because the Black Forest Duchy held their lifeline.

And for herself and the Kingdom, rather than spending tremendous effort constructing defensive works, stationing troops along the border for years, passively awaiting the Kingdom of Ashito's invasion, it would be better to reverse the strategy, seize the initiative, and force the Kingdom of Ashito to move southward early, by choosing an advantageous time.

Although war is the worst option, merely resisting war blindly will inevitably lead to greater tragedies.

Rather than continuing to heavily invest in the military, letting defense works and military expenses cripple the Kingdom's finances, it would be more feasible to initiate a timely battle, allowing the Northern Kingdom to understand that its somewhat weak neighbor also has the capability to perish together.

Lifting the pen to list the military comparison between the two countries on the back of the discarded document paper, Princess Veronica's face revealed a resolute expression.

A fight is feasible!

Even though the military strength between the two countries still holds a significant gap, unlike the previous defensive battles, with the advantage of controlling the initiative, this is almost an open ambush, with little possibility of losing, and the intensity of the war is easy to control.

With the main routes severed in advance, only two to three corps are needed to block the Kingdom of Ashito's southward path, in addition to the opponent's hasty deployment and logistical challenges in winter.

Then, without even requiring a major battle, just a month of standoff and a few small-scale confrontations will be enough to make the Kingdom of Ashito retreat, opting for negotiations actively.

At that time, one's side can promise to resume coal transportation but demand the Kingdom of Ashito to return the pass seized six years ago, and once that pass is exchanged back, only one-sixth or even fewer permanent troops will be enough to completely block these bandits' southward path!

Once the border pressure is lifted, large scale disbandment of those inherently weak old troops can occur, prioritizing the financial budget over education and public spending, then training a large batch of individuals with some education within eight to fifteen years.

Once this generation grows up and becomes the seeds to spark more individuals, one will have the capability to wield power decisively, thoroughly removing the Kingdom's rotten layers, rejuvenating this already ancient nation!

Chapter 548: Reports and Threats

"Your Highness?"

Just as Princess Veronica sat at the table with her eyes eagerly scrolling through a child's notebook, a cautious voice reminded her from outside the royal bedchambers.

"You have six more hours until the budget meeting at the Ministry of Finance, accounting for the time needed to dress, meet with the members, and transit, you should rest now."

"Alright, I'll sleep now."

Upon hearing the attendant's reminder, the princess looked up at the window and realized with a start that dawn was already breaking. She had been so engrossed in reading that she had completely lost track of time.

After carefully closing the old notebook and storing it away in the drawer, the princess yawned tiredly, got up from the desk, and walked towards the large bed in her bedroom.

However, just as she was about to sleep, she suddenly remembered something and turned to ask the attendant:

"By the way, is tomorrow afternoon's interview all set?"

"It's all arranged."

The attendant, who was drawing the curtains, was slightly taken aback by the question, and then responded with an odd expression:

"I have talked to the lead writer of 'Scepter and Horn,' requesting them to ask more about... about your relationship with Prince Leon during the interview.

As for the questions they compiled, I have copied them for you and placed them on your desk in the third pending file, which you can see after the budget meeting tomorrow."

"Great, thank you for your hard work."

Satisfied, the princess nodded before lazily flopping onto her large bed, hugging a pillow, and then sleepily instructed:

"But remember to adjust the order in the future; anything related to Leon should be in the number one file, as I want to see it first."

Number one? Isn't that the state affairs file? Although I understand it's your first love, isn't this a bit excessive?

Upon hearing the princess's instruction, the attendant felt her cheeks twitch slightly and muttered inwardly. Nevertheless, she nodded respectfully:

"Understood, I will remember."

"Mhm Mhm."

"By the way, Your Highness..."

Just as Princess Veronica closed her eyes, seemingly ready to drift into sleep, the attendant couldn't help but quietly ask:

"With so many affairs to handle these days, you only sleep four to five hours before getting up. You're so busy; do you really not need to cancel the interview, adjust the schedule, and get some proper rest?"

Worried the princess might misunderstand her intentions, the attendant quickly continued to explain:

"Your Highness, it's not that I think you shouldn't spend time on Prince Leon. I just feel that rather than taking these interviews with little meaning, you'd be better off resting more and then meeting him directly..."

"That won't do~"

Upon hearing the attendant's suggestion, the princess shook her head with her eyes closed, saying:

"You don't understand Leon. Normally, he's very cautious and avoids situations he can't control. So if I repeatedly intrude into his life too forcefully, not only would he not accept it, but he'd distance himself from me.

Conversely, if I don't actively seek him out most of the time and just use small tricks to maintain my presence, occasionally 'unable to help myself' showing up, he would find it harder to push me away."

"..."

The problem is, who would push you away? Our dear prince does seem a bit blind!

Glancing at the princess lying on the bed, with her sleep dress revealing her shapely figure, the attendant barely resisted the urge to reach out and gave a slight nod.

"Also, do you think I'm coming on too strong?"

Kneeling on the bed, pressing her head onto the pillow, the princess let out a pleased sigh and said softly with her eyes closed:

"I actually know that you probably think I've been arranging all the newspapers to focus heavily on Leon recently is quite absurd, and maybe even laugh at me for being so infatuated after finding a prince, am I right?"

?!!!

Upon hearing the princess's words, the attendant was slightly startled and hurriedly shook her head to deny:

"No, Your Highness, I never thought that!"

"It's okay because you're not wrong. When I'm free, my mind is indeed full of Leon."

"..."

After wiggling in the bedding, the princess smiled and playfully asked the attendant, whose expression was somewhat broken:

"Tell me, if there's a man who doesn't care about your family background, doesn't covet your wealth, nor your beauty, who is kind to siblings, hardworking, responsible, and almost impeccable in personal character.

Besides that, he understands your thoughts, agrees with your ideals, and even risks everything to stand by you, daring to storm the palace with his team to save you from danger... wouldn't you be moved?"

"..."

Well, that would be moving...

"See?"

Seeing the dreamy look on the attendant's face, reminiscent of showcasing her most cherished jewelry, Princess Veronica smiled contentedly and punched her fist into the air resolutely.

"You must know that life seems full of opportunities, but some chances come at you, and if you don't seize them tightly, they're gone forever.

Leon, to me, is someone I must grasp firmly, no matter what. I must fight, I must strive, and do everything to hold on! Being mocked by others in their hearts means nothing compared to him!"

"..."

Looking at the princess lying on the bed with her behind half twisted yet maintaining an assertive fist-clenching posture, the attendant couldn't help but cast a complex gaze at her.

Although... your determination is admirable, is such a relentless pursuit necessary just for a romance?

"Haha, just kidding."

Watching the attendant, who was momentarily stunned by her "romantic teachings," Princess Veronica chuckled and nestled under the covers, neatly lying down with closed eyes:

"When I'm free, it's not entirely about thinking of him... perhaps only seventy percent. The other thirty percent, I do consider other matters, like arranging those somewhat absurd reports."

Those reports?

Seeing the attendant's puzzled expression, the princess, with a sleepy look, murmured softly:

"When Joshua and the Queen were first placed under house arrest, the Minister of Finance and the nobility of the upper chamber really made a fuss with me, even publicly declaring it an illegal coup, which although suppressed, caused quite a stir.

But after I took on these interviews and temporarily unified the reportage of several major newspapers, heavily discussing Leon every day, have you seen anyone still talking about a coup?"

"?!"

Everything was intentional?!

"Speculation on coups and conspiracy theories can't be suppressed when stirred, but a juicy tabloid story can effortlessly overshadow such unsettling rumors."

Watching the astonished expression of the attendant, Princess Veronica smiled and sweetly continued with her eyes closed:

"With such big hype in those reports, Leon must have seen it but hasn't come to ask me about it, so he should've figured out why and understands the significance. He gets me~"

"..."

Your Highness, that last statement might not be entirely credible...

Watching the princess, who had unknowingly drifted into a peaceful sleep with a smile, the attendant shook her head speechlessly, and holding her heart full of mixed emotions, she quietly left the bedroom and returned to her resting chamber opposite.

A dreamless night.

Perhaps having eaten too much "midnight snack," the attendant had an extraordinarily sound sleep. But just as she was getting up with a sore back under the nagging noise of the alarm, intending to wake the princess, a court servant rushed in.

"There's trouble!"

Seeing the attendant, the court servant slightly relaxed, then handed a note over with urgency:

"The ambassador from the Crolock Kingdom said that they lost something extremely important during the previous airship attack and will consider imposing sanctions on the Kingdom if it's not retrieved in three days!"

Chapter 549: One Third

"So... you came running to me?"

Standing in the hallway of the Happiness Apartments, having just listened to the threats from the Crolock ambassador as relayed by the female police officer, Leon couldn't help touching his cufflinks, then evasively said:

"But I'm on vacation right now. If you want me to help find something, you should report it to the Clean-up Bureau and wait for three business days..."

"Bah, stop evading!"

Seeing Leon trying to muddle through, the infuriated female officer stomped her foot and then whispered angrily:

"I've already figured it out, the ones who attacked the Boarding Tower were you!"

Others might not know, but I'm quite clear. Those who assaulted the Boarding Tower carried real documents and uniforms that were all taken from the reserve vault of the Secret Investigation Bureau, and right before that, you happened to ask me for a clearance slip!"

"..."

Indeed, the truth is out...

Seeing the female officer, who was working overtime frantically since the Boarding Tower incident, with eyes darkened like a national treasure, Leon felt a small pang of guilt in his heart, then coughed lightly and awkwardly explained:

"Well... sorry about that, but there was a reason for keeping this from you..."

"I don't care about your reasons, you have what the Crolock Kingdom wants, don't you?"

Pulling Leon by the collar, the female officer said agitatedly in a low voice:

"I know you wouldn't mess around, you must have a reason for doing this, so the Police Department, while having traced the reserve vault, hasn't exposed this matter. I've been covering for you all along, but what do you say now?"

Even though I don't understand international relations, I do know how important the Crolock Kingdom's technology is. Now that the Police Department can't find the culprits of the Boarding Tower attack, they're getting anxious for sanctions. What should the Kingdom do?"

"Don't worry, let me think."

Patting the back of the female officer's hand to show comfort, Leon furrowed his eyebrows and analyzed the current situation.

The Crolock Kingdom suddenly posed a threat, likely after handling the Sky Clipper wreckage, realizing that Atifei-128 had been taken away, and since they couldn't find its whereabouts, they had no choice but to apply official pressure on the Kingdom.

For the Kingdom in a weak position, the best solution now is to hand over Atifei-128, but the issue is that this thing absolutely cannot be returned; its "brain" likely contains the Kingdom's energy exploration records.

If it is handed back, exposing myself is a minor concern; what's crucial is that the revelation of the Kingdom's "volcanic energy" situation would leave the Crolock Kingdom likely to opt for waging war, which would be a most fatal blow to the Kingdom that has just begun to have some vitality, so...

"Indeed, I have the item, but I absolutely cannot return it to them."

?!

Upon hearing the first half of the sentence where Leon admitted possession, the female officer let out a sigh of relief, but before finishing it, Leon's latter words caught it back in her throat.

"The explanation for the reason is a bit complicated... In simple terms, not returning the item would mean sanctions for the Kingdom, but returning it would lead to war between the two countries."

After roughly explaining the reason for not returning the item, Leon attempted to comfort the somewhat baffled female officer:

"Additionally, concerning the sanctions, there's really no need to worry too much; the situation in Crolock Kingdom is a bit special, the Clean-up Bureau is preparing to investigate, and once the investigation is completed, action will be taken."

...

"The bureau probably won't act directly."

After providing an unexpected answer and seeing Leon's somewhat bewildered expression, the red-haired director helplessly reminded:

"Although the Crolock Kingdom's issue is significant, Mr. Taurus soon needs to ascend to the palace. At the very least, for the coming month, everything must yield to this; the bureau's intention is to focus on investigation first, then make a decision once the situation is confirmed."

"That's not urgent either."

Leon pondered for a moment and said:

"Anyway, in a little over a month, Mr. Taurus can successfully ascend. One or two months of sanctions won't be much for the Kingdom."

"Not just one or two months, it might be half a year, or even longer."

???

"Because the problem with the royal family affects not only the Crolock Kingdom but isn't good to act rashly; they might wait until the situation is thoroughly cleared up before addressing it all at once."

The red-haired director explained:

"Leon, during your vacation days, the Sagittarius Director had each branch carry out a self-inspection, discovering that besides Crolock Kingdom, there are others..."

"Hold on!"

Upon hearing the red-haired director's words, Leon couldn't help but interrupt:

"Having each branch perform self-inspections? Didn't the tin doll say there's another traitor in our bureau? What if news leaks during the self-inspection?"

"Don't worry, this kind of low-level mistake, the bureau won't commit... Well... generally won't commit."

After somewhat unconfidently adding this, the red-haired director said:

"Back when you exposed Aquarius Director and found out he was also the director of the Gemini branch, all eleven directors of the Zodiac Branch Office, myself included, underwent certain checks, and employed two numbered abnormal objects for temporary Word Spirit constraint.

Due to the high consumption of using those two items, Word Spirit constraint slots were limited. The small branches not part of Zodiac might still be uncertain, but we major branch directors can at least ensure loyalty, for if even that couldn't be guaranteed, the Clean-up Bureau wouldn't have endured until now."

"..."

What an insight from the bureau... But may I ask, which bureau did the Gemini branch's director betray? The Clean-up Bureau? Handling Bureau? Certainly not us, right?

"Ahem... Anyway, after the Zodiac Branch Office responsible for guarding The Twelve Kingdoms did an internal self-inspection, they found not just Crolock Kingdom has issues, but there's a total of four royal families with problems."

"Huh?!!!"

In Leon's utterly shocked expression, the red-haired director said equally helplessly:

"The King Ship of Thousand Sails Maritime Country Seo has been completely turned into a ghost ship; once exposed to full moonlight, everyone aboard instantly turns into ghosts. If it weren't for the King Ship anchored in Moon Barren Sea under year-round fog, it might have been doomed long ago;

There's a problem with Witch Kingdom Mithfala too. The royal lineage there is passed down single-handedly, the current Grand Witch is already over 130 years old and likely to die soon, but her only daughter has disappeared, leaving behind just a fake, making it impossible to confirm if she's alive or not."

"..."

"Trouble also arose for Twin Kingdoms Carleighwen. Historically, the Eastern and Western Carleighwen Kingdoms had completely different faiths, worshiping light and darkness separately. With Eastern Carleighwen Kingdom's downfall due to the Ophiuchus Sub-bureau incident, the Luminous Church worshiping light should have ceased.

But lately, the church unexpectedly emerged, mingling with West Carlay Wen Kingdom's native Abysmal Church, attempting a revision of the national church to restore the former Eastern Carleighwen Kingdom within West Carlay Wen Kingdom, with a significant possibility of targeting the royal family."

"..."

So, counting the City of Machinery Crolock that erupted with an Intelligence Crisis, out of the entire twelve kingdoms in the world, already a third has been infiltrated? What are the twelve Zodiac Branch Office even doing?

Totally unprecedented! Even when the Clean-up Bureau claims never to make low-level errors... Indeed, low-level errors are seldom committed, but aren't they committing ones that are critically dire?

Chapter 550: End of Vacation

"In short, the current situation is rather special. Although those kingdoms seem to be in trouble, the royal families haven't truly been severed. To avoid pushing them to desperate measures, the Bureau can't afford to make too much noise."

Upon saying this, the red-haired director couldn't help but glance thankfully at Leon.

Compared to those already "fallen" branches, his own Virgin Branch is hardly any better. Whether it was the fleshly manifestation of the doe nearly descending six years ago, or the iron doll that lurked beside the princess for six years, success was only a step away.

If it weren't for his luck being good enough, that the doe's plan was accidentally foiled, coupled with recruiting someone as capable as Leon, whose rebellion happened to sabotage the opposing plot, perhaps the Virgin Branch would be the most disgraceful one.

"Does avoiding too much noise mean that the headquarters is preparing to take its time again?"

Leon, having no mind to ponder which branch is more humiliating, felt frustrated knowing the Kingdom might be sanctioned for at least half a year or more.

"Last time when the Aquarius plot was revealed, the Bureau said Watcher's Palace was more urgent, and didn't directly move to arrest the Aquarius Director, sealing off headquarters itself instead. Now upon discovering that someone plans to harm royal families, we don't act immediately but continue to slowly investigate? Do we have to be so indecisive?"

"Mr. Taurus, they just have no choice..."

The red-haired director sighed in response:

"You know the responsibility of the Clean-up Bureau is heavy, and if a decision goes wrong, it's never a small matter. Hence, over the years, caution has become the norm."

"Just forget about it."

Leon shook his head in disagreement:

"If the Bureau were truly cautious, they should've immediately moved upon sensing anything, stopped potential threats at the outset, rather than dithering here, hesitating and afraid to make moves. This isn't caution; it's pure hesitation!"

Indeed...

Hearing Leon's words, the red-haired director sighed inwardly, thinking that although careful planning is beneficial, overthinking, demanding perfection before any action, may result in missing opportunities.

Since the director went to Old Soil, while the Bureau could maintain normalcy usually, but when big issues arose, if the directors had divided opinions, there was no one to make the final decision, leading to poor responses to many situations.

It's not that the directors are incapable, but compared to the director and the Aries Director, other directors lack a bit of force with "leadership qualities." No one has overwhelming superiority in identity or strength, causing every decision to be unusually conservative.

Currently, the Clean-up Bureau feels like a muscular strong man torn between decisions, clearly able to easily defeat opponents by full force yet constantly hesitates considering pros and cons, waiting for perfection before acting.

It's frustrating, frustrating to the point of wanting to scream.

...

"Director."

Feeling disheartened about this dysfunctional Clean-up Bureau, Leon suddenly inquired:

"Since the Bureau decides to take its time again, should the investigation with Nicole in the Crolock Kingdom also switch to covert operations?"

"Hmm..."

The red-haired director nodded in response:

"Although personnel remains largely unchanged, it's still a Scorpio Branch-led investigation with our Virgin Branch aiding, but the approach has indeed shifted to be more covert. Conveniently, in Orleson... oh, I mean the Kingdom where the Scorpio Branch is stationed.

You know, Orleson, known as the Green Shade Country, is the largest grain exporter. Thousand Sails Maritime Country Seo, City of Machinery Crolock, Refraction Kingdom Riviere, Ice Plains Nation Ashito... Four out of The Twelve Kingdoms purchase grain from Orleson Kingdom every year.

Lately, the Orleson Kingdom is preparing to send a mission to exchange for the newly developed irrigation technology from the Crolock Kingdom. The Scorpio Branch members might mix into the mission, heading over these days... Oh yes."

Recalling something, the red-haired director chuckled slightly:

"Last time with the King of Nightmares, apparently Edward was deeply impressed by you. Upon hearing it's you in this joint task, his expression was particularly complex.

How to say... it's like a tiger starved for ten days finally seeing a passing creature, but it happens to be a spiny hedgehog, wanting to eat yet fearing to be pricked. Quite amusing."

"..."

"Furthermore, after some contemplation, he finally asked Mr. Taurus for a request, welcoming you but hoping you'll follow instructions.

Also, when encountering situations, you should avoid recklessness, notify him before taking any actions, refrain from making impulsive decisions, and choose milder approaches..."

"..."

Come on... what kind of absurd request is this?

During the incident with the King of Nightmares, I was cornered so I couldn't hold back; I'm usually very rational, is it necessary to repeatedly emphasize this? As if I'm some impulsive brute...

With a speechless pout, Leon pondered a while and then thoughtfully proposed:

"Director, how about we tweak the plan and learn from the Scorpio Branch's approach?"

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing Leon's suggestion, the red-haired director blinked and understood:

"Have your paramour send a mission too?"

"..."

What paramour...

With a slight lip twitch, Leon replied speechlessly:

"With the Crolock Kingdom urging, why not send a mission there, explaining the Boarding Tower situation, then Nicole and I mix into the mission, drawing less attention."

"Yes, yes, not bad at all."

The red-haired director nodded approvingly, smiling:

"Compared to disguising as travelers or merchants to sneak in, indeed this approach is better. Although more eyes might be watching you, it also offers more ways to confuse the Crolock Kingdom, making operations more convenient.

Moreover, having a mission identity also has a benefit – as a Prince leading a visiting mission, the Crolock Kingdom must dispatch royal family members to receive you as per diplomatic etiquette.

If so, you have the best excuse to contact the Crolock Kingdom's royal family, investigate the situation, and even lend a hand for rescue — truly the best of both worlds... no! Truly a win-win-win scenario!"

"That's what I was thinking."

Leon agreed and added:

"Sending missions simultaneously with the Orleson Kingdom also allows official contacts with the Scorpio Branch members, minimizing suspicion from the Crolock Kingdom, facilitating our joint action."

"Indeed, however if we proceed, the timeline needs moving forward, not only cutting your vacation short, but Mr. Taurus won't make it either, leaving you time to acquire new main combat abnormal objects..."

Frowning slightly in thought, the red-haired director asked:

"By the way, I recall the dagger the Aquarius used to kill the Canine Deity, it should also be a strong abnormal object?"

"Hmm... but its ability doesn't quite suit me."

Leon thought for a moment before answering:

"Its name is [Silver Dagger of Cutting], capable of slicing anything as easily as cutting paper, even intangible things can be severed.

However, effectiveness requires manually cutting, and my physical condition and reflexes are only at the lowest of second-level Cleaner standards, enough to bully ordinary people but if facing those controlled Cleaners from Gemini Branch, wielding it is probably futile."

So the issue is insufficient reflex speed, making it hard to effectively attack stronger Cleaners?

After listening to Leon's answer, the red-haired director pondered again, then reached for her ear, removing an earring, half of a heart.

"Here, I'm giving you this~"

"???"

Seeing Leon's puzzled look, the red-haired director handed over the [Heart-stealing Stud], smiling as she explained:

"Leon, your greatest strength has always been taking hits, even without using the substitution from the sheep heart, combining [War Cornerstone] and post-drunken state, you have two types of Undying Body, lacking only in reflex speed means missing targets.

My thought is, since your issue is reaction, unable to hit with the blade, why bother reacting?

Rather than improving reflex speed, directly take a hit relying on your two types of Undying Body, then utilize this [Heart-stealing Stud] during impact, to steal the opponent's thoughts.

And when they land a blow, slightly relax vigilance, preparing to continue attacking, you can directly prepare in advance, poised with your blade ready for them to charge onto it themselves!"