

The Mighty Dragons Are Dead

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Chapter 31: Shit Road of Coral City

The past between Melissa and Lady Penelope had become an old tale within the Castle.

Lady Penelope criticized Melissa for not being able to stand her. Backed by the Marquis, she was untouchable and had to move out of Tulip Castle.

Li Si Te, however, felt that, in truth, Lady Penelope was too harsh—it had been over ten years, and she was still incessantly complaining.

Moreover, in those ten years since Melissa's death, Lady Penelope still hadn't been able to move in, because she was now at odds with the new Earl's wife.

"You're lucky to have come back today; the Baron's daughter isn't in the Castle, or I would have been the first to turn around and leave. That woman has a kind of odor on her that makes me uncomfortable. Only your father could tolerate her. Now the whole Castle is filled with her scent, and I can't stand to stay for a moment,"

Li Vera sat beside Lady Penelope and, hearing this, clung to her arm, swapping her usual assertiveness for a coquettish tone, "Grandmother, if you dislike Tulip Castle, you can come to my Falcon Town; I have a very beautiful manor there, and a hot spring that you're sure to love."

"My dear girl, as a noble lady, you must possess proper bearing. Look at yourself, nineteen years old and you still haven't found a suitable other half. This is because you're not ladylike enough."

"Grandmother is right, Li Vera; you need to learn to be a lady, not to ride horses and bear arms like us," Levis teased, and then said to Lady Penelope,

“Grandmother, if you think the Castle has a bad odor, I can put out more air fresheners.”

“This isn’t something air fresheners can fix. Two women in succession entering our home have already drained me. I don’t want to visit the Castle unless absolutely necessary,” Lady Penelope said before turning her head to speak to the Butler, Louis, who stood at the ready, “Louis, you will help me pass these words along to the Baron’s daughter, right?”

Her words carried a provocative undertone.

Louis smiled amicably, “Madam, as you know, I much prefer to keep my lips sealed.”

“Boring Louis, ever so dull from youth to old age,” she said.

Ever since Lady Penelope entered the Castle, the entire conversation revolved around her. Of course, about eighty percent of the conversation was also dominated by her.

Li Si Te could only offer an awkward yet polite smile.

It wasn’t until the Earl returned from outside and announced that the dinner could start that Li Si Te was released from that highly uncomfortable atmosphere.

A banquet at Tulip Castle was obviously incomparable to one held in a small Castle in Fresh Flower Town.

Simply in terms of the number of guests, there was no comparison.

At tonight’s banquet, basically all the Nobles in the Castle were seated, including the Earl’s family, family tutors, the Knight Captain, and a few Earl followers who were guests at the Castle, amounting to sixteen Nobles in total, comprising Honored Knights, Barons, Viscounts, and Earls.

With Lady Penelope at the banquet, there was no chance of a dull moment as she kept the conversation flowing at all times.

Li Si Te focused on enjoying the food, and although he never quite accustomed himself to the Western style of eating, it was delectable compared to the rough fare in Fresh Flower Town. He did not participate

much in conversation and few sought him out for a chat, thus, just like in the memories of his previous life, he became an invisible presence in the Castle.

However, in the past, he had wanted to interject but found no opportunity.

Now, he simply had no interest in doing so, for after all, he was but a transmigrator using another's body; he couldn't immerse himself in the Tulip Family and could only stand by as an observer, calmly dealing with everything and keeping a low profile, doing what was appropriate for the era while focusing on his own development—perhaps, one day, he could live freely, without the need for secrecy.

The day after the banquet ended, Li Si Te awoke early because he and his siblings were to set sail with the fleet to visit their ailing grandfather, Marquis Merlin Taro, on Red Crab Island.

“Convey my sincerest regards,” the Earl also got up early and had breakfast with his three children.

As a son-in-law, he should have visited in person, but his current status was that of an ex-son-in-law, estranged from the Long Taro Family, making it inconvenient to visit anymore.

Lady Penelope had already returned from her walk, her tone desolate, “Levis, Li Vera, Liszt, send my regards to Marquis Merlin as well. I remember him as a handsome and elegant noble, strong and outstanding. But a few years have passed, and he has fallen ill to the point where he can no longer work, even stepping down from his position as captain of the Court Fleet.”

“Birth, aging, sickness, and death are the natural laws of the universe, mother, you shouldn't dwell on it.”

“Are you trying to tell me that I'm also a damned old hag?”

“Why would you think that, when I am hoping that you live past a hundred years old?”

“From the two women you married, it's clear you can't wait for me to die so you can have some peace. No one to bother you from doing whatever you want on Coral Island.”

The Earl could only put on an awkward yet polite smile.

Liszt, with Marcus and a castle servant following behind, carrying his luggage, bid farewell and together the siblings headed to the dock, a part of Coral City. Calling it a city, Liszt preferred to think of it as a “giant latrine,” with the sour smell of fermenting feces pervading every street and alley.

For this reason, the Tulip Family’s production of richly fragrant Tulips, that were widely popular with city dwellers.

The citizens who were out and about would pin a Tulip on their chests to neutralize the nauseating odor on the streets.

Putting aside the smell of feces.

In terms of grandeur, Coral City could not compare to even a small county town in Liszt’s hometown.

There were no tall buildings or mansions, just sporadic wooden houses next to stone ones, expanding constantly along streets of varying widths. Shops lined the streets, and hurried pedestrians inevitably stepped on various fecal matter—residents always liked to dump their waste on the road.

If it was just a pile of dog feces, one could of course choose to sidestep it.

But if an entire street was covered in dog feces, the correct approach was to frown and tread upon it.

Thus, layer upon layer of feces, through constant trampling, merged with the road surface, creating the city’s unique “shit roads,” naturally reeking.

Why was sanitation so appalling?

Because the commoners were too busy making a living to care about cleanliness; nobles lived in castles on the edge of the city and didn’t care about the filth.

The only consolation was that Coral City was just an island city with a limited population. The amount of feces produced, weathered by nature, was still bearable.

If it were a larger city, it might well have drowned in its own excrement.

“Could it be that the Elf’s abilities limit their vision, leaving them unable to think of using feces as fertilizer for farming?” Liszt pondered while looking at Coral

City, his imagination running wild, “Perhaps I could collect all of the island’s feces and haul them to Fresh Flower Town, and on the outskirts of town no, on the outskirts of the town, build a few biogas digesters.”

He understood the principle of biogas digesters, but using biogas for lighting or cooking was a bit tricky.

After simple fermentation to use as fertilizer was the quickest method; the barren soil of Fresh Flower Town, comparable to loess land, was indeed in dire need of fertilization.

“But the transportation is inconvenient, hauling a load of feces by carriage would cost more than the feces themselves better forget it, don’t pollute my Fresh Flower Town. It’s best if the town’s feces are produced and consumed locally.”

Chapter 32: The Twin-Masted Schooner at Sea

The city isn’t worth the anticipation, only the castle is worth looking forward to—nobles do care about hygiene, with bathrooms and toilets available, and servants to carry feces and trash outside the castle walls.

Since no one knows to use feces as fertilizer for fields, it is randomly discarded in the wild, naturally decomposing.

Effectively using feces as fertilizer would definitely reduce the dependence on elves—only reduce, because elves also have the ability to improve crop traits.

The twin-masted ship sails on the azure sea, with Coral City gradually disappearing from view, and the towering Tulip Castle beginning to sink below the horizon.

Could this perhaps prove that this world is also spherical?

Liszt would occasionally ponder about the world he had traversed to, unable to draw any conclusions due to the lack of information.

“My Lord, what are you looking at?” Marcus walked over.

“The sea, the azure sea, conceals countless treasures.”

“I grew up by the sea since I was a child, and don’t have such wonderful imaginations about the sea. There are sea monsters in the sea, and maybe some fish, but there are also fish in rivers and lakes, and they’re not dangerous. The wealth of the continent is the real abundance, inexhaustible. The glory of knights and nobles is also contested on the continent.”

The Duchy of Sapphire is an archipelago nation, but has never given up on conquering the continent, organizing Knight Orders every few years to fight for mineral resources.

That has created batch after batch of nobles.

The Tulip Family also prospered from this, and Marcus often dreamt of going to the continent to fight in wars, hoping to be granted the title of an Honored Knight for his achievements.

Now determined to serve Liszt, he naturally tried to entice him every so often.

Liszt still looked at the profound sea, not caring for the “continental wealth theory,” thinking that battlefields were so dangerous, why go there? It’s better to be a quiet rural landlord, to do missions, to farm, to advance step by step steadily. If it were just a mere traversal, he didn’t think he could stand out among the natives, but with the help of the Smoke Mission, becoming strong was just a matter of time.

As for what the Smoke Mission was, the secret would be unraveled one day.

“Teacher Marcus, I heard that there are large undeveloped islands beyond the archipelago of the Grand Duchy?”

“Yes, I have chatted with some old sailors, there are indeed a large number of islands beyond the archipelago, but those islands are situated in the deep sea, where storms are frequent, and there are many hidden reefs, making it difficult for ships to come and go, without much value for development.”

“Perhaps.”

Liszt responded noncommittally.

Leaving other things aside, as long as the deep-sea fishing industry is developed, the wealth of the sea will gradually reveal itself, and at that time, the competition for islands will probably not be less than that for land.

He was not capable of that now, being just a small town's landlord, he would focus on developing further.

“Set sail! Navigate to the front side!”

“Set sail! Navigate to the front side!”

Boisterous shouts from the crew came from below the mast, as a southerly wind had risen, blowing from the stern, rustling. The captain decisively ordered the sailors to set sail to catch more wind.

The advent of sailing ships allowed humans to venture into greater areas of the sea. The ships of the Duchy of Sapphire were all sailing ships, but they were all equipped with horizontal sails, without the appearance of longitudinal sailboats yet. The advantage of horizontal sails is that they're fast with the wind, but the disadvantage is that they are almost ineffective against the wind, requiring oars to row.

With the wind at their back, the fleet raised their sails, forming a triangular formation on the sea, a spectacular sight.

Departing in the morning, they arrived at Red Crab Island by evening.

Red Crab Island is ten times larger than Coral Island, and Long Taro Castle is not by the sea but on the mountainside in the center of the island. Thus, after disembarking, Liszt and his companions had to stay overnight in the port city of Sea Crab City, then switch to a carriage the next day, and it would take another day to reach Long Taro Castle.

The practice of training pigeons to send and receive letters had not yet developed, and pigeons probably wouldn't be able to carry the weight of thick paper.

However, because there had already been arrangements for knights to send messages, stating that youths from the Tulip Family would visit shortly, servants at Long Taro Castle's branch estate in Sea Crab City were specially assigned to wait for them. After receiving Liszt and his party, they immediately

arranged for them to stay in the guesthouse, sparing them the dirty accommodations of the city.

After dining in the evening, Liszt took a bath and lay down in bed.

He was a bit seasick.

Back home, he was used to airplanes and trains, and sincerely found seafaring quite uncomfortable. Fortunately, his predecessor was an islander with decent swimming skills, which helped him somewhat overcome the problem, so he wasn't completely incapacitated by seasickness.

"As an islander, yet subject to seasickness, Liszt, I must say you're losing face for the Tulip Family. I thought you had matured, but it turns out you're still so incompetent; it really reminds me of the cowardly acts you used to commit, my foolish little brother." Li Vera appeared in Liszt's room at some point without his notice.

No knocking.

This gave Liszt a start, as he was examining his Smoke Serpent Script—often taking it out to see if there were any new insights.

But he quickly calmed down, realizing that Li Vera seemed unable to see the Smoke Serpent Script. It was something only he could see, so there was no worry of leaking secrets.

"You forgot to knock."

"I didn't knock? That's not important," Li Vera said, crossing her arms and glaring at Liszt as she expressed her disdain.

"To me it's important. You didn't respect my privacy, and besides, it's very unladylike to do so. Nobles prefer ladies, dear sister."

"I don't need to change myself to please any noble! Besides, Liszt, when did I ever need your advice? If we weren't on Red Crab Island right now, I would truly teach you a lesson and make you understand that becoming an Earth Knight means nothing!"

Liszt had been bullied by Li Vera since childhood.

He believed the fundamental reason was Li Vera's jealousy of his appearance—which could make most women feel ashamed of their looks.

“Did you come here just to tell me that I'm still quite weak?”

“I just wanted to see the pathetic sight of you being seasick.”

“Well, you've seen it, so could you please leave now?”

Li Vera shot him an angry look before turning and walking away. Liszt got up and locked the door. At nineteen, she was still a young woman, and her behavior was indeed puzzling.

Not that it mattered much, as the Li Vera in his memories was always blunt, or rather recklessly frivolous.

The Earl often lamented that he and Li Vera should exchange temperaments.

One more delicate than girls, and the other wilder than boys.

As he lay back down, Liszt found himself unable to sleep and started thinking about trivial matters, “Five months ago, I made a visit to Long Taro Castle for the holiday season. At that time, Marquis Merlin wasn't on the island as he was serving as a captain in the Court Fleet; it's been about four or five years since we last formally met.”

Given the nobility's monogamous system, families often weren't very prosperous.

Marquis Merlin had one son and two daughters. His youngest daughter, Melissa, had passed away, and his second daughter, Melinda, married Viscount Roland Pinecone, a follower of the Marquis. There was only one heir, the eldest son, Mesiro Taro, who also had only one son, Meioubao Taro.

“Cousin Meioubao seems to be nearly twenty-five and still unmarried? Is it because he's pursuing the Sapphire Duke's daughter? This princess of the small state is said to be quite the social butterfly.”

The Grand Duchy, a vassal state of an empire or kingdom, is ruled by a Grand Duke at its highest rank. Strictly speaking, they are not kings, so their daughters cannot be called princesses. Moreover, the new Sapphire Duke, being unable to become a Dragon Knight, had his rank downgraded to Duke.

In the system of nobility, the ranks of Prince, Grand Duke, and Duke are on the same level, but one can only be addressed as Prince or Grand Duke upon becoming a Knight; otherwise, one holds the title of Duke.

However, rules are rigid, people are flexible; within the Duchy of Sapphire, all nobles refer to the ruler as the Grand Duke, and naturally his daughter is regarded and pursued as a princess.

With malice, Liszt thought to himself, "If Meioubao does marry the princess, he might well find out the children aren't his heh heh."

Chapter 33: The Lord of Long Taro Castle

The rocking carriage jostled Liszt to the brink of sleepiness.

From Sea Crab City, he had endured a bumpy ride to Redstone City, where he spent a night. By dawn, after another two hours of travel, they finally saw Long Taro Castle standing halfway up the mountain.

Long Taro Castle was almost four times the size of Tulip Castle, with arrow towers that soared to a height of one to two hundred meters. Its location on the mountainside almost merged the castle with the mountain range.

Liszt had once traveled from his hometown, Earth, to visit Neuschwanstein Castle in Europe.

The majesty of Neuschwanstein Castle was comparable to Tulip Castle, save for the latter's precipitous cliffs. However, compared to Long Taro Castle in front of him, Neuschwanstein seemed modest in scale. Long Taro Castle alone bore the grandeur rivaling The Lord of the Rings' White City.

Below the castle lay a city.

The carriage didn't need to go through the city, taking a rather steep mountain road directly towards the castle instead. Midway, it was spotted and approached by the Knight Squad of Long Taro Castle. Learning that they were relatives of the Tulip Family, the Knight Squad immediately escorted the carriage to the castle.

And one knight sprinted up the mountain to inform them ahead of time.

Thus, when the carriage arrived at the castle's entrance, the heir to Long Taro Castle, the three siblings' cousin Meioubao Taro, was already awaiting them with servants.

"Levis, Li Vera, Liszt," said Meioubao Taro, who was handsome and graceful, with sapphire-like eyes shining exceptionally bright, "I received the letter and have been waiting a long time. Was your journey smooth?"

Liszt had to admit.

This cousin, both in looks and demeanor, was quite outstanding, almost on par with himself. Standing together, he looked more like a brother to Liszt than Levis did.

"Cousin Meioubao, everything went smoothly."

"Cousin, you've become even more beautiful than last year."

"Thank you for the compliment, cousin, but compared to your handsome features, it always feels like mockery," Li Vera said half-jokingly and half-seriously to Meioubao Taro.

Meioubao Taro laughed heartily, "I can't refuse this, right, Liszt?" The second part was addressed to Liszt.

Liszt gave a slight smile.

Finally, he confirmed that Li Vera had been teasing him all these years out of jealousy for his looks: "Cousin speaks the truth."

"Haha, indeed, heroes share common views. Let's go inside the castle. Father is overseeing this quarter's tax collection on foreign land and has yet to return. Grandfather is recuperating his health but was very pleased to hear of your arrival."

"How is grandfather's health now?"

Meioubao Taro sighed, "Grandfather's illness is a complication arising from the recurrence of an old injury. It fluctuates; sometimes it's better, sometimes worse. The Grand Duke has already sent the Court's physician to treat him — I believe he will recover."

In the opulent bedroom, sitting on the bed was the master of Red Crab Island, one of the seven marquises of the Grand Duchy, former captain of the Court Fleet, the most venerable person in Long Taro Castle.

Merlin Taro.

He was a septuagenarian, his pale, wrinkled face still retaining its long-cultivated dignity, but fail to conceal the frailty brought on by age and illness.

Even as a former Sky Knight capable of leaping into the air, he was not immune to the ravages of time.

His sapphire-blue eyes had already turned cloudy, not to mention a head of white hair.

He lay quietly against the headboard, with a low tea table on his quilt-covered legs, laboriously writing with an ink-dipped quill on a sheet of thick paper.

The age spots on his face were particularly noticeable.

“My lord, Young Master Sun has already brought the three young masters and miss of the Tulip Family into the castle,” the butler, almost as old as Marquis Merlin himself, didn’t bear to disturb him and spoke in an especially soft voice.

Marquis Merlin’s pen tip hesitated slightly, then he continued writing, not lifting his head, “Melissa’s children? Then let them come and visit this old man, half buried in the grave.”

“My lord, you are only temporarily indisposed, and you will recover soon. You’ve said that you would live to a hundred, outlasting that old scoundrel Marquis Wallace from next door,” the butler said.

“Ha ha, I also threatened the Grand Duke’s Sapphire Dragon, saying that if it didn’t make me the Dragon Domain Landlord, I would slaughter it. However, it was to no avail; this time, I’m afraid I’ve lost to that old undying fellow,” Marquis Merlin laughed heartily, quickly finishing the last few words, and put down his pen.

The servants attending beside him immediately carried away the tea table.

The old butler supported the marquis, leaning him towards the head of the bed to sit more comfortably. He then bent down to straighten the red tie at the marquis's chest.

A servant brought a bronze mirror.

Other servants handed over water, towels, and hair clips, serving the marquis in turn.

The marquis meticulously groomed his appearance, quickly transforming from a frail old man back to a figure of authority, and then, he waited.

Hearing familiar footsteps outside the door, his murky eyes couldn't help but shine a bit of light.

Which was quickly concealed again.

Meioubao was leading the three siblings, and they had already walked into the bedroom.

Levis took the lead, with Li Vera and Liszt quickly following to the bedside, addressing Marquis Merlin with the courtesy of juniors, "Grandfather, Li Vera, Liszt, and I have come to visit you. Father also asked me to extend his sincere regards and hopes that you will recover immediately to restore the splendor belonging to the master of Long Taro Castle."

"Your father is thoughtful," the marquis nodded lightly, "Did you have a smooth journey?"

"It was smooth."

"That's good to hear. Since you have come to visit your grandfather, stay for a few days at Long Taro Castle."

"Yes, grandfather."

The marquis's gaze moved past Levis and Li Vera, settling on Liszt, with a reminiscent look in his eyes, "Liszt, you've come of age."

"Yes, my coming-of-age ceremony was on the ninth of March this year."

"I've heard that your father has titled you a baron; which town is it?"

“Fresh Flower Town.”

“Hmm, not even able to allocate a viscountcy, it seems Earl Li Weiliam has been quite unsuccessful,” Marquis Merlin commented bluntly, then his tone became wistful again, “I wasn’t there for your coming-of-age ceremony; Melissa will surely blame me. Seeing you is like seeing Melissa standing right before me.”

Meioubao echoed, “Grandfather, Cousin Liszt indeed resembles Aunt Melissa so much. When I was a child and met Aunt Melissa, I thought that the Long Taro flowers were truly the most dazzling in the Grand Duchy.”

“I can hardly remember my mother; I can only look up to her through the portraits at Tulip Castle,” Liszt said, indeed he had no memory of his mother.

Liszt had been only two years old when Melissa passed away; what could a two-year-old child remember?

There were portraits of Melissa in the castle, but he didn’t often look at them. Besides, even if they were portraits, they lost much in their veracity, making it difficult to capture the true elegance of the person.

It was a cause for regret.

The marquis’s emotions were quickly reined in, “It’s been over a decade, but sometimes it feels like just yesterday You must be tired from your journey. Meioubao, take your cousins to rest. I want the young men and women to be full of vigor at the luncheon. Also, if time permits, hold a ball tomorrow night; make it a lively one for the young people.”

Chapter 34: Little Minor Elf’s Saliva

“Chirp.”

“Chirp.”

Down the corridor of the castle, a strange chirping could be heard. Liszt, who had planned to rest until noon before attending the banquet, pushed open his

room door and saw, not far away, a little blue minor elf dancing around a pillar in the corridor.

A few maids were attending to the minor elf.

Seemingly noticing Liszt, the minor elf fluttered over in a swoosh, hovering about a meter in front of him. It curiously sized up Liszt with its big eyes, occasionally letting out a “chirp,” with no indication of what it meant.

“Young Master Sun Liszt,” a maid approached him and greeted respectfully.

Liszt asked, “What kind of minor elf is this?”

“It is a Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elf, just turned three years old,” replied a maid with a lovely face, who boldly took two glances at Liszt with her brown eyes.

There was an inexplicable spiciness in her gaze.

Liszt didn’t notice her looking at him, and he stretched out his hand to lightly gesture towards the Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elf, “Does it have a name?”

The minor elf tilted its head, clueless: “Chirp?”

“It doesn’t have a name. There are many minor elves in the castle, and we just refer to them as Cordyceps. However, this Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elf is the naughtiest one of all. That’s why several maids need to follow it around to prevent it from causing mischief and trouble,” the maid answered.

Elves are magical creatures nurtured by nature, most are quite docile, but there are always some with tricky and quirky temperaments.

“What trouble can it cause?” Liszt felt it was much ado about little, a minor elf only needed one maid to follow it, yet several maids were attending to it, which seemed like they were slacking off.

But before the maids could explain.

The hovering minor elf suddenly pursed its lips at Liszt and then—splatter, it spat saliva right onto Liszt’s face.

It was so sudden that even with his Earth Knight reflexes, he didn’t react in time.

By the time Liszt regained his composure, the minor elf was already “chirp,” “chirp” laughing away as it flew into the distance.

“Young Master Sun Liszt, the Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elf is very naughty, often spitting at guests of the castle. We are terribly sorry. We hope you won’t take it to heart,” said the maid with the spicy gaze. Turning to her companions, she said, “Quickly follow the Thick-Leaf Grass, don’t let it disturb anyone else. I’ll take Young Master Sun Liszt to wash his face.”

Having said that, she elegantly extended her hand to guide him: “Young Master Sun Liszt, please allow me to fetch water for you to wash your face, as an apology for the Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elf’s behavior.”

“All right.”

Liszt had planned to just wipe it off, considering the minor elf to be a not filthy creature, and he didn’t mind its saliva. But since the maid had offered, he decided to use the water to wash his face again.

Once the wash basin was brought over, the maid wrung out the towel and proceeded to wipe Liszt’s face.

“Thank you, but I’ll do it myself.”

“It is our duty as maids.”

“For things like washing my face, I prefer to do it on my own,” Liszt coughed, fully aware that high society was used to indulgence, with servants attending to all their personal needs, but he would never get accustomed to it.

After wiping his face.

He handed the towel back to the maid.

Her eyes shining, the maid asked: “Would you like to wipe again?”

“No, that’s all right.”

A fleeting look of disappointment crossed the maid’s face as she picked up the basin and stood up to leave: “Then I’ll take my leave Oh, Young Master Sun Liszt, my name is Anna, and I would be more than willing to serve you if you require.”

Liszt smiled faintly, “Okay, Anna.”

In that moment, with his forehead just damp from water and a stray wet lock of hair, he became even more charming by a fraction. The maid was obviously dazzled by Liszt for a moment, then she lowered her head and quickly exited the room.

Once she left the room,

She felt her heart pounding furiously in her chest, and a faint blush rose on her cheeks.

“What are you doing?” suddenly a questioning voice came from beside her.

It was a male servant, assigned to Liszt as his personal attendant in the castle, responsible for his daily personal care. He had just gone to fetch some milk tea for Liszt from the kitchen and returned to find Anna coming out of the room, still carrying the basin—caring for guests was his job!

“Young Master Sun Liszt needed to wash his face, so I attended to him.”

“Is that so? It doesn’t seem like it’s the maids’ turn to do that, Anna. Don’t do anything that would disgrace Long Taro Castle,” the male servant said sternly, his voice filled with menace.

Anna kept walking: “Lyskey, you’re not the butler. You have no say in what I do!”

“Then I’ll tell the butler!”

“I’m just doing my job, what you choose to report is your business.”

After Anna had completely disappeared around the corner of the corridor, Lyskey snorted coldly: “A bunch of bitches!” After cursing, he quickly masked his anger with the proper solemn and dignified demeanor befitting of a male servant, along with a composed and graceful appearance.

He knocked on the door: “Young Master Sun Liszt, I have brought you the milk tea you requested.”

“Come in.”

Anna returned to the group tending to the Thick-Leaf Grass Minor Elves.

The maids immediately started chattering: “Anna, did you touch Young Master Sun Liszt’s face?”

“Is Young Master Sun Liszt’s face really smooth and delicate? Did your face turn red and your heartbeat speed up at that time? Is he as handsome as Young Master Sun?”

“Lucy touched Young Master Sun Liszt’s face a few years ago when she washed it for him, even though he wasn’t an adult yet, he was already so handsome.”

Anna shook her head, her voice tinged with disappointment: “No, Young Master Sun Liszt washed his own face; he doesn’t like maids washing his face for him.”

“How could that be? Could it be that he like Viscount Ophius, likes likes men?”

“That shouldn’t be, I saw Young Master Sun Liszt last year; he was staring at Sister Luya’s butt.”

“Sister Luya’s butt is indeed nice to look at; I’m jealous.”

“Then you need to pat it every day; otherwise, you have no butt at all.”

“By the way, Young Master Sun Liszt is of age now, he should have received his title, right? What rank is he now? I think he’s a Viscount. The Tulip Family’s Coral Island, I’ve heard, is quite a large island.”

“I don’t know. If Miss Melissa were still alive, with the Earl backing her, he would definitely be a Viscount. But the Earl of Coral Island has remarried, and Young Master Sun Liszt’s situation might be quite awkward now.”

“I really want to go comfort him.”

“Stop dreaming during the day. Do you, a maid, need to worry about noble affairs? I advise you all to come to your senses and do your jobs as maids well. Ugly ducklings won’t turn into swans; ducks will only sire ducks, and swans will sire swans.”

“So what? I’ve decided to stay unmarried for life, like Mrs. Fini. Aren’t I allowed to create a romantic love encounter for myself?”

As she spoke, the maid propped her chin in her hands, lost in daydreams: “A down-on-his-luck noble from afar, handsome and dashing riding a great horse, falls in love with a castle maid while she sweeps. Because of family and societal pressures, they must part, a deep kiss before dawn, and then they separate. Oh my, I’m about to tear up.”

Chapter 35: The Knight’s Quality of Self-Reliance

The maidservant’s thoughts and feelings were unknown to Liszt.

He had never considered, like most nobles, having an irresponsible fling in someone else’s castle. His body was only sixteen years old, newly matured.

According to the laws of his hometown, one was considered an adult at eighteen and could marry at twenty-two.

For now, it was best to focus on growing, without dwelling on unnecessary thoughts that could sap his energy. His former self might have been useless, but the current Liszt had confidence in striving for the title of Sky Knight. After all, his comprehension was not bad, and he had the help of the Smoke Mission. Perhaps one day he might even ride a dragon and become a Dragon Knight.

The pinnacle of combat power in this world was the Dragon Knight, an existence that could destroy the heavens and the earth.

“I must keep training in ‘Fire Dragon Drill’ and ‘Flaming Wave’. Although I can avoid going to the battlefield, it is essential to constantly practice the skills necessary for self-defense.”

The lunch banquet at Long Taro Castle was a family meal, and the number of people attending was not large. The Mesiro couple was away overseeing tax collection, leaving only two masters in the castle—grandparent and grandchild. According to the rules of Long Taro Castle, the Knight Captain did not dine in the castle, and Meioubao’s family tutor had already left to take an official position in town.

So, sitting around the dining table were only the grandparent, grandchild, and the three siblings.

Marquis Merlin was in a wheelchair, unable to walk easily. The castle's meals were a notch above those at Tulip Castle, as evidenced by the bread on the plate, which was the highest quality white bread.

Liszt picked up a piece of white bread, took a light bite, and enjoyed the soft, buttery, melt-in-your-mouth texture—hardly like bread at all, more akin to cake.

The wine was from Raz Manor's cellar, a vintage even finer than Crescent Moon Wine.

As each dish was unveiled—pudding roast beef, golden salmon with sauce, avocet eggs, yolk sauce jellied rock lobster, roast goose with lettuce salad, cheese meat pies, asparagus leaves, lobster sauce trout—the abundance of food was on par with Tulip Castle's major festival banquets.

However, the rich variety of food was contrasted by a rather stiff atmosphere.

The Marquis was a serious man who once wielded great naval power, possessing a strong presence. Levis and Li Vera were restrained in front of the Marquis, speaking cautiously.

Liszt also felt some restraint, for in his heart he didn't see these "ancient people" as anything special, yet he couldn't feel at ease with strangers.

So it was even more important to focus on enjoying the delicious food.

Especially the yolk sauce jellied rock lobster.

Very tasty.

He had finished one plate and had called for another.

"Rock lobster is a product of the Red Crab Island waters. Our family's fleet rarely goes out fishing; it's mostly some fishermen who take the risk to harvest them. The yield is not high, and almost all of it is sent to the castle," Meioubao explained in between bites of bread. "If you like it, I can arrange to prepare a batch of live lobsters for you."

“It may be difficult to transport them. From Long Taro Castle to my Fresh Flower Town is quite the distance. I would need a day and a half’s travel to Red Crab Island, a day by boat, and another half day to get to Fresh Flower Town. Considering overnight stays and other delays, it would take at least five days to return.”

“Rock lobsters are actually quite easy to keep alive. Just dab them with water every day. They have the blood of the Aquatic Monster Exquisite Lobster, a sea creature, and are not easy to die.”

Sea creatures, or magical beasts of the sea.

Liszt, naturally, would not object: “Then I thank you.”

“No need for formality,” Meioubao smiled. Among the three siblings of the Tulip family, he felt closer to Liszt—possibly a case of like recognizing like, or birds of a feather flocking together. Handsome people always seem to befriend other handsome people.

Hearing their conversation, the Marquis suddenly said, “Liszt, tell me some stories about Fresh Flower Town.”

“Grandfather, life in Fresh Flower Town is actually quite unremarkable.”

“Every aspect of local customs and living environment can be discussed.”

“Well, the town has fewer than two thousand people. It all started with the discovery of a new variety of Tulip, so my father moved his subjects and built Fresh Flower Town. Now, the main crop is wheat, and the land is quite barren, with little tax revenue. But fortunately, a new variety of Tulip magic potion has sprung up in the town, bringing prospects for new development.”

“A new variety of magic potion, that certainly is good news.” The Marquis inquired, “For this magic potion, did Tulip Castle pay a substantial amount of Gold Coins?”

“It was a profit-sharing arrangement. The town can’t plant too much, so I reached an agreement with my brother and sister to grow it together, but they have to give me thirty percent of the profits.”

“Hmm, that’s a very interesting cooperation, worth far more than a lump sum of Gold Coins. Liszt, you’ve inherited not only Melissa’s beauty but also the shrewdness of the Long Taro Family.”

The shrewdness of the Long Taro Family was well-known in the Grand Duchy.

The reason lay with the Marquis’s father, the previous Marquis, who at that time was only an Earl. Given the Grand Duchy’s urgent need for funds to arm the Knight Order for an expedition to the continent to fight for mineral resources, the Earl dispelled his fortune to support the Sapphire Duke’s endeavor, eventually securing Red Crab Island and the position of Marquis.

Now, the annual revenue from Red Crab Island probably far exceeds what the Earl had spent from his family wealth.

An exceptionally valuable deal.

“Fresh Flower Town is just a small town, I need to make money to maintain the expenses of the Castle.”

“Self-reliance, that is a quality of a proper Noble.”

Courage, politeness, loyalty, self-reliance Nobles preach a whole list of virtues, among which self-reliance is the most hypocritical. Essentially, they are a group of Vampires squeezing the common folk, and from birth, they probably don’t even know what a hoe looks like.

Of course, the self-reliance the Marquis speaks of probably means “relying on oneself to squeeze others,” rather than asking for handouts from family.

After the lunch came the dinner.

After the dinner was rest, and then another lunch the next day; after lunch, Meioubao got busy, because per the Marquis’s instructions, he planned to hold a grand ball that evening, gathering the young Nobles of both sexes from nearby towns.

A Noble’s ball could simply be seen as a matchmaking event.

Especially those second and third sons of Nobles, who are most enthusiastic about such balls. The eldest son can inherit his father’s title, with no worry of finding a match for marriage, but second and third sons need to strive on their

own to marry a rich and beautiful woman so they can continue to enjoy a Noble's life.

Otherwise, generation after generation, they will end up as ordinary Knights and fall out of the Noble class.

Noblewomen also look forward to balls. Not every young lady can marry the eldest son of a Noble; they too need to target those potential Noble heirs and exert their charm.

"Liszt, you need to get ready!" Meioubao, along with his personal servant, brought over a pile of dresses, "These are all ones I've never worn. You and I are about the same size; they will definitely fit you."

"Cousin, there's no need to try them on one by one, I think the one I'm wearing is quite nice," Liszt replied.

"No, we must strive for perfection. Think about it, the notices I had the Knights send out on fast horses yesterday will have reached at least thirteen small towns, whose Nobles received invitations and will be able to attend the ball. There will be many beautiful young ladies waiting for you, seeking to form a blissful union and a beautiful encounter."

"I am still young, I am not in a rush to marry," Liszt said somewhat speechlessly. How had he never noticed before how keen his cousin was on playing matchmaker? "You should be dressing up my sister instead. She's at the right age for marriage. And my brother, he needs to find a suitable mistress candidate for Tulip Castle."

"They don't need my reminders. Levis had borrowed many suits very early on, and Li Vera has been dressing up since this morning, haven't you noticed?"

"Have they?" Liszt asked.

Indeed, Liszt hadn't noticed, busy reading books from the Long Taro Castle's library in his spare time, and at meals, he was preoccupied with his food.

Chapter 36: Miss of the Salmon Family

The tailored tailcoat, wavy hairstyle, and the reluctantly applied bright powder on his face made Liszt, fresh out of the dressing room, dazzling to behold.

“Perfect!”

Sir Meioubao patted Liszt on the shoulder, “You will be the center of attention for all the ladies at the ball tonight.”

“I have no such intention, perhaps in a few years I will be very keen, but for now, sorry cousin, I have no plans to get to know any noble ladies.”

“Words spoken against one’s true feelings, those I will not believe. Rest assured, Liszt, the best thing in life is to meet the right person at the right time, don’t just leave it to fate, you have to seize the opportunity.”

“Is that why you, my cousin, are still unmarried after all these years?”

“Don’t shift the subject to me; we are talking about you now.”

Liszt shook his cuffs. Sir Meioubao was rather good to him, and he actually wanted to tell his cousin that instead of chasing the Sapphire Duke’s socialite daughter with the possibility of elevating the Long Taro Family by replacing old with new, it would be better to sincerely find a noblewoman to marry.

But the words reached his lips and he held them back.

This situation surely involved the will of the Marquis—the Long Taro Family prided itself on its astuteness; perhaps they aimed to move further up the social ladder. Once someone married the Sapphire Duke’s daughter, their family’s status would be unbreakable.

He was merely a Baron from a small town in the country and should not harbor the ambitions of a Marquis while eating coarse bread.

After getting all dressed up, he followed Sir Meioubao to the hall where the ball was to take place. Nobles were arriving in twos and threes, chatting leisurely in the hall and enjoying the beverages prepared by the servants.

“Sir Meioubao, you finally deign to show up?” a noble with a wine glass in hand approached.

“There’s no rush, the ball hasn’t started yet, Matil.”

Matil glanced at Liszt, “And who is this?”

“My cousin, his father is Coral Island’s Count.”

“Oh, from the Tulip Family, nice to meet you for the first time, I am Matil Nustinger.”

“Liszt Tulip.” Liszt kept a polite smile but wasn’t very enthusiastic. He wasn’t a noble keen on socializing and was at the ball rather reluctantly.

But then, he had no choice but to endure, and, with Sir Meioubao’s introductions, got acquainted with the young nobles from Red Crab Island. They were basically followers of the Long Taro Family—nobles enfeoffed by the Marquis and utterly loyal to him.

One interesting aspect of the nobility system was,

The nobles enfeoffed by the King were the King’s vassals, and the lesser nobles enfeoffed by a noble were that noble’s vassals. However, the lesser nobles were not the King’s vassals, nor did they have to be loyal to the King. For example, Earl William Lee of Coral Island was a noble conferred by the King and a vassal of the King, but Liszt was not. He only needed to be loyal to his own father.

And after a century when his father passed away, he would have to be loyal to his brother, Levis.

“Have you taken a fancy to any pretty young lady? If so, let me know, and I can be your matchmaker. Don’t hold back.” After greeting a round of guests, Sir Meioubao returned to Liszt’s side, “Look at your brother; he has completely adapted to the ball’s scene and has already charmed the daughters of three Viscounts.”

Following his gaze, one could see the average-looking Levis, who had said something to make a young lady burst into laughter.

“And your sister, she’s being courted as well.”

Over by Li Vera, two male nobles were laughing and chatting with her—she wasn’t very beautiful, but with a little inquiry, it would become clear that Li Vera held a Baronetcy, which to those Honored Knights or nobles unable to inherit their family’s title was a prime marriage prospect.

Once married, they could go on enjoying noble status.

Liszt lifted his cup of fruit wine and clinked it with Sir Meioubao's, "Wishing them all the happiness, and as for me, cousin, you really needn't worry."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Alright, but I will still keep an eye out for a suitable young lady for you."

"There's no need for that," Liszt said speechlessly. His cousin was overdoing it. Was he really so keen on playing matchmaker?

However, Sir Meioubao shrugged slightly and whispered to him, "Actually, this is Grandfather's wish. He knows that you're not highly regarded in the Tulip Family and hopes you can come to Red Crab Island. Besides, I need a helping hand too. The Long Taro Family's numbers aren't flourishing; I have no siblings, you know. I really hope you all can come."

Liszt felt that Sir Meioubao was speaking earnestly.

By his conversion of measurement units, Coral Island was roughly the area of a prefectural city, about ten thousand square kilometers.

Red Crab Island was ten times larger than Coral Island, around one hundred thousand square kilometers.

This area was comparable to provinces like Jiangsu and Zhejiang. With no roads and transportation relying on horse-drawn carriages, the larger the area, the harder it was to manage. Moreover, with nobles operating in a decentralized manner, an increase in small nobility could lead to more chaotic territorial management and even destabilize the ruling family's foundation.

After pondering, to say he wasn't tempted would be untrue; Fresh Flower Town really had little development value.

Moving to Red Crab Island for development, the Long Taro Family would at least have to offer him a higher status—Viscount, giving him a fief comprising a small town.

Yet, to achieve this goal through marriage, Liszt was resistant, “Let nature take its course, cousin. If there’s someone I like, I won’t miss out, but don’t force me if there isn’t.”

“Alright.”

As nightfall descended, the dance began.

Soft piano music flowed from the fingertips of a pianist, creating a suitable atmosphere for the event.

As the host, Sir Meioubao danced the first number with the daughter of a viscount, then stepped aside to signal everyone to freely choose their dance partners.

Liszt sat in a corner, watching young men and women dance gracefully in the center of the ballroom.

He made no move.

He had already observed all the female attendees—tall, short, plump, slim, beautiful, and plain—and had formed an impression of each, but sadly, none caught his fancy. Even though a few mature women fit his aesthetic standards, their age was a barrier—he was, after all, only sixteen.

At this age, many nobles already began to indulge in pleasures.

But it was not yet the age for marriage. The time when men turned twenty and women eighteen was the restless season for wedlock.

His gaze wandered over the crowd, resting nowhere in particular. Then, after a moment, an invisible mist began to emerge, coalescing into twisted Serpent Script.

“Task: Fresh and tender alfalfa, not only loved by cows but also by horses, is fundamental for setting up a horse field and is the first step in building achievements. Please arrange Cordyceps for the Alfalfa Bug. Reward: Three wild corn stalks.”

The task had been present for several days, and he was slightly anxious.

“After several days’ delay, the alfalfa should have grown by now. I can probably arrange it for the Alfalfa Bug when I get back Wild corn, I wonder

what it looks like. Its yield should at least be several times more than that of wheat.”

While he pondered the task,

An oriole-like pleasant voice suddenly reached his ears, “Hi, Liszt, may I sit here?”

The mist disappeared abruptly.

Liszt came back to his senses to see a seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl who looked somewhat like Mary Crawley, the Earl’s oldest daughter from “Downton Abbey.” Wavy flaxen hair, a pointed nose, deep-set eyes, and thin lips that seemed to always carry a smile.

Quite striking, more than an eight out of ten.

Sir Meioubao had introduced her to him before; she was the youngest daughter of a viscount, named Asina Salmon, and her family was famous for their Salmon.

Liszt showed a gentle smile and extended his hand to gesture, “Lovely Miss, any seat would welcome you.”

Chapter 37: You Can Come to My House as a Guest

“I didn’t see you dance,” Asina sipped her juice, asking, “Why didn’t you join in?”

“I’m not very skilled at dancing, so it’s nice just to quietly appreciate others’ dance moves.”

“Then you should dance even more. The steps are simple, and you’d learn after a few tries.” Asina blinked her eyes, her face full of expectation, “If you want to learn, I can teach you.”

With the lady taking the initiative, Liszt couldn’t very well refuse bluntly; he could only stand up and extend his hand: “May I have the honor of this dance with you?”

“The honor is mine.” Asina extended her hand to Liszt and stood up smoothly.

And so, Liszt led Asina to the dance floor, and with the accompaniment of a soothing piano melody, he wrapped his arm around Asina’s waist, their left hands clasping, and they began to dance together on the floor. The social dances of the nobility always had very simple steps. Liszt had never danced them himself before, but his predecessor had quite a lot of experience.

“You don’t dance stiffly; it seems you were fooling me before,” Asina said with a smile as they danced.

“Perhaps it is an exceptional performance this time.”

“Is that so? Then I believe you.”

After a moment of silence,

Asina asked again, “I’ve never been to Coral Island. In fact, I’ve never left Red Crab Island. Is Coral Island far from Red Crab Island?”

“Not very far, about half a day’s sail. If there’s a tailwind all the way, it might only take half the time.”

“What does Tulip Castle look like?”

“It’s built on the cliffs along the shore, much smaller than Long Taro Castle, but the surrounding hills are covered with tulips, in a riot of colors.”

“That must be very beautiful. If I get the chance, I would like to visit Tulip Castle.”

“There will be an opportunity.”

“Do you live at Tulip Castle?”

“I grew up there, but I’ve already moved to live in my own town now.”

“Right, I heard Sir Meioubao say that you’re now enfeoffed as a baron, in Fresh Flower Town?”

“Hmm.”

“There must be many beautiful flowers there. Is the castle where you live also surrounded by flowers?”

“It might disappoint you, but there are only about a dozen acres of tulips, the rest is planted with wheat. As for around the castle, well, I’m in the process of planting grass and building a horse ranch, and I might raise some dairy cows too.” Liszt spoke indifferently, sensing that Asina might be inquiring about his background.

Perhaps the girl was attracted by his handsome appearance and wanted to become the Baroness of Liszt?

It would be best to nip any such notions in the bud, he thought, and after a pause, he continued, “Hmm, the town is quite remote. We don’t have enough wheat or milk, and even vegetables can’t be had regularly. Even with gold coins, it’s difficult to buy meat because a mountain range, with magical beasts in it, cuts us off, and merchant caravans are unwilling to come in.”

Asina opened her mouth in surprise: “Are you an Earth Knight?”

“I’ve just recently been promoted and am still practicing the Dou Qi Manuscript.”

Liszt, over one meter eighty in height, looked down and could see Asina’s expression, stiff with discomfort. She was barely one meter sixty.

Probably the gap between ideals and reality was causing her distress.

Anyone seeing Liszt for the first time would certainly take a liking to him; women, in particular. But once they understood Liszt’s background, most would keep their distance. A baron from an unimportant, impoverished, remote town, with poor Dou Qi aptitude, might well end up selling his estate and wandering to some other landlord’s domain.

Managing an estate is no simple matter; many of the smaller nobility go bankrupt and end up as family tutors or knight captains.

Goltai was one of them.

Even the great Nobles could go bankrupt and lose their estates if they mismanaged their businesses.

“Next, I suppose it’s time to let go, signaling the end of the dance,” Liszt thought.

However, Asina did not let go. Her somewhat stiff expression quickly returned to her previous gentle smile: “Your father, the Earl of Coral Island, wouldn’t just ignore Fresh Flower Town, would he?”

“My relationship with my father isn’t very harmonious, possibly because my brother and sister are too outstanding.”

“But I think your demeanor is more outstanding. When you stand next to Sir Meioubao, you look very much like a pair of close brothers.”

“I take after my mother more.”

“Your mother must have been a graceful and noble baroness.”

“Actually, I don’t remember what she looked like; she passed away when I was two.”

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

“It’s okay.”

The two then stopped talking and danced the entire piece with their waists embraced. During the rest, he returned to his seat, and to his surprise, Asina followed him over.

Then she sat down beside him and continued to make conversation: “My home is in White Fish City. The castle doesn’t have a name. I also have an older brother who is married. He married Sister Lidia from Viscount Zavier’s family. They met at the ball in Long Taro Castle last year.”

“Hmm, no wonder I didn’t see your brother come today,” Liszt replied somewhat perfunctorily.

“He and Sister Lidia have a good relationship and rarely attend social balls anymore,” Asina said, blinking, “My father is very hospitable, Liszt. You’re welcome to visit my home if you have the time.”

“I’m afraid I won’t have the time. My grandfather is recovering, and I must return to Coral Island tomorrow.”

“When will you come again then?”

“Not until the holidays.”

“Oh.”

As the piano music started up once again, Liszt danced another dance with Asina. He then excused himself, saying the dance floor was too stuffy, and declined Asina’s hope to continue dancing with him.

After making a round in the castle, he returned to find the ball approaching its end.

With the music stopping, Sir Meioubao represented the host in announcing the end of the ball. The nobles, in groups of threes and twos, either went directly home by carriage if they lived near or, if they were from farther away, were led by the servants to the rooms prepared in the castle. Liszt also prepared to return to his room.

Asina found him again, merely saying, “Good night, Liszt.”

“Good night, Asina.”

Before he went back to his room, Meioubao visited: “Liszt, did you enjoy chatting with Asina?”

“We just danced twice.”

“I can tell that Asina is quite interested in you. What do you think?”

“I don’t have any thoughts.”

Seeing Liszt was serious, Meioubao nodded: “Alright, I understand. Have a good rest. Oh, and grandfather said he wants to give you an adult gift tomorrow. He regretted not being there for your coming-of-age celebration and hopes to make up for it a little.”

“Grandfather is too kind.”

“Right, good night.”

“Good night.”

Late into the night, Liszt was still awake, pondering what the Marquis would give him as his adult present—it should be something not too shabby given it's coming from a Marquis.

“Maybe it's a magic longsword?”

Among nobles, especially when elders give gifts to the younger generation, it is common to give weapons, signifying that a knight's honor must be earned with a blade or spear.

A Marquis would at least give a magical weapon, wouldn't he?

Magical weapons are incredibly precious, and he had never owned one, so the more he thought about it, the more excited he became. His excitement, to no small extent, also included Asina's enthusiasm—inside and out, she seemed to radiate that she fancied Liszt and wished to become a baroness.

It's always pleasing to be liked, especially by a rather pretty lady.

Always a reason to be happy.

Chapter 38: The Crimson Blood Sword Set with Gemstones

The next morning, Liszt, with slightly dim undereye circles barely visible, had already packed his luggage.

And he enjoyed a breakfast in his room—a spread of bread, fried eggs, pastries, jam, milk, honey, and coffee.

After Levis and Li Vera had also packed up, the three siblings prepared to bid farewell to the Marquis. The Marquis, having risen early and seated in his wheelchair, was writing something.

“Did you sleep well?” the Marquis stopped writing, lifted his head, and looked at the three tall siblings, “I heard you all enjoyed last night's ball immensely.”

Levis replied with a smile, “A very comfortable evening, Grandfather. The ball hosted by our cousin was delightful, and we met many nobles and fine ladies, some of whom I was quite taken with.”

“That’s good, while you’re young, follow your heart and take action.”

After a brief chat, the three siblings expressed their desire to depart, and the Marquis did not insist on them staying. Instead, he said to Liszt, “I missed witnessing your coming of age ceremony, so to make up for that regret, I have a gift for you. Meioubao, bring the prepared gift over to Liszt.”

Meioubao quickly entered, carrying a long box.

Seeing the box, Liszt immediately understood and guessed correctly that the Marquis’s gift was indeed what elders most liked to give to their younger relatives—a weapon.

“What kind of magic weapon might it be?” he wondered in eager anticipation.

Meioubao handed over the box, “Liszt, your grandfather is giving you the Crimson Blood Sword, in hopes that you will blaze a trail and shine bright as a knight.”

“The Crimson Blood Sword?”

Liszt opened the box, and instantly, a bright snow-white knight’s two-handed sword caught his eye.

The slender blade, guard, and hilt all came together in an ensemble reminiscent of a German two-handed sword. Where the guard and hilt met, a fiery red gemstone was conspicuously inset. Just by looking, one could feel the magic power emanating from the fiery red gem, circulating endlessly along the blade.

One could even see fine, blood thread-like red traces emerging on the blade’s surface.

No wonder it looked snow-white but was named Crimson Blood Sword.

Most importantly, this wasn’t just a magic weapon, but something even better—a gemstone weapon!

“A ruby?” Li Vera saw the red gemstone at the intersection of guard and hilt, and was immediately shocked, her eyes revealing deep envy and jealousy.

A normal magic weapon would cost around a hundred gold coins.

But a gemstone weapon could be worth thousands of gold coins, ten times that of a magic weapon.

Just this Crimson Blood Sword might be worth several years of tax revenue from a wealthy small town. Her Falcon Town was roughly equal to a small prosperous town, and after scrimping and saving for years, could barely afford a gemstone weapon—but she would never give up her luxurious life, so there was a very high chance she'd never be able to afford one.

With jealousy in her heart, and characteristic straightforwardness, she voiced her thoughts, "Grandfather, you're playing favorites with Liszt. You only gave me a dress for my coming of age gift."

"Wasn't a Little Minor Elf given to you by the lad from Coral Island, and didn't he also bestow you with the title of Baroness? But Liszt couldn't enjoy that. Coral Island's lad can play favorites, but I can't?" the Marquis spoke as if it were the most natural thing, also revealing his dissatisfaction with Coral Island's Count.

Liszt, who had scored a bargain, quickly ingratiated himself, "Thank you for the gift, Grandfather. I'll cherish the Crimson Blood Sword and keep its brilliance untarnished."

A gemstone weapon, which could immediately be sold for one to two thousand gold coins—how delightful—but of course, he wouldn't sell it. The ruby inlaid on the Crimson Blood Sword clearly had fiery attributes, which would assist his cultivation much more effectively than using magic potion ingredients.

A Dragon produces nothing but the finest goods.

With the Crimson Blood Sword in tow, Liszt prepared to return home under the watchful eyes of Meioubao and a large group of servants.

His brief stay at Long Taro Castle thus came to an end.

He felt no great reluctance to leave, after all, there were piles of matters waiting for him back in Fresh Flower Town, and no nest was as cozy as one's own. Just as he was about to board the carriage, someone suddenly called out to him, "Liszt, wait!"

Turning around, he saw Asina.

“Miss Asina, good morning.”

“Good morning.” Asina was a bit out of breath, probably from running over from the castle, “Are you leaving now?”

“Yes.”

Levis, who had gotten on the carriage but then stepped out again, suddenly chimed in, “If there were a beautiful girl looking forward to my return, I’d rather not go back.”

Liszt turned his head and shot him a glare, “Brother, please get on.”

Levis shrugged, “Miss Asina, you two talk.”

“Thank you, Sir Levis.”

With space left for Liszt and Asina, Asina fidgeted with the hem of her dress, “Won’t you stay a few more days?”

“There are many matters waiting for me to deal with in town.”

“Then will you come to visit White City?” Her eyes were filled with anticipation.

Liszt smiled as he declined, “I’m sorry, but I have no reason to visit your house; I do not know your father, and we have no social ties.”

The interactions between nobles always required an excuse, one could not simply visit without cause.

“You could come to see me,” Asina said, and then lowered her head, the meaning couldn’t be clearer—if a man was unmarried and a woman was unmarried, a visit implied only one kind of relationship.

Liszt sighed inwardly.

Feeling that his next words might hurt this sweet young lady’s heart, but he had to say it, “Miss Asina, I appreciate your affection for me, but, I have never considered the possibility between us. Please, do not dwell on me; someone as beautiful as you will surely have many suitors better than I.”

Asina’s eyes quickly dimmed, but soon, she bloomed into a smile again, “Thank you for your honesty, Sir Liszt, I wish you a safe journey.”

“Thank you, take care,” Liszt spoke, then turned and entered the carriage.

The coachman cracked his whip, and the horses, pulling the carriage, sped down the mountain. On the gravel-paved road, there was no dust, only the sound of the wheels clinking and clattering.

“Liszt, you rejected the overture of a noble young lady with such a cold heart,” Li Vera remarked with a hint of an indefinable emotion, probably doubt over her brother’s character, soft as she thought he was, to be able to turn someone down.

“If there’s no feeling, why should I force myself and harm both parties?”

He looked back through the carriage window and saw Asina still standing at the castle gate, her petite and exquisite figure clad in a dress fluttering in the wind.

She was brave, but he simply couldn’t accept her feelings.

He felt like reflecting on this for a good ten minutes.

But Li Vera’s scoff broke the mood, “Who needs feelings for a noble union?”

“If that’s the case, why don’t you just randomly pick someone with good conditions to marry?”

“Because I do not wish to be a vassal. Even in marriage, it must be he who comes to Falcon Town! Or, they must have the charm to make me give up Falcon Town and move into their castle. If I were to meet such a person, even if I gave my all to them, what would it matter?” Li Vera said proudly.

Liszt chose not to comment.

A few moments later, Li Vera stretched out her hand, “Let me see the Crimson Blood Sword.”

Beholding the masterfully crafted Crimson Blood Sword and the vibrant ruby set in it, Li Vera’s envy was undisguised, “Why is Grandpa so good to you? A gemstone sword, I might never even be able to afford to use in my entire life! Liszt, it’s a waste on you. Give it to me, and I’ll give you a hundred Naldas in return!”

“No deal.”

Chapter 39: Information of the Formless Dragon

Three days later, Li Si Te returned to Coral Island's Fresh Flower Town.

It was Tulip Castle's Knight Squad that escorted him back to Fresh Flower Town, accompanying Li Si Te and Ma Ku Si were two down-on-their-luck nobles, descendants of nobility, yet themselves without inherited titles, only addressed as Knights.

They were friends introduced by Goltai.

Lured by the promise of double wages, they came to Fresh Flower Town to take up official posts.

"Li Si Te, welcome back, you were gone just over a week, and I started missing you," Goltai greeted the town's landlord with slightly exaggerated enthusiasm.

His warmth was extravagant yet thorough.

"And there's Ma Ku Si, the Baron's loyal knight. Seeing you both in fine attire, I knew at once that your journey went smoothly."

"Haha, look who these two are, Isaiah and Blair, my old friends. Seeing you arrive with the Baron fills me with immense joy, evidently you have chosen Fresh Flower Town."

Next, a banquet was prepared in the small castle to feast the Knight Squad that escorted Li Si Te and his group.

Before the banquet began.

Li Si Te couldn't care less about being travel-worn; he quickly cradled the Jade Box with the Alfalfa Bug to the newly finished castle's front paddock. The ground was already a lush green, the alfalfa sprouting rapidly, almost summer now, and the temperature would also promote their growth.

"Little guy, come on out."

The chubby Alfalfa Bug, adorned with purple patterns, was quite beautiful.

Unlike the lethargic Tulip Bug, it was full of energy, opening its mouth to spit out the Cordyceps. In almost fast-forward, a single alfalfa plant sprouted and grew rapidly in the middle of the paddock. Larger and sturdier than ordinary alfalfa, it bloomed with purple flowers directly.

“Don’t forget to install fences around it, to prevent the horses from destroying the growth of the Cordyceps,” Li Si Te instructed his personal servant, Thomas.

Elf-related matters were directly managed by the castle; there was no need for the town officials or serfs to intervene.

“Rest assured, my lord, I’ll start building the fence right away.”

By the time Li Si Te returned to the castle.

Butler Carter greeted him: “My lord, the banquet has been properly prepared; you may take your seat.”

“Then let us begin.”

The banquet at Fresh Flower Town Castle was worlds apart from the feasts Li Si Te had partaken in a few days earlier, but he preferred the current atmosphere, for among all those seated, he was the most honored.

“Firstly, I’d like to thank Lord Layden and the honored knights for their escort along the way, I raise a toast to you all.”

“Baron, you’re too kind,” the knights lifted their glasses in unison.

Emptying a pint of beer, servants immediately refilled it, and Li Si Te raised his second glass: “This one, to wish Isaiah and Blair a joyful life in Fresh Flower Town.”

“Thank you, Baron, for your blessings; we hope to contribute to the development of Fresh Flower Town.”

“Lastly, a toast to my teacher Goltai, who managed all affairs in my absence.”

“That’s what I should do, Li Si Te, as long as there are fine wines to drink daily, I’m willing to stay forever drunk in Fresh Flower Town,” Goltai laughed heartily.

“Sober to govern Fresh Flower Town, well-supplied with food and wine at meals,” said Li Si Te.

“Of course, work and fine wine go hand in hand.”

“Haha.”

In the harmonious atmosphere, lunch was earnestly finished.

After seeing off the Knight Squad, Liszt returned to the castle for a midday rest. Lying on the bed and concentrating for a moment, the familiar Smoke Mission promptly arrived. The Serpent Script finally altered, “Complete the mission, reward three wild corn plants.”

Suddenly, the smoke transformed, and a new mission was released.

“Mission: As a Landlord, taking care of Elves is your inescapable responsibility. Have you forgotten the Little Wheat Elf Bug? Its abilities can produce more food for your lands. Please arrange Cordyceps for the Little Wheat Bug. Reward: Information about the Formless Dragon.”

“Information about the Formless Dragon? What kind of reward is that?”

An audacious idea suddenly sprang to Liszt’s mind, “Could it be that the Smoke Mission is preparing to reward me with a Dragon? That shouldn’t be right, it’s too much of a thrill, a Dragon! A being that suppresses the fate of a nation. However, what does Formless Dragon mean? Invisible? A Dragon without shape?”

According to the memories of his predecessor, Dragons come in three main types.

One type is the Gemstone Dragon, such as the Duchy of Sapphire’s own Sapphire Dragon, which can produce Sapphires. The Crimson Blood Sword, gifted to Liszt by Marquis Merlin, with its set Ruby, is also produced by a Gemstone Dragon and possesses magical power.

Another type is the Metal Dragon. In the Knight’s Novel, the White Maw Iron Dragon that fought against the Sapphire Dragon is a Metal Dragon that can produce iron ore. In terms of numbers, Metal Dragons are more common than Gemstone Dragons, particularly the Iron Dragon subgroup about which Liszt has heard quite a bit through various Knight’s Novels.

Lastly, there are the Elemental Dragons, such as the Fire Dragon and the Water Dragon, which are very difficult to tame and possess intense magical elements, causing astonishing destruction. They often destroy towns and injure numerous people. They tend to be the targets of Dragon Slayers in Knight's Novels—humans are a peculiar animal, worshipping Dragons yet also wanting to slay them.

“Gemstone, Metal, Elemental which category would the Formless Dragon belong to?” Liszt couldn't fathom.

He decided to ask others.

He summoned Butler Carter, “Mr. Carter, have you ever heard of a Formless Dragon?”

Carter thought for a moment, “I have not, my lord.”

The afternoon.

Accompanied by his Retainer Knights, he went towards the town to seek Goltai and his two friends, incidentally seizing the opportunity to stumble upon a clue about the reward of three wild corn plants.

“A Formless Dragon?”

Goltai stroked his chin, “I seem to have heard about it from somewhere. Isaiah, Blair, do you remember?”

Isaiah and Blair reflected carefully but shook their heads in unison.

In the end, after half an hour of recollection, Goltai still couldn't remember whether he had ever heard of the Formless Dragon, “One gets muddled with age, Liszt, I'm sorry. Perhaps I'm mistaken. I may have wasted your time; I may not have heard of a Formless Dragon at all.”

“That's alright. By the way, Teacher Goltai, how have you arranged Isaiah and Blair's duties?”

“I oversee the government affairs, Isaiah is in charge of finance, and Blair handles legal and foreign matters.”

“Since there are arrangements in place, I leave the development of Fresh Flower Town in your three hands,” Liszt did not linger in town. He was

confident he could foster the growth of Fresh Flower Town, but that was limited to conveying his intentions to subordinates like Goltai to realize the specifics of the work.

For him to take matters into his own hands would firstly go against the Noble system—nobles that work the fields are not considered Nobles, and those who dine with Serfs are even less so. Secondly, arranging matters himself might not achieve the desired effect, instead wasting energy.

For example, why should he personally conduct a census when he could have Servants do it instead?

Having finally crossed over into nobility, not to indulge but to toil away was equivalent to needlessly burdening himself.

Back in the Castle, Liszt pondered, “Since the reward is information about the Formless Dragon, it implies that I won’t receive the reward before completing the mission, right? In other words, nobody knows what the Formless Dragon is, and probably someone will come forward to tell me after I complete the task?”

Immediately, he left the Castle without delay and hurried towards Little Wheat Village—the Little Wheat Bug awarded by the Earl was waiting for him to arrange the Cordyceps.

Chapter 40: Why Wild Corn Looks Like This

Just as Liszt had properly settled the little wheat bug’s cordyceps, suddenly the steward Gejir from Little Wheat Village told him something, “Lord Landlord, I don’t know if I should mention it.”

“What is it, please tell me.” Liszt’s eyes lit up, thinking that the other party might be about to reveal information about the formless dragon to him.

Yet, Gejir said, “Lord Landlord, I’ve found three very strange plants on the wasteland of Little Wheat Village. They’re exceptionally tall, about two to three meters, and lush green. Our chickens are very fond of eating their leaves.”

“It’s corn!”

Liszt immediately realized that the lead given by the steward wasn’t about the formless dragon, but about three wild corn plants. He promptly ordered the steward to take him there—corn, the anticipated corn.

However, once they arrived before the wild corn plants, Liszt was plunged into confusion.

“Gejir, how long ago did you find these three plants?”

“It’s been three months now.”

“Have they always looked like this?”

“Yes, Lord Landlord.”

Liszt habitually touched the Crimson Blood Sword hanging at his waist.

He had kept the sword with him at all times; the magic power of the ruby constantly stimulated his fire attribute Dou Qi, nourishing and growing it. In other words, with the sword, he was always in training. Eat a little more magic potion in the future, and it wouldn’t be impossible to become a Sky Knight.

He kept examining the three wild corn plants.

The corn in front of him wasn’t a single straight stalk with a few leaves and a bunch of flowers on top, with one or two ears of corn in the middle. Instead, it was a messy cluster of several stalks, each tipped with a bunch of flowers, and where the ears of corn should’ve been growing in the middle, there were a few tiny toothpicks.

The toothpicks were segmented, each segment was a grass seed.

“Don’t tell me wild corn looks like this. This isn’t corn; it’s wheat!” Deep down, Liszt was hurt. He knew very well that the three wild corn plants were these three plants in front of him.

But he couldn’t accept it.

What happened to the large, plump ears of corn that were promised?

“This is simply grass for livestock to eat Ah, I remember now, these three wild corn plants should probably be called Mexican corn grass?”

Liszt, who had experience growing crops in his hometown, recalled that someone in the village had planted a certain pig grass, which was fed to pigs, known as Mexican corn grass. It was said to be a very high-yield forage, particularly favored by pigs, cows, and sheep.

“That must be it. If it were real corn, there would be no need to use the word ‘wild’ before it, as it seems corn does not have wild varieties, it’s the result of millions of years of human cultivation.” With this understanding, he could only sigh inwardly and console himself, “At least I’ve obtained a high-yield variety of forage, not a loss.”

He composed his disappointed feelings.

Liszt put on a noble’s restrained and subtle smile anew, “Gejir, based on my judgment, this grass is called corn grass, and it’s a highly productive forage that livestock are fond of. Chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, cows, and sheep all like to eat it. From now on, you need to take good care of it; I need its seeds.”

“Yes, Lord Landlord! Gejir will make sure to protect the corn grass, not allowing any serf or any livestock to get close to it!”

“Very good. I will inform Teacher Goltai, and when the time comes, he will make further arrangements. You just wait to cooperate.”

“Yes, Lord Landlord.”

After one last look at the Mexican corn grass, Liszt took a deep breath and lifted his riding crop, “Let’s go back!”

The placement of the little wheat bug’s cordyceps went very smoothly, and thus the peanut bug, alfalfa bug, tulip bug, and little wheat bug had all been adequately settled.

Only the placement of the thorn bug was still uncertain, and the millet fields for the millet bug were still being planned.

Nevertheless, the elves would be given the best care.

On the way back, Liszt bumped into Marcus, who was on his way to see him at the castle.

“Teacher Marcus, what’s the matter?”

“My lord, I heard from Sir Goltai that you were inquiring about the Formless Dragon?”

“Oh, you know about the Formless Dragon?”

“I’ve heard of it,” Marcus said seriously. “It was mentioned in a knight’s novel that had been torn in half, a book I read when I was very young. I don’t know the name of it.”

“Is that so? How was the Formless Dragon described in it?” Liszt knew that the reward for completing the Little Wheat Bug task had come.

Marcus explained, “The novel said that apart from the Gemstone Dragon, Metal Dragon, and Elemental Dragons, there is another type of dragon called the Sacred Dragon. The Formless Dragon is a type of Sacred Dragon; it is transparent, and no one can see its form. Wherever it goes, it brings endless disasters.”

“Disasters? Then why is it called a Sacred Dragon?”

“Because it can produce a very special gemstone.”

“A special gemstone? It should be categorized with the Gemstone Dragons then, right? And what’s this special gemstone, does it possess any different powers?”

“This gemstone is related to a legendary piece of equipment. Have you heard of a Space Ring, my lord? It’s a small ring that can hold a lot of things.”

This world also has Space Rings?

Liszt searched his predecessor’s memories but hadn’t heard of it. He then said, “No, so, do Space Rings really exist? Or rather, can the gemstones produced by the Formless Dragon be used to craft Space Rings?”

“I don’t know whether Space Rings exist or not, and even if they do, they would be priceless treasures that only true Nobles could possess,” replied Marcus. “The knight’s novel I read indeed stated that wherever the Formless

Dragon went, in addition to endless disasters, it would also leave behind gemstones it produced. Whoever found them would possess a Space Ring.”

“What happened then?”

“That’s all there was.”

“Doesn’t the book contain any more information about the Formless Dragon?”

“No, and I believe it’s just a story fabricated by people. You know how those novels that inspire our knightly glory are often just full of fabrications by the authors with their eyes wide open.” Marcus had come specially to tell Liszt this information, but clearly, he didn’t believe in the existence of the Formless Dragon himself.

Liszt couldn’t confirm or deny this and continued to ask, “Then, are there any other Sacred Dragons?”

“I don’t know, the book was missing half, and the part I read only introduced the Sacred Dragon, solely focusing on the Formless Dragon.”

After Marcus left.

Liszt still didn’t understand.

What exactly was the meaning of the task reward, the information on the Formless Dragon?

Was it simply to inform him through a task that he now had knowledge of the Formless Dragon? Or did it imply that there was a Formless Dragon nearby that he could go and capture? Or perhaps it meant that a Formless Dragon was going to attack Fresh Flower Town, and he should be on guard? Of course, there was also the possibility that a Formless Dragon might come to deliver equipment, maybe even a Space Ring?

While pondering, the smoke in front of him appeared again.

“Task completed, reward: Information on the Formless Dragon.”

After a twist in the air, a new task was issued: “Task: The sudden appearance of wild corn in Little Wheat Village has caught your attention, hasn’t it, my lord? You need to consider why wild corn is growing in Little Wheat Village.

Perhaps there is more wild corn nearby. Please find the original habitat of the wild corn. Reward: New information on the Formless Dragon.”

Quickly, Liszt focused his attention on the reward for the new task.

“Again with information on the Formless Dragon, what in the world is this, how much information about the Formless Dragon are they going to tell me?”