

## Runesmith 183

### Chapter 183: Strange noble.

\*Cough\*

Mary covered her mouth with her hand while giving out an obvious fake coughing sound. Arthur looked to her and then back to Roland that had a confused look on his face. It took a few seconds for it to click but soon he did realize that he picked the wrong words.

“Ah, by ‘mine’ I meant that I wish you to become one of my retainers, of course.”

Arthur turned his head to the side, Roland could clearly see the young man blushing after making an awkward comment. While for any normal person being given an opportunity to work for a noble as a proper retainer was a big deal, for Roland it would not be anything that he desired.

The whole reason that he left the Arden estate was to be self-sufficient. Even in his previous life, he bounced around because of the whims of others. Parents, teachers, perhaps even the society that he was in, he felt as if he just followed a paved road that others just told him to tread on.

But as much as he wanted to refuse instantly he suppressed this urge. Arthur might have asked him to become a follower but this didn't mean that he would be something similar to the maid or the guards outside. Instead, he could just be something more like an exclusive blacksmith that gains some rewards for prioritizing his lord's orders.

Thus before he could make a decision, he needed to figure out the details of this deal. Roland had already gone through several contracts and was not against signing others depending on the deal. By this point in his life, he had already come to terms with this part of this world.

“You wish me to become one of your servants?”

“In short, yes but not quite what I had in mind, let me clarify. First of all, I'm aware of the problems you have faced, the dwarves and merchants must not have made it easy to survive in this city. But, even though they have tried you have managed to claw your way up!”

Roland looked to the noble that turned away from him and started monologuing about his achievements. It seemed that Arthur Valerian was impressed with what he was able to do in this short amount of time.

“And then there is this golem, it would be very disheartening if such a talented craftsman like you would be able to reach his full potential, thus I am willing to offer you an opportunity Mr. Wayland, become my personal blacksmith!”

“Personal Blacksmith?”

Roland parroted the statement of the lord as everything was moving fast. He was somewhat expecting to get some kind of offer but becoming the main smith of a lord was not that simple. It carried a degree of responsibility towards that noble, in some cases, these craftsmen could be accused of purposely making faulty equipment which could spell death for them.

If he was responsible for making some personal weapons, he would be also responsible if they broke during battle. Even if it broke for good reasons some nobles would take out their rage on these craftsmen, punishing them in various ways. So, while the title would probably be quite the boost to his prestige in the city, it would also carry with it some drawbacks.

“Oh, is it such a surprise? or are you dissatisfied with the offer?”

Arthur asked while also looking away from the magical glass that was showing him the auction house beneath. It would be somewhat rude for Roland to turn down the offer, thus he was not sure what he should do now. The person here could make things really difficult for him if their relationship turned sour.

“Well, my Lord...”

“Speak freely, I can clearly tell that you have some reservations, I would not force the position upon you, I realize that working for such an insignificant noble like me might not be something that such a young and aspiring Runesmith would want to do...”

“Uh, my lord?”

Roland raised his brow while looking at Arthur that for some reason was commenting about his own low birth. While he knew that the noble was probably a bastard son that was sent here to get rid of, it wasn't confirmed before he spoke out.

“Lord Arthur, why did...”

The car girl that was listening on the side raised her voice after hearing the ‘insignificant’ part. She quickly stopped as Arthur raised his hand up though.

“It's fine Mary, I'm not looking for mindless lackeys, it's best if Mr. Wayland knows what he is getting himself into.”

Roland just looked between the two while not saying anything, during this whole conversation he wasn't really able to give much of his own input. It did seem that this young man valued Roland quite a bit and the only reason that he could come up with, was a lack of power. Perhaps the one with the leverage here was not the lord but him instead.

While the noble continued to talk Roland noticed some oddities in his tone and mannerisms. Arthur seemed somewhat nervous when he tried to ask some questions and for some reason, he was being overly truthful.

At first, it looked like it would be some kind of negotiation between them but suddenly the young man dropped the noble act. It was as if he wasn't looking for an employee but a partner instead.

It also didn't seem as if this noble had a good opinion of himself as he continued to talk down about his own standing. He was somewhat getting emotional as well, it was as if Roland was a piece of wood that he was trying to cling to after his ship had sunk.

“Excuse me my Lord... can I be frank?”

Finally, Roland gathered up some courage after hearing the man blunder about without getting to the point of it all. After the question, Arthur just nodded his head before he finally sat back down on his chair.

“Please go ahead.”

“I am not interested in becoming a part of any noble house. I am still in training, I’m also part of the adventurers guild which does take up much of my time, I don’t think I would be able to continue bettering my craft if I settle down as a personal blacksmith.”

Roland replied quickly, for normal craftsmen it was probably the ticket out of poverty. The nobles would supply them with materials and they could just craft away while progressing further with their craft.

Bettering himself as a runesmith was only a part of his future plans, this also included gaining levels and being able to protect himself from others with his own two hands. For that, he needed to fight monsters and create new items for that purpose.

“But... I am willing to hear your offer, I’m sure we can work something out. The lord already knows my situation with the dwarves and how they organized my removal from this auction house.”

Arthur nodded.

“Ah, yes the dwarves, of course, you will be free to present your wares to the public at my auction house, I wanted to save it for later but it does seem that you have made up your mind Mr. Wayland.”

Arthur moved his hand towards his desk and brought out a small stack of papers. At first, Roland thought it was just another contract but after seeing the first page he noticed that it wasn’t his name that was on it, but it was Elodia’s.

“I see that you are surprised, I hope that it won’t sour our relationship but my people have looked into your personal matters.”

“These are... papers for the Orphanage?”

What he was looking at now were documents that stated that Elodia could keep the orphanage that she had bought a couple of years ago.

“Yes, the city official that signed off on the inspection has been removed from his position, he had been clearly taking bribes and didn’t cover his tracks well enough.”

This wasn’t all as besides them he also received a permit to sell items in the auction house. There was even a special card that was similar to the adventurer card which would give him some special privileges.

“Is this a golden supplier card?”

“I see that I want need to explain then, yes this was part of the offerings I wished to hand to you Mr. Wayland.”

The golden supplier card opened up the auction house to anyone having it. People with it wouldn't need to bother with waiting in line, they could drop off their wares whenever they wanted. They would also pay smaller fees for their wares which sometimes went up to 30%.

Now with those two gifts presented Roland wasn't sure what to do. Would Arthur snatch them away, he really wanted to help Elodia with the orphanage. If he stayed on Arthur's bad side he could easily reinstate the old inspector and do the whole thing again.

But if he joined him, the merchants in the city would probably get the message that Roland had some backing. While he couldn't force them to sell materials to him directly, he could indirectly pressure them in other ways.

Just like that, one city official gave a bogus inspection to Elodia's orphanage, so could he order the same. The dwarves might find themselves with their materials being held up for many weeks by the guards.

Normally a city lord would not go against the dwarven union as they were paying a lot in tax money. But if he could somewhat replace them with his own people, then he would. Back in Edelgard, there was one bloodthirsty noble in particular that went with that option.

"You have my thanks but I'm not sure if I can just accept these..."

"Nonsense, I insist."

"You would give me these? But I already refused your main offer..."

"I see it more as an investment, I'm sure with time you will see it my way, Mr. Wayland."

"My Lord you are very..."

Roland stopped himself before continuing but Arthur decided to finish the sentence.

"Generous?"

"No,... naive."

He somewhat quickly blurred out what he was thinking. The noble was investing in someone like him without any contracts or promises. This would normally spell disaster, there was nothing keeping Roland from moving out of the city.

"How dare you!"

After blurting out the word the cat maid that was to the side raised her voice. Roland turned his head to the side to eyeball her as it seemed that she could attack him at any moment. But before a brawl ensued the two heard a joyous laugh coming from behind the desk.

"Hahaha, naive he said? I think I like you even more Mr. Wayland, are you sure you don't want to reconsider? I can't offer you much in money but I can lower the margins for any auctions you take part in!"

It seemed that he wasn't offended, which was good for him.

“Did you work for a noble before? You don’t seem intimidated by my name at all, the way you conduct yourself is also peculiar...”

While Roland was noticing elements about Arthur, he was doing the same to him. Roland was brought up in the modern world and also in the Arden estate. He did not conduct himself as a commoner that would probably be panicking at this moment if they were in his shoes.

“Ah... well, I apologize for being rude.”

He performed an awkward bow but this only made Arthur burst out in laughter even more. The maid that was on the side seemed to do the same as they both started laughing together.

‘Does this guy have a screw loose or something? It seems that instead of a runesmith he is looking for a friend or something, I don’t get it.’

If Arthur wanted to make a good impression on a potential retainer he had failed miserably. He was talking in a casual way and also just gave out the only bargaining chips that he had. Normally he should have made Roland sign a contract before giving him the papers for the orphanage.

‘Well, I don’t feel like he is lying to me at least.’

The person he was talking to was behaving strangely but this only made him seem more genuine. Was Arthur just good at acting and was hiding some kind of ploy that he would regret in the future?

“As I said before, I’m open to doing business with you my Lord, if you wish I will treat you as a priority customer.”

“Priority customer?”

Arthur rubbed his chin while thinking before slamming his hand down on the desk.

“I guess that will have to do, for now, I’m sure you’ll come around soon enough. Now, let us talk business, Mr. Wayland.”

It seemed that even though he had refused the proposal, Arthur Valerian was still willing to do business with him. This meant that he would keep the auction house privileges and also get the legal papers for Elodia. In return, he would be getting a new business partner that would probably ask him for some favors.

What ensued after was just regular business talk between the two men. Arthur was mostly interested in presenting Roland’s golems on display. In his mind, this was the most unique product that he could offer and he wanted to maximize on the monetary gain.

“Thus I would like to propose this divide...”

After some back and forth they agreed on a certain percentage. During the conversation, Roland was sure to mention his displeasure in the merchant’s way of dealing with him. He did not mention that he was getting his materials from the thieves guild but even without asking, Arthur probably had a suspicion.

This was somewhat dangerous, Roland didn't really save much money on buying from the black market but the city lost money in untaxable wares. If this was known, he would quickly be thrown into jail. Luckily his new associate was willing to help him out with that.

"I don't think that would be a problem, Mary."

"Yes my Lord?"

"Mr. Wayland, this is Mary, my personal maid, if you give her a list of the goods you require she will be able to get them for you, of course you'll cover the cost of the transaction."

It was a very simple solution. While Arthur could potentially threaten the merchants into selling to Roland, there was no need to. Instead he could use Mary as a middle man. The merchants would not be able to deny services to the lord's personal maid, even if they knew that she was just dumping off everything at Roland's house instantly after.

"Isn't this deal somewhat one-sided?"

After everything was said and done, Roland asked this question. When something seemed too good to be true, it mostly was. Either he was getting himself into something that could backfire dramatically or he was receiving a deal of his lifetime.

Even after refusing the main request of becoming the lord's retainer, he was still getting all the things that he wanted. Access to the auction house, the right to Elodia's orphanage, and being able to receive materials at the market price through Mary's help.

There were also no binding contracts prepared, Arthur was just giving out gifts that were almost free. Not like he wouldn't be working and creating more items either way, now he just had a better venue that could probably gain him more money and prestige.

"It might seem one-sided to you, Wayland but I think I'm a good judge of character."

Arthur just smiled while Roland was handed the paperwork. The meeting was over and for the time being, they agreed on helping Roland present some runic items when he was ready. He needed some time to figure out what the best model to sell would be as he would be opening himself up to a new market.

"Is that so, well then... I'll see you when I have the prototype ready."

With no binding contracts, Roland had ample time to work. But, even though the promise was made with words he intended to work diligently with this new noble. This was his chance to finally stick it to the dwarves and after three years of being kicked around by them, he was eager to out stage them.

...

"That didn't go as well as I hoped for Lord Arthur, are you sure we can trust him? I did prepare a proper contract..."

After Roland left, Mary and Arthur were left alone in the room. The plan was to convince the runesmith into signing a contract with them, but for some reason, Arthur decided to go off-script.

“Didn’t you notice? That man is hiding it well but... I’m sure of it...”

“Hiding something? No... what is it?”

“Haha, well it doesn’t matter, I’m sure he will deliver on his part of the agreement.”

Arthur shrugged while walking back to the magical mirror, from it he continued to stare at the beginning of a new auction with a faint smile covering his face.

#### **Chapter 184: Secrets.**

“What is this?”

“What does it look like?”

“I mean... how did you get it? What did that noble ask you to do? Did you sign a contract? I... we could have found a different way, why did you have to...”

“Wait, calm down, why are you crying? I didn’t sign any contracts, just wait and let me explain...”

Roland was back home, the nice-looking vest was off and he had returned to wearing some loose clothes around his home. After the conversation with the city lord, he returned to his home where Elodia was waiting for him.

Thus after relieving himself of the new clothes he handed her the orphanage papers that he received. This of course caused a misunderstanding in which she believed that he sold himself to the new lord. It took some time to explain that the man named Arthur Valerian wasn’t like most of the other nobles.

“I’m not sure I understand the new lord but... he might just be a better person than we expected?”

“It does seem that way but I wouldn’t be surprised if there was another reason for it.”

Roland commented as he wasn’t quite convinced. There could be various reasons why he decided not to use a contract, maybe he wanted there to not be any paper trails to lead back to him.

“Do you think they could be problems? Oh my, do you think he is doing something illegal and needs someone to be a scapegoat?”

“That’s a possibility but I’m not sure, he didn’t give me the impression of being the evil plotter type.”

He shrugged as from what he knew, the new noble really didn’t have much pull in the city just yet. At most he could control the Auction House and help him get materials. If he tried to strongarm too many people, the rich merchants could use some of their contacts to get revenge.

While he was dealing with commoners, they were rich commoners. Some of the merchants were in a better state than other nobles. They could probably pay some of them off to cause some trouble for Arthur in the future.

After living in the Arden estate for five years and reading up he heard about a few incidents. In those, some nobles caused incidents where they challenged others to duels for no reason. Then later they were given a costly gift from a rich merchant that the other noble insulted.

By the size of Arthur's entourage, it didn't seem that he had much pull in his own house. The name Valerian carried a lot of weight behind it, but only if it belonged to a proper heir or part of the family. If it was one of the bastard sons, they wouldn't be taken as seriously.

"What do you think his real intentions are?"

"I'm not sure, normally if he wanted to gain power and prestige he should have gone to the union or the rich merchants. He could easily make their life easier while funneling some money towards himself."

For Roland, it made sense to stick to the corrupt ways of the nobles. He could easily accept bribes while slowly increasing the wealth of the merchants in the city.

"On the other hand... if he really wants to own this city, he would need to get rid of them all, or at least make them work for him."

Elodia nodded, the city belonged to the rich. Even though Arthur was the acting lord, he could be replaced. He wasn't much more than a bonafide tax collector and judge. The real power belonged to the Valerian household that he didn't seem to get along with.

"Though I'm not sure how he can go about this, a good way would be to find evidence of their hidden deals, if they evaded taxes in any way, it would be within his right as the city lord to apprehend them but even then, he could just put away one figurehead while another one pops up to take over the business from outside..."

Roland gave out a sigh before sinking back into the couch. Even though it wasn't that late, he was feeling tired. The discussion with the noble went better than he could ever expect but he wasn't sure what the future held.

"This might be over for now... but I think we should prepare."

"Prepare?"

Asked Elodia while looking at Roland that he had some concern in his tone.

"Yes, we will have to look into other options, maybe find a better location for the children, aren't some of them already working? Maybe we could find them an apprenticeship where they could live?"

Roland's biggest concern now was to get rid of this problem. Even though Arthur helped him out this time, it was easy to make another bogus inspection paper to kick them out again. Some of the kids were older and could work.

It wasn't strange for younger kids to live together with a master that taught them their craft. They would assist them in their work while being given valuable experience and also food. He went through a similar experience back in Edelgard but there he was offered his own small home.

"We?"

While Roland was slowly blurring out words, Elodia cut him off as he didn't realize that he was implying that both of them were working together.

"Did I say something wrong?"



He asked as he wasn't sure what the problem was. At this point, it should already be obvious what his intentions towards her were. Would he be taking sketchy papers from an unknown noble to help her out, if he wasn't at least somewhat serious about her?

"Did you think I'd kick you out or something? At this point?"

Roland chuckled while placing his hand on top of Elodia's head, this of course caused the woman to blush.

"But... aren't you worried that you are wasting your time and money with me?"

She answered while lowering her gaze down, it was clear that she didn't want to ask for help and felt bad about dragging Roland into this.

"Wasting money and time? Well, I guess then we can waste it, together."

While he had made his decision about Elodia, he was not that keen about becoming a stepfather to so many orphans. Instead, his plan was to find them jobs after they reach a certain age. They could even work here as long as they wouldn't live at his house where he needed to have his own space.

That being said, there was a stray thought that appeared in Roland's mind. While he might have made his decision to go forward along with Elodia, he wasn't telling her the whole truth. She was not aware of his past roots, if he really wanted to continue this relationship he felt that he needed to fess up.

"Elodia... I need to tell you something, you might want to sit down."

He wasn't sure why but he felt that if he continued to lie about his origins, that sooner or later something bad would happen. After spending so much time in this city, he became more comfortable with people around him, thus he would be inclined to stay true.

"Oh? Is something wrong?"

It was clear that the lady with glasses was confused as the atmosphere quickly changed. Roland leaned forward from the couch to press his palm against each other while remaining silent. He was deeply in thought and somewhat scared about pronouncing his origins but sooner or later it needed to be said.

At this point, he trusted Elodia to not pronounce his secret to the world. Not many people would actually believe that he was a noble. This information was probably more detrimental to his enemies, as they would now have to deal with blemishing the name of a noble. Even though the Arden estate wasn't that known, it would be enough to throw them into jail.

"You probably have already noticed that I always wear this thing around my neck, even when we are around the house..."

The necklace that he was given by his gnome boss back in Edelgard was constantly around his neck. Even during his sleep, he kept it there out of fear that someone would examine his status and find out that he had a last name. Instead of pronouncing his real name, he removed the trinket from around his neck and placed it on the table.

"Go ahead, examine my status, those glasses should be powerful enough."

Elodia looked at the item that was always around Roland's neck. It wasn't a secret that he was hiding something and she somewhat learned to ignore this part of him, but the curiosity never did die down.

Her knee-jerk reaction was to tell Roland to just put it back on if he didn't feel comfortable with it. He on the other hand just looked at her very seriously, it was clear that he wanted her to proceed. It wasn't like she wasn't interested either, there had been many times that she questioned his origins but as she had somewhat of a past herself, she didn't ask.

With the help of her glasses, she looked at him and used a pinch of mana to activate their effect. They momentarily started to glow with a blue hue as they presented the stats to her. Finally, she was able to see his full status screen and instantly she realized that the man that she used to call Wayland, wasn't Wayland at all.

"Roland?"

"Yes, that's my real name but I'm sure that you noticed..."

"Roland Arden?"

She repeated his name again but this time it was the full one. Only certain people in this world possessed last names and they mostly belonged to one group, the nobles. Even rich merchants didn't have them, it was a title given to the special. It was clear that now she knew that he wasn't what he said he was.

"Um... is that it?"

Elodia asked while looking at Roland's confused face. Instead of asking questions, she didn't seem to be perturbed by the fact that her boyfriend was lying about his real name.

"Wait... aren't you mad?"

"Why should I be mad? Doesn't take a genius to realize that you were using an alias... Roland... that's a nice name, much better than Wayland to be honest."

She just shrugged while complementing Roland on his true name. Roland on the other hand felt like he wanted to crawl under his bed for stressing himself out for no reason.

"You did behave more like a son of a rich merchant or a noble... or are you perhaps from some kind of knight order?"

"I... okay, let me explain..."

It seemed that Elodia had somewhat figured out that he was keeping a secret from everyone. As they continued to speak she revealed to him that he didn't behave like a regular commoner which made her suspicious.

There was a certain fear that the commoners had towards people of noble birth. They were taught to feel inadequate compared to them and it was clear that Roland didn't act that way. He had no problem with talking with nobles and when he did, it looked somewhat strange as if he was constantly restraining himself.

Roland didn't want to beat around the bush so in short, he described his life. From the five years that he spent at the Arden estate to his arrival here. He didn't forget to include the details about the cult that he once had a run in. But after so many years of them never showing up they weren't considered a threat anymore.

Elodia didn't comment and continued to listen, probably if she had a bag with popcorn it would have been all eaten when he was finished with the story.

"...I'm not sure what to say... "

"I thought you'd be more surprised but you already figured out some parts by yourself, you're too smart for your own good."

He smiled while looking at Elodia that was now sitting right next to him on the couch. From the looks of things, it didn't look that she was as shocked as he expected. This played out differently in his mind, he was even expecting her to raise her voice after realizing that he was lying to her for all these years.

"I didn't think that you'd be a runaway noble, at most a member of a fallen knight family..."

She chuckled while looking at him, it was clear that she wasn't mad at all. It wasn't that rare to find people from disgraced knight families, they also possessed last names and mostly came over to the adventurer's guild to seek employment.

"But you certainly were daring in your younger days, I can't imagine running away from home at ten, was it really that bad?"

"Well..."

To be frank, from Roland's standpoint, no normal person would choose his way of living. Being sent to the knight academy was far better than living out on the streets as he did. A position in the army was guaranteed and if he was a noble's son he might have even been stationed somewhere safe. The world was already filled with many dangers, being a soldier wasn't considered more dangerous than being an adventurer.

"I didn't expect this, I thought you'd be madder for me lying..."

Elodia smiled but then seemed to pause for a second before answering.

"Everyone has their secrets, even I have things that..."

It seemed that she was also hiding something, but just like she saw through him, so did he. It was somewhat strange to be opening an orphanage in a city like Albrook. When he arrived, Elodia was already living here but it was clear that they arrived at a later date. He didn't want to pry into her business but it looked that now after he had shared his secret, it was time for her.

"... It isn't anything spectacular like being a runaway noble but."

"It's fine, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to..."

The moment she started speaking Roland could see some amount of shaking. It was as if she was scared to divulge information about her circumstances.

“No, you were truthful with me, I need to also be sincere.”

Apparently, she made up her mind, with a sigh escaping her mouth she finally faced the man in front of her and told the tale of her younger days. There was not much behind it, she had no glorious background as he did, it was the reverse, she was one of the many orphans roaming the cities.

Along with Armand and Lobelia, they spent their days out on the streets. They all lived together at one of the church buildings more on the mainland. The moment Elodia started mentioning her old living condition he did notice her slow down, soon enough he would realize what it was about.

“The priest did?”

“Regretfully so, he was quite the strong believer in the doctrine, he would punish us regularly if any of the children weren’t able to articulate the passages from the scriptures well...”

The main priest responsible for the church was apparently very pedantic about how the kids should be brought up. Sometimes they spent days out in the rain as punishment, with no food to fill their bellies.

But it wasn’t all bad, the three siblings stuck with each other from a young age. Armand started out adventuring at the young age of twelve and Lobelia followed him soon after. Elodia remained in the orphanage while also trying to look for some work but then when the incident occurred.

“He tried to do what?”

Roland found himself raising his voice as Elodia continued to tell her story. The older they got, the more aggressive the punishments became. Armand took the brunt of them but when he started his adventurer journey, the caregiver turned his rage towards the other kids. On one faithful day, it was Elodia’s turn. But this time around, he attempted to go further than usual and attempted to force himself on her instead.

“It’s fine, nothing happened, he wasn’t able to continue but that’s also the day that everything changed.”

As the story continued he was finally given the answer to why they were here. Apparently, during the attempted assault, Armand showed up after completing a mission together with Lobelia.

They were already somewhat older at this point at fourteen. They were close to an age where they could leave the church shelter altogether. The priest was beaten up to a bloody pulp after which they had to run. Even though the man was a failure of a cleric, he was part of the sun church. If they were caught, they would get into trouble.

They quickly packed up their things and escaped along with some of the other children from that orphanage. Then they traveled through the kingdom and finally ended up in Albrook with even more kids in tow.

“I see, so that’s what happened, you didn’t have it easy...”

Rolland commented but Elodia shook her head instead as she responded.

“What about you? I can’t imagine traveling all by myself.”

He just shrugged and with a smile on his face replied.

“Hey, well I guess we are good at running away from our problems.”

Soon the room they were in was covered with silence which was only broken by a large howl outside of the door. Roland was just about to wrap his arms around his partner but it seemed that his ruby wolf was tired of sitting outside. Even when he tried to ignore him, the howls and barking soon changed into door scratching, it was clear that he wanted in and wouldn't take a no for an answer.

“Damn it Agni...”

Roland rolled his eyes while Elodia laughed out loud, soon he was forced to open the door to only get pounced on by his overly happy tamed monster.

“Stop licking my face!”

“Awooooo!”

Replied Agni while jumping off and homing in on Elodia, it seemed that the licking was not yet over and soon one more person would find their face moistened up.

“Nooooooooooooo.”