

S vs Rebirth 541

Chapter 541 Pass

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes in shock, feeling the change of atmosphere again. Instead of the freshness of the spring, he suddenly felt a chill all over his body.

The winter was different from any winter he had faced in his life. This winter froze not only his body but also his heart.

His mind couldn't help but ask, 'Where am I? Why is no one here for me? Why do I have to endure this alone?'

Noel was turning around as if trying to find a person. But before he stepped back as if he was hesitating on his path, he actually stopped while sucking a cold breath.

"..." Noel had never taken a 'step back' in his life. No matter what had happened to him, he still tried to move forward as if he was trying to do his best to improve.

Even when his parents were executed, he still tried to move forward by getting stronger to avenge them.

So, if he took a step back here, everything would be over. After all, once he did it, there would be second and third times.

Noel gritted his teeth, resisting the will that prevented him from taking a step forward. His face became a bit pale, but it didn't mean much for him and his determination.

He managed to turn around and step forward, completing the seventh and eighth steps.

Normally, the last few steps would be the hardest. However, it seemed that fate favored him.

The moment he was about to take the ninth step, he suddenly felt people's voices echoing in his ears.

"!!!" Noel obviously knew these voices. It came from the people he held dear.

'Noel...'

'Noel... Why are you so lazy?'

'If you were not so lazy, you would have succeeded in my position and I could stop the royal family.'

'If only you focus on becoming better like now, we wouldn't have to die.'

Noel couldn't help but smile when he heard those voices. Even without glancing back, he could feel four freezing hands that gave chills down his spine.

Yet, Noel didn't feel lonely or cold. Instead, he was smiling as if he was happy with this illusion.

There were two figures behind Noel. They were his parents. But instead of the normal parents, they were like zombies. Their flesh was rotten and some parts had already started melting. It was disgusting beyond belief. One could easily puke when they saw them.

Yet, Noel didn't spare even a glance at them. He simply kept walking forward, completing the ninth step.

But before he finished his last step, he said two things. "My father and mother are supportive of my actions. If I'm unreliable, they can simply change their plan whether it's to make me reliable or abandon me completely. They are not useless enough to blame me for something they can't control.

"Besides, do you think that these foolish illusions can fool me? I'm not as simple as you think!"

Noel finished his tenth step. In that instant, the illusion disappeared as the melody stopped.

The woman behind the curtain had stopped playing and even held her harp while bowing her head.

"Congratulations, Sir."

Noel's expression became cold as he walked toward the curtain. He stopped for a moment as if he was staring at the person behind it.

He opened the curtain, finding the person behind it.

It was a woman, but he didn't expect the woman to be this young.

In front of him actually stood a woman, who seemed to have just become an adult. Their age shouldn't be that much different.

Her height was a bit shorter than him, but her eyes were devoid of emotion. It felt like she had accepted her fate if Noel wanted to kill her.

"You should try your own illusion," Noel stated with a cold tone.

The meaning was clear. Although Noel managed to complete it, it was still annoying to experience that illusion. He wanted the woman to try it herself.

"I have done it, Sir..." The woman shook her head. "Almost every night, I play the melody for myself. This piece is called Joy of Sorrow. With my Spirit, I can form an illusion related to your sorrow... the people, the atmosphere, the scene..."

"It's been two years since I started doing this. Unfortunately, this piece never allows me to see a single person..."

Noel suddenly fell silent. If her explanation was correct, it meant that she never had a person she cared for. And judging from her expression, it seemed that she was completely devoid of emotion.

Although it was annoying to have emotion since it could give away your feeling, cause a lot of problems, or even hurt the people around you, it was still a blessing to have emotion. It was what the people felt alive.

Noel could finally understand that the woman in front of him never felt like she was alive. After all, she had no feelings.

He wanted to say something earlier, but after understanding her circumstances, he became hesitant. That feeling was reinforced by the affection he saw from her.

Name: Lisciana

Affection: -

Description: -

There was no affection from this person. She didn't hate or like him. She simply did something she was asked to do.

On the one hand, he pitied her life. On the other hand, he didn't like the treatment he had received so far.

He scratched the back of his head. He didn't want to prolong this matter as well.

After some consideration, he had decided to drop the matter for the time being. He said, "You've promised to lead me to your boss. Now that I have completed the trial, I think it's time for you to honor your promise."

"I understand." The woman politely bowed to him. "Please follow me."

Without hesitation, the woman headed straight to the stairs as if there were no more traps from this point onward.

To his surprise, there was only one door on the top floor. It was clear that there was the boss' room on this floor.

Chapter 542 Loyal?

Noel frowned. He had two concerns. The first was the fact that there was no place where he could run away. Although he was confident with his ability, he didn't know whether his strength was enough to destroy the walls that had been reinforced by Spirit Enchantment.

In addition, there was actually a maid standing in front of the door, waiting for them.

When she noticed their presence, she looked at the woman before turning to Noel as if observing him.

But she soon bowed to him and said, "Welcome to the Eternal Flower, Young Master Noel. The owner has been waiting for you."

"!!!" Noel widened his eyes, never expecting the other party to know about his identity. But this also confirmed how much they knew about him.

He became even more cautious while observing the other party's affection.

Name: Illia

Affection: Neutral (50/100)

Description: Someone who has known about you but has no intention of you.

This was similar to what he found from bystanders. But they were not as high as her in the degree as they didn't know him.

Noel furrowed his eyebrows, not knowing what to say.

However, the other party had knocked on the door.

"Young Master has arrived."

"Let him in."

Illia suddenly opened the door without hesitation while politely bowing to Noel.

"..." Noel was preparing to take out Ardagan that was hidden inside his Spirit Mark. If the other party tried to attack him, he would immediately take out his weapon and kill him.

But to his surprise, the moment he reached the door and took a peek inside. He immediately saw that person along with his affection.

Name: Harley

Affection: Loyal (70/100)

Description: Someone who is loyal enough to risk their life for you.

This was another affection. He thought the other party would be supportive like Rose, but he realized there was a difference between Loyal and Supportive. In Rose's case, he wasn't a noble yet, so she still considered him a companion in the Demon Relief Squad. That was why her affection was 'Supportive' instead of 'Loyal' despite having sworn her loyalty to him.

Meanwhile, the other party was loyal to the Ardagan Family. So, it was clear why he was loyal to him. He was the young master of the Ardagan Family as well as the next head when he rebuilt the family.

He was quite surprised to find out that the other party was still loyal to him.

But he suddenly felt something weird from his attire. It might be because he had confirmed his affection that he dropped his guard a little, but he surely focused on the second most important thing from Harley, his attire.

Harley completely looked like a woman. Aside from his voice, everyone would think he was a woman.

Harley seemed to believe that Noel had a grudge against what he had experienced earlier. That was why Harley immediately stood up while politely greeting him. "Welcome, Young Master Noel. I have been waiting for you here. Please come in and allow me to explain the reason why you have to go through such a thing."

"..." Noel narrowed his eyes. He took another glance at the two women next to him as if trying to confirm their affection before entering the room.

To his surprise, the two women actually came together with him as if they were trusted enough to hear whatever they were trying to discuss.

As soon as the door was closed, Harley dropped to his knees as if he was confessing his crime.

"I'd like to offer my apology to Young Master. What you have gone through earlier is called the Banquet. It's basically a test for me."

"A test?" Noel glared at him, not appreciating such a test if he was this loyal.

However, Harley managed to strike right at the heart of the problem. He said, "The reason for that test is simply because I'd like to confirm the young master's will."

"I am Harley, the second in command of the darkness division of the Ardagan Family. We are the division that handles the information network, assassination, and connection that can't be known by others."

"And as a person from this division, I have heard about the young master's reputation. Master once told us to test the young master by ourselves to see whether you are capable enough to lead us or not... That's his answer when we have a doubt whether we can continue to serve you. After all..."

Harley couldn't say it. But Noel already knew the continuation. Yes, Noel was such a disappointment in the past. Although he had the talents, he was simply doing everything at his own pace. In the people's eyes, he was lazy.

So, he knew why they had such doubts.

"So, this test..." Noel muttered while contemplating.

"Yes. The second floor is filled with a hallucinogen that will incite your desire. It's to make sure you are strong enough to resist the temptation. Unfortunately, we can only use this one to see the resistance to women... We can't test the riches, power, and authority.

"As for the third floor, it's to see whether your will is strong enough to rebuild the family. The master and lady have been a huge part of your life, so I'd like to know whether you are strong enough to rebuild the family or not."

The test was understandable. He could see the reason why there was a need for such a test. After all, the past him was completely different from the current him.

He closed his eyes for a moment before asking, "So, are you disappointed with the result?"

Instead of answering him with words, Harley decided to show it with his actions.

He raised one of his knees, kneeling like that of a knight. The maid fell to her knees while the emotionless woman lowered her body gently while hugging the harp.

"We pledge our loyalty to Young Master. Right now, you are our Master and we are ready to die for you in order to rebuild the Ardagan Family.

"If Young Master is displeased by the test, Young Master can order us to die and we shall slit our throat right away!"

Chapter 543 Suspicious

"..." Noel furrowed his eyebrows, wondering how this actually happened. There were so many questions in his mind as he couldn't really understand the entire situation from how he was still loyal to the Ardagan Family to making contact with the noble and the Supreme Devil Organization.

"I know that after the test, it's hard to gain your trust. However, if we can gradually earn that trust from the young master. You can tell us anything and we'll do our best to fulfill it." Harley added after seeing the frown on Noel's face.

Noel confirmed that Harley was loyal. Meanwhile, the other two weren't so loyal to him.

But even without the medal, he knew that these two followed Harley, not him. As long as Harley ordered it, they would do it.

Noel looked down for a moment, contemplating. He couldn't accept their pledge easily after that test.

So, he had to confirm all the questions in his head first before accepting them.

"If that's the case, you don't mind answering my questions, right?"

"Certainly." Harley nodded without hesitation.

"In that case, you may rise. It's uncomfortable talking in that position."

A smile appeared on Harley's face while rising from the ground. He gently pointed at the couch near the door. "Please sit here."

Noel nodded while Harley asked the maid to prepare tea for Noel. He even asked the emotionless woman to play to set the mood, but Noel preferred a serious and silent atmosphere, so Harley ended up dismissing her for the time being.

"So, what would the young master like to ask?"

Noel thought for a moment, reorganizing his questions. The first question must be related to his identity since this was the most important.

"I'm still wondering how you know it's me... I believe I have made a perfect identity for this..." Noel narrowed his eyes. There should be only a few people that knew about his identity, so if there were actually more people that knew about this without his knowledge, his life would be in danger.

"Yes, Young Master's disguise is perfect, except for the fact that we are the ones providing that mask." Harley pointed at the masquerade Noel was wearing.

"Huh?" Noel widened his eyes in shock. This masquerade was given by the commander, but he never really asked where the commander got this mask.

"Yes. This masquerade had been created by Master. I don't know about the details, but it seems that the master had asked for a famous Master Blacksmith to create this mask. If I'm not wrong, your grandfather was also related to the creation of this mask.

"And under your father's order, I gave this mask to the commander of the Demon Banner Army, telling him to hand this mask to you after you pass a certain requirement."

"..." Noel fell silent, recalling the time he got this mask. It was after he defeated the Ancient Demon Tree. He realized that the special requirement was something related to his potential.

The commander had recognized him the moment he killed that Ancient Demon Tree.

"I see..." Noel closed his eyes for a moment, never expecting the situation to be like this. But the fact that he received an order from his father meant Harley knew everything that transpired behind the scenes. "So, you should know that my father is still alive, right?"

"Certainly. Unfortunately, I don't have the details since your father is working with my superior. Even I don't know what he is planning. My only task is to wait until the young master visits me so that I can pledge my loyalty to you."

"After testing me," Noel added.

"Yes, after testing you," Harley admitted without hesitation. He knew it was a problem, but his young master had completely changed. In fact, he had a high hope that the current young master could rebuild the family.

"Then, why are those two..." Noel glanced to the side, looking at the maid.

"I shall introduce you to them. She is Illia and the one outside is Lisciana. You can think of them as my right hand and left hand. They are the ones helping me take care of this brothel."

"Now that I think about it, the brothel seems to be related to an organization specializing in espionage..."

Harley smiled. "Actually, we are not tied into an organization. Instead, we are the organization itself."

"I'm not sure if the young master has known about this, but do you know a brothel called Sleeping Flower?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure. But I think I've heard the name somewhere..." Noel frowned.

"The Sleeping Flower is one of the biggest brothels in the kingdom aside from two other brothels. Though, they are true brothels, unlike us. Anyway, our brothel has a lot of branches, but no one actually knows that the Sleeping Flower itself is just a branch of a certain brothel."

"Wait a minute. A certain brothel..." Noel looked at Harley.

"Yes. The Sleeping Flower Brothel is just a branch of the Eternal Flower Brothel. My superior is in charge of security, while I'm in charge of information gathering. We have been using the brothel to get all kinds of information."

"..." Noel pinched the bridge of his nose. The Eternal Flower seemed to be strong, but he still didn't know whether to trust him. After all, he was contacting the noble and the Supreme Devil Organization.

If he had a bad intention, he would have his loyalty decrease after being suspected. So, Noel tried this risky move since he didn't have a lot of time.

"So, I guess you have inherited the will of my father..." Noel paused for a moment as his expression darkened. "Now I'm wondering why you are trying to cooperate with the Supreme Devil Organization when my father has been fighting against them?!"

Harley fell silent, not expecting that question. But Noel had actually got his answer from the change of affection. It didn't decrease. It actually went up.

Name: Harley

Affection: Loyal (80/100)

Description: Someone who is loyal enough to risk their life for you.

Chapter 544 Harley

"!!!" Noel was shocked to the core, not understanding why the other party became more loyal after being suspected.

For Harley, the fact that Noel actually knew about this information meant Noel had a strong information network. After all, it wasn't easy to find information like this. This showed Noel's ability, which made him grateful because the person he served was this powerful.

Harley answered without hesitation. "I have three reasons. Firstly, I have been trying to figure out the Supreme Devil Organization. So, I've been trying to make contact with the people the Supreme Devil Organization has chosen in order to find out their way of contact before trying to somehow find their base.

"The second reason is that this matter is related to a bigger picture. From the information we've collected, it seems that he has made contact with the people from the Tower Association. Although I'm not sure yet, I believe an Elder from the Tower Association has been working with the count.

"I'm still not sure about what kind of project they're working on, but we're trying to find it out.

"Last but not least, we are Eternal Flower Brothel, not Sleeping Flower Brothel. Only the insiders know that we are actually the main branch of those Sleeping Flower Brothels.

"So, if the people suspect us of working with the Supreme Devil Organization, we can simply destroy this Eternal Flower Brothel. You can say that this is just a disguise. And because of this disguise, we can take this bold action. This is the fastest way to get information!"

Noel could understand what he meant. Since no one knew about their true identity, they could simply abandon their disguise if necessary. As long as there was no trace of them, they would be perfectly fine.

It was risky, but the potential reward was worth it. So, he had no reason to tell them to stop.

"Hmm... Actually, why a brothel? There are a lot of organizations that specialize in espionage, right?"

The smile on Harley's face suddenly became pale as if he was reminded of a certain sad memory.

"I have been following Young Master's news, from you joining the Demon Banner Army to your current position. We are not helping you, but we've contacted Dimitri a couple of times. That's how he can keep following you.

"And I'm sure you remember that you once saved nineteen women from the bandits, right?"

"!!!" Noel certainly remembered those people. After all, they were one of the first batches of people he had helped.

"Your father once did something similar. But that group was far bigger than the one you helped... Because they can't do a lot of things, your father has been trying to take care of them, dividing them into groups that handle one task specialized for them.

"And these women, who have nothing but their bodies to offer... Well, it's also because they've been working in this kind of environment that your father has agreed to make a brothel. But because it will smear the reputation of the Ardagan Family, the ownership of the brothel is under our division management.

"Still, your father helped us despite the difficulty and we managed to grow to this level. And right now, we have the power to finally help the master and you, Young Master."

"I see..." Noel let out a sigh.

"Though, I have to say that you remind me of Master. His kindness has helped a lot of people and those people have reached their peak like me. And that group of nineteen women you saved back then? They actually had left the village.

"Of course, it wasn't because they were expelled from the village. Instead, they formed a mercenary group. Their skills might be sloppy, but they have made cooperation with a certain merchant group that ends up sponsoring them.

"The leaders of that merchant group are the twins you know from a certain Master Blacksmith."

"!!!" Noel's body shook as he couldn't believe what he had just heard. "What did you say?"

Harley smiled. "It's surprising, isn't it? You once helped the twins and ended up making a connection with a Master Blacksmith. And the group of independent women, who once thought death was salvation, became a mercenary group and related to the people you also helped.

"Just like your father, although not all people you saved would be eternally grateful to you, there will always be people that will end up meeting each other. They create a stronger bond and your kindness will be repaid.

"To be honest, I'm a bit concerned about our Lisciana. She has no emotion because of her past. After I hear about the group you made with some children, I'd like to ask you whether it's alright to let her join their group or something.

"What Lisciana needs right now is their warmth and energy. I hope that it can transform into emotion for Lisciana. On the other hand, it should be better for the kids to have a musician at their party since they are going to dance, right?"

"Lisciana might not be strong, but she should have enough strength to protect them. This way, Young Master doesn't need to worry about them anymore. Don't you think it's a win-win situation?"

"..." Noel was speechless. He didn't have any words to rebuke him. Because of it, he couldn't help but mutter, "Link, huh..."

Harley smiled. "That's right. You don't realize that your kindness has spread and their relationship will become a link that will end up going back to you. That's why I'm going to say this, Young Master."

Harley stood up once again and politely bowed to him like a faithful servant. "I, Harley, and all the people under the Eternal Flower Management will be of service. Let's rebuild the Ardagan Family, Young Master."

Noel simply did what his father taught him. He didn't realize that his action would turn out this way. But it somehow ignited a fire in his heart.

Noel couldn't help but smile as he said, "You make one mistake, Harley. I'm not going to rebuild the Ardagan Family. The old Ardagan Family ended the moment my fake parents died in front of everyone.

"And in the future, there will only be a new Ardagan Family. This time, I'm not going to make the same Ardagan Family, but a Family that will surpass the glory of the old. I'm going to make history, Harley. And to do it, I need your help."

Harley's body shook when he heard his ambition. He couldn't help but smirk as if the challenge lit up his courage. "Young... No, I shall serve you with my life, my master!"

Chapter 545 Destroying Enemies With Scheme

Noel smiled. He acknowledged the power behind the Eternal Flower.

Though, no one expected that Harley had grown it to this degree. He felt a bit bad that everything that had been built so far became his right this instant.

Noel looked down for a moment, contemplating. On the one hand, he didn't want to use the Eternal Flower because he still didn't understand their depth and abilities. On the other hand, he had to ask for their help.

After all, Harley's loyalty was actually of great help to his current plan.

Seeing the hesitation on Noel's face, Harley immediately asked, "Is there anything troubling you, Master? If you need our help, you only have to say the words. We shall assist you to the best of our abilities."

Noel remained silent for a moment before glancing at the maid, who maintained her neutrality. It seemed that even though he was their leader, he still couldn't capture the heart of his subordinates.

Noel sighed. "As much as I don't want to involve you in this, getting your help will smoothen the entire progress. So, I need your help, Harley."

"Please tell me about the problem."

"First of all, I have to confirm it first. The noble you are dealing with is..."

"Count Leinberd, but he is a direct subordinate of Marquis Walford. Everything in our agreement must be traced back to the marquis. In other words, if we play our card right, we can destroy the marquis. Well, this might be a personal reason, one that I shouldn't use if I want to take care of my enemy, but the marquis has been eyeing for the Ardagan Family's wealth."

"Because of that, the people under your father don't like him very much. Now that there is a chance to crush him, I'm trying to use that opportunity..."

"Do you have any concrete plan?" Noel asked.

"I'm planning to form a good relationship with the Count first while trying to make him misunderstand my affiliation and relationship with the Supreme Devil Organization. After that, I'll use that connection to meet the marquis and find any concrete proof to report him to the royal family.

"Although the marquis is strong, the moment we publicize the evidence, the public opinion will cause instability in the family. Even the Royal Family has no other way but to act against them despite being one of their allies."

Noel pinched the bridge of his nose. The plan was good, but it would take too long. Noel also had a plan in his mind, but with this cooperation, he had to adjust it a little bit.

"Say..." Noel was hesitant a little bit but still continued, "What if we don't need proof to destroy them? Instead, how about we create the proof itself?"

"That's a good plan, but that depends on the proof itself. We can't create the proof from nothing, Master. It'll lack credibility, and the royal family will help them instead of judging them." Harley shook his head.

"No. I don't mean the proof related to the Supreme Devil Organization. Instead, we shall create proof that will strengthen the suspicion of others that they're related to that organization." Noel smirked.

"Huh? I apologize, but I don't really understand what you're talking about."

"Since you have been following me, you should know about Runes, right?"

"No. Although we've been following your news, we never go too close since it's Dimitri's mission, not us."

"I see. What if I told you that I had a book of the completed version of the Spirit Enchantment? It can allow a normal person to be as strong as the demons of the same level without the help of spirits! And the ones who can cultivate it are not limited to Master Blacksmith."

"!!!" Harley was stunned by the explanation, but he still didn't understand why he mentioned it.

Noel smiled. "Do you have a map here? I'm going to explain my plan and see if you think you can help or not."

Harley nodded. "Illia, get the map and a few pieces. We need the entire Western Region Map and the map that covers one hundred kilometers around Tamworth."

Illia acknowledged the order and retrieved the maps immediately. During that time, Harley cleaned up the table so that they could put the map on it.

As soon as he laid the map down, Noel saw a few familiar names.

Count Leinberd, Marquis Walford, Countess Christina. Everything was written on the map and their territory was near each other.

Noel smirked and pointed at these three territories. "My plan will involve these three people."

"Hmm? Countess Christina is your father's ally, Master."

"Of course. I'm planning to 'give' her the book. And I want you to help me spread the word about this.

"We'll use her and the book as bait to lure out the Count. I'm sure that the Count will come and try to snatch the book.

"If they're truly related to the Supreme Devil Organization, the Count will hand this book to the marquis in order to get something big. And the latter will use it as collateral in the Supreme Devil Organization.

"But during that time, we're going to spread the news that the marquis has the book. You should know the worth of that book and the Third Prince has known about the book's existence.

"That's why I'm sure that the Supreme Devil Organization, the Third Prince, and even the Royal Family will be eyeing that book. Then..." Noel smirked. He didn't have to finish it.

Harley already understood his plan. "Though, I have to ask... Are you planning to spread the knowledge?"

"Yes. I have two reasons. The knowledge is beyond a person's ability, so it's better to spread it instead of monopolizing it. In addition, for my goal, I have to increase the overall ability of humanity. I've asked some people to spread the knowledge in other kingdoms, so you don't have to worry about it."

"I see..." Harley pondered for a moment. It seemed that he agreed with the plan, but he had to confirm a few things. "So..."

Chapter 546 Agreement

"So, you want to use the count and the marquis as a scapegoat to spread the knowledge. This way, you can avoid the blame from the Third Prince while still defeating your father's old enemies.

"During this turmoil, our Eternal Flower can infiltrate that place and gather information about the Supreme Devil Organization. Even if they're not related, they're going to be destroyed anyway."

"Yeah." Noel nodded. "This way, I can safely spread the knowledge."

"Does that mean you don't trust the Third Prince?"

"Although my father has supported him, I don't know the Third Prince personally. The fact that he is still adamant about his Third Prince's status, as if he is still the successor of the throne, has told me everything. He is still planning to become the king.

"Having this book will not only allow him to ascend the throne, but also become a higher ruler compared to the other three kingdoms. At that time, there will be a chance that the other three kingdoms will make an alliance and strike our kingdom.

"I don't want a war like that, Harley. I want humanity to unite and use that power to expand our territories by defeating the demons. Our enemies are not other humans. It's the demons." Noel looked at Harley with genuine concern.

Harley never thought that Noel didn't think only of this kingdom but the entire humanity. It seemed the only way to surpass their ancestor was to go beyond this kingdom.

He could finally see the path that no one had ever tread before. And this time, Noel wanted to walk on this path. To do that, he needed his help.

Harley thought for a moment. "In that case, I have to confirm two more matters, Master. First, how do you wish to treat the Countess?"

"She is my father's ally, not mine. Hence, I'm going there as a friend. If we can cooperate, it's good. But if we can't, that's when you make your move."

"Ah, I see..." Harley nodded. "Lastly, how do you wish to lead this brothel? I and the girls are at your command, so we'd like to know how you are going to lead us."

This question put a frown on Noel's face. On the one hand, this question seemed to be a warning from Harley. He wanted to see whether Noel was a good leader or not. He might have the ambition and the will to be a leader, but he didn't know about his ability.

"I see. So, you are giving me the command over you, the girls, and the brothels?" Noel smirked as if he was having an evil thought about it.

"Yes." Even Harley started to doubt, thinking he was hiding some weird intentions.

But to his surprise, Noel actually patted him. "In that case, I shall hand the authority back to you. You are the one who develops the brothel and our information network. So, you should be the leader. I'm asking for your cooperation, Harley. I'm not going to order you like a doll. After all, your experience and expertise are useful to me."

Harley closed his eyes for a moment. After hearing it, even Illia, who had been maintaining her poker face, couldn't help but have a change of emotion. Even the neutrality in her heart gradually turned into loyalty.

It seemed that their new leader was quite good.

After considering some pros and cons, Harley confirmed. "I understand. We shall cooperate fully with Master's plan. We have spread our people around their territories. So..."

Harley turned to Illia and nodded his head.

Illia immediately walked to a shelf and took out a metal box. She presented it to Noel while opening it, showing a black coin.

The shape and size looked like a normal gold coin, but the color and the drawing on it were different.

"Please take this with you, Master. If you present this to the receptionist in all our brothels, they'll guide you to the manager of that brothel. They will treat you like how they see me, so you can ask for their cooperation."

"I see. It's good to have a backup." Noel nodded. "Don't worry. Even if I have to involve them, I'm still going to consider their lives. I'm not going to send them to their deaths."

"I'm grateful for Master's consideration."

"Alright then. Let's discuss the details, shall we?" Noel smirked.

It took them three hours for Noel and Harley to discuss the details. However, they surely felt satisfied with the development. Since it took them a while to finish, Harley sent Illia to inform Anna and Rose of the current development.

Those two felt relieved since they gained the cooperation of the brothel. And Anna didn't have to fight against the brothel whose owner was Noel's subordinate.

...

After finishing their discussion, Noel decided to leave, planning to finish his own preparation.

Of course, he explained all the details to Anna and Rose. For Rose, this was a good opportunity to see how Noel's plan could take down a Count and a Marquis. This showed a lot of his abilities.

On the other hand, Anna felt overwhelmed because it was clear that the brothel's help would be a big boost to her investigation. Whether they were related or not, it wouldn't really matter since she would complete her own task with flying colors.

At the same time, the Royal Family and the Third Prince would be fighting against each other for the time being, giving breathing time for her father. This way, she could finally return to visit her father for a while, discussing the next step.

"And that's how it is..." Noel ended his explanation with a smile.

Rose nodded, satisfied. Meanwhile, Anna actually dropped her jaw.

Yes, the plan was good. But Anna felt it was too good.

With this plan, he could take down a marquis. Even she had heard that the marquis' downfall was related to this scenario.

But she also had a certain thought. 'What if Noel actually used this plan to destroy her family?'

It could destroy her family. But she somehow felt glad that Noel should have known about his father's secret before launching this plan. Otherwise, her situation in her past life would be much worse. And in this life, they might have to kill each other for real.

Chapter 547 Count Christina

After gaining the support of the brothel, Noel could finally go to Countess Christina's territory. His aim was to receive her support.

On the other hand, Anna went straight to Count Leinberd's territory. After all, she had to investigate the relationship between the noble, the brothel, and the Supreme Devil Organization.

Although she could gain a lot by relying on the brothel, Anna didn't want to leech off Noel's influence in order to finish her mission.

Since Noel had told them that the brothel was on their side, that was enough for her to continue her mission.

In the end, the two had to move separately once again.

Of course, they also decided on one thing. It was time for their next meeting. Considering they had a sudden vacation, it was impossible for them to meet.

Fate had played them, but they weren't so free that they would sit together and talk about it before doing their punishment game.

So, the two ended up leaving this matter for another time, which would happen one month after Noel returned to the squad.

But before that, Noel had to face Countess Christina.

He was riding a horse with Rose as they found the city on the horizon. Before reaching the gate, Noel couldn't help but ask, "Have you read the information?"

"Yeah. I've studied the report." Rose nodded with a calm expression. To show his support, Harley had given him all the information they had regarding the three nobles.

Noel and Rose took turns studying them.

Rose let out a sigh. "The Countess is a unique woman. Unlike the normal nobles who put the son in the successor seat, the Countess has defeated all her brothers in order to become the successor of the previous Count.

"She is extremely talented as a Spirit ian to the point that she became the disciple of the Fire Lord. When she was about to become the Fire Lord's successor, she decided to step down and return to her family to defeat her brothers and finally become the successor.

"So, using her as a scapegoat for your Rune Book is perfect. Even the Third Prince will acknowledge the idea since you don't have many allies at the moment.

"Of course, we have to judge whether the Countess is our ally or not. Her relationship with your father was not so simple.

"The one who helped her avoid the political marriage from her family was your father. In fact, thanks to your father's connection and resources, she could be acknowledged by the Fire Lord.

"In addition, after going back to become a Countess, she received a lot of attacks from her neighbors, especially Count Leinberd.

"In the end, she knew that the Ardagan Family was the enemy of the backing of Count Leiberd, Marquis Walford. Knowing that your father is a much bigger man than a Count, she allied with your father to resist both of them.

"You could say that she is always on the receiving end. So, if you want to use that favor to help you against those two nobles. I think it's possible.

"Then again, we have to be careful since we don't know whether the Countess will ignore you or not, considering your power and influence are still far from your father's glory. Have you gone there before?"

Noel shook his head. "No. I didn't visit a lot of places when I was still young, simply because I was lazy. Though, I had learned about the situation around me since the books I read were not only some stories or weird books, but also history, cultures, and politics."

Noel thought for a moment. He had the Affection Medal, so it should be easy to determine the other party's feelings toward him.

However, he had to be careful this time. After all, he had to reveal his identity in order to meet the Countess and gain her support.

That was why if he didn't play it right, he might end up leaking the crucial information.

"Do you think our identity is enough to have an audience with the Countess?" Noel asked.

"That depends on the Countess herself. I could say that our current identity has reached that level, but it's still not at the level where it matters in the Countess' eyes. Unless you have something that can pique her interest, then I don't think she will meet us."

Noel narrowed his eyes, trying to find a way for them to meet.

"How about using the Ardagan Family Seal? You should have that, right?"

"I do, but..." Noel fell silent. "If we show that seal, more people will know about us."

In the end, they were trying to come up with a way to pique the Countess' interest.

It would be much easier to ask for Dimitri's help, but he didn't want to rely on Dimitri most of the time. At the same time, there was no Sleeping Flower Brothel in this city, so he couldn't take advantage of the brothel manager to deliver the message.

Hence, Noel decided to use the Demon Relief Squad's reputation and mix it with some lies in order to meet her.

Although this was a risky move that could make Captain Clara judge their loyalty, it should be fine as long as they could somehow take down some nobles. They could simply mix more information to justify their action.

As soon as they reached the gate, Noel and Anna entered the city by giving away their identities as members of the Demon Relief Squad's Zero Squad.

They were allowed to enter immediately and obviously, the news of them entering the city reached the Countess' ears pretty soon.

The Countess, who was taking care of her business, suddenly received the report about Noel and Rose. She frowned.

"The Demon Relief Squad? I don't think I have called for their help... And since they're using their identities to enter the city, it means that they want to let me know their presence. What are they planning to do?"

Chapter 548 Change Of Affection

The next day.

Noel and Rose were sitting in front of the Countess. Countess Christina was a woman with long red hair. She appeared to be in her early thirties. Despite having to work under a lot of pressure and prejudice while taking care of her children, her complexion was good and there was no wrinkle on her face yet.

She appeared to be confident and bold. She looked at them while furrowing her eyebrows as if judging them and their characters.

After all, Noel and Rose had entered the mansion in a way she frowned upon.

There was a letter on the desk that separated them. She asked, "I'd like to ask the meaning of this letter, two guests from the Demon Relief Squad. I hope that you can give me a satisfactory explanation."

...

One day prior.

After settling down in their inn, Noel gave a letter to Count Christina. Of course, he had to use the Demon Relief Squad's name in order to force the Countess to read the letter.

As expected, the letter was given to the Countess immediately.

"Ma'am. We've received an urgent message from the Demon Relief Squad. What should we do?" The maid entered the room in a rush, holding an envelope.

"Hmm? The Demon Relief Squad?" Since she had just received the news of them entering not long ago, she kind of expected this kind of letter to come. After all, they wouldn't reveal their identities unless it was necessary. Hence, the Countess extended her hand. "Give me the letter."

As soon as the maid handed the letter, she ripped the envelope apart and read the letter.

"The Demon Relief Squad would like to inquire about a few things with Countess Christina regarding the recent rumor about the Supreme Devil Organization. Since this matter is important, we'd like to have your cooperation."

"!!!" Christina obviously had heard that rumor, but it wasn't her territory. So, she didn't know why the Demon Relief Squad came to her. And this task should normally go to the Demon Beholder Squad, so it was weird to see this type of letter from the Demon Relief Squad.

She couldn't help but crush the paper while gritting her teeth. "What are they doing? This is so ridiculous."

Recalling that letter truly made her feel sour. She glared at Noel and Rose in front of her and stated, "Listen here. I don't care if you are from the Zero Squad of the Demon Relief Squad or even the captain of that squad. If you can't give me an explanation right now, I'm going to judge you myself and let your captain come here if she wants you two back!"

Noel smiled as if he didn't feel threatened. He had seen the Countess' affection and realized another thing.

Because he was using the second identity and the Countess wasn't aware of his true identity, the affection he received was Hostile.

Although it meant he didn't have any idea about her true feelings for Noel yet, the Countess should give him her honest feeling because of the shock of the revelation.

That was why he had to see her first reaction as well as the affection to make sure whether she was on their side or not.

"I hope this is good enough for the explanation, Countess..." Noel smiled while taking off his masquerade. His blond hair and blue eyes had turned back to black while Noel's white sword turned black. This was the only thing he needed to prove his identity.

"You—!" Christina widened her eyes in shock, not believing who she had just recognized. "Those black eyes and hair along with that sword... You are Noel Ardagan, the last Ardagan..."

"Thank you for recognizing me, Countess Christina." Noel smiled. There was another reason for his smile. He managed to see the change in her affection.

Name: Christina Welfeirm

Affection: Indebted (80/100)

Description: Someone who will sacrifice a lot of resources to repay you but won't use her life to help you.

Name: Christina Welfeirm

Affection: Worry (90/100)

Description: Someone who doesn't want any trouble because of you.

The affection changed twice. The first one was when she was shocked, which was her true feeling. She recognized his identity and the debt that she couldn't repay to his father.

But after regaining some composure, she thought about her territory and the implication of being connected to Noel. Hence, the affection was worry.

The fact that Noel came to her meant there was an important business they had to discuss. Whether it was a good thing or not, she simply didn't want to do it because it would involve the Royal Family. She didn't want to implicate the whole family after all.

She gritted her teeth and pointed at the door. "I'm going to forget about the problem with your letter and pretend you never visited me. However, you have to leave right now."

Noel understood her reaction. However, he placed Ardagan on the table while stating with a strict tone. "I am Noel Ardagan. I might be here to take advantage of my father's glory. However, I don't come here without a good proposal.

"I only want you to hear about it. Whether you want to cooperate with me or not, I shall respect your choice."

Seeing Noel's grim expression, Christina fell silent for a moment. On the one hand, listening to him wouldn't hurt. After all, she still had the right to reject.

On the other hand, if this matter was super important, she might get implicated just because she heard it. After all, ignorance was bliss.

Christina looked down for a moment, contemplating. She truly felt indebted to the Ardagan Household. But their former glory had vanished, so except for the fact that she felt indebted and wanted to repay them, there was no other reason for her to accept it from a political point of view.

That was why Christina was in a dilemma.

But Noel gave her an offer that she couldn't refuse.

"If you can help me, I'm going to get rid of the nobles that try to harm your territory. What do you think?"

Chapter 549 Threat

"!!!" Christina widened her eyes in shock. She was surprised at first, but she immediately calmed down to think about the implication. She glared at Noel and said with a cold tone. "Your words are not light, Noel Ardagan."

"Of course. If Countess Christina can support me, I don't have any problems removing those two nobles."

"It seems that my support is crucial... If I say that I don't have any interest and use this information to alarm the Count and the Marquis, I can gain some stability for a while. Don't you think so? After all, they are more worried about the remnants of the Ardagan Family instead of me."

As expected from a woman that could succeed a noble house, she still managed to threaten Noel back.

Noel seemed to have prepared for this. He still looked at her calmly while saying his pieces.

"Unfortunately, you can't do that."

"Hoh?" Christina narrowed her eyes. "It seems that you have underestimated me, Noel Ardagan. I thought you were as sharp as your father, but I guess, the rumor about you was true."

"I should be the one to say that. It seems that because I'm still this young, you underestimate me, Countess Christina." Noel pointed down. "I'm watched by the Third Prince right now since I'm extremely important to him right now. Hence, the news of me visiting you would have reached the Third Prince's ears as well."

"Although the Third Prince has been weakened after the throne war, you should know that his force is still something to be reckoned with, right? If you're trying to betray me, then you should be ready to face the consequences." Noel smirked evilly as if everything had gone according to the plan.

"!!!" Christina was not the only one who was shocked by that statement. Rose also felt chills down her spine.

Noel actually took advantage of the Third Prince surveillance to threaten Christina. There was no proof of it, but if this was right, Christina would face a huge backlash, one that might destroy her family. So, if she didn't cooperate with Noel this time, she would be implicating her family, the one thing that she didn't want to do the most.

Christina gritted her teeth. "It seems that I've truly underestimated you. I guess a tiger's son is also a tiger."

As a noble, she obviously knew about what happened during the throne war and the fact that the Ardagan Family lost everything after that war.

But looking at Noel's current strength and his influence, it seemed that Noel still retained a lot of power the Ardagan Family had hidden.

And the connection to the Third Prince was crucial.

"You're trying to blackmail me, you know that..." Christina looked at Noel coldly.

"Of course. Though, I'm doing the same thing as you..." Noel shrugged.

Christina gritted her teeth. The fact that the Third Prince was going to be involved in this matter, meant she couldn't escape from this problem.

And if they succeeded, the annoying nobles would disappear. So, Christina accepted with great difficulty.

"It seems that we're going to work together for a while."

"Great choice." Noel smiled.

Christina took a deep breath, never expecting someone who had just reached adulthood to be able to pressure her like this.

She called the butler for tea before asking, "Alright. It seems that we're going to have a long discussion. Tell me about your plan."

Noel nodded. He immediately took out the rune book he had written.

In that instant, Christina widened her eyes. She was still one of the leading Spirit ians in this kingdom. She even almost succeeded the Fire Lord's position.

So, when Noel showed her the rune book, she instantly recognized the symbol.

"This is... Spirit Enchantment? But how... This is more complete than the version I've seen... Will this even work? But the symbols look perfect unlike the Spirit Enchantment..."

Christina gasped.

"I want you to help me distribute this book."

"Huh? If the knowledge contained in this book is true, then you should know the immense power this book has, right?" Christina gritted her teeth. As expected, even Christina was influenced by greed. She wanted to study it and took advantage of the power of this book.

However, Noel shook his head. "This book holds too much power. I... No, even if the entire kingdom has it, this book's power is still beyond that. I've judged that it's better to spread the knowledge instead.

"The details will be decided by me. As for you, I think you should be able to make a connection between this book, the nobles, and the Third Prince, right?"

"!!!" Christina's body shook as she couldn't believe what she had just heard. "What? Are you serious?"

Noel nodded.

"You want them to think that these books are in their possession. And by taking advantage of that situation, I can spread the knowledge under their names. So, I can satisfy your condition while using that information to deal with those annoying nobles.

"But the fact that you mentioned the Third Prince bothered me... It seems that the Third Prince knows about this book. Are you sure you're not using me as a scapegoat as well?"

Noel smiled. "Of course not. I know that you still considered my father your ally, and I'm not planning to harm an ally.

"And as one of the leading Spirit ians as well as one of the few allies of the Ardagan Family, I think everyone can understand why I ask you to help me with this book, right?"

"Well, it's true that the ones who can apply the Spirit Enchantment are mostly blacksmiths, but the ones who can put more theories and research about them are Spirit ians like me. It won't be strange to leave that book to me..." Christina looked down. She could understand what Noel wanted and how he planned to do it.

And the fact that Noel, who just became an adult, made this plan and managed to 'threaten' her to become an accomplice showed what kind of political figure he could become in the future.

That thought couldn't help but make her shudder.

Chapter 550 The Beginning

"Well, our job is done here." Noel smirked while stretching his body as he laid down on his back.

Rose was shaking her head helplessly. She wondered what kind of leader she decided to follow. Although she knew about his talent and ambition, the previous negotiation was still too much.

Noel actually managed to force a noble to accept his proposal while maintaining their current relationship. This was a win-win situation even though it was a threat from Noel.

If Noel was allowed to grow for another decade, he might not only become a Spirit Grandmaster, but he would also become a formidable noble.

His level could be equal to an Arbiter's, if not stronger. And they still had to account for Noel's influence.

"Well, it seems that we're done here. What will we do next?" Rose asked. "Are we going to go to those nobles now?"

"Why should we do that?" Noel smirked. "We are visiting this place just to meet my father's ally, right? After that, we will go to Lelelei Fort to hunt a firebird, no? We're going there after this."

"Eh? You sound confident enough that everything will go according to your plan." Rose was a bit skeptical since something might go wrong.

However, Noel raised two fingers, showing her there were two reasons. "First of all, I trust my people. If I give them the task, then it shall be their task. Because I act that way, I can become this confident.

"And the brothel isn't weak, so I'm sure everything can be taken care of even if there are problems appearing here and there.

"Last but not least, Anna is there. Do you forget our original aim? We want to spread the knowledge, so no one can monopolize it, right? That's what we're doing. The minor details shall be taken care of by the people. If I have to handle every little thing, I might die from overwork when I become a noble again. So, you have to change your mindset, Rose."

Rose looked down, comprehending Noel's words. As he said, he would be too busy if he handled all the little details. So, as the head of the Ardagan Family, he had to look ahead and control the bigger picture instead. Let his people do the rest. This would also make it appear like Noel trusts them.

"I see. It seems that I have been too short-sighted."

Noel waved his hand as if treating it as not a big deal. "Let's just focus on our original objective and enjoy the show."

...

As Noel said, his subordinates had started working to the best of their ability.

It all started from the Sleeping Flower Brothel.

Harley had sent the message through the pigeon and even ordered his subordinate, Illia, to handle this matter personally.

The owner of the Sleeping Flower Brothel located in the Count Territory had received the message while Illia was going there with the fastest horse.

Of course, she wasn't alone this time. The one who accompanied her was none other than Anna.

Although they were not friends, they were allies in this mission. Illia's objective was to inform the count and pique the marquis' interests. If possible, she wanted to invite the Supreme Devil Organization as well.

Meanwhile, Anna's objective was to investigate the nobles. Of course, he would receive help from the brothel if she wanted to get the complete information.

Her true task was to pressure the nobles into taking action, forcing them to inform all the people behind them.

That was why they were coming to Count Leiberd at the same time.

As expected from the Sleeping Brothel, they delivered the message pretty fast.

There was a beautiful woman standing in front of the count's mansion, asking for an appointment.

She had long blond hair and a well-endowed body. Even the soldiers couldn't help but take a peek here and there.

However, their enjoyment soon disappeared since the count had sent someone to invite her.

The soldiers thought the count must have invited her to enjoy her company. They felt a bit envious and wanted to become a noble since they could have a woman that pretty to accompany them.

This was one of the reasons why Harley established the brothel. Most people wouldn't think much about a brothel.

But the nobles who understood the dark side of the brothel would know that the brothel was just a front to hide an espionage organization. And the fact that she was visiting him personally meant the problem was big enough to get an immediate response.

"Lady Henriette. To think that you would come personally to my mansion... Even I was taken aback." The count smiled vulgarly. Of course, he knew about the urgent matter, but it didn't change the fact that he was also a regular.

Henriette gracefully lowered her head. "Thank you for receiving this lowly woman, Sir Leinberd."

"I see. It seems that there is an urgent matter..." The count smirked while walking toward her. He placed his hand on her shoulder, but the hand was moving closer and closer to her breast as if he was trying to tease her.

She chuckled coquettishly while saying, "Haha, Sir. I'd love to accompany you. Unfortunately, I have just received an important message from the owner. Does Sir know about Spirit Enchantment?"

"Of course, I know."

"According to the owner, it seems that there is a completed version of that book. We're trying to confirm how many are interested in that book, but it seems that there are a lot of parties trying to aim for that book already, including the Third Prince. It seems that the book is a relic from the ruined Ardagan Family..."

"!!!" The count's body shook as he couldn't believe what he had just heard. "What did you say?"

"I'm merely relaying the owner's message as a proof for our relationship. The owner is sending someone to help you here."

"..." The count fell silent for a moment. His expression turned serious. "Since it'll be weird for you to come out right away, stay for the night. The maid will guide you."

All the lust in his eyes suddenly disappeared as he understood the severity of this matter. He even immediately excused the brothel manager.

The manager politely lowered her head before leaving the room. She maintained her poker face, but she was actually smiling in her heart.

