

SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

Chapter 601: The Influence of the Blood Seed

Ashe leaned against the wall of the passage, sitting in the shallow waters of the Golden Flow. Vesser still had her back to him. If it had only looked like an “embrace” before, now she was completely lying in Ashe’s arms.

It was over.

The power of the Blood Seed was far more violent than Ashe had imagined.

Although Silver Lantern was still only sucking blood from his fingertips, the blood energy within Ashe was desperately escaping through this opening, flowing into Silver Lantern’s mouth.

The rate at which he was losing blood was no slower than if Silver Lantern had cut open an artery.

Ashe had a moment of clarity: perhaps the prototype of the Dragon Blood Cultivation System was to place the Blood Seed on a virtual realm creature like the Blade Fish Dragon, and then absorb the energy of other creatures through “complete consumption,” thereby condensing upper-tier dragon blood.

Both the Dragon Blood Cultivation System and the Blood Saint race likely originated from the miracles of the Gluttony Sect.

The Dragon Blood Cultivation System Silver Lantern used was a perfect foolproof version. She didn't have to lift a finger; the Blood Seed would deliver the nutrients directly into her body. It was like a keyboard that could type on its own-as long as the author had an idea, it would automatically write a bestseller.

But the Blood Seed still retained its primitive feeding instincts. When Ashe offered himself to Silver Lantern, engaging in close contact, the Blood Seed quickly turned him into food.

After losing a certain amount of blood, Ashe no longer had the strength to stand and could only barely sit against the wall in the Golden Flow. He had some ability to resist before, but now, whenever he tried to act against Silver Lantern, the Blood Seed would maximally restrict his physical reactions.

It was like when he ate Lala Fatty-Lala Fatty wouldn't jump up and punch him.

Fortunately, the flow at the end was slow, and more importantly, his will wasn't weakened by the blood loss.

Silver Lantern was the same. Ashe could vaguely sense her excitement, whether it was the Blood Seed stimulating her appetite or some other influence.

Although their bodies were growing weaker, their spirits were becoming more and more exhilarated, to the point where the Golden Flow couldn't wash away their intense

thoughts. They sat there at the end of the Golden Flow, waiting for the hungry Circle Cicada to come and take its meal.

Silver Lantern's head rested against Ashe, her hair tickling his nose. It was hard for him to move away, and he thought to himself that this was all the influence of the Blood Seed.

When he felt Silver Lantern stop biting his fingers and instead began to play with his hand, he asked, "Are you giving up?"

"I'm bored," Vesser said. "I've bitten all ten fingers, every fingertip, every knuckle... I've completely memorized the feel of your hand. I'm tired of it."

"Then where else do you want to eat?"

"Would you give it to me if I told you?"

Ashe mimicked her tone: "Do we have any other choice?"

Vesser didn't answer. Instead, she said, "Even if I stop sucking your blood, your life energy will continue to flow into me... If you hold me tighter, it'll happen faster."

After a while, Ashe still didn't move. He was still resisting any unnecessary contact. So Vesser grabbed his hand and wrapped it around her waist, leaning slightly into his embrace, like a foolish lover being intimate in the wrong place.

Except her wrist was still dripping silver blood, staining Ashe's clothes and falling into the Golden Flow, rushing toward the Circle Cicada. Ashe's face grew paler, and silver flakes kept falling from his body, merging into Silver Lantern.

This was their true portrayal-as long as Silver Lantern lived, Ashe would remain trapped in the curse of the Blood Seed. And Silver Lantern wouldn't mind others bleeding; she was willing to offer all living beings as sacrificial offerings to the grand cause she aspired to.

The surroundings suddenly grew very quiet, except for the increasingly close sound of cicadas, like the countdown to a funeral bell.

"The difference between delusion and reality," Vesser suddenly said, "is that in delusion, we'll eventually come to an end."

"But in reality, we can stay like this forever."

"Spare me. I haven't really done anything bad enough to deserve this," Ashe said. "Being with you forever would probably count as the cruelest punishment even in the Sixfold Hell, right?"

“Oh?” Vesser’s fingers lightly traced his chest as she whispered, “Do you really hate being with me that much?”

“Of course,” Ashe said seriously. “I despise people like you-ruthless villains who stop at nothing. My companions and I have been dragged into this curse because of you. You’re cruel, selfish, and heartless... Who would want to be with someone like you?”

Instead of getting angry, Vesser seemed even more amused. “But you’re still going to die with me, and then we’ll step into eternity together.”

Ashe suddenly asked, “You keep talking about eternity in the Virtual Realm. What do you plan to do once you reach it?”

Silver Lantern fell silent. Ashe thought she didn’t want to answer, but after a moment, she suddenly said, “I don’t know. After all, how can you know what eternity is like unless you reach it? Making plans now is pointless. Only when we reach eternity can we set goals...”

“Unlike you, I’ve already made plans for after eternity,” Ashe said. “Since I’m dying with you, the first thing I’ll do in eternity is check if you’re nearby. If you are, I’ll get as far away from you as possible.”

“Then I’ll set a small goal for eternity too,” Vesser said. “If you’re right beside me when we get there, I’ll grab you. If you’re not...”

“I’ll find you. Until eternity.”

“That’s a truly vicious curse,” Ashe sighed, glancing at the Circle Cicada as it drew closer. “Meeting you is the second most unfortunate thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Don’t worry, we still have eternity,” Vesser said, raising her hand to gently caress Ashe’s face. “I’ll work hard to become the first.”

Seeing this, Ashe suddenly felt a stirring in his heart. He also raised his hand and reached into the fox mask, his fingers brushing over Silver Lantern’s moist lips, smooth skin, delicate nose, and-

Smack!

Vesser slapped his hand away and looked up at him calmly. “What are you trying to do?”

“I’m just doing what you’re doing,” Ashe replied.

“You’re lying,” she said. “You’re touching my face more to figure out what I look like than out of desire.”

Ashe didn’t deny it. “We’re about to die. Aren’t you going to take off the mask?”

“My name and my face are mine alone. Even in eternity, I won’t reveal them,” Silver Lantern said seriously. “No one will see my face or know my name.”

Ashe fell silent and didn’t touch her face again. He simply closed his eyes, a sense of detachment radiating from within.

Vesser watched him for a long time before asking, “Do you really want me to take off the mask that badly?”

Ashe opened his eyes and stared into the eyes behind the fox mask.

“But if you want me to take it off, you’ll have to pay a painful price.”

Ashe couldn’t help but laugh. “We’re about to die. What else can you possibly take from me?”

Vesser studied him for a moment, then smiled. “Don’t regret it.”

As Silver Lantern placed her hand on the mask, Ashe’s pupils constricted.

Did he really want to see Silver Lantern's true face? Of course, but that wasn't the main reason. Or rather, the significance of Silver Lantern willingly removing her mask far outweighed the importance of her actual appearance.

Now, this murderer who had killed everyone she once knew, destroyed countless cults, aided the Four Pillars Cult in its tyranny, and spread disaster across the Senlo Wasteland, was finally about to reveal her most authentic self to Ashe.

He watched as she slowly lifted the mask, revealing the outline of her chin, and held his breath in anticipation.

Then everything went dark. He couldn't see a thing.

Silver Lantern had covered his eyes with her hand.

"I've taken off the mask, but whether you see it or not is another matter."

How infuriating. She was still playing word games at a time like this?

Ashe immediately tried to push her hand away, but he felt a weight press down on him. Silver Lantern had climbed onto him, her cold body seeming to merge with his. Then he felt a warm breath against his earlobe as she whispered, "It's time to pay the price."

“You asked me earlier what I wanted to eat if I got tired of fingers, didn’t you?”

“Now, I’m going to answer.”

Ashe froze. His eyes were still tightly covered, the world plunged into darkness, but then he felt the warmth of another pair of lips against his own.

He immediately reached out to push Silver Lantern away, but she caught his hand, rendering him completely immobilized. Both of them were weak, but Silver Lantern, with her superior physical condition, could overpower him-or rather, the Blood Seed was forcibly suppressing his ability to resist, ensuring he would quietly accept his fate as her meal!

Ashe felt Silver Lantern’s breath lightly brush against his face. “I’ll give you one last chance. Right now, you’re holding my heart. If you just squeeze a little harder, you can kill the Silver Lantern you despise most with your own hands.”

“Either you kill me now,” Vesser said, leaning in closer.

“Or,” she kissed Ashe, “let me love you to death.”

Chapter 602: Rust, Lemon, and Sweet Orange

Before his eyes was an impenetrable darkness, not even the light of the Golden Flow could seep through.

In his ears, the chaotic breathing sounds made the chirping of the Circle Cicada seem incredibly distant.

Ashe felt as if he were dreaming, or perhaps just waking up in a daze. In his muddled state, occasional clear thoughts would flash through his mind-why hadn't he crushed her heart yet?

Was it because, physically, he lacked the strength to resist?

Or was it because, rationally, he still needed Silver Lantern to dominate the Circle Cicada?

Or perhaps... was it all the influence of the Blood Seed?

"Hmm!"

Ashe suddenly felt a sharp pain on his lips-Silver Lantern had bitten his lower lip. Lips were far more sensitive than fingertips, and the pain made Ashe instinctively pull back. But Silver Lantern pressed even more forcefully against him, even attempting to bite him a second time.

This lunatic!

Already weakened and with his vision limited, Ashe was extremely unsettled. Now, with Silver Lantern daring to act like this, he immediately used the only weapon he could wield-his teeth-to bite back!

Silver Lantern didn't dodge or resist, allowing him to bite her lip, and then she kissed him tenderly.

As the liquid flowed, Ashe's tongue tasted something different. His blood was the authentic Blood Moon human blood, carrying a hint of metallic sweetness, while Silver Lantern's was silver dragon blood, tart yet distinctly sweet, like lemon with sugar.

After a moment, Silver Lantern lifted her head and asked, "What does my blood taste like?"

Ashe didn't want to answer, but he felt that not responding would make her even more extreme, so he said, "Lemon and sweet orange."

"Do you like it?"

"I'm not a Blood Saint."

Vesser leaned close to his ear and whispered, “I don’t know if you’ve ever kissed anyone before, nor do I care who you’ll be intimate with in the future...”

“But I want you to remember my taste,” she said. “It’s rust, lemon, and sweet orange.”

This reason threw Ashe into chaos. He could only struggle as much as possible, muttering softly, “You’re truly a lunatic.”

Vesser seemed to particularly enjoy watching him resist. She lowered her head once more to savor him.

Boom!

Suddenly, a loud noise from nowhere jolted the weak and disoriented pair awake. Vesser still covered Ashe’s eyes, seeing the golden dome above them shaking violently.

“What’s happening?”

“Ashe, it seems you have quite the group of companions,” she said, turning her gaze toward the Circle Cicada. “But for us, it might not be a blessing.”

The tremors had the greatest impact on the palace's drainage system. With the rumbling vibrations, numerous new drainage outlets opened in the palace's passageways. The Golden Flow Water, no longer a straight stream, quickly dispersed and began to dry up!

The Circle Cicada immediately grew frantic. It was already only a few dozen meters away from Ashe and Vesser, and now, as the Golden Flow's water level dropped, it swiftly raced along the river toward the source of the flow-right where Ashe and Vesser were.

Or rather, it was charging straight toward them. If the Golden Flow Water was akin to air, an essential for its survival, then Ashe and Vesser were at least emergency oxygen tanks!

Its newly awakened survival instincts and predatory drive made it realize it had to consume the two of them to prepare for the Golden Flow's depletion!

Ashe heard the cicada's shrill cry rapidly approaching and felt Silver Lantern's body trembling. He hesitated for a moment, sighed inwardly, and gave up on pushing her away, simply sitting there in silence.

Vesser, sensitive to his subtle shift, pressed her face against his, finally able to suppress the fear born of her survival instincts and face eternity with dignity.

Crack!

Suddenly, the torches on the pedestals burst into roaring flames. The fierce fire erupted like an explosion, instantly filling the entire passageway. Vesser instinctively shielded Ashe, only to find the flames had no effect on them.

Instead, the Circle Cicada let out an ear-piercing screech. Its shadow stretched long-so long that it crossed the entire passageway, imprinting itself on the wall at the passage's entrance!

Then, like ropes, the shadows pulled the Circle Cicada back toward the wall!

“Zhi-“

“Le!”

No longer the naive Demi-God, the Circle Cicada seemed to recall the countless years it had spent embedded in the wall. It summoned all its strength to resist being buried back into the wall once more. Its body flickered incessantly, and the surrounding Golden Flow Water rapidly dried up, indicating its desperate attempts to traverse time-escaping into the future or retreating into the past-to evade the Miracle Trap left behind by the Gray Fox sorcerer.

Yet Vesser saw it clearly: this Miracle Trap was likely a convergence of miracles from multiple Sects-Shadow, light spells, Truth, fate, and more. Most importantly, the core miracle of this trap was the Time Miracle, specifically designed to counter the Circle Cicada's various spellcasting abilities!

It seemed the Circle Cicada cult had long anticipated the possibility of the Circle Cicada transforming into a spirit, even foreseeing its ferocious instincts post-transformation. That's why they had meticulously designed this retrieval mechanism.

But the Golden Flow's channel was clearly prepared for the Circle Cicada's feeding...

The ever-scheming Vesser immediately realized that the Circle Cicada cult must have had multiple plans when they recruited legends into the Cicada Sound Project. If the project succeeded and everyone could share the Circle Cicada, that would be ideal. But if it failed, these legends on the verge of extinction would become materials for a second plan.

But that was over two hundred years ago. No matter how much Vesser speculated, it was merely a reflection on the past. Instead, a peculiar thought arose in her mind:

If a Demi-God transformed into a spirit could possess such a strong will to survive and intelligence, then the deities ascended by Demi-Gods likely wouldn't be inferior either. Would the Demi-Gods who ascended in the past truly be willing to serve as deities under the Divine Sovereign of Senlo?

At that moment, the Circle Cicada seemed to realize that it couldn't escape the Miracle Trap on its own. It pressed itself against the ground, absorbing the water flowing into its body-or rather, it was actively drawing in the silver dragon blood still flowing from Vesser.

"Ashe."

“We’re not going to die?”

“No.”

“That’s good news,” Ashe said slowly. “But for you, it might not be.”

“I understand what you mean,” Vesser replied. “But for me, it’s also good news.”

Thud!

As a massive stone fell from the golden dome beside them, the two immediately felt the heavy chains binding them vanish into thin air-

The seal on their spirits and spellforce was broken!

Sanctuary!

Ashe and Vesser instantly expanded their Sanctuaries, and in an instant, they separated to opposite sides of the passageway, just like before, just like always.

Spellforce rapidly replenished their weakened bodies. Ashe stood up and saw a familiar silver lantern.

It was exactly the same as the countless times he'd seen it before-stunning, mysterious, and dangerous. She had removed her mask, but she had also put on the most familiar one.

The moment Vesser regained her spellforce, she immediately used a miracle to complete her disguise, and her Gate of Truth automatically closed. The moment the environment shattered, the divine fire seed and her extreme time talent began to rapidly diminish. How much of it would remain as their power depended entirely on luck.

Vesser turned to look at the Circle Cicada. It was no longer bound by the Miracle Trap, but its condition was far from good, lying weakly in the water.

With a gentle wave of her hand, the Circle Cicada fluttered toward her.

Had Silver Lantern really succeeded in dominating the Circle Cicada!?

Ashe's mind was instantly flooded with a strong sense of danger. Even without the Golden Flow, the Circle Cicada was an extremely dangerous Four-winged Spirit. If someone like Silver Lantern truly gained control of it-

At that moment, Ashe also felt a faint connection with the Circle Cicada. With a thought, he reached out toward it, and the cicada immediately halted, its compound eyes flickering uncertainly between Ashe and Vesser.

This could work!

Silver Lantern had used too much of Ashe's blood, so the Circle Cicada was essentially nurtured by both of them. As a result, Ashe also had a certain degree of domination over the cicada!

Seeing this, Vesser was somewhat surprised.

She naturally understood why she could suddenly dominate the Circle Cicada-or rather, why the cicada had actively sought the protection of a sorcerer. The Miracle Trap wasn't designed to hunt the Circle Cicada itself but to capture wild spirits. As long as it had no master, it would inevitably be buried back into the wall.

This also revealed that the Gray Fox sorcerer of the Circle Cicada cult had long prepared for the possibility of dominating the cicada.

The Circle Cicada had no choice but to submit through the silver dragon blood, pledging its loyalty to Vesser. Of course, it didn't fully become her spirit. As a Four-winged Spirit, it instinctively resisted becoming the pet of a three-winged sorcerer.

At the same time, Vesser could sense that her authority over the cicada was far greater than Ashe's. If she wished, she could completely seize control of the Circle Cicada. However...

After a brief hesitation, the Circle Cicada suddenly split into two—a square cicada and a round cicada. The square cicada flew toward Vesser, while the round one drifted toward Ashe.

Vesser caught the Square Cicada in her hand and looked up at the gaping hole in the collapsing dome. She spread her virtual wings and took flight. Even if she couldn't reach the surface directly, her mastery of the Earth Sect allowed her to navigate through the underground.

"What's your real name?" Ashe suddenly asked, panting heavily.

Vesser looked at him and shook her head. "I told you, my name belongs only to me."

She paused, then added, "But Silver Lantern belongs only to you."

With that, she flew into the hole, cast a miracle, and vanished in the blink of an eye.

A moment later, a loud crash echoed nearby as a section of the golden dome collapsed, revealing a passage leading straight to the surface.

Igor and the others jumped down from above. Seeing Ashe leaning against the wall in a daze, Igor raised an eyebrow. "What happened?"

“A lot of things,” Ashe replied, turning to look at them. He glanced at the round cicada perched on his shoulder and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

“But it was all just a delusion.”

Chapter 603: ③ Seconds of Cicada Lurk

Harvey pulled back the curtains and glanced at the street outside the inn.

Even though it was deep into the night, the entire town was shrouded in darkness. There were no candles or lighting, and one had to rely on the miracle of spirit to gain night vision and move around in the night. Despite this, there were many people on the streets, shopping and even doing business. In the darkness, countless whispers and footsteps could be heard.

Blind Town, the core stronghold of the Blind Sight Cult, was also one of the most famous trade centers in the Qinyi Alliance.

The most distinctive feature of this town was that everyone had to pretend to be blind and could not create any source of light. Even during the day, a barrier blocked the sunlight, ensuring that the town remained in complete darkness at all times.

Although it was dark and devoid of light, as the cult's stronghold, it naturally could resist the Choking Green of the night. Due to the unique nature of Blind Town, even the Green Calamity dared not approach it. Despite the bustling streets, no sorcerer dared to fight here, making it one of the top five safest places in the Qinyi Alliance, second only to Black Robe Town in terms of prosperity.

The rules of Blind Town were unbreakable. If you revealed that you were not blind or created a source of light, you would become truly blind, permanently losing your vision. No miracle could restore it, and you would even forget what "eyes" were, as the area where your eyes should be would be smoothed over.

The reason for this was that Blind Town harbored a piece of the gray fox heritage. Unfortunately, it was also related to the Misty White Demi-God.

After all, the Misty White Demi-God had once pursued physical enhancement and conducted many experiments. One of these experiments was to determine whether losing one sense could permanently enhance other talents.

The results of the experiment are unknown, but the Blind Sight Cult was derived from this experiment. They pursued the idea of “completely losing all senses to become one with the world and achieve Immortality.” All their followers were residents of Blind Town who had willingly lost their sight. Moreover, every Blind Seer who reached adulthood would, without exception, become a sorcerer.

Without exception, not even a single one with a mental disability.

However, the Blind Sight Cult was not considered a powerful cult because self-mutilation was very common among its members. For instance, Harvey now saw someone grinding their hands on the street until the wrist bones were exposed, a sight that made Harvey feel a pang of pity.

The Blind Seers do not pursue pain; they seek to “reduce information.” As if to provide theoretical support for “losing all senses,” the Blind Sight Cult proposed the “Theory of Emptiness as Bliss,” which posits that human suffering stems from what one knows and obtains. If a person receives no information, they become “empty” and thus achieve “peace of mind.”

Simply mutilating their senses is meaningless. What they truly desire is to “forget their senses,” much like how Blind Town has made them completely forget their eyes. The Blind Seers are constantly searching for other ways to “forget their feelings.” They even regard “forgetting oneself” as the ultimate pursuit, calling it “forgetting both self and the world, achieving unity with the cosmos.”

Because of the Blind Seers’ inward-focused nature, they never pay attention to outsiders in Blind Town. As long as you don’t claim to see things or create light, they will ignore you. If you want to become a Blind Seer, all you need to do is produce some light.

Due to these rules, sorcerers in Blind Town dare not fight, as even a minor collision could spark a flame. As long as you don’t want to join the Blind Sight Cult, you must behave yourself in Blind Town. This fulfills the Senlo Wasteland’s key requirements for a trading hub, making it a natural choice as a trade center.

For Harvey, however, the greatest advantage of Blind Town is that he can keep Alice by his side without having to apply makeup every day. Harvey is actually a very meticulous necromancer. To care for his teammates’ feelings, he almost daily tends to Alice, as “corrosive aura,” “fear aura,” and “negative energy invasion” are innate traits of every necromancer. Only by applying

makeup can these combat passives be nullified. Others who see Alice without makeup dare not speak up, though they may feel aggrieved.

As for Ashe and the others, they have gradually grown accustomed to it, to the point of indifference.

“Has he not returned yet?”

The sound of a door opening echoed in the darkness as Ashe and Igor entered the room, accompanied by the flapping of wings.

When they saw Harvey and Alice in the room, they instinctively shifted their gazes slightly, ensuring that the unaltered Alice was no longer in their line of sight.

They had grown used to averting their eyes just enough so that neither Harvey nor Alice would notice.

“Not yet,” Harvey replied. “Maybe he’s finally decided to become a Blind Crow.”

It had been five days since they left the Twinborn Cult.

After rescuing Ashe, the group of four fled at the first light of dawn, not even daring to stay for breakfast. The Dark Serpent Twins had shown Igor the cult’s core Nightfall control panel, and in return, Igor had caused the Twinborn Abyss to completely collapse. It was a case of repaying a drop of kindness with the destruction of an entire family.

Naturally, they rushed out of the city to dig up their motorcycle, wishing they could attach wings to it.

“Could it be that we’ve run into pursuers from the Twinborn Cult?” Ashe worried aloud. “Relying solely on Tamashi to gather information was probably too much to ask...”

Even with the Night Vision miracle, moving around in Blind Town still required immense courage. After all, even kicking a small stone and creating a spark could leave you permanently blind. Tamashi claimed he had undergone full

darkness training before, so the task of gathering information outside was entrusted to him.

“I don’t think the Twinborn Cult will hold us accountable,” Harvey said.

“Why?” Ashe asked, puzzled. “We’re the ones who caused the collapse of the Twinborn Abyss.”

“Not us,” Harvey corrected. “It was Igor.”

Ashe frowned in dissatisfaction, his tone sharpening. “What’s the difference?”

“Even though the Abyss collapsed, the Twinborn System might not have been destroyed,” Igor interjected, glancing at Harvey. “They haven’t sent anyone after us, probably because they’ve turned misfortune into fortune and found a more efficient way to produce Twinborn Sorcerers.”

“That could be the reason,” Harvey said noncommittally. He closed the window and drew the curtains tightly, then turned to Ashe with wide eyes, his

necromancer's face showing a strangely human expression of longing. "Hurry, hurry, hurry."

Ashe patted the Round Cicada beside him, and the cicada slowly emitted a golden light, illuminating the entire room.

On the walls, the floor, and every blank surface, blood-red words appeared: "Don't tell them you can see," "Don't create light," and so on.

Yet Ashe and the others were already accustomed to this environment. Their tense expressions instantly relaxed.

After staying in the darkness for so long, their bodies felt parched, desperately in need of light to nourish them.

In theory, nothing in Blind Town was allowed to emit light, including spirits, since spirits are connected to their sorcerers' souls. It's like how if your pet dug up someone's ancestral grave, you, as the owner, would undoubtedly be held responsible.

But the Round Cicada was different.

Because strictly speaking, it wasn't Ashe's spirit.

Unless a spirit willingly submits, a lower-tier sorcerer simply cannot accommodate an upper-tier spirit. The Round Cicada clearly had no intention of becoming Ashe's pet. It had merely used Ashe to escape from a Miracle Trap and hadn't reached the point of pledging its life to him.

However, the Round Cicada didn't abandon Ashe after using him.

In its naive, newly born mind, it likely developed a mental imprint that "leaving the sorcerer would lead to being sealed again," which is why it chose to continue staying by Ashe's side.

After several days of observation, Ashe had begun to vaguely understand the extent of his control over the Round Cicada. First, he didn't need to provide spellforce to use it (his Prismatic spellforce couldn't sustain the Round Cicada anyway). However, the Round Cicada could only cast spells for him three times a day, with the effect of "stealing the fate from three seconds ago and

replacing the current fate with it.” Ashe called this ability the “Three-Second Cicada Lurk.”

In simple terms, it allowed him to escape any harm by reverting to a state three seconds prior.

This wasn’t exactly a healing ability, as it did nothing to address existing injuries. Moreover, it was highly time-sensitive-once the three-second window passed, it became useless. Therefore, Ashe had been training diligently with the “Three-Second Cicada Lurk” these past few days. If he could use it in a critical moment, it would be nothing short of a lifesaving miracle.

Ashe also knew that the Square Cicada, which Silver Lantern had taken, likely had the effect of “stealing the fate from three seconds in the future and replacing the current fate with it.” Compared to the Round Cicada, the Square Cicada seemed even harder to use. But Ashe was certain that with Silver Lantern’s intelligence, the Square Cicada would become a trump card capable of turning the tide at some point in the future.

The Round Cicada’s food was Golden Flow Water, which naturally forms as the world flows and changes. This meant the Round Cicada could sustain itself, which was a relief for Ashe, as he had no idea how to feed a Four-

winged Spirit otherwise. If he had to continue using gold coins for its sustenance, the daily cost would have bankrupted Ashe in no time.

One-Winged Spirits are fed with silver coins, Two-Winged Spirits with gold coins, and Three-Winged Spirits can barely be sustained with gold coins. But for a Four-Winged Spirit, gold coins are far from sufficient. Fortunately, the Round Cicada was exceptionally easy to care for. If it had been any other legendary spirit, Ashe wouldn't have been able to afford it at all.

Since it didn't drain Ashe's spellforce, only offered limited spellcasting, and didn't require feeding, the Round Cicada couldn't really be considered Ashe's spirit. If anything, it was more like a stray cat that lived nearby-it occasionally let Ashe pet it and was willing to catch mice in the area, but it would never truly enter Ashe's home.

Thus, when it emitted light, it was akin to a stray cat's mating call. No matter how much the gray fox heritage of Blind Town might want to hold someone accountable, they couldn't pin it on Ashe. And since there was no way to blind the Round Cicada, Ashe and his companions were able to enjoy the blessing of light within Blind Town.

The three sanctuary sorcerers squinted their eyes, gathered around the golden-glowing Round Cicada.

Only through loss can one truly understand how precious certain habitual things are.

Chapter 604: Tit for Tat

“Is Mercury Trojan Horse about to find us soon?” Igor suddenly asked.

“Yeah,” Ashe nodded. Three days ago, Mercury Trojan Horse had informed them that Silver Lantern had passed through Blind Town, but by the time they arrived, Silver Lantern had already fled. So, they had no choice but to wait here for the time being.

“You gained quite a lot from the Divine Fire Trial. For you, it was just an improvement in physical fitness or talent enhancement, but for Silver Lantern, it means she’s one step closer to her goal,” Igor said. “If you hadn’t snatched Round Cicada, she would have had a complete victory.”

After five days of observation, Ashe realized that his limit in time talent had completely disappeared. Perhaps his time talent had improved slightly, but it wasn’t reflected in Aurora’s Sorcerer Handbook, indicating that his cultivation speed still wasn’t as fast as sharing the Witch’s cultivation.

However, the quality of his soul had fundamentally improved.

For example, before, his spirits would spend about half their time sleeping within his soul. Now, they were like they were on adrenaline, constantly dancing and playing music in his soul.

If the soul quality of an ordinary sorcerer is categorized as ‘One-Winged thatched hut,’ ‘two-wings sweatshop,’ ‘three wings office,’ or ‘Four Wings villa,’ then Ashe’s current soul could be described as an ‘office filled with stimulants,’ where the spirits never want to clock out.

In this state, Ashe was certain that if he died, he would definitely become a Demi-God. Even if his obsession was ‘wanting to indulge in lust,’ he would become a ‘Demi-God of Lust.’

But Ashe didn’t care about what would happen after his death. For him, the only benefit of improved soul quality was that his spirits’ effects had become stronger (though they also consumed more). For Silver Lantern, however, becoming a divine fire seed undoubtedly accelerated her plans significantly.

Ashe remained silent for a moment, then nodded. “Silver Lantern is becoming harder and harder to deal with.”

“Actually, I’ve been wanting to say this for a long time,” Igor said. “Compared to chasing Silver Lantern, leaving Senlo would actually solve more problems. As long as we keep feeding, we can basically offset the curse of the Blood Seed, not to mention that the distance between different Kingdoms would significantly weaken the Blood Seed’s effects. As for your Half Tactile Sense, Ashe, I remember Mercury Trojan Horse mentioned that the Four Pillars Cult’s tactile sense is one per Kingdom. If you leave Senlo, Silver Lantern would naturally become the complete tactile sense, and you could escape the gaze of the Four Pillars.”

“So, let’s give up on chasing Silver Lantern,” the Con Artist said. “Let’s find a way to head to another Kingdom.”

“So, how do we leave Senlo?” Harvey asked.

“Precisely because there’s no way, that’s why we should give up on the chase,” Igor said. “We’ve been pouring all our energy into Silver Lantern. When would we have the time or energy to gather other intelligence? Given the prosperity of the Gray Fox Divine Era, it wouldn’t be surprising if they left behind a heritage for traversing Kingdoms. Yet, we’ve been led around by Mercury Trojan Horse all this time. She must have deliberately been stopping us from finding clues about the heritage!”

Ashe stared at the shimmering golden Round Cicada, but the cicada was fixated on the window, ignoring him.

He said, “But someone like Silver Lantern...”

“Even if she’s a rotten person, it’s none of our business. We’re just passing travelers,” Igor said. “How many people she harms, whether she wants to destroy the world-what does that have to do with us? We didn’t grow up in the Senlo wasteland. As long as we leave this place, what does it matter if she tears apart the Land of Senlo?”

Harvey: “But we still have the Blood Seed inside us.”

“I know, but she’s not targeting us specifically. We’re just collateral damage,” Igor said, spreading his hands. “Are we really going to waste the rest of our lives on revenge?”

“Isn’t that kind of nice?” Harvey said lazily.

Igor ignored the necromancer and looked at Ashe. “We’ve already wasted enough of our lives, Ashe.”

“Lise, Annan-they’re waiting for you,” he paused, hesitating for a moment before adding, “And I owe Anfel an explanation too.”

Ashe stared blankly at Igor. That’s right, they had promised to return as soon as possible...

“It doesn’t have to be one or the other.”

A voice suddenly came from the window. The three sanctuary sorcerers immediately turned their heads and saw the Death Raven sitting on the windowsill, unnoticed.

Harvey and Igor’s faces instantly darkened-Harvey had already closed the window earlier!

Which meant that Tamashi had opened the window from the outside, closed it, and then sat down, all without anyone noticing!

“Tamashi, when did you get back?” Ashe asked in surprise. “I didn’t notice you at all. Have you gotten stronger?”

“Yes.”

The black raven nodded. “I’ve been training with the Blind Sight Cult these past few days. Finally, I’ve made some progress.”

Training with the Blind Sight Cult? Everyone blinked. While they finally understood why Tamashi had been so elusive these days, the reason was utterly terrifying-like seeing a gas canister volunteering to be a firefighter.

Igor said coldly, “Being able to move without even sanctuary sorcerers noticing-that’s practically a Miracle, isn’t it?”

If it were just about being good at stealth, that would be one thing. But the problem was that Raven was not only skilled in stealth but also excelled at close-range, lightning-fast assassinations! Previously, he needed to set up an ambush to take down a sorcerer, but now he could simply walk up and kill one. Even Igor, who had recently solidified his Sanctuary, couldn’t help but feel a deep sense of unease toward Raven.

He even suspected that one day, not even a Sanctuary might be able to stop Raven’s blade!

“It’s just a basic technique that ordinary people use to integrate mind, skill, and body into one,” Raven said. “It’s nowhere near as powerful as the large-scale mental influence of a mental sorcerer. You could become invisible much more easily than I can.”

“Can you teach us?” Ashe asked, eager.

Igor and Harvey were both slightly taken aback, but what surprised them even more was Raven’s response: “...If you want to learn, I’ll organize the method in a few days and explain it to you. Then you can memorize it and practice slowly.”

“Great!”

Igor steered the conversation back: “Tamashi, what did you mean earlier when you said it doesn’t have to be one or the other?”

“Killing Silver Lantern and searching for the heritage don’t conflict,” Raven said. “She’s after the divine fire system, and the Gray Fox heritage is inevitably located near it. In the process of chasing her, haven’t we already encountered and even obtained quite a bit of the Gray Fox heritage?”

“Whether we continue to hunt her down or capture her for interrogation, both are far more efficient and quicker than blindly searching for heritage clues.”

Raven’s reasoning was sound, and with the experiences of obtaining heritage through the Transcendent Cult and the Twinborn Cult, even Igor couldn’t argue. Not to mention, Silver

Lantern had the [Dragon Array Shopping Card]. If they could get their hands on it, they could unlock many Gray Fox products from the vending machines, which would be extremely beneficial for traversing Kingdoms.

“Ashe, you haven’t brought it up, so I haven’t asked,” Raven said. “During the four days of the underground Trial when you had to face Silver Lantern alone...”

“You didn’t develop a fear of her, did you?”

“Of course not,” Ashe shook his head.

“Then, the next time we encounter her...”

“I’ll work with you to kill her,” Ashe said, lowering his eyelids. “To put an end to everything.”

Raven added, “Actually, capturing her alive would also work. After all, you need her intelligence.”

The room fell into silence, and then Ashe stood up. “I’m heading back to my room. Leave the Round Cicada here. If you don’t need it, just tap it, and it’ll return to my side.”

With that, Ashe turned and left.

Once the door closed, Igor also stood up. As he walked to the door, he suddenly spoke:

“Tamashi.”

“Yeah?”

The Con Artist said, “I still really dislike you.”

Raven replied, “The feeling’s mutual.”

Harvey said to Alice, “See, this is the downside of being alive.”

Alice tilted her head.

Just then, the door opened from the outside, and Ashe walked back in. This time, however, he was followed by an unfamiliar woman.

“Silver Lantern has appeared at the Rainwood Wind Industrial Park,” Mercury Trojan Horse said, glancing at the Round Cicada before delivering the intelligence bluntly.

“What?” Raven was surprised.

The other three, however, didn’t understand the significance of the location. They looked at Raven, who explained, “The Rainwood Wind Industrial Park used to be the largest resource production area of the Tribulation Fire Temple, but it was overrun and destroyed by the Four Pillars Cult a year ago. It’s now abandoned.”

“By the way,” Mercury Trojan Horse added, “the one who led the attack on the Rainwood Wind Industrial Park was Silver Lantern.”

So, was Silver Lantern revisiting the scene of her triumph? But why was Tamashi surprised...

Soon, Ashe and the others realized the true significance of the location.

“The Tribulation Fire Temple has long been within the Four Pillars Cult’s sphere of influence. While her exact destination is unclear, based on her route...”

“She’s venturing deep into the heart of the Four Pillars Cult’s territory,” Mercury Trojan Horse said, a fierce light in her eyes:

“She’s back in my domain.”

Chapter 605: Sword Peerage Sonya

Stars Kingdom, Swordflower College.

“From today onwards, I am part of the nobility.”

Sonya stepped out of the administration building and opened the red velvet box in her hand. Inside, resting on pink satin, was a heavy sword star badge made of stainless steel, devoid of any additional patterns or jewels.

Despite its plain appearance, this sword star badge represented the foundation of the entire Stars Kingdom: the Sword Peerage.

A million Sword Peerages, guarding the Stars.

Though this was just a line used by the upper-tier individuals to motivate and placate the lower nobility, it also showed that only by becoming a Sword Peer could one truly step onto the stage of the Stars.

Non-noble commoners were like fragile rice stalks, livestock to be raised, and parts to be maintained-but they were never considered people who could have a voice.

In addition to her noble title, Sonya also took on a part-time role as a ‘Swordsmanship Researcher.’ Her mentor was still Professor Trozan, or rather, this was a position Professor Trozan had specifically applied for her to take advantage of state benefits. Every year, she could apply for certain subsidies, which included not just money but also quotas for Miracles and spirits. Though the amounts were small, it was better than nothing.

The most significant meaning of being a ‘Swordsmanship Researcher’ for Sonya was not only elevating her status within the college but also unlocking her faculty permissions on the college forum.

Though she couldn’t ban accounts, she could easily mute someone for 24 hours-unfortunately, it was unlikely that anyone on the forum would dare to insult her now.

After the Meteor Trial, all of Sonya’s detractors had vanished. Now, the forum was abuzz with discussions about which lucky man could become Ms. Therave’s dog.

“Even if you’re just a Sword Peer, a sanctuary sorcerer can still make money from noble consultations, national research, and business association inquiries,” Professor Trozan spoke without reservation on these matters. “I can help you make connections, but you can also figure it out on your own-or wait for someone to offer you money.”

Sonya had initially thought that a sorcerer like her, who only wanted to remain a Sword Peer and not accept the blessing of the Stars, would face subtle societal ostracism. However, after discussing it with Sister Trelozan, she realized that sorcerers like her were not uncommon-or rather, it was only natural for sanctuary sorcerers to resist being controlled.

No matter how wonderful the effects of the Stars' blessing or how righteous the cause, it still forcibly turned people into slaves. Without even mentioning how much sanctuary sorcerers cared about national concepts, the mere addition of the attribute 'compulsion' was enough to make anyone resentful and resistant.

Not to mention, sanctuary sorcerers are essentially tactical weapons capable of ensuring their own safety-before the sanctuary, no matter how hard a sorcerer's skull was, it couldn't withstand a bullet; but after the sanctuary, no matter how much you bombard them, the sanctuary remains unshaken.

Of course, some might doubt, "Can't the state control you, a newly ascended sanctuary sorcerer?" If faced with the full force of the state, Sonya certainly couldn't resist. But the problem is, the state apparatus is made up of individual components.

Setting aside Trozan, a sanctuary sorcerer close to her, even unfamiliar sanctuary sorcerers wouldn't hold any grudge against her.

It's precisely because of 'wild fox sanctuaries' like Sonya, who refuse the blessings of the Stars, that the 'domesticated dog sanctuaries' appear more valuable to recruit.

Even the most enforced justice has gaps for personal interests.

Not just Sonya, even Dimy, the eldest son of the Stargazer Duke, is only a sword peerage. Though he can't directly inherit his family's noble title, he could easily take the highest-

tier guard palace title of ‘armor peerage.’ Yet, he deliberately delays accepting the blessings of the Stars.

It’s almost an unspoken consensus among upper-tier sorcerers to resist the blessings of the Stars.

If even the great nobility are doing it, why can’t Sonya?

Who wouldn’t want to control their own fate?

As for the Royal Family of the Stars, they likely don’t care much. They hold the most critical social resources. If the ‘wild fox sanctuaries’ thrive, so be it. But once they hit a bottleneck, they’ll naturally turn their gaze toward the blessings of the Stars and advanced resources.

Taking a step back, even if a wild fox sanctuary truly ascends to become a wild fox legend, the Royal Family of the Stars surely has other ways to recruit them.

In an era where nations don’t interact, all talents eventually remain within their own borders. They’re in no hurry-after all, there’s nowhere to run.

However, due to the oversaturation of sword peerages, there’s naturally no formal knighting ceremony. The village girl simply went to the school’s administrative building and received her medal and researcher contract. From that moment, she became a noble of the state.

Sonya looked at the medal in the box. While others didn't think a mere sword peerage was worth much attention, only she knew how significant this title was to her.

Even if it wasn't exactly a dream come true, this Sword Star Medal was enough to comfort her: "You haven't betrayed the hardships you've endured."

Yet, for some reason, Sonya couldn't feel any joy. She didn't even have the desire to wear the medal.

She returned to her dormitory, where Adelle, who had been waiting, immediately took the box and examined the Sword Star Medal. "Why does it look even more exquisite than my dad's..."

"That's because this is a newly minted medal. Your family's Bow Star Medal has been around for so long that its luster has faded. Just get it polished, and it'll look good as new," Lois said without looking up from her book.

Engulite leaned in to take a look as well. "I want to get one before I graduate."

"If you perform well in next year's Meteor Trial, you might just earn it," Lois replied.

Closing her book, Lois turned to Sonya. "Is it really just a sword peerage?"

“Yes.”

“The minimum requirement for that Moon Nine Drama from the Thousand Star Business Association is a bow peerage...” she said softly. “They have ways to apply for a cultural sector peerage for you.”

Adelle scratched her head. “My dad actually meets the criteria. Are there any roles for middle-aged handsome guys in the drama? I think my dad could-“

Lois ignored Adelle’s interruption and continued, “There’s also a collaboration proposal that just came in at noon. The invitation is from Nalaiduo’s studio.”

Everyone froze.

“Nalaiduo?” Adelle asked, unsure. “That Nalaiduo?”

“Who else but Nalaiduo, the director hailed as the ‘Sage’?”

“But she’s practically Delarose’s exclusive director!”

“Exactly,” Lois nodded. “Though it’s only a supporting role as the third female lead, this time, Sonya, you have the chance to collaborate with Delarose and appear in her next film.”

Hearing this, the Stretch Paw Club President was momentarily stunned.

After a moment, she sighed and shook her head. “Turn them all down.”

“But it’s Delarose!” Adelle nearly jumped up, hugging Sonya and pleading pitifully, “Take me to the set! Even if it’s just to get me an autograph-preferably one that says, ‘To the most adorable Adelle’...”

Engulite reached out and pulled Adelle back. “The person here who loves Delarose the most is Sonya herself.”

“It’s so close!” Adelle said, unwilling to let it go. “So close, my roommate could have starred in a Delarose film!”

“It’s not you, so why are you so worked up?”

Lois watched Sonya’s back as she sat down and asked, “Aren’t you even going to ask about the peerage requirement?”

“Isn’t it also sword peerage and above?” Sonya smiled. “Or is there a surprise?”

Lois nodded. “Well, since Delarose’s films are guaranteed to make over a hundred million at the box office, all main cast members need to be at least lance peerage or higher.”

Adelle clicked her tongue. “My dad wouldn’t even qualify to have a single line in that.”

“However, for special guest roles, there’s no such requirement,” Lois said. “After I replied that you weren’t planning to advance your noble title for now, they proposed a second collaboration: since Delarose is playing a Swordmaster in this film, they need a Swordmaster to help with guidance, or even make a special appearance.”

“There’s no noble title requirement for this,” Lois added with a smile. “I just don’t know if the esteemed sanctuary sorcerer is willing to lower herself to such a task.”

Sonya turned and stared at Lois for a moment, then smiled softly. “Thank you, Lo.”

Adelle immediately stepped forward, delivering a karate chop to Sonya’s head—a mortal daring to challenge a sanctuary sorcerer. “Lo is my personal nickname! If you want a nickname, come up with your own. Don’t steal mine!”

Sonya teased, “Lo Lo Lo Lo Lo...”

“Don’t think I won’t hit you just because you’re a sanctuary sorcerer!” Adelle rolled up her sleeves, but Engulite quickly grabbed her and pulled her back.

“Enough joking around,” Sonya said. “Lois, it’s really unfair and troublesome for you to be my manager.”

Lois nodded calmly. “What can I do? I’ve got a village girl artist who’s completely hands-off.”

“But,” Sonya lowered her gaze, “I still have to turn down this collaboration.”

Lois was taken aback and quickly added, “Even though it’s a special guest role, they’re offering a rate befitting a sanctuary-level consultant. It wouldn’t demean your status-“

“No, it’s not about the money. I’d be willing to pay to collaborate with Delarose,” Sonya said. “I just don’t want to test myself.”

“Test yourself?”

“I don’t want to test whether I can resist the temptation to advance my noble title,” Sonya said softly. “I have reasons for not doing so.”

The others sighed but didn't press further. In fact, when Sonya wasn't around, Engulit had explained the concept of a 'Wild Fox Sanctuary.' They all assumed that Sonya, a genius sorcerer, didn't want her freedom constrained by the blessings of the Stars.

But that wasn't the case.

Sonya didn't mind serving her country. For her, almost everything was negotiable, including her freedom.

To her, trading the freedom of 'loyalty' for full access to advanced social resources was the most ideal deal imaginable.

She really wanted to say yes. She wished she could become a professor at Swordflower College today, star in Delarose's film tomorrow, and reach the pinnacle of her life.

However, within the laws of the Stars Kingdom, there are two rules:

One cannot leave the Stars Kingdom for an extended period, and if accidentally leaving, one must return as soon as possible (those inside are not allowed to leave).

Kill any visitors from exotic lands (those outside are not allowed to enter).

If there were only one rule, Sonya might have found a loophole. But these two rules together completely extinguished the village girl's ambition to become an upper-tier noble.

The lawmakers probably never imagined that these seemingly insignificant regulations would become the primary reason sanctuary sorcerers abandon their allegiance.

Nevertheless, although Sonya believed she could resist the temptation of ascending her noble title, the recent events in the Virtual Realm made her unwavering heart waver.

That's why Sonya dared not accept Delarose's invitation to collaborate, fearing it might be the final straw.

She was afraid of developing a longing and even more worried that she might start to feel... resentment.

In the afternoon, she didn't go to training but continued watching TV dramas with Adelle. She had been rewatching Delarose's films for several days in a row.

"Should we watch 'Blade of Shifting Time,' 'Bouquet in the Stars,' or 'Inverted World'?" Adelle asked.

"'Inverted World,'" Sonya replied.

After spending the entire afternoon and evening rewatching the seven-episode drama, Sonya left her dormitory and headed alone to the Meditation Building.

Although both Engulite and Lois were sorcerers, they had recently died. Engulite was killed by a sorcerer projection, while Lois met her end at the hands of the Blade Fish Dragon.

The new assassin, Blade Fish Dragon, certainly lived up to its fearsome reputation.

Adelle ran to the balcony and watched Sonya leave the dormitory area before starting to gossip: “I feel like Sonya has recently fallen into an emotional whirlpool.”

“Honestly, I don’t really care,” Lois said. “We beautiful girls always end up in emotional whirlpools. Adelle, you probably wouldn’t understand, right?”

“Well, that’s true... It’s just that I have a fiancé, so I don’t! If I wanted, the line of suitors would stretch from here to the school gate!” Adelle grinned.

Engulite seemed puzzled: “Sonya is so wonderful; could there really be someone who wouldn’t cherish her? And with her good judgment, would she really fall for someone who doesn’t appreciate her?”

“Who knows,” Lois said. “Those who enjoy watching Delarose’s films are often young girls willing to be deceived... Maybe she’s met a man who makes her willingly accept being fooled.”

Engulite picked up her sword bag: “Should we help her, then?”

“As if you know who it is,” Lois retorted. “I’ve had so many people keeping an eye out, and yet there’s been no information. I’m starting to suspect her lover might be right here in this dormitory.”

“That’s right, it’s me,” Adelle said, patting her chest.

“Still, I don’t think we need to worry because Sonya seems to be planning to resolve things herself.”

“How do you know that?”

“From the changes in the types of dramas she’s been watching,” Adelle explained. “At first, it was pure love dramas like ‘The Last Night of the Abyss,’ with no unexpected twists. Then it was tragic love dramas like ‘Dragon Tiger Phoenix,’ where a third party complicates the relationship. And these past two days, it’s been ‘Inverted World,’ where the female lead is resolute and never backs down.”

“She probably doesn’t want to endure it anymore.”

Virtual Realm, Distant Sky Domain.

Tonight's initial phantom seemed to be a research facility. They appeared in a clean, white-walled, and empty laboratory.

Sonya watched expressionlessly as Deya, as usual, clung to Ashe's arm. After Ashe distributed the initial collection, Sonya took a deep breath and said, "Observer..."

"Before we begin tonight's exploration, Sword Princess, Witch," Ashe looked at them, "there's something I want to tell you."

Chapter 606: True and False Kill

Chapter 606: True and False Kill

"Vesser," Ashe apologized, "Could you perhaps..."

"Of course, no problem, Captain."

Vesser feigned surprise as she pushed open the door and moved to another room. Yet, deep down, she had anticipated tonight's events for quite some time. Or rather, this was her original plan.

From the moment they met, Vesser knew that the Sword Princess and the Witch could never coexist peacefully. Previously, because Ashe was in danger, they refrained from arguing to avoid adding to his burdens, as if they were under the “lover without benefits” affix, growing closer to Ashe without any quarrels.

If everyone acted purely rationally, this situation might have continued indefinitely. After all, beyond emotions, there were pursuits like ‘spellcasting,’ ‘future,’ and ‘power’ that held more significance in realizing life’s meaning, with the Virtual Realm team being their most steadfast chain of interests.

The best-case scenario was for the Sword Princess and the Witch to maintain an ambiguous relationship with Ashe, with the team atmosphere being competitive yet unbroken; Ashe shamelessly enjoying this bittersweet dilemma, gradually becoming the leader of the team.

However, the Sword Princess and the Witch were not purely rational beings. More importantly, Ashe couldn’t bring himself to act in such a manner.

When leaving Nightfall, Vesser had predicted tonight’s events, though she hadn’t expected them to unfold so quickly. She thought Ashe and the Sword Princess and Witch could endure for about a month, but it only took five days to reach the final stage.

Even if she couldn’t witness the scene, Vesser knew what kind of conflict and opposition was about to erupt. After all, this was the trap she had planned countless times from the start, the most crucial step in tearing apart the team.

Regardless of the outcome, it would inevitably destroy the team, causing Ashe to lose the Virtual Realm team, his most important bond and support.

Yet...

She sat by the door, gently biting her finger. She could have tormented Ashe further, but for some reason, she felt uneasy and a bit heartbroken.

Ashe sat in the corner, with Sonya on his left and Deya on his right. Even the usually lively Deya was sitting quietly now. She was inexperienced but not foolish, and even if she were, the White Queen and Black Butler would remedy it. So when Ashe calmly said he wanted to talk, she knew something was amiss, her hair showing hints of color from nervousness.

If anyone in the team wanted to maintain the current atmosphere, it was undoubtedly Deya. This way, she could continue to act spoiled around Ashe without restraint. More importantly, she knew Ashe's feelings for her weren't as deep as those for the Sword Princess, meaning if it came down to choosing one, she'd likely be the one left behind.

So she looked at Ashe pitifully, her eyes welling up with tears, her fingers lightly touching Ashe's, making a final effort.

Sonya, on the other hand, remained calm, not out of arrogance from having the upper hand, but more like she had made up her mind.

"Do you remember Annan?" Ashe unexpectedly brought up someone not present.

Deya hesitated, while Sonya said, “The woman who dominated you in the Gospel Kingdom?”

Ashe nodded, “Although our initial encounter was akin to a slave meeting a master, as we got to know each other better during our adventures, our relationship gradually improved.”

“Before attempting to assassinate the Gospel Princess, we were in Nabistin’s underground city gathering Intelligence. One night, while discussing the future, she said she wanted to paint a picture for me, mimicking the Gospel Ranking.”

Ashe briefly recounted that night’s events, “...Due to the Pact, I couldn’t control my body and had to go along with her...”

“Did you two...?” Sonya asked calmly.

“No,” Ashe shook his head, “We were interrupted.”

Deya blinked.

However, Ashe continued, “But if we hadn’t been forcibly transported to the Senlo wasteland, perhaps...”

He paused, then said, “A few days ago, during the final Trial with the Silver Lantern, I triggered a special mechanism and was engulfed by the Golden Flow.”

“...Because the Blood Seed nearly turned me into her prey, I lost most of my ability to resist her...”

Though Ashe only briefly mentioned the events in the Golden Flow, he didn’t omit important details, including the bloody kiss, which made Deya blush.

Sonya listened quietly and asked, “And then?”

“There are a few more,” Ashe hesitated, “But they’re not as significant as these two.”

“These two events don’t really matter,” Sonya lowered her gaze, “You were forced, beyond your control.”

“Yeah, yeah!” Deya nodded repeatedly, “Honestly, weren’t those two bad women’s fault?”

“Exactly, honestly, I did nothing wrong,” Ashe agreed, looking at them, “But why are you talking about honesty?”

Sonya gazed at him, her right hand gently resting on her sword hilt.

Deya also stopped smiling, pursing her lips, her hair color becoming more complex.

Ashe’s lips curled slightly, but the light in his eyes dimmed, and he chuckled softly, “I don’t know any Sword Princess or Witch who talks about honesty.”

“Besides, if those were instances of being controlled, I’m free to act now.” Ashe held their hands, his fingers slowly intertwining with theirs until their fingers were tightly clasped, “I should have responded to you both that night.”

“Instead of dragging it out until now without giving an answer.”

Deya placed Ashe’s hand on her chest, her eyes brimming with tears, “It’s okay,” she said, “No matter what happens, I’ll accept you, I won’t get angry, just like... even if you don’t choose me, I won’t give up.”

“But I am angry.”

The Red-Haired Sword Princess held his hand, placing it on her sword hilt, as if borrowing his hand to suppress the urge to draw her sword, “Especially seeing you willing to hold the Witch’s hand now, I’ve killed you both a thousand times in my mind. I thought I could endure this for you, but I can’t.”

Deya immediately said, “Sword Princess, I’m sorry.”

Though Deya spoke sincerely and anxiously, as if the words had been buried in her heart for a long time, she still didn’t let go of Ashe’s hand, showing her stance through her actions.

“Do you know what I’ve given up for you?” Sonya said, her hand trembling on the sword hilt, “Do you know what I’ve been thinking these past nights seeing you close with the Witch? Do you know-“

“I don’t know,” Ashe still managed to smile, “That’s why I know I can’t drag this on.”

“I’ve been thinking about whether there’s a way not to hurt either of you. But the Silver Lantern made me realize I might be hurting more than just you two.”

“I promised Annan I’d return, so what will I face her with? Warmth, joy? What will I face you with? Anxiety, guilt?”

“I’ve been restless these past few days because I feel a strong sense of guilt.”

“I even sought counseling from a mental sorcerer yesterday, thinking I hid it well, but he saw through me, or he wouldn’t have suddenly proposed changing the schedule today.” Ashe sighed, “My problem is quite simple.”

“Because I’ve lost so much, when someone sincerely loves me, I passionately reciprocate. Because I have no home, when someone offers to be my home, I cling to it.”

“Because if I lose you both, I’ll be left with nothing again,” Ashe said dejectedly, “I can’t bring myself to hurt those who love me.”

Ashe’s vulnerability at that moment left Sonya and Deya momentarily stunned. In Deya’s eyes, Ashe was always the lazy, carefree kin, the knight who helped her escape the Royal Palace; in Sonya’s eyes, the Observer was someone who faced life-and-death situations without flinching, a strong figure who had survived Prison Breaks and deadly battles.

In their moment of distraction, a peculiar thought crossed their minds: If he had no home and was left with nothing, what would he become?

Sonya asked, “You don’t dare hurt us, so do you want us to hurt you?”

Deya immediately replied, “I won’t.”

“But I will.”

Sonya said softly, “Do you know, I’ve been very afraid lately. Afraid of seeing you and the Witch close, afraid my efforts won’t be reciprocated, afraid... I’ll hate you.”

“You know, I’m the type to resent the world if I can’t have what I want,” she said, “I know all my achievements are thanks to your help, and I’m grateful to have met you. But when I see myself losing more opportunities, when I remember what I’ve given up for you, I’m afraid I’ll think-would it have been better if I only saw you as a teammate?”

“I know,” Ashe smiled, “Even though those things have nothing to do with me... but you’re just not someone who talks about honesty.”

“Yes, I’m just that unreasonable,” Sonya looked at him, “Even if you’ve given me 100%, if I give you 110%, you need to give me back 1000% for it to count.”

“And that 1000% has to be your all, even if you have extra, you can’t give it to anyone else. Not the Witch, not Annan, not anyone you meet in the future.”

The Red-Haired Sword Princess’s eyes welled up with tears as she held Ashe’s hand tightly, her heart filled with bitterness, “But you can’t promise that, can you?”

Ashe didn’t speak, only tightened his grip on her hand, his face showing a prepared expression.

Sonya pursed her lips, tilting her head slightly back, then said, “Why didn’t you pretend to be oblivious, pretend not to notice my and the Witch’s feelings, pretend to know nothing, and drag it out until we become legends, until we’re so deeply entangled we can’t extricate ourselves, until we all become yours?”

“Why couldn’t you... deceive us for a lifetime?”

Ashe blinked, showing an expression of surprise as if saying, ‘Oh, there’s that option too.’

But he quickly smiled, “But I can’t pretend not to see you both in pain.”

The village girl’s tears flowed uncontrollably, but she took a deep breath, her face showing determination, and then-

Click!

In a distant place, the gears of fate turned once more.

The room began to dissolve, scents twisted, lights danced, and everything started to reorganize.

“True and False Kill: A gaze from the peak of Ruby Mountain attempts to shatter the Tactile Sense of the Four Pillars. All outsiders’ positions are scrambled, and sorcerer projections identical to the outsiders are randomly spawned, with the projections consciously disguising themselves. If an outsider dies, they suffer severe soul damage and must kill over ten sorcerer projections and survive for 30 minutes to leave this Phantom.”

Ashe immediately stood up, but the room was already devoid of others.

Bang!

The door suddenly swung open, and Ashe turned to see the ‘Sword Princess’ entering.

“Show me the collection I equipped you with!” Ashe immediately said.

The ‘Sword Princess’ extended her hand, revealing a projection of a pair of crystal shoes: “Golden Collection: Ice Crystal Shoes, each stomp creates a patch of frost, and staying on the frost for over three seconds results in an ice strike.”

Is it real? Or can this curse affix even replicate collections?

Many thoughts raced through Ashe's mind as he discreetly opened the virtual realm map, only to find it changing every second. The curse affix's influence might not target the virtual realm map directly but could be a comprehensive defense against prophecy-like Miracles.

Ashe said, "Alright, now it's your turn to verify me."

"No need."

The 'Sword Princess' drew her sword, "Whether you're real or fake, since this curse affix has conveniently set us against each other..."

"Let me kill you to vent my anger."

Chapter 607: The Witches Insight

"Good thing that curse affix appeared," the Black Butler remarked. "Otherwise, I wouldn't know how to wrap this up."

"It's just a delay," the White Queen replied. "Eventually, we have to face the problem."

The moment the curse affix information flowed into her mind, Deya found herself transported to an unfamiliar room.

Compared to the sword Princess and Ashe, she was the most grateful for the curse affix.

Because she wasn't mentally prepared at all.

She really thought the "lover without benefits" status could continue indefinitely and felt it was quite nice. Although she liked Ashe, she didn't dislike the sword Princess. After all, for Deya, friends were far too few.

In a way, she was similar to Ashe, trapped in the Tower for over a decade, eager to cling to anyone who could protect her. Yet, after finally escaping the Tower, she found herself confined in an even larger Royal Palace.

She willingly bore the responsibilities of a ruler, which also meant she had to endure the loneliness of one.

Her relationships were ultimately cemented during those two months of wandering.

She hadn't truly considered how their relationship should develop. Though she was a bit older than Sonya, she was still the princess in the Tower: innocent and naive.

She had her favorite person and her favorite color.

As long as she could be with Ashe, as long as everyone was happy, that was enough.

However, it seemed everyone but her was in pain. If she had anticipated the sword Princess's anguish, Ashe's guilt was something she couldn't comprehend.

"I thought he'd be happy..." Deya murmured. "After all, having two super cute girls like us who like him..."

The White Queen said, "He was happy at first, but then it became painful."

Deya asked, "Why? We haven't even argued."

The Scarlet Dead Apostle replied, "Because he sensed your sadness."

Deya questioned, "Am I sad?"

"You and the sword Princess are both good at hiding your true feelings," the Black Butler explained. "She deceives others by pretending she can endure; you deceive yourself by pretending not to care."

"You like to act spoiled because you sense you'll be favored; you act sensible because you're afraid of being abandoned."

“Even without warmth or scent, the connection between hearts is the hardest to conceal,” the White Queen added. “I’ve noticed several times that when Ashe interacts with the sword Princess, he’s consciously observing your emotions.”

Deya asked, “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? I actually... I mean, I care a little, but it’s not unbearable.”

“Impossible,” the White Queen stated firmly. “The essence of love is giving, possessiveness, sensitivity, and irrationality. Its side effects are clinginess, jealousy, suspicion, and inexplicable behavior. You can endure now because you know you’re at a disadvantage, so you only hope to get closer; but when you’re at an advantage, you won’t be more generous than the sword Princess.”

Deya weakly replied, “You can’t be so sure...”

The Black Butler continued, “And like the Secret Princess, Ashe is someone who finds joy in others’ happiness and sorrow in their sadness... The more you suppress yourselves to be good to him, the more he feels guilty and upset. If the sword Princess wants more and interrupts this ambiguous game, he just hopes you all lose less and end this emotional torment.”

“Yet, because of his psychological issues, he can’t be harsh to those who love him, which is why things have reached this point.”

“If he could be ruthless, we wouldn’t have had a chance from the start. No matter how much better, more beautiful, or stronger we are than the sword Princess, the order of arrival is the rule of emotions.”

The Scarlet Dead Apostle remarked, “It’s funny, and it’s sad.”

Yes, it’s funny and sad.

If Ashe didn’t have these issues, Deya wouldn’t have been able to break through the boundaries of being just a teammate and occupy a place in his heart, forcing him to care about her feelings. But because he has these issues, he only has the courage to hand them the blade, unable to make the decision himself.

Bang!

The laboratory door suddenly opened, and Deya looked up to see ‘Ashe’ entering.

“I equipped you with the ‘Colorful Collection: Night Comet,’ which makes every directional Miracle unleash a comet riptide, enough to instantly kill any normal enemy when combined with your dense threads.” ‘Ashe’ began by proving himself, then asked, “Witch, I’ve been wanting to ask you for a long time... Why do you like me?”

Deya was taken aback and shook her head. “I can’t tell you, but I genuinely like you.”

“Is that so...” ‘Ashe’ smiled. “Thank you.”

“So, should we go find the sword Princess, or wait here?” He chuckled bitterly. “But if we meet the real sword Princess, she might just attack me on sight.”

“Have you thought about how to resolve this, Observer?” Deya asked.

“I’m just taking it one step at a time,” ‘Ashe’ sighed, observing the laboratory environment and slowly approaching the Witch. “I’ve already prepared myself for the possibility that neither of you will accept me.”

“That won’t happen,” Deya shook her head. “No matter what you become, I’ll always like you.”

“Even like this?”

“Even like this,” Deya said softly. “Even if you like more than just me, it’s okay, as long as I can always be with you.”

‘Ashe,’ feeling downcast, sighed softly. “How can I ever repay your feelings?”

“What about the sword Princess?” Deya asked. “She’s not like me; she puts her feelings on par with yours.”

“I don’t know,” ‘Ashe’ murmured. “But if she can’t accept me no matter what, I’m prepared to cut ties with her. We’ll go back to being the most familiar teammates, the most distant friends-“

Boom!

As ‘Ashe’ drew his sword, Deya had already activated the Miracle “Empress’s Gaze,” with threads emerging from ‘Ashe,’ each accompanied by a comet riptide capable of piercing a Sanctuary, instantly reducing ‘Ashe’ to foam.

“Ashe would never give up on the sword Princess,” Deya said softly. “Because that would cause the deepest hurt to her.”

The Witch composed herself, no longer lingering, and opened the door to explore other areas. Soon, she opened a door to find ‘sword Princess’ waiting inside.

The ‘sword Princess’ silently summoned the “Ice Crystal Shoes,” and Deya summoned the “Night Comet.”

But they both knew this gesture wasn't enough to convince each other.

"Sword Princess, before we were separated," Deya asked, "had you already made a decision?"

The 'sword Princess' nodded. "I intended to force the Observer to choose tonight, or rather, to choose me and abandon you."

"Just didn't expect he had similar plans," the 'sword Princess' said, her hand on her sword hilt, her face full of bitterness. "Even more unexpected, he didn't choose me."

"But he didn't abandon you either."

"But how is that different from abandoning me?" the 'sword Princess' said with a bitter smile. "I can't keep playing this jealous, ambiguous game with you... If this continues, I'll end up resenting both of you. Whether it's you, who intruded, or the Observer, who can't refuse you."

"I don't want to spend the rest of my life soaked in resentment, even sacrificing everything to take revenge on you two," the 'sword Princess' murmured. "I read somewhere, 'Anything that harms you is a relationship you need to let go of.'"

Deya asked, "Sword Princess, are you saying..."

“You two lovebirds can stay locked together; I won’t disturb you anymore,” the ‘sword Princess’ said coldly. “Without love, I’m still a sanctuary sorcerer. Without the Observer, do you think I can’t find someone who likes me?”

This was the best outcome Deya could imagine.

The sword Princess steps back, and she has Ashe all to herself-at least temporarily in the Virtual Realm-until Ashe returns to the Gospel, and they can move towards a happy ending.

And this fits the sword Princess’s character; she’s always been the jealous and decisive type, trying every way to speak ill of the Observer in front of Deya on the Time Continent, afraid Deya would develop any affection for him, just to have the Observer all to herself.

Now that she knows she can’t have a unique love, giving up is only natural. Besides, she’s accomplished in her Kingdom and a young female sanctuary sorcerer; would she lack admirers?

But...

Boom!

With the comet's bombardment, Deya withdrew her threads, not even glancing at the 'sword Princess' who had turned to foam, and pushed open the door to leave the laboratory.

"The sword Princess wouldn't give up on the Observer," the Witch said. "Nor would she admit defeat to me."

Chapter 608: You Are Not Allowed to Fall in Love

Is even the Virtual Realm helping him?

Sonya gazed at the empty laboratory, taking a deep breath to calm the ripples in her heart.

Before entering the Virtual Realm, she had already prepared for the worst.

Although logically, the Observer should choose her no matter what, Sonya had sensed the Observer's psychological flaws as early as in the Sea of Knowledge.

"...Feeling as light as a balloon, yet tethered to the ground by a single thread."

He never felt a sense of belonging to this world.

His reckless pursuit of adventure, his indifference to his own circumstances, and his yearning for affection all stemmed from his flaws.

Sonya was the luckiest because she appeared during Ashe's loneliest time, becoming the person he needed most, the one who tethered his balloon; but she wasn't lucky enough because she wasn't by Ashe's side.

Not only did she want to feel Ashe's warmth, Ashe also yearned for her comfort.

The survival instinct Ashe exhibited when facing danger was largely driven by his attachment to the Sword Princess. Even the mere prospect of meeting in the Virtual Realm tonight was enough reason for Ashe to keep living.

But ultimately, she wasn't the home Ashe could reach out and touch.

Sonya was confident that if she could meet the Observer in reality, she could definitely tame him completely, and if he dared to glance at another woman, it would mean Sonya had lost.

But the problem was, there was a distance between their Kingdoms.

Sonya's life was indeed more than just love; she had her mother, her career, her aspirations, and even her country.

But Ashe had none of these things; he had nothing at all.

He hadn't stayed in one place for more than a month; he didn't even have a 'home' in the physical sense.

If Sonya couldn't give him what he yearned for, even if he wouldn't actively seek it, how could he possibly refuse someone else's genuine affection?

Sonya knew he was trying to find a way to the Stars Kingdom, and she herself was looking for a way to Senlo. But the journey between Kingdoms was inherently difficult, and even if they became legends and found a way to meet, by then, Ashe might have already been consumed by the bad women in reality.

The village girl had always thought she could endure until the day she met Ashe, which was why she tentatively shared Ashe with the Witch.

Because she knew she had to maintain the team's atmosphere, because she didn't want to trouble Ashe.

Wasn't it just sharing a paramour? Sonya initially wanted to marry into a wealthy family and had long been prepared for her partner to have dozens of lovers; could she not tolerate even one Witch?

She really couldn't.

When you truly like someone, you wish their eyes were filled only with you.

And it wasn't just the Witch; actually, the Observer had been acting a bit unusual these past few days. Even though he hadn't said anything, Sonya could sense his remorse.

Sometimes she hated herself for being such a sensitive person.

But even these things she didn't know, things that hadn't happened before her eyes, could make her heart ache for a long time. It was at this time that Sonya began to revisit Delarose's TV dramas seeking answers.

Because she knew she couldn't continue like this.

Her dignity wouldn't allow her to be dragged into the mire by emotional entanglements, wasting time and energy on something that would only bring her more pain.

When watching TV dramas, one of the character types she hated most was those who were hurt by the person they liked but still clung on, hoping the other would regret and return, viewing their own pain as a noble sacrifice, seeing their broken relationship as great love... The funniest part was that some TV dramas even glorified such relationships, as if they were truly some kind of passionate romance.

However, when Sonya watched, she only thought the people inside were foolish, the people inside were weak.

So when it was her turn, she absolutely wouldn't be the female protagonist in a bitter romance.

For this reason, she deliberately watched many of Delarose's TV dramas, using Delarose's image to inspire herself. The independence and confidence of the female lead in "The Last Night of the Abyss," the kindness and determination of the female lead in "Dragon Tiger Phoenix," the resolute pride of the female lead in "Inverted World"... These were the female protagonists she aspired to be.

So...

Sonya gently stroked the sword hilt, murmuring, "You can cry under the covers, you can drink, you can even try smoking... But you mustn't feel undue sympathy for him."

She took a deep breath, and at that moment, the laboratory door was pushed open, and the 'Witch' walked in.

The 'Witch' immediately displayed her Colorful Collection, seeing Sonya's lack of reaction, she smiled bitterly, "Whether I'm real or not, do you want to kill me?"

Sonya shook her head, “I just don’t think a curse affix would have such an obvious flaw; a fake would definitely replicate the collection.”

“And a fake would pretend to be real, saying things the real person wouldn’t say, even saying things the fake person would say. Sometimes, encountering a fake isn’t necessarily a bad thing.”

“You’re right,” the ‘Witch’ nodded, saying, “Whether you’re real or fake, I want to tell you... I’ve given up.”

Sonya: “Oh?”

“I just like him, I never thought of hurting him,” the ‘Witch’ slowly walked over, saying, “I originally thought you would tolerate me, thought he would enjoy the sweet trouble of being liked by two beautiful girls... I never thought he would be pained by it.”

“And I know, the most important person in his heart is you.”

“Since he can’t make a choice, let me do it.” The ‘Witch’ showed a relieved expression, “If you were to leave, he would continue to be pained because of you; if I were to leave... You would surely make him stop worrying about me.”

Sonya was slightly lost in thought.

If the Witch voluntarily left, could she continue to persist? Perhaps she could, after all, there weren't any close females around Ashe in reality, and incidents like Annan and Silver Lantern wouldn't happen often.

As long as the Virtual Realm remained their wonderland, as long as the Observer's eyes were only for the Sword Princess...

She was silent for a moment, then asked, "Will you still fall in love in the future, Witch?"

"Probably?" The 'Witch' said with feigned lightness, "Surely I won't be betrayed every time I give my heart?"

Clang!

Even though the 'Witch' immediately raised her Sanctuary to unleash an Explosive Miracle, her head still separated from her body. Sonya put away "The Invisible Hand's Secret Blade," leaving the laboratory expressionless.

"Although I don't know why the Witch would like the Observer..." she said, "But whether it's a wholehearted love, I can still tell."

"How could the Witch possibly give up?"

After discerning a fake ‘Vesser’ through conversation, Sonya walked to a new laboratory, opened the door, and saw a contemplative ‘Ashe.’

Without hesitation, she drew her sword and approached him.

‘Ashe’ seemed to realize something, smiled bitterly, “I’m sorry.”

“You have to be as sad as I am for it to count as an apology.”

Sonya withdrew the Invisible Hand, stepping over the ‘Ashe’ who had been cut into Phantoms without even glancing at him.

“He knows I hate verbal apologies the most,” the Red-Haired Sword Princess said softly, “Apologies composed only of words are merely weapons to force forgiveness.”

Moments later, before Sonya could leave the laboratory, she saw ‘Ashe’ push the door open.

“Show the collection I equipped you with!” ‘Ashe’ immediately said.

Sonya thought for a moment, then displayed her “Ice Crystal Shoes,” though ‘Ashe’ didn’t seem entirely reassured, he still said, “Alright, now it’s your turn to verify me.”

“Even if you’re fake,” Sonya asked, “What would you say to deceive me?”

‘Ashe’ seemed a bit puzzled, a bit helpless, he sighed softly, “Alright, whether you’re real or fake, I want to tell you...”

“Let me go,” he said, “You’ll find someone better than me.”

Sonya shook her head, smiling as she swung “The Invisible Hand’s Secret Blade.”

“But I’ll never be this good to anyone again.”

She stepped over the phantom that had turned to foam, whispering softly, “How could he bear to let me go?”

The Stretch Paw Club President passed through several rooms, seeing three more ‘Ashes,’ but she killed them upon sight, not even bothering to ask.

Until she opened a door to enter a laboratory and saw another ‘Ashe’ walk in through another door.

She met his gaze, and without hesitation, he quickly walked over, without raising a Sanctuary, without any defense, directly reaching out to tightly embrace the Red-Haired Sword Princess.

“I thought the curse affix had separated us into different Phantoms, otherwise why couldn’t I find you all,” he released her, smiling sheepishly, “Though I knew with your strength there should be no problem, I still have to ask... You didn’t accidentally kill them, did you?”

Sonya looked at him calmly, her right hand summoning the Invisible Hand, but she ultimately withdrew it, “Hard to say.”

Ashe scratched his head, “So should we go find the Witch and Vesser now? Or...” His face darkened, but his voice remained light, “...continue the conversation we interrupted earlier?”

The Red-Haired Sword Princess looked at him, her hand resting on the sword hilt, asking, “When you rushed over just now, weren’t you afraid I’d accidentally kill you?”

Ashe blinked, “If I said I’d willingly die by your sword, would it sound particularly...?”

“It would,” Sonya nodded, “Even I wouldn’t be so pretentious.”

Ashe tilted his head, thought for a moment, and said, “I actually didn’t think much just now, just when I recognized you, my body moved instinctively, and by the time I realized it, I was already hugging you. If I had to say...”

“Just like I can recognize the true Sword Princess,” he said, “You can surely recognize the true Observer.”

Sonya stared at him blankly, then shook her head, her face showing a ‘you’re hopeless’ expression. Then she leaned back slightly, her body like a slingshot, suddenly crashing her entire red-haired head into his chest.

“You, oh you...” Sonya buried her head in his chest, her small hands began to gently pound his abdomen, but the Sword Princess’s attack speed grew faster and faster, until later her hands had become a blur, shaking Ashe’s very soul.

Ashe dared not raise a Sanctuary now, only smiling bitterly as he took the beating. He had to be grateful this was the Virtual Realm, where the soul felt no pain; if it were reality, his duodenum and twenty-four ribs would have shattered.

After Sonya finished venting, she lifted her head to hug Ashe’s neck, saying, “Promise me three things.”

“Mm, I’m listening.”

“Can’t you promise first?” The Stretch Paw Club President complained, “Normal people would be eager to promise here, right?”

Ashe blinked, “I have psychological issues, with proof from a mental sorcerer.”

Sonya sighed helplessly, saying, “First thing, before you come to the Stars Kingdom to see me, you mustn’t stop, mustn’t settle down, you must constantly seek a way to the Stars!”

Ashe nodded, “Alright, I was planning to do that anyway.”

Sonya raised an eyebrow, “So you were eyeing me early on, huh?”

Seeing Ashe blush and unable to answer such a question, Sonya finally felt she had regained the upper hand. That’s right, she was the legendary sorcerer of the love Sect!

“Second thing,” she said, “Before you come to the Stars to see me-“

“You are not allowed to fall in love.”

Chapter 609: The First Initiative

Ashe wasn't as nonchalant as he appeared.

This was evident from the fact that he had been stalling for five days.

Before entering the Virtual Realm that night, he specifically sought out Igor, asking him for a bit of mental miracle.

The look Igor gave him was quite peculiar, as if he was watching a Lala Fatty contemplating testing the heat of a frying pan.

In truth, Ashe just wanted a bit of mental miracle to become braver, more decisive, kinder, and more confident.

Igor understood and told him to head left and find Harvey, who might still have some Snow White Brand candies brought from the Blood Moon-mental sorcerers don't offer drug services.

After much pleading, Igor reluctantly cast a special miracle on him: using fingers as a medium to directly touch the scalp, soothing the brain nerves to achieve mental tranquility... If Igor weren't a mental sorcerer, Ashe would have thought it was just a head massage.

But the effect of this mental miracle was indeed excellent. Ashe felt much calmer inside and was mentally prepared for the worst-case scenario, allowing him to face the sword Princess and Witch with composure.

No avoidance, no evasion, bringing everyone's unspoken anxieties to the forefront.

Yet, despite all his preparations, when the sword Princess said, "You can't fall in love," Ashe was left bewildered.

He pondered for a moment and asked, "Do you mean I'm not allowed to fall in love with anyone?"

"Yes."

"Like Annan, whom I met in reality?"

"No."

"The Witch I only see in the Virtual Realm?"

"No."

"What about you?"

Sonya gazed into his eyes and slowly shook her head, “No, not even me.”

Holding onto something without using it... That was Ashe’s first thought.

“Don’t think I’m just trying to restrict you,” Sonya pinched Ashe’s cheek, “though there’s a bit of that... But more importantly, it’s the only outcome we can all accept.”

“The Witch won’t give up on you, and you won’t give up on us, but I can’t stand you maintaining intimate relationships with others.” The Stretch Paw Club President felt one hand wasn’t enough and used both hands to cup Ashe’s face, “So there’s only one answer—since we can’t move forward, let’s step back. Step back to where you’re just friends with everyone, so you don’t have to give up, the Witch won’t refuse, and I won’t have to worry.”

“Your request has a prerequisite,” Ashe said with a smile, “‘Before I meet you in the Stars’-“

“Exactly, once you meet me in reality, you won’t have to follow this restriction anymore.” Sonya huffed, “That’s why I’m willing—because I know that no matter how close we get in the Virtual Realm, it’s just a castle in the air, a drifting weed. Falling in love with you in the Virtual Realm isn’t a high-value option.”

Ashe blinked, “Not high-value, but you like it.”

“I don’t like it,” Sonya stuck out her tongue playfully, hesitating before adding, “And I have to consider the Witch’s feelings too.”

“Just like I’d feel bad seeing you close to the Witch, wouldn’t the Witch feel bad seeing you close to me?” she said softly, “So let’s all step back to a safe range, that way... at least we can still be together.”

“But your request only postpones our problem until the moment we meet,” Ashe pointed out, “We’ll still have to face it then.”

“Don’t worry, because by then, I’ll be by your side. And by then, I’ll definitely be stronger than you, with more power.” Sonya’s lips curled into a smile that outshone the Stars:

“I’ll help you solve this problem completely. And then...”

Then, what would happen?

Before Ashe could ask how she planned to solve it, Sonya continued, “Actually, my request mainly targets your situation in reality! Can you promise not to mess around in reality?”

“I haven’t messed around at all!” Ashe defended himself righteously, then added weakly, “But if...”

“I know, I won’t hold Annan and Silver Lantern against you, you were truly ‘out of control’ then.” Sonya gritted her teeth, hands claspings Ashe’s neck, “But now you’re a sanctuary sorcerer, you won’t be swept away by the Golden Flow every day, right? You won’t be enslaved every day, right?”

Ashe shook his head, “Not really, but you know I’m always adventuring, there’s always a chance...”

“If you really get controlled again, I won’t blame you even if you get involved with someone!”

“Really?”

“False!” Sonya stomped on his foot, triggering the Ice Crystal Shoes to create frost all over, chilling Ashe’s soul. But she quickly calmed down, “But also true, I can at least convince myself not to be angry with you. After all, you can’t guarantee your safety now, and you’ll be adventuring to find a way to the Stars, I can’t demand more from you.”

Not be angry with me...?

Ashe vaguely understood Sonya’s meaning. He ran his fingers through the sword Princess’s crimson hair, gently caressing her cheek with the back of his hand, “I understand, I promise to try not to make you angry.”

Sonya said lightly, “If you can lie and hide it from me, as long as I don’t know, I naturally won’t be angry.”

“Girls are contradictory, aren’t they?” she laughed softly, “On one hand, they like to hear false sweet words, on the other, they hope to hear honest confessions, even if it hurts.”

“Not contradictory,” Ashe said, “The feeling of liking someone is uncontrollable. Ultimately, it’s because I’m not good enough, yet not bad enough.”

“I’m not good enough to avoid hurting you, nor bad enough to deceive you.”

Sonya shook her head, “This time, I don’t want to blame you, because I brought this on myself.”

The Red-Haired Sword Princess lifted her head, eyes misty, stubbornly looking at Ashe with a feigned lighthearted smile:

“Then let’s continue to torment each other like this.”

Being looked at like that, Ashe felt as if his heart had been struck hard, a complex mix of affection and guilt swirling within him. He gazed earnestly at Sonya, leaning down for a gentle kiss.

No entanglement, no depth, just a fleeting touch, yet both felt shy, and even the usually assertive Ashe seemed a bit evasive.

“Not counting that time you deliberately led me to the Dark Miracle Wonderland,” Sonya asked, “Was this your first kiss?”

“That time I just wanted to kiss your cheek, who knew you’d turn around...” Ashe weakly explained, then nodded, “Yes.”

He didn’t realize I had the same thought that time... This realization put the village girl in a good mood, she chuckled, “Though there’s no warmth, no taste, no biting, I’m your first.”

“That’s my third request.”

Even though Sonya’s voice remained steady, her face turned crimson to her ears as she spoke, “All your first initiatives must be reserved for me.”

Ashe looked at her in surprise.

Even though she was so embarrassed she wished to find a hole to hide in, Sonya didn’t back down, meeting Ashe’s gaze head-on, maintaining her dignity as a legendary sorcerer

of the love sect. Her soul, swayed by her emotions, caused her pupils to nearly turn heart-shaped.

Pfft.

Ashe couldn't help but laugh, then looked at her seriously and shook his head.

"No."

Chapter 610: The Couple

Although he refused the third request, Ashe didn't dare to tease the sword Princess. He quickly explained:

"Your first condition is that I must go to the Stars to see you. The second condition is that I can't fall in love before I see you. This means that before I see you, I can't take the initiative with anyone else."

"Even if you don't make the third request, all my first initiatives will be reserved for you."

"And..."

Ashe blinked, “I originally wanted to save the most precious things for you.”

Sonya crossed her arms and pretended to be indifferent, but she didn’t hide the smile at the corner of her mouth. “I didn’t force you; you promised on your own.”

“Yes, yes, the Observer is captivated by the charm of the sword Princess and willingly becomes her servant.” Ashe smiled slightly and lowered his eyes. “So, keep the third thing. Consider it something I owe you.”

Sonya glanced at him. “Are you apologizing? Then I’ll accept it, but you’ll regret your generosity today sooner or later!”

Ashe looked at her quietly and sincerely said:

“Thank you.”

Sonya didn’t respond. She changed the subject, “Do you regret liking someone like me now? Sensitive, suspicious, possessive, and unreasonable... If it were someone else, someone more open-minded who didn’t care about your affairs, you wouldn’t have to worry. After all, you’re a sanctuary sorcerer now. Having dozens of paramours wouldn’t be a big deal.”

“I didn’t mess around. I just have some psychological issues...” Ashe defended himself again and then said, “After all, liking someone is something you can’t control.”

“So, I’m actually more doubtful if you can keep your promise.” He blinked, “Can you really ensure that you won’t get close to me in the Virtual Realm?”

At this point, Sonya felt a bit shy. “Not in the next two days, since you just kissed me.”

“Then after two days...”

“If I can’t hold back after two days, I’ll find a time when the Witch won’t notice and get close to you,” Sonya glanced at him. “You know what to do then, right?”

Ashe was stunned and hesitated slightly, “Reject you righteously and maintain my purity?”

“Respond to me!” Sonya lightly punched Ashe’s chest. “I made these requests because I didn’t want the Witch to be upset. Do you think I really want to draw a line with you? As long as she doesn’t see, we can secretly date!”

Ashe blinked, “But doesn’t that make you a hypocrite?”

“What,” Sonya pretended to be fierce, grabbing Ashe’s collar. “You don’t like it?”

Ashe couldn’t help but laugh and whispered in her ear,

“Woof woof.”

“Hmph, I’ll put a collar on you sooner or later.” The Stretch Paw Club President’s face was flushed, but she was satisfied.

“But have you thought about this,” Ashe asked, “What if the Witch does the same?”

“I won’t give her the chance.” Sonya held his hand tightly. “If she finds a loophole, then she wins.”

To be honest, there wasn’t much time for private interaction in virtual realm exploration. After announcing this rule, they would definitely keep a close watch on each other, leaving no gaps. But Sonya’s words subtly revealed her tolerance limit-Ashe and the Witch could only have fragmented, occasional, innocent, and secret intimate interactions.

This level would only make her jealous, not angry.

Of course, she and Ashe could only do the same. This loophole applied to everyone.

As for the Witch, Sonya could tolerate a bit more since they had a good relationship and she was willing to compromise for the team. But that was the limit. If anyone dared to break the rules in front of her, she’d knock their head off.

Overall, Sonya was confident she could completely prevent Ashe and the Witch from having private interactions. She wouldn't propose something that would put her at a disadvantage. Even if there were loopholes, she believed she could plug them.

"Let's go find the Witch and see if she's willing to accept this proposal, or if she has other requests, or if we can come up with a better plan," Ashe said.

"Okay, let's go."

After walking a few steps, Ashe looked at their clasped hands. "Should we..."

Sonya raised her head proudly and looked at him sideways, saying in a very petty tone, "I'll let go when we meet the Witch."

"You..."

Sonya suddenly remembered something and asked, "You should know that I'm very likely to let you go, right? You don't think I can't live without you, do you?"

"Of course not," Ashe said. "Before entering the Virtual Realm, I was prepared for you to leave me."

“Then what will you do?” Sonya asked. “Just let me go?”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Then try acting spoiled with me,” Ashe suggested.

Sonya looked at him in surprise, tilted her head, “Okay.”

She lifted Ashe’s chin, her voice soft and pitiful, her proud smile full of affection, “You just bully me because I like you.”

Although it wasn’t the kind of acting spoiled he imagined, Ashe still felt deeply affected. He had no choice but to honestly say, “If you really leave, I’ll still go to the Stars Kingdom to find you.”

Sonya: “What if I’m already married by then?”

Ashe said, “If you’re not married, I’ll pester you until you come back. If you’re about to get married, I’ll ruin your wedding and take you away. If you’re already married, I’ll have an affair with you every night until you fall for me.”

“You scoundrel,” Sonya said, both angry and amused. “You never thought of letting me go, did you? Meeting you is like being bitten by a dog.”

“If you truly love something, only a fool would let it go.”

Sonya pretended to be angry, “I’m not a thing!”

Ashe held back his laughter, “Then what are you?”

“I’m...”

Sonya wrapped her arms around Ashe’s neck and gently bit his earlobe:

“Woof woof.”

Gospel, Yisuo Royal Palace.

Annan had returned to Nabistin two days ago after finishing her field research. Naturally, Lise continued to have her elder sister Annan accompany her to sleep, currently nestled in the arms of the Purple Moth.

The great Empress rubbed her eyes, sat up, pushed away the stuffed animals, and yawned as she went to the restroom to wash up. Although there were maids in the palace to assist the Empress with washing and dressing, the elder sisters insisted that Lise complete these daily tasks on her own. At most, she could act spoiled and have Annan help, but she couldn't use her royal authority for personal gain.

They didn't want to raise Lise to be a spoiled child.

Lise was still half-asleep, but when she looked in the mirror and listened to her sisters recount what had happened in the Virtual Realm, her eyes slowly widened, and she accidentally swallowed the mouthwash.

When the sword Princess proposed the new 'team affix' to the Witch, the Witch naturally agreed.

Deya didn't have the courage to break the relationship like Sonya did. She was the one most hoping to drag things out.

Moreover, delaying the problem suited her interests, as she needed time to master the 'Gospel' deity. Before she could fully utilize the 'Gospel,' Deya could only touch and nudge Ashe, not daring to reveal her secret.

The Witch sisters naturally understood the sword Princess's little schemes, knowing that the red-haired girl never intended to give up Ashe. If Ashe reached the Stars, he might end up locked in a dark room.

But first, Deya felt a bit guilty facing the sword Princess, so making a small concession here was fine. Second, by the time she mastered the 'Gospel' deity, the sword Princess would at most be a legendary sorcerer. Third, the probability of Ashe returning to the Gospel was much higher than him finding the Stars.

At that time, whose dark room Ashe would live in was still uncertain!

But there was a small problem...

Lise quickly dried her face and ran back to bed to hug Annan.

After half an hour, Annan exited the Virtual Realm and returned to reality. The Purple Moth opened her eyes to see Lise staring at her with bright eyes.

The Purple Moth sat up and kissed Lise's forehead, "Good morning, Your Majesty."

"Annan, I have a question!" Lise didn't hide anything. "If Dad comes back, what will you do?"

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, will you have a baby with him?” Lise asked.

Annan shook her head, “No, I don’t really want to have children.”

Then she gently rubbed Lise’s head. “But I know what you’re asking... I’ll do the things that make babies with him, and we won’t be able to sleep with you. And I probably won’t use contraception. If it happens, it happens.”

Lise asked, “What if Dad doesn’t want to?”

Although the Purple Moth’s first reaction was ‘how could he not want to,’ she seriously considered it and included this possibility in her plans. She said, “If he doesn’t want to, then he doesn’t. We don’t have a Pact binding us... even if we did, I wouldn’t dominate him.”

Lise blinked, “So, will you give up?”

“Well...” The Purple Moth’s smile turned dangerous. “When we reunite after a long time and I invite him to dinner alone, he can’t refuse, right?”

“Dad won’t refuse.”

“If the dinner is at my place, he won’t mind, right?”

“He shouldn’t mind.”

“Then I’ll pray for a ‘fervent blessing,’ and he won’t be able to resist, right?”

Lise was stunned. Connecting to the Gospel database, she immediately understood what the ‘fervent blessing’ was—a positive blessing anyone could pray for through the Gospel Book, making them extremely passionate and impulsive about what they were doing, even overwhelming their rationality.

Annan noticed Lise’s change in expression and knew she understood. She flicked the Empress’s forehead and smiled, “Ashe is easily influenced by the atmosphere. Just a little push and some encouragement...”

“I’m already the Moth. How could he not burn for me?”

Oh.

Lise discussed it with the Witch sisters and confirmed that Ashe probably couldn't escape Annan's schemes. She sincerely said to the Purple Moth, "Annan, you should quickly advance to the Sanctuary."

"Hmm?" Annan was puzzled. "Two-wings is enough for my work."

According to the sword Princess, if she wasn't angry at Ashe, it meant her anger would be directed elsewhere.

Lise earnestly said, "If you don't advance to the Sanctuary, I'm afraid you'll be in danger."

Stars, Swordflower College.

Sonya had just opened the dormitory door when Adelle poked her head out from the bed. "You forgave him?"

The village girl blinked, a thought crossing her mind-could Adelle be a fate sorcerer?

"Your radiant news has spread from the Meditation Building to the Dining Hall, from Swordflower College to Truth College. Everyone knows," Lois looked up from her book, glanced at her, and nodded. "You do look radiant, almost dripping with joy."

Adelle said, “If you check the school forum, you’ll see the hottest posts right now are ‘Did Ms. Therave just come back from a date?’ and ‘The sword Princess smiled at me!’”

Sonya felt a bit embarrassed by their comments. “Is it really that obvious?”

“If you were an icy glacier a few days ago,” Adelle remarked, “then now you’re a glacier blooming with ten thousand roses, heralding a new spring.”

Engulite raised her hand. “Let me say something fair.”

Sonya said, “Engulite, you’re the most impartial. You never join in their teasing. Go ahead!”

“I attended my cousin’s wedding, and even as a bride, she wasn’t as happy as you are now,” Engulite said. “Only when she was meeting her paramour did she have that same glow, as if it was ingrained in her bones.”

“Engulite, you’ve turned mischievous too, joining in with them. I’m not talking to you anymore!” Sonya turned to leave. “I’m off to train!”

After a while, Adelle peeked out from her bed, glancing towards the balcony. Seeing Sonya leave the dormitory area, she said, “What do you all think?”

“She’s being toyed with by a bad guy,” Lois said calmly. “What else is there to see? It’s a train wreck.”

Engulite was shocked. “Even Sonya can be played with emotionally?”

“Even sanctuary sorcerers are affected by hormones,” Adelle sighed. “But I’ve never seen Sonya this sweet before. Maybe she’s not just forgiven the scoundrel; she might have taken it a step further. What do you think, Lois?”

Lois closed her book. “It’s possible.”

“A step further?” Engulite blinked, a blush spreading across her earnest face. “Are you saying Sonya has... kissed him?”

“No, no, no. Sonya wouldn’t be swayed by just a kiss,” Adelle adjusted her imaginary glasses. “From my legendary romantic perspective, she might have already... connected with the bad guy!”

The swordsmanship girl tilted her head, looking puzzled.

“Connected... what do you mean? Holding hands?”

Adelle and Lois exchanged a glance, both showing disbelief-Engulite, despite being of noble birth, lacked even basic knowledge!

Compared to Sonya, Engulite was truly a lamb, likely to be easily ensnared by a scoundrel!

With a mission to enlighten her roommate, Adelle beckoned Engulite over. “Engu, come here. I have some interesting videos to recommend...”

Vesser opened her eyes to darkness. Her neck was wrapped in a glowing green, like a serpent ready to strangle.

The Flaming White Tiger, serving as her temporary bed, yawned and nudged Vesser with its tail, urging her to get up. Yet Vesser lay on her side, sinking into the plush tiger fur, and the Flaming White Tiger could only remain still.

“They’ve made up...” she murmured softly.

After the “curse affix: True and False Kill” ended, the sword Princess had pulled the Witch aside, and after a brief exchange, the team had returned to calm. Although Vesser hadn’t participated in the gathering, she could tell that the sword Princess and the Witch had chosen to “both step back” to allow the team to move forward.

Though they had returned to a respectful teammate mode, avoiding overstepping boundaries, their relationship hadn't regressed; it had, in fact, deepened.

Vesser had thought this would surely hurt them, but she hadn't expected that a group of people unwilling to let go could also choose not to hurt others. In the past, she couldn't understand their mindset, but now, she vaguely grasped their inner turmoil.

Just like her now, feeling a twinge of regret that Ashe hadn't severed ties with the sword Princess and the Witch, yet unable to suppress a hint of joy at hearing Ashe's voice no longer filled with melancholy.

Only, Ashe's happiness had nothing to do with Silver Lantern.

I can only watch your life from the sidelines, feeling bittersweet that your emotions aren't for me.

Knowing it's all just a delusion, knowing I never cared about these things...

"Turns out I do care."

She stared blankly into the night, her eyes growing more and more teary, yet she refused to wipe them, letting the tears escape down her cheeks until her vision blurred. She didn't notice the Choking Green around her neck slowly tightening.

At this moment, a square cicada at the Flaming White Tiger's head suddenly lit up. Through her tear-filled eyes, she saw the golden light ripple in her tears, like a golden river filling her vision.

Golden River.

She quickly wiped her tears, biting her lip, her eyes shedding their weakness, replaced by infatuation and determination.

"Ashe..."

The Choking Green stopped tightening, returning to its original state.

"Turns out I do care about you liking others," her face flushed, her breath quickened. "But it's okay..."

"Because only I can have you."

The night in Senlo had yet to break.