

Witch 211

Chapter 211 Light Industry

Roland sat at his desk and was reading with great interest through the recent report of the First Army from his Chief Knight.

Compared to his meticulous appearance from several months ago, nowadays Carter's iceberg like face often carried some other emotions, letting him appear much less calm, and instead giving him an aura of expectation and eagerness.

Most probably this has something to do with the Star of the West, Roland thought.

About the event of Carter's and May's recent stroll, Roland had also heard about it. After all, as one of the top members of the First Army, he also represented the Army, so every movement would naturally be noticed. Not to mention May, the woman walking at his side, belonged to the kind that would draw the attention of all men to herself.

When they had appeared side by side on the streets of Border Town for the first time, his guards had immediately passed along the news to his ears.

Regarding this kind of matter, Roland didn't really mind it. Carter was roughly two to three years older than he was. So it was reasonable to say that it was a strange that he still wasn't married. And if he could actually find his other half in the Western Territory it wasn't that bad, as long as it didn't interfere with his work.

According to the Knight's report, the First Army had been equipped with about 200 revolving rifles, adding almost a dozen with every day – in fact, if the raw materials were sufficient, Anna's production capacity could be increased by several times. But at the same time she was also in charge of the refining pig iron into steel and manufacturing the steam engine, which was slowing her down.

However, this speed was still acceptable. After all, the First Army was only 600 people strong, so another one and a half month would be enough to entirely replace all their weapons. Furthermore, before the next expansion of the population, the military's size couldn't be further expanded anyway.

Another point of the report was the formation of the Second Army.

In order to make the training convenient as well as maintain their secrecy, Roland had the people recruited from Longsong Stronghold all incorporated into the second army. Currently, they were all undergoing disciplinary training, which followed the same pattern as the military's training. Then it would be time for ideological education in the evening, in the attempt to let these people as soon as possible think of themselves at the protector of the Western Territory, implanting in them the believe that their loved ones' safety needed to be protected by them.

"At present, the training of the Second Army is progressing well; the current estimation is that they should be ready to start with the shooting practice in a week. By that time, enough weapons should have been replaced making it possible to have a flintlock to match every hand." Carter concluded.

This was the advantage of guns, to train a cold weapon soldier, at least one year's time was needed; to teach a knight, five or six years had to be spent on training; while soldiers equipped with guns could

already be dispatched on military missions after only a month of training. Furthermore, the longer a battle lasted, the bigger advantage of firearms became – after all, pulling a trigger was much safer than fighting with a sword.

“During the shooting practice, the supervisors have to pay attention to the number of guns, how many have been given away and how many of them come back. The same applied to the gunpowder, when it was distributed for the training, the veterans of the First Arm would be responsible for its supervision.

“Yes,” he nodded.

“Very well,” Roland dismissed him with a wave. “That was all; you must be busy now as well.”

“Uh, Your Highness...” Carter hesitated. “Last time you said that the perfume mixed with the soap was made out of sugar cane, was that true?”

“Yes,” the Prince said, sitting up in his chair. “What’s the matter?”

“That sugarcane, is it expensive?”

“No... they are just some common crops.”

“I’ve heard people say that a thumb-sized bottle of perfume could be sold for five gold royals in King’s City,” Carter scratched his head, “If this is the case, shouldn’t manufacturing the sugarcane perfume bring a huge income to the town?”

“Five gold royals?” Roland got startled; he had never considered this point. Recalling the previous life in the palace, the 4th Prince had never cared about the price of commodities, it was even more the case with perfume, something with which he had less contact –only women would prefer a trinket that only delivered a nice fragrance.

His initial motivation to make perfume was his wish for fine perfumed soap. Otherwise, by only having running water and no bathroom soap, it felt like there was something that was missing. Ah, the sensation of having his whole body covered with bubbles.

If a small bottle of perfume could be sold for several gold royals, it was indeed a pretty good business idea. Unlike coated mirrors, the raw material of sugar cane and flowers were much cheaper than crystal glass was.

Thinking it through, Roland laughed, “This idea isn’t bad, I will consider it.”

“His Royal Highness, the... sugar cane, can I take one out of the castle with me?” asked the Knight with a look full of expectation.

“It won’t hurt,” hearing him speak in this manner, Roland could immediately guessed as to what he wanted to do with it. After all, this was the Western Border, unlike the Port of Clearwater, the crops of the Fjord’s relatively rare here. So it was a good choice as a gift when asking a lady from the West out, “They are growing on a wall in the backyard, just pick some for yourself.”

“Thank you, Your Highness!” Carter saluted.

Afterward, Roland called for Barov – still calling him assistant minister wasn't quite appropriate anymore. As City Hall's number one figure, he was already regarded as Border Town's Premier Minister.

After Barov took his place, Roland roughly described the perfume business plan, "Do you think this could be something we can earn large sums of gold with?"

He did not reply immediately, but later asked with wide open eyes, "Your Highness, are you sure that perfume is produced out of the sweet crops?"

"Don't you also use the perfumed soap? The reason for its fragrance is that I had mixed the perfume inside," Roland spread his hands out, "It is indeed true that these raw materials are of little value. But I never knew that the perfume in King's City was so expensive until Carter brought it up."

"Far more than that, your Highness!" Barov said excitedly, "Perfume is King's City Alchemist Workshop's top-secret product, every year there are approximately one thousand bottles, only a small part of it is sold in King's City. The rest is sold to the other cities in Graycastle, there they can raise the price by twenty to thirty percent, but in case they sell it to the Fjords or other Kingdoms, the price would almost be doubled. To prevent the merchants from making a profit out of the difference in prices, the association not only firmly controls the perfume prices in other places; they even assign all the merchants by themselves. So in case you could produce perfume, even if you only sold it to Redwater City or Fallen Dragon Ridge, you would definitely obtain a generous payback."

"So, that's how it was."

Your twenty years serving as an assistant of the Finance Minister wasn't for nothing, Roland thought, regarding the commodity prices and current market situation, Barov is indeed magnificent. With this information, Roland formed a preliminary plan in his mind.

There were many ways to make perfume, the simplest method was to mash the petals or herbs with unique flavors and let them soak inside alcohol, letting the alcohol dissolve the plants, and leaving an aromatic oil remaining. Lastly, the remaining remnants will be filtered out and diluted with water.

The alcohol came from the juice of the sugar cane; while for the aromatic oil they could use roses, or the more commonly rosemary and vanilla. However, since it was necessary to achieve mass production, the best choice would be to let Leaves use her magic to transform a plant to directly secreting this fragrant oil.

In addition to perfume, the industry could also produce white sugar and liquor. Also, a lot of consumables would be needed, and their profit would be less than what was gained from the perfume, but if sold to the town's people at a low price, it would enrich their diet, which could be regarded as a significant step forward for the people's welfare.

Roland's main reason for the slow development of the light industry was due to the shortage of a workforce, and the difficulty to earn high profits with a small-scale production of daily necessities. Because of this, a limited population investing into heavy industry production, would be the most cost-effective approach.

Since the manufacture of perfume was incredibly profitable, maybe he could take advantage of this opportunity to make up for the shortcoming in environment.

Chapter 212 Caravan and new information

It was already the second month of summer, and as scheduled, Margaret arrived on the day of midsummer.

This time, the amount of ships brought by the business group was far more than the pier could accommodate, so many boats now had to dock by the river and wait for the other ships that were in front of them to finish unloading, and allow them to access the pier for themselves.

This caused Roland to realize that the town's pier would have to be expanded.

This month, Graycastle Industrial Company has finally completed their task, by reducing the scrapping rate to forty percent, they had successfully produced three steam engines for the day of delivery. Although compared to the current third generation used in Border town, the ones the factory produced for foreign trade were lacking in power, leaked air, were noisy, rattled and had other aspects that made them of a much lower quality. But compared to the former number of produced machines, it was still a great deal of progress.

The Crescent Moon Bay Caravan brought an artisan team of three hundred as had been arranged. Roland placed all of them in the industrial park at the southern side of the Redwater River. In addition to building a new wooden factory besides the original plant, he also ordered Karl to build an employee dormitory near the river. So that they could finish these facilities within a month, all the the huge logs needed were transported to the scene and then cut by Anna along with Karl's technical guidance. Like this, the originally most time consuming task of processing the wood was completed in just two days.

When Teacher Karl saw Anna's new ability he was stunned, in just six months, this weak and quiet girl had become so self-confident and seemed to always be in high spirits.

At the castle, Roland held a sumptuous dinner, welcoming the arrival of the business group.

At the same time, it was also the first time that White Liquor appeared in their line of sight.

"Every time we come here you will have developed new stuff, Margaret really did not lie to me," Hogg yelled, "even the wine is so out of the ordinary...this..."

"White Liquor," Margaret reminded.

"Yes, white liquor! Compared with this ale and wine are absolutely bland and tasteless," and with a grin, Hogg tossed the cup of liquor down. "Your Highness, this stuff, you must sell me a few boxes of it."

"I think its flavor is too hot, or with to say it differently, the fruit wine is more suitable for me," the businesswoman smiled and shook her head.

Roland smiled, "That has to do with personal preferences, the high concentration of distilled liquor isn't with everyone taste. I also don't plan to spread it out, but since I happened to have made some, I thought I could let everyone have a taste."

In this era brewing and drinking wine was still the mainstream, but distilling alcohol clearly offered a great potential to open up a new market. Like the White Liquor, Rum, Whiskey, and Vodka were all distilled spirits with higher alcohol content. And together with these distilled spirits, they also came the

corresponding string attached to the bartending culture. However, for the present, it was still too early to open up this industry in Border Town.

“Your Highness, I have brought some news with me according the matter you mentioned in your previous letter,” Margaret began, “Now, after the Church has taken over the Kingdom of Endless Winter, they haven’t brought up many changes. Currently they are facing a very strong resistance of the Wolfsheart Kingdom. Because of this they have gathered all their troops at the Broken Tooth Castle, but even with them they have not been able to take a step forward during the last two months. In addition, the Kingdom of Dawn has sent a message to Graycastle, that the Church goal should be to eliminate the witches, instead they want to take over the Four Kingdoms. They suggested that the two countries should establish an alliance, expelling the forces of Church out of the kingdom, and jointly fighting against the Holy City of Hermes.”

“How did the King’s City respond?” Roland asked

“The Kingdom’s Prime Minister, Marquis Wyke, has immediately refused this proposal, and even denounced the other side for speaking nonsense.” Margaret shrugged her shoulders, “This matter has caused a large commotion in King’s City; even the nobility is unable to reach a consistent view. As far as I know, many people are in support of the idea of an alliance. After all, at present, the Church hasn’t shown a sign that they will return the sovereignty to the successor to the Kingdom of Eternal Winter.

“Did Timothy not step forward?”

“The answer was certainly to incite Timothy, at the moment he himself is rushing with his army to the East,” Margaret showed a somewhat dignified expression.

“I heard that there was a massive fleet east of the Seawind Region, which attacked and looted the eastern coast. They stopped at nothing, even the churches hadn’t been spared and there were also many merchants of the Fjords who met with disaster.”

“Many people have now become fugitives in the Eastern Region, Hogg and I have already given shelter to many of them.”

Margaret then added, “They said that the looters were no longer only snatching just money. Nowadays they are even taking people with them, and after everything that could be moved was taken, they would burn everything that was left down. It seems that they want to turn the whole eastern territory into a white land. This is absolutely a severe blow to the eastern aristocracy who had recently been subdued by Timothy.”

Normally, hearing that Timothy was suffering under massive attack should be a joyous message, but when he heard that the other side even captured the population, Roland’s heart was hit by waves of pain, “Those who were able to escape...”

“Are you interested in them?” Margaret lightly smiled, “After reading the letter, I already guessed that you might want to buy a large number of slaves to enrich the workforce in your territory. However, compared with the foreign refugees from the Kingdom of Endless Winter and the Wolfsheart Kingdom, the refugees of Graycastle may not be willing to sell themselves into slavery.

"I do not need them as slaves. As long as these people are willing to come to Border Town and settle down, there will be food and housing for them, and they will also be paid for their labour." Roland corrected, he also realized that this was a good opportunity to expand his number of people, even though the news arrived slightly late. "How many people are there?"

"Most of the robust and powerful refugees have already been taken in by the nobility and caravans, but there should still be nearly ten thousand people gathered outside of King's City, however, most of them are younglings or women."

"Well, I'll still send someone on the way to screen them," the Prince said. "In case I want to take them, do I need to deal with the officials of King's City?"

"No, you don't," Margaret waved her hand to emphasise her words, "They will be ever grateful to have someone take those people away. Otherwise the food they have won't be enough. In the event that the number continues to increase, it might even become possible that the food shortage could lead to riots."

...

After the dinner, Roland returned to his office and called for Theo, his personal guard.

This incident made him aware of how backwards his intelligence system currently was. If he had received knowledge about the refugee problem immediately, he could have done the preparations earlier. In the end allowing him to bring even more people to Border Town. At present his understanding of the outside world laid only on the information he got from the caravans that arrived once a month, and a rate like that was simply unable to meet with his demands.

Even with his stationed army in Longsong Stronghold, which had been establishment as a relay post. he could only monitor the Western Region. If he really wanted to compete for the throne of Graycastle, he would have to extend his intelligence network to cover the whole kingdom, or even better, the whole of the mainland.

Right now, Roland did not have a sufficient number of loyal and devoted subordinates that he could use to establish a complete intelligence network, not to mention sending spies to all parts of the country to work as his secret agents. Therefore, he first started with laying down the foundation by sending some people over to King's City, and let them collect information from the city and the outer regions. It wasn't needed that they start with detailed monitoring, but this way he could still at least receive a rough understanding of the overall situation and wouldn't have to be passive any longer as with today.

Being aware of Theo's influence on King's City's black street rats, the prince knew that he was the best candidate for the job.

"You want me to follow the caravan to King's City?" Theo gawked in disbelief.

"That's right; you will have two duties. Your first mission is to meet up with the refugees of the Eastern Region. I will send a group of one hundred or so soldiers with you who will be in charge of the escorting them back to Border Town. I will inform you later about the specific conditions of the screening, but that will still be before the caravan leaves.

"Yes!"

“Second, when the flood of refugees has calmed down, you will stay behind in King’s City and starts to collect information from everywhere in the city for me. Since you’re already used to dealing with the underground rats, you should be clear about how you have to go through with it. Furthermore, Margaret’s caravan will be fully supporting you, in case a task requires you to spend some money you can go to her. Compared with your task of going to Redwater City to spread the news about the witches, this time your funds will have no upper limit.” He then put a revolver on the table, “Pay attention, and protect yourself, I hope that I to hear some good news from you soon.”

Chapter 213 The paddler blueprint

Four days later, the merchant fleet set sails leaving the docks.

Theo and one hundred members of the First Army went along with the ship, setting out to King’s City.

During these days, Roland and Margaret had come to an agreement, Theo could come to her shop to request any amount of gold royals. The amount would then be deducted from the price of the steam engines, in addition, Roland also needed to pay an additional one percent of interest.

This time the amount of saltpeter and ore was two times that of the previous transport, but with the deposit for the transformation of steamboats, Roland had still received more than 2200 gold royals. Which was a monthly sales income Ronald almost wouldn’t even dare to dream of during the Months of Demons – even by selling one month of ore, he would also only have gotten an income of three hundred gold royals.

When the caravan had left, Maggie’s day for temporarily leaving Border Town had also arrived.

In accordance with the agreement made with Ashes, she would travel to the islands in the Fjords, bringing them news about the West.

Roland wrote an especially long letter which Maggie had to take along. In addition to expressing his wish for cooperation, he hoped that the 5th Princess could dispatch some auxiliary witches who could come and help him. In the letter, he did not address himself as her brother but as the Lord of Border Town and now after killing Duke Ryan, Lord of the Western Territory. Although the possibility that the other side would go along with his requests was minuscule, he still wanted to give it a try – anyway, spending some time writing a few more words wasn’t an effort at all.

The farewell took place in the castle’s backyard, all of the witches were present.

Nightingale gave her a small bag of dried fish; while Lightning gave her a package of ground pepper.

The other witches were also reluctant to part, they all stepped forward to caress and stroke her feathers, and hugged her goodbye – acting the same as if it was time for a battle and they could be parted forever.

“Rest assured, goo,” Maggie said, raising her head. “I’ll be back soon, goo!”

“What if Tilly does not allow you to come back?” Lightning asked worriedly.

“Goo...” The pigeon shrank her neck and pondered over it for a while, then shook her feathers. “In that case, I’ll just sneak back, goo!”

“Then we have come to an agreement,” the little girl promised earnestly,

“If you come back, I’ll personally catch a bunch of birds and roast them for you to eat. There is also the honeycomb we discovered last time; I will wait for you to come back so that we can pull it out together.”

“Goo!” She nodded again and again, “has reached an agreement goo!”

What good words could I say? Roland standing at the side was also overtaken with emotion. It has only been a month, but Maggie has already become one of us. Well done, Lightning!

“Well, Good-bye everyone goo!” Maggie flapped her big wings, after running a few steps she slowly rose up, circled them two times then gradually disappeared into southeastern horizon.

“She will reach the island smoothly.” When Roland saw the small point slowly disappear, he couldn’t help but worry about her.

“Yes, there won’t be any problems,” Lightning agreed without hesitation, then crooked her head, “there shouldn’t be... right?”

After sending Maggie away, Roland quickly went back inside, busying himself with the daily work.

This time, he wanted to draw the complete set of plans for the conversion of the two ships for the Crescent Moon Bay Caravan – they would be the world’s first steam-powered paddle-ships.

Due to them using a single power source, it was not needed to change the trunk, directly connecting the steam powered paddle to the wheel. Using some roots to control the intake of the air pipeline, and with that also controlling the ship. To slow or stop the boat, it would only be needed to close the inlet pipe, while the excess steam would leak from the exhaust port. During the stopping procedure, the fire would still continue to burn, making it very easy to drive forward again.

The principle behind the plan wasn’t complicated, so Roland was able to draw out a rough model fairly quickly. In case he wanted to get an accurate production drawing, he would have to go to the dock to measure the precise size of the boats.

At this time, Anna entered the office, carrying a book.

“What’s going on?” Roland put the goose writing brush down while being unable to restrain a smile.

“I finished this book,” with this words she put the book with the title “Theoretical Foundation of Natural Science” down on his desk.

Seeing this, Roland’s smile suddenly became somewhat stiff; this was simply too exaggerated! Just within a few months, she was able to read the complete mathematical and physical knowledge of high school level? He didn’t even need to ask if his counterpart had understood everything, because when Anna spoke of reading she meant complete understanding, or she would certainly take another look, or simply come to ask him.

“Are you drawing the blueprints for replacing the sail with a steam engine as a power source?” Anna’s attention was quickly attracted to the sketch laying on the table, “But...”

“But what?”

“Are these two wheels similar to rowing puddles? When they rotate, they can produce a pushing force, but half of them are exposed, which is a huge waste of power. So why not just completely immerse them in the water?”

“...” Roland stared at her with his mouth wide open, not knowing how to reply. Since people who are born with knowledge do not exist, does that mean, that just by looking at the scratches she was able to make this judgment within these few moments? Thinking about this possibility suddenly rose his interest, “Then can you tell me how you would improve it?”

For a moment Anna pondered about it, then she raised the brush and began to draw on the paper.

Roland supported his chin with his hand while appreciating with keen interest her carefully drawing attempt – her bangs fastened with his hair clip swayed back and forth with her every move. Her long slender eyelashes beat twice and her white cheeks revealed a natural rosy tint to them. Although, from this angle he could only see the side of her face, but in contrast to the bright background, her profile from the bridge of her nose to her chin and on to the neck formed a perfect and gentle curve.

“Do you want to eat some fish?” Nightingale scrambled over and put her hands between the two.

“En,” Anna nodded and took the offered snack. “Thank you.”

When his line of sight was blocked, Roland coughed twice and then had to look back to those paintings on the desk once more.

Initially, Anna had tried to completely embedded the wheel in the water. However, this way meant it would become difficult to observe the wheel’s position when it came close to the shore, making it easy for it to hit the pier or the dock.

She then put the wheel at the back end of the ship – which was the standard practice, but with this the transmission setting became much more complex, after all, the bulky steam engine was not suitable to be placed at the end of the hull. In that way, the drive shaft and gearbox would end up occupying quite a huge part of the hull.

When Roland saw drawings of her newest concept, he once again couldn’t help himself from exclaiming in admiration for his counterparts keen thinking capability.

The sketch Anna was currently considering came infinitesimally close to the single-axis propeller layout; the steam engine was set at the bottom of the hull and the drive shaft extended out of the hull to below the waterline. To its end, she had connected four square blades, which gave it an appearance that was similar to a windmill.

“I do not know if it can be done this way,” she hesitated. “but, it’s reasonable to say that by keeping the paddle at tilt, it can produce horizontal pushing force. However, by reducing the wheel to our blades, I do not know if it can generate enough power to move the ship.”

“Of course it would be possible, it just needs a slight modification.” Roland took the quill out of Anna’s hand, and draw the propeller’s original design, “Compared to a windmill shape, this shape of the blade is more suitable for rotating within the water. Your train of thought is entirely correct, but the contractual requirement is to transform the ship into a paddler, so we will still keep with the first method – this has

nothing to do with technology, it is simply a business strategy.” He paused and then asked, “I’m going to measure the hull, do you want to come with me?”

Anna blinked her blue eyes, “Uh-huh!”

Mastering the theory and then putting it into practice, is the best way to learn.

...

“Nightingale?”

When Anna followed the Prince to the door, she saw that Nightingale was still looking at those blueprints on the table, making it unable for her to not open her mouth.

“Ah, you can go first, I’ll come around immediately.”

While holding the sketches in her hand Nightingale repeatedly compared them, coming to the conclusion: Didn’t they just change the position where the wheel is placed?

Chapter 214 The travel to King’s City

The merchant fleet followed a branch of the Redwater River on its way north and after passing Silver City entered into the Grand Canal to King’s City.

Theo remembered that he had once read in the “Chronicles of Graycastle” that two hundred years ago, everything around here had been a wasteland. In order to transport the mined silver in the nearby mines back to King’s City, Wimbledon I had summoned stonemasons and nearly ten thousand handymen. After 20 time-consuming years spent digging, they finally opened a direct connection between the silver mines and King’s City. However, during the construction process a new city had also gradually formed itself around the silver mines, which was then later named Silver City by the late king.

But the scene that unfolded itself in front of him was completely different from the view of 200 years ago; this was no longer a wasteland. Instead, both sides had now been covered with lush farmland, that slowly transformed itself into a village. Seeing this scene made Theo think of the Kingdom Avenue which connected Border Town and Longsong Stronghold. When that road was finished, he believed that the surroundings hills would also become more densely populated.

“I heard you that you have previously already lived in King’s City?” Suddenly a woman’s voice sounded from behind him.

When Theo turned his head, he saw that the voice belonged to Margaret, the owner of the caravan, he nodded, “Before I became a palace guard, I have been living in the inner city.”

“How do you feel about returning to your old home?”

“Honestly speaking, not bad,” he said, “if it were not for the order of His Royal Highness, I’d rather stay in Border Town. Although King’s City seems to be such a lively place, it makes people develop a suffocating feeling living there.” Which is particularly the case because of the lower nobility, Theo thought.

“Is that so?” Margaret smiled, “how much do you know about His Highness Roland?”

“What’s going on?” Hearing this question let his heart slightly shiver with cold.

“I think he is really an incredible person. Of course, many bad rumors are flowing around in King’s City, you also should have heard a lot of them. However, in Border Town... it is nothing like those rumors said, his behavior and ideas are unpredictable,” she paused, “If the steam engine was accomplished through his knowledge and skills, why then, are even the soldiers trained by him so out of the ordinary?”

Speaking of the First Army, Theo glanced in the direction of the soldiers who were sitting on the deck – taking into account that their activities in King’s City had to be hidden as much as was possible; they were not equipped with guns, nor were they wearing a unified military uniform. Instead, their armor had been replaced with all sorts of different leather armors, and the only weapons they carried were the wooden spears on their back, they looked just any other caravan guard. For most of them, it was the first time that they were away from the Western Territory, and because of this, they were all curiously looking around and talked with each other about what they saw, but no one had yet taken off his shoes or laid down on their arms.

On the other hand, the mercenaries of the caravan, to avoid the sun many of them had left the deck and went into the cabin, leaving only three or four people behind on the deck who in turn have taken off their shoes and laid flat in the shade with their hands stretched out beside their body.

“I am not quite clear,” Theo reluctantly answered. It wasn’t that he was trying to hide something, it was simply that he didn’t know the answer – after coming to Border Town, the 4th Prince had become very different compared to his former self, “Probably His Royal Highness from before was just a disguise.”

“Is it...?” Margaret said nothing more, keeping silent for a moment and then she suddenly reached out with her hand and pointed in the distance. “Look, that’s the city wall. We will be arriving soon.”

At the end of his field of vision he could make out a fuzzy natural gray, just by standing here and looking, he could already feel the magnificence of the city walls – the city walls were the most outstanding work of the stonemason guild before they were dissolved. Both its height and thickness were second to none in the Kingdom of Graycastle. He had even heard that the walls had rooms and channels that offered places for nearly a thousand soldiers to rest. Making it possible to guarantee an uninterrupted patrol and fast support.

When the walls became clear for Theo to see, the figures of the fugitives also entered his field of vision.

A large number of civilians had gathered in the outskirts of King’s City. They had built simple sheds along the walls. In front of those sheds, many fires were burning, sending white smoke into the air, they were all seemingly boiling rice porridge. For now, these people had not yet run out of food, and their facial expressions were also still good. But King’s City would certainly not support them with free food forever, as soon as the aristocrats had selected their workforce, they would send their troops to drive these people away.

“How do you plan to go through with your task?” Margaret asked curiously, “Will you sent out the soldiers given to you by His Highness to pull the people in by propaganda?”

“No, such a plan would have a low efficiency. Moreover, it would be very easy to come to the unwanted attention of others,” Theo shook his head. “If you want to get something done in King’s City you either bribe an official or hire the rats, about this you should already have a profound understanding of.”

“Sure,” she laughed, “I wanted to help you with one or two words, but it seems it is unnecessary. So, if there is a need for money, just come to me.” Margaret handed him a sign, “As long as you reveal this, one of my shop managers will immediately contact me. Of course, everything under 100 gold royals can be directly taken.”

“Thank you.” Theo took the token – it was a deep red stone, engraved with some lines he had never seen before.

“There is no need to be so polite,” she chuckled. “The money will be repaid to me by His Highness, with interest.”

After arriving at the canal’s pier, Theo ordered the soldiers of the First Army to stay on the outskirts and wait for news of him. Their only current task was to avoid the sight of King’s City patrols as well as they could, while Theo himself entered the city together with the caravan. At the gate, he noted that the inspection of the guards had become a lot stricter than before. Apparently, they didn’t want any of the fugitives, who were able to escape from the East to enter the city.

After entering the city, the first thing that came to his eyes was a row of towering gallows.

Hanging on them were four women with their hands tied on their back, releasing an awful stench due to their expose to the scorching sun. Seeing such a scene let Theo immediately frown.

“Timothy is performing witch hunts in the city, and they are the unfortunates who get caught,” Margaret sighed, “but that is not accurate, of some of the witches the nobility just got bored, they just took advantage of this opportunity. It’s hard to say what is better, continuing to be imprisoned in a dark room without light, or being freed from the pain as soon as possible... No matter what, I wish for them that they can rest in peace.”

During the last half year at Border Town, Theo had realized that witches were not as unforgivable as the Church had preached and that except for their strange abilities, there was no difference between them and ordinary people. Looking at the bodies of the women hanging on the gallows he could determine that the smallest had only been around fourteen to fifteen-years-old. When he realised this, it suddenly felt like as if his heart was being pressed together, immediately returning the suffocating feeling.

Apart from the refugees outside of King’s City, little else had changed within half a year. Beside the main road which led to the city gate, that was paved with blue stones, all the other side roads and alleys were made out of mud. Now, under the hot summer sun the ground was covered with cracks, and whenever a carriage passed by a burst of yellow dust would rise up from it. It was hard to imagine that the capital city of the kingdom unexpectedly was outdone by the municipal constructions of a desolated small town just outside of the western border.

After crossing two streets, in one line the caravan entered the market area. Instead of following, Theo waved goodbye to Margaret and turned walking on his own into an alley.

Arriving at the familiar entrance of the “underground trumpeter” tavern, he immediately pushed the door open and went inside.

“Hey! The tavern will only open at night!” Someone shouted.

Theo ignored them and directly went to the bar, facing the strong man who busied himself with earnestly wiping a wine glass: "Still remember me?"

"From under which stone did you jump up grasshopper, didn't you hear that the pub only opens at night?" He impatiently put down the glass, raised his gloomy face, while two waiters also came over to encircle him, stopping their table and chair arranging, "Now I will count till three – Th-Sir Theo?"

"It's me," Theo spat to the side. "I have a good business deal I want to offer you."

Chapter 215 Skeleton Fingers

Theo was brought to the second floor of the small house; the brawny man had told the waiters to continue cleaning then shut the door.

These rooms were usually used to entertain those customers with special needs, but for only twenty-five copper royals a night, the environment wasn't very elegant. Within the room, there was an unpleasant moldy smelling and a narrow bed, with a bedding on top which was so crumpled as if it hadn't been washed or taken out to the sun to dry for a very long time. The cracked table was missing a corner and the cracks were filled with a black floccule, giving it a dirty and greasy appearance. But Theo was too lazy to care about all of this, he sat on the bedside, quietly waiting for the opposite party to start to talk.

"You have disappeared for quite a while," the brawny man said with a grin. "Since Sir Naji has taken your seat, why didn't you have come to the tavern? Even if you are no longer in charge of this matter, you could still have come to drink a cup of wine with us, right?"

His nickname was Black Hammer; he was the watchman for the "Covert Trumpeter", and one of skeleton fingers' member. His name sounded quite scary, but he was only one of King's City many street rats. To help each other, the rats had formed groups, divided the territory under their control, and according to their business operation they were either a huge and firm group or a loose organization. These underground organizations had more or less all had a noble or wealthy merchant as mastermind behind them and the skeleton fingers was no exception. But unlike a domestic dog, most rats didn't choose to be loyal to only one person, as long as they became interested, they would work for everyone.

"Nonsense," Theo said bluntly. "This night, you will call Hillwei, Swineherd, Silver Ring, and Pott into the tavern. I have something I need to get done."

"These few are only the people of the Covert Trumpeter," Black Hammer shouted out shocked, "Will they be enough?"

"I said, this is an excellent business opportunity." He shrugged, "I have come looking for you since you have done a lot of things for me already."

According to the usual procedure when dealing with street rats, the first step was to find the connector, and then it was the other party who determined whether they take up the task or not. When the two came to an agreement, the connector would delegate the task to the right person, and at the same time be in charge of the money.

Of course, during the whole process, they would make no contract or certificate which could be used as a guarantee, and ultimately, if they could achieve the desired result for the employer was also

completely unknown. In general it could be said that the more prestigious organizations would care about their credibility, so their commission costs were also high, while the new organization would charge a lower price, but made it more likely to lose one's life and property in the process. With time a delicate balance had been formed between the street rats and the city patrol, which together maintained an image of superficial order inside of King's City.

Before Theo had entered the palace to become a palace guard, he had served as patrol, responsible for giving some task to the street rats to handle if they were inconvenient for the public to see. As a result, making it very clear to him which groups of street rats were the most powerful and what their share in King's City was, giving him the opportunity to eliminate the time taken to deal with the connector. As for the reason why he had chosen the skull fingers, that was because they weren't as thoroughly bad as the others.

"Can I ask you, whom are you working now?" Black Hammer asked after a moment of hesitation.

Theo didn't give him an answer. Instead, he simply pointed with his thumb into the direction of the palace behind him.

After leaving the patrol and rats, most people only knew that he had become a guard, but they didn't know that he was soon selected by Wimbledon III as the personal guard of the 4th Prince, following His Royal Highness to Border Town. Within his six months of disappearance, they should think that he had been working in the palace. Moreover, by just pointing to the direction of the palace, he hadn't lied – the royal family wasn't only Timothy, Roland Wimbledon was also a member of the royal family.

"I see," he nodded. "But Hillwei and Swineherd are gone, can I pick my own hands?"

"What happened to them?"

"Dead," Black Hammer said full of hate, "Within last year's winter, a conflict with the people of Dreamland Water arose, they had taken hold of poppy flowers and dying fern, selling it within the northern city district. Casas had led everyone to drive them back. During the fight, Hillwei got a knife to his neck, the blood simply could not be stopped from flowing, and Swineherd was also thrown into the canal.

Theo frowned, with such kind of thinks the patrol would bother themselves, from time to time they would even deliberately provoke the rats into biting each other in order to control their strength and quantity, so whenever one of them died, they wouldn't care. "That's all right, but remember, they must be the people of the tavern."

...

Theo took a deep breath after leaving the Covert Trumpeter.

The moist and moldy smell in the pub made him want to vomit, only when his lungs were once more filled with the burning hot summer air was he able to disperse the dark and suffocating feeling.

Although Black Hammer had invited him to wait in the tavern, even claiming that he would come up with good wine to entertain him, Theo wasn't willing to stay in that small place for too long. In the event that something unforeseen arose, he would be unable to react by the time he became aware of it.

After leaving the tavern, he decided to go to the inner city, and look for a reasonable Inn and reserve a room there for the night. As for the soldiers of the first army, they were already very skilled in setting up camp for the night, so there was no need for him to worry about them.

When night fell, Theo returned to the Covert Trumpeter.

At this time, the pub was doing its usual business, and from time to time a customer would enter or exit. For a while he just watched from the dark, waiting for the regular customers to come into the house.

As a low-grade tavern in the outer city, most of the visitors were commoners, so the drinks were also the cheap ale. Just ten copper royals was enough to drink several large cups in succession. Within the noisy surrounding, he quickly found Black Hammer's men; they were sitting around a table next to the wall and on top of their table laid a white phalange.

When Theo, calmly and collectedly walked over, a person immediately stood up to make a place for him.

"Good evening, Sir," Silver Ring and Pott greeted him with a nod.

"Let me introduce these two to you. This is Little Finger." Black Hammer patted the little woman beside him and then pointed at the young man opposite her, "And this one is Hill Fawkes, he only recently became a member of the Skeleton Fingers."

"Fawkes?" Theo's eyes stopped on the opposite party, while the latter somewhat sparingly bowed his head in greeting.

"Within our line of work, there are only a few who have a family name," Black Hammer laughed, "he had gambled until nothing was left. First, his wife ran away, then he even had to sell his house, after that he came to join the ranks of the street rats. He used to live in the Northern District and was an occasionally patron of the Covert Trumpeter."

Silver Rings and Pott were old acquaintances, while Little Finger looked like any other child from the streets, but Hill Fawkes, Theo actually felt that there was something strange about him... yet, his appearance really resembled someone who had gone through such a drastic change of life, suffering physically and mentally. Yet, within his eyes, there was something, which Theo was unable to grasp, it was like... In the end, after thinking about it, he was still unable to get an answer.

Whatever, since he had been living in the Northern District and was a customer of the tavern, there shouldn't be a problem. Furthermore, my first task it just to complete the transport of the fugitives, there isn't any risk involved.

"Alright, now listen, the job you have to do isn't complicated. The upper ranks don't want to see that the number of fugitives who fled from the Eastern Region continues to increase. The grain reserves are becoming less and less every day, if it goes on like this, it is only a matter of time until riots start to break out, making it much harder to deal with them. Because of this, they thought of a way to lure them away from King's City."

"What do you need us to do?" Black Hammer asked.

"It is very simple; you only have to spread the message that the wasteland in the West is being reclaimed and that the local Lords are willing to accept the fugitives. Moreover, a fleet with mercenaries

has already set out to escort them back and will arrive in three days at the canal's pier. So, the only thing you need to do is to spread this message between those fools outside of the city. Feel free to add the specific details, the more attractive you make it appear, the better.

"But... If the appointed time for the fleet and mercenaries comes and they aren't there, saying all this will have no use ah." Silver Ring said.

"Of course, the escort will come," Theo smiled.

"Ah?" He got startled, "Is it really true that the Lords of the Western Region want to accept them?"

"You fool," Black Hammer gave him a slap on top of his head, "If you want to play such an act, you naturally have to go through with it. After they get escorted to the Western Region, do you believe they will be able to come back by only relying on their two feet? As for how to handle them afterward, let the local Lords get a headache about that." He looked to Theo, "This is indeed not a difficult task, but the reward..."

Theo raised two fingers, "Twice as much. My new employer has money, unlike the patrol. He just wants to see some results as quickly as possible, how much gold royals it will cost him, doesn't matter to him." He smiled, "Haven't I told you already, that this is very a good business deal."

Chapter 216 Demonic Plague

During the following two days, Theo moved non-stop between Margaret's Chamber of Commerce and King's City's suburbs.

Margaret would provide the fleet for the transportation of the refugees while the First Army, who would be disguised as mercenaries, would arrive at the canal's pier at the appointed time to arrange the screening and embarking.

As for the dissemination of information, Theo wasn't worried that Black Hammer would handle such a task relaxedly after swallowing such attractive bait. Letting street rats do such work was much more convenient than giving it to outsiders. Although their range of activity was limited to the Northern District, the refugees would certainly spread the news amongst themselves. Furthermore, he couldn't handle them all at once anyway. Prior to this, His Royal Highness had explicitly explained to him that this was a task which could be done over time by sending one ship after another.

On the day of the fleet's arrival, nearly one thousand destitute and homeless people had come to the pier, much more than Theo had expected. If he had relied on the First Army to promote the journey, Theo believed that if 100 people had come, it would already have been considered a good result.

According to His Royal Highness's screening requirements, the children were allowed to embark on the ships first, followed by the children's families, and finally, the other adults. As for elderly citizens... Theo discovered that there were almost no people with gray hair in the crowd. Perhaps they didn't want to risk going to a remote and unknown place, or they might have been unable to escape from the Eastern Region to King's City since the beginning .

After the first fleet of ten single-mast ships left the pier with 500 people on board, the rest of the waiting refugees were driven back to the camp, but they all took the news with them that "the fleet will return".

Thinking that he could easily succeed in completing the first of His Highness' tasks, he did not expect that he would encounter a severe problem soon after the merchant fleet brought away the second batch of people.

A strange illness had suddenly broken out in King's City.

The first deceased to be discovered had laid at the roadside, his body covered with many black spots, and his teeth fallen off. His skin had also broken open in many places, and the blood flowing out of those places had changed color – turning black like the blood of witches who were devoured by the terror of the demonic bite. But this time, the deceased was not a woman, but rather a male resident of the Northern District.

Not long after, several corpses with the same symptoms were discovered one after another. Furthermore, some of the people who came into contact with the corpses also began to grow dark spots. Whether it was herbal treatment or cold compresses, nothing was able to subdue the illness. Even when using bloodletting treatment, their blood which was usually red had now turned black, as if having been mixed with a large amount of ink.

Soon, fear spread through the masses, which steadily increased the amount of people who went to the Church to pray, but everything was useless. Every day, more and more people showing those black spots would appear, and even people with the same symptoms were discovered in the fugitives outside of the city.

Finally, the High Priest of the Church appeared in front of the praying masses and declared that all this was a plot by the witches to spread the Devil's power, infecting other innocent people this way. Furthermore, the priest said that at present, any treatment was unable to resist the power of the Devil, and the people who fall to the corrosion will die under extreme pain. However, the Church would never idly sit by; they had already developed the Holy Elixir, which was powerful enough to drive the Devil back to Hell.

This statement let the infected people once more see a glimmer of hope. Every day, they would sit in front of the church's door, waiting for the release of the Holy Elixir.

Although Theo had strong doubts regarding the Church's claims, he temporarily stopped the shipping off of the refugees to provide for every contingency.

"Why do you want to stop?" Black Hammer asked, extremely puzzled, "Why aren't we rushing to send those people away before they become eroded by the Devil's spirit? Do you want them to stay in the city to become seeds for the witches?"

"This is the wish of the people above," Theo answered impatiently. "They are just ordinary fugitives. If the West is also infected by this evil force, how will the kingdom then look like?"

"Uh -" Black Hammer slightly stannered, "But what happens to the Western Region doesn't matter to us at all. Sir Theo, how about this? We just don't hear the opinion of the people above and simply drag them away. Think about it, this is such a demonic illness— one touch and you will are infected. I simply can't stay here and wait for the devil to come, even if a wall is separating them from us."

"As if we haven't heard them?" Theo asked coldly. "Just like me, you also only have one head!"

After he left the pub, he went to the next shop marked with Margaret's Caravan emblem, and revealed his token.

"I must see your boss. The sooner, the better."

It didn't take long until he could meet with the female merchant in a secret room of the shop.

"The disease definitely has nothing to do with the witches," Margaret began, "If they could release such a demonic power, the God's Stone of Retaliation would be powerless, and they would have already turned Hermes into a deadzone.

"I also think the same, but this is still a pressing matter that has to be reported to His Royal Highness. Although there have been no symptoms of black spots on the two groups of people who embarked to Border Town, it seems that this disease does not manifest itself on the spot. In case some people on the ships were infected by this evil force, Border Town must prepare for it immediately." Theo pulled a folded letter out of a pocket, "I need your help to send the message back to His Highness as quickly as possible."

"Naturally," she nodded. "Information transmission between merchants has always been the fastest."

...

After several days of sailing, Lucia wanted to vomit.

During the past month, it seemed she had been always fleeing— first from the Eastern Region to King's City, then from King's City to the Western Region. The reason for the former was that she had been driven out of her home, while for the latter was because she had finally come to see a glimmer of hope again.

"Elder sister... water, I am thirsty..."

Bell gave a painful moan and reached out, grabbing Lucia's arm.

"Alright, I'll go and fetch you some water."

Lucia grabbed the bag on hand and staggered out of the cabin, lying flat at the lowest point of the ship and reaching out with her arm to soak the bag in the river water. Her stomach acid bubbled up again, in the end making it impossible for her to contain it, and with a wow sound the vomit flew out. She also spit the last of the gravel left in her stomach out, not only through her mouth, but also through her nostrils. She forcefully suppressed the urge to burst into tears, clenched her teeth, and rubbed her face with the back of her hand, then continued to soak the bag in the river. When the bag was finally filled with water, she carefully held it in her arms and trotted back to the cabin.

"The water is here, open your mouth."

However, Bell's face again appeared to be a bit worse than before. Her cheeks weren't covered with their normal flush and her forehead was also terribly hot. She tightly clenched her lips, only intermittently releasing moaning noises.

With no other option than forcing her mouth open, Lucia twisted the water bag so that the water droplets would directly fall into her sister's mouth.

“You are too close to her. The dark spots have already reached her neck, she cannot hold on for much longer.” A weak middle-aged man who was also in the cabin said, “We will die here, you have to think of yourself.”

Shortly after they had left King’s City on the ship, some people had begun to suffer from a terrifying disease. First, their whole body would become unusually hot, followed by the emergence of dark spots on their skin. Within three to four days, the illness would begin to worsen. Not only had the infected fallen into a coma, but the people who came in contact with them also caught the disease. Therefore, on the fifth day, the fleet had cleaned out a sailboat specifically for the transportation of the patients. Lucia guessed the reason why the other side hadn’t just thrown the sick refugees into the river was because there were also some infected people on their side.

After the first dark spots were discovered on Bell’s body, Lucia didn’t listen to any discouraging words from others and decided that she would follow her younger sister onto the ship of sickness.

In order to take care of young Bell, she had almost not slept for an entire two days.

However, Lucia had still not given up. She believed that as long as they were able to reach the Western Region, all would change for the better.

If the rumors were right... the Witch Cooperation Association would be her final hope.

Chapter 217 The cause of the disease

Roland and the witches had finished, but just as he decided to return to his room and take an afternoon nap, Carter stormed into the dining hall.

“Your Royal Highness, the ships transporting the Eastern Region refugees from King’s City just arrived at the pier!”

“So fast?” It seems that Theo’s work efficiency is quite high, Roland thought, pleased, as a man who has relations to the black and white side of the society, his time serving in the patrol wasn’t wasted. However, when he looked at his sweating Chief Knight and saw his pressed brows, Roland immediately felt that there was something wrong.

“What happened?”

“The people on board have caught a strange disease,” Carter described the patient’s characteristics quickly. “At first, it was only a few individuals, but by now the disease has spread over two to three ships, even the soldiers of the First Army have been infected!”

An illness which causes black spots all over the body, which also spreads on contact? This sounds very similar to a plague, similar to the famous Black Death. However, the bubonic plague bacillus didn’t change the color of the infected’s blood, not to mention making their skin break apart.

Roland wrinkled his brow.

His first thought was Lily, but they had not fully grasped the scope of her new ability yet and making her handle an infectious diseases which had never been heard of before would be very dangerous. If she were unable to cure them, it would be quite probable that she would also get infected. So he had to

make his decision very carefully, but according to Carter's description, it seemed that these people couldn't hold out for much longer.

In any case, at least I have to first blockade the area.

Thinking up to here, Roland ordered Carter, "Go and send out the First Army; they should set up a restricted area outside of the pier, forbidding anybody from entering or leaving it. Additionally tell them: Miss Nana and I are also already on the way."

"Yes!"

"Is it going to be very difficult?" Nightingale asked.

"That's still unclear, everything depends on Lily's ability," he said. "Call all of the members of the Witch Union, there will be no afternoon naps today."

...

Through the whole journey to the pier, Roland thought about how to verify the effectiveness of Lily's ability while keeping her isolated from the patients.

Fortunately, her ability to protect freshness belonged to the summoning category, with a range of five meters like that of many other witches, it allowed her to use and efficiently control her ability over a distance without the need of actually touching the target.

Thus he brought two carpenters along, and with the help of Anna they quickly built a rectangle box. The room was split in the middle, and it was possible to see the opposite side through a window embedded within the barrier. Within the lower half of the wall two symmetrical holes were cut, on top of which Soraya had painted a flexible curtain, so that when Lily stretched her hands through the hole, the coating would tightly wrap around her hands. Furthermore, the soft sky colored curtain would also cut off the air circulation between the two rooms. With this, as long as she later washed her hands with alcohol, all possibility of being infected should be eliminated.

During all this, it were still the 100 soldiers of the First Army who maintained the order on top of the ships. That they were still able to uphold discipline wasn't due to their strong willpower, but because most of them believed that the angelic Miss Nana would certainly let them recover like she always had.

As soon as the box was prepared, one of the soldiers who had shown the black spots but could still walk was selected.

According to instructions he entered the room and stood still, Lily then stretched out her hands through the barrier, and made full use of her ability. At the same time, Roland stood beside her and observed the soldier's situation through the window.

The magic power took effect silently, and when the little girl nodded, giving Roland the signal that she was done, he opened his mouth and asked, "How do you feel now?"

"Your Highness?" When the soldier heard Roland's voice, he excitedly raised his hand to salute, then froze on the spot, "Hey, I feel like my strength has been restored. Oh my God! Your Highness, I already feel much better now!"

Roland also saw that the dark spots on the soldier's hand were rapidly fading; this definitely isn't a plague symptom. If I remember it correctly, the soldier's black spots should have come from a complicated sepsis and a high degree of cyanosis. Even after killing the bubonic plague bacillus, these spots should have taken a long time before they faded away. After all, Lily doesn't possess the ability to heal.

However, her new ability had an effect on the unknown infection, which made Roland feel a little relieved.

"Once you have fully recovered, go and call for the other soldiers to come in. Let the next ten people enter, whether they show symptoms or not, they all have to come here for treatment."

"Yes! Your Highness," the soldier shouted, paused for a moment, then saluted again. "Thank you, Miss Nana."

"It wasn't Miss Nana, this time the one who saved your life was Miss Lily," Roland corrected him laughingly, "Only in the case of the illness already advancing so far that the skin has broken open, will you need Miss Nana to heal you."

"Yes... well," he touched his head. "Thank you, Miss Lily."

By the time when the soldier had left, Lily glanced at the Prince, "I didn't mind that he thought it had been Nana, I do not need to be thanked."

Well, if that's case, why would you suddenly stand up so straight? When Roland looked at her and saw her swing her two ponytails, he couldn't stop himself from rubbing her head, to which the other side unexpectedly didn't show any sign of protest, but stifled a hum.

Since this wasn't a plague, in the end, what is the cause of this disease? The moment he left the box, Nightingale appeared at his side and leaned over. "Your Royal Highness, I have just seen a strange phenomenon, the blood flowing out of their wounds... it contains signs of magic."

"What?" Roland stopped shocked.

"Within the fog, it seems like I'm looking at the stars in the night," Nightingale explained, "Until now, I've never seen such a tiny magic glow."

This came unexpected. But as long as something involves magic it has to be closely followed up, not because of the witches, but because it means that the Church could likely be involved. Now, I'm at least sure of one thing; this disease wasn't caused by a natural bacteria or virus.

"I got it!" After thinking for a moment, the Prince continued, "Since it is like this, I have to get some drops of blood to observe."

"No, you may get infected!" Nightingale interrupted nervously.

"Rest assured," Roland smiled at her, "Lily's new ability has completely restrained the disease."

The blood samples had been taken from a coma patient, then he covered the glass slide with the blood and placed it on the stage, afterward adjusting the distance. When the scene through the lens gradually became apparent, he thought in case the symptoms were caused by something with only the size of a

bacteria it may be that he couldn't see anything. But when the object came into focus, Roland could hardly believe his eyes.

Within the narrow line of sight, he saw a number of fat bugs with tentacles slowly moving through the blood, from time to time, they were spraying out some sort of mucus from their rear, which resembled thin hairs. Their size was nearly of the same dimension as single-celled algae, but just like Lily's mothers, their body wasn't transparent, making it difficult to distinguish between whether it belongs to a single-celled organism or not.

Fortunately, the magical glow of the bugs didn't affect the ability of the little girl, letting her mother's playing their role. When a copy was mixed into a sample of blood, it would even give priority to attacking those strange insects, and turn them into one of their own kind.

When all the soldiers of the First Army had been healed, to avoid any accidents, Roland ordered that all the fugitives when stepping into the box should wear a hood and would be led by the soldiers to help them enter. At the same time, another box was also set up, which was mainly there for Nana to treat the seriously ill patients with the open wounds.

The treatment continued from noon until evening, and when the more than five hundred people from the ten ships had fully recovered, the crowd burst into cheers. Many people kneeled on the ground, shouting one wave of "Long live His Highness" after the next, unable to quieten down for a long time.

"You don't seem to be happy?" The Nightingale winked at him.

"The one who cured the disease wasn't me, but Lily and Nana, who are witches," Roland shook his head. "They should be the ones to whom they cheer for."

Having said that, he, of course, knew that it wouldn't be wise to tell it to those who haven't fully accepted the witches. So he just sighed softly and hoped that one day witches could also come up to stand on stage.

It seemed that Nightingale could understand the thought within Roland's heart, she generously patted his shoulder and said, "It is unlikely that anyone cares about it, you have already done enough. Besides, the day will come sooner or later, won't it?" She paused for a moment "Well, there's a good news that I forgot to tell you."

"Which one?"

"There might soon be another member added to the Witch Union," Nightingale revealed with a grin.

Chapter 218 Lucia

Bell's condition stabilized.

Like the time they had boarded the ship for the first time, they were once more arranged oddly. Those mercenaries armed with the wooden spears divided the people into smaller groups. Those whose life were in danger were the first to be carried into the strange room. Afterward, they took the young children, then they took families of the children and finally, it was the adults turn.

Lucia was placed together with Bell in the front of the row, the whole treatment process was handled very quickly, they blindfolded her sister, and two mercenaries grasped her under the arms and carried

her into the cabin. She didn't have to wait for a long time before someone placed a pill in her hand. The pill was very small, and had a slightly sweet taste, at the same time the mercenaries also took the initiative to tell her that they had also fed the medicine to her sister so that she didn't need to worry.

When she was out of the room and could take off her hood, she was pleasantly surprised to see that Bells colors was improving at a visible speed. Although she was still in a coma, her forehead was no longer burning hot, the flush on her face had also faded, and the dark spots disappeared without a trace.

When all the people had been freed from their fear of their impending death, they felt like they had gained a new life and became so excited that they could no longer contain themselves after seeing the man with gray hair standing in the distance. They kneeled down and cheered, paying him the highest of respects. From the mercenaries' mouth, they had heard that he was the Lord of this land, the one that was in charge of the Western Region, His Royal Highness Roland Wimbledon.

Afterward, following exactly what had been promised in the rumors, the Lord not only lit bonfires at the edge of the pier, but also distributed meat porridge to everyone and told them that they would be paid and also received food and shelter as long as they were willing to work for the town. While everyone was enjoying the fragrant meat porridge, they were also talking about how fortune it was that they had boarded the ships and fled to this Western Region, and then once more praised His Highness for his kindness.

Only Lucia felt a little anxious.

How can I get in touch with the Witch Cooperation Association? The secret message only said that a group of witches lived in Border Town. It didn't mention how I can find them. Most probably this important part had gotten lost during the transmission process, she had only faintly heard, that the news had been spread within the large cities of the kingdom's Central Region.

The moment when the people had filled their stomachs, and the mercenaries began guiding them to wooden sheds near the river, a woman's voice suddenly came from behind Lucia.

"Were you looking for us?"

She was so frightened that at the same time she turned her head she also jumped two steps forward, ready to escape, but when the speaker's appearance came into her eyes, Lucia couldn't help but be rooted to the spot.

Gosh, what a beautiful woman! Her long curly hair, illuminated by the gentle orange glow of the flickering flames, her eyes, twinkling bright as the stars, a sweet smile. But the most striking part was her aura, which wasn't inferior to that of any noble, as if she was a important person herself.

"My name is Nightingale; I'm a witch, welcome to the Border Town."

Becoming aware of this feeling, Lucia was unable to stop herself from lowering her head "I... my name is Lucia White, I want to join you."

"In that case, come with me," Nightingale said with a smile, "I'll take you home."

At this time the sun had already fallen behind the mountains, only leaving a weak light behind. While carrying the sleeping Bell, Lucia slowly followed behind her.

"When was your time of awakening?" Nightingale suddenly asked.

"Awakening?" Lucia got started.

"That's the moment when you got turned into a witch," Nightingale explained. "From that moment on, your body will continue to gather magic, and because of that, we call this transformation 'Awakening'."

"I think... maybe two years ago," Lucia recalled. "Is magic the power of demons?"

"That's just the Church's excuse nothing more," she shook her head, "Magic is a ability given by God, it has nothing to do with good and evil. The so-called demonic bite is just the pain experienced when the magic within your body becomes too plentiful; this can easily be avoided with practice."

"I do not need to bear that pain?" Lucia's eyes grew wide.

"Yes, as long as there is no oppression of the Church, us witches don't have to bear the pain of the bite." Nightingale explained, "But here in our home, we can use our magic freely." Then she pointed behind her, "Is this lovable fellow your younger sister? What about your other family?"

"They all died, only Bell and I could escape," for a moment Lucia kept silent, "A group of people attacked Valencia, burning, looting, and killing everywhere. In order to resist them, father... His chest was pierced by several swords and mother made us run away quickly, in the end, she also, also..." The grief which had been enclosed within her heart for so long made it impossible for her to continue the sentence. All of the suffering, hunger, thirst, fear and grievances, in short, the whole injustice she had to endure along the way, suddenly burst free.

For her sister, she had clenched her teeth and held on, but now, it seemed that the defense lines she had built around her heart was no longer able to block the emotional ups and downs from her thoughts. which quickly turned her sobbing into very loud cries. She knew that this wasn't a good time for it, that during the first meeting she should keep her courtesy, but the tears were like a storm, they couldn't get stopped.

She will hate me for this, right? She could feel how her tears and snot mixed together and her mouth began to taste salty. However, to Lucia's surprise, a pair of arms suddenly wrapped themselves around her, taking her into a warm hug, gently patting the back of her head. Taking completely no offense because of the dirt and tears on her face. Instead, she softly said: "Cry, cry now, it is fine to let it all out."

...

When Lucia's outburst finally calmed, she raised her head, only to see that Nightingale's shoulders had been soaked through with her tears.

"I'm sorry..." she blushed.

"It doesn't matter, is it better now?" Then Nightingale took out a handkerchief and helped her to wipe her face clean, picked Bell up with one hand and held her in the other. "Let's go; there are still many sisters waiting to welcome you."

Lucia had thought that the witches' residence would be located somewhere in a small abandoned warehouse or basement, she never expected that Nightingale would bring her to the castle area, wasn't that the Lord's private territory? Even more surprisingly, the guards not only did not stop her, instead they also greeted her.

Could it be that the whole town is under the control of the Witch Cooperation Association?

Reaching the third floor of the castle, she walked into a brightly lit room, only to shockingly discover that the man sitting on the opposite side was the Lord who had recently received the cheers of the masses.

"This is the leader of the Witch Union, His Highness, Lord Roland Wimbledon. He took in the survivors of the Witch Cooperation Association, and also let spread the message to other cities, hoping to attract more homeless sisters," Nightingale introduced the man, "He made Border Town into the home of us witches. You do not need to doubt this point, after all, the people who treated your sister and all the other sick people on board of the ships were us witches."

Lucia's head had turned blank, she totally hadn't anticipated, that there would be noble willing to provide a home for witches, instead of seeing them as tools or slaves. When her soul finally came back to her body, she began to panic and bowed in a flustered manner. Her bizarre posture was so out of shape, that Nightingale couldn't suppress her laugh, "Don't mind it, His Royal Highness does not care about etiquette."

"You came from the Eastern Territory?" The Lord's voice was calm and relaxed, not giving her the impression of an interrogation, but more of a friendly chat.

Lucia stole a glance at him, seeing that he was sitting leisurely on his chair, and looked at her with an expression full of interest.

"Yes..."

As the conversation became deeper, and Nightingale supplemented some explanation, her mood gradually relaxed. Even though her counterpart was a noble, but he didn't show an aggressive attitude, but rather the care of an elder.

"So, when your awakening was two years ago, you shouldn't be an adult yet..." he spoke full of interest, "So, what is your ability?"

"Turning goods back into their original form," Lucia said hesitatingly, "but it isn't effective on all things."

"Their original form?" His Royal Highness touched his chin in thought, he then pushed an beautiful cup to her over the table, "Can you demonstrate it for me?"

"This will destroy it."

"It won't hurt."

Lucia nodded, went to the table and put her hand on top of the cup.

After a short while, the cup began to shrink and deform, ultimately forming into three distinct substances: The one on the far left looked like a pool of oil, dark and viscous. The one in the middle

seemed to be a small cluster of fine black powder. Lastly, the one on the far right appeared to be clear water, which was slowly dripping down from the edge of the table.

Chapter 219 Older sister, younger sister

“Welcome to the Witch Union!” In the hall, a group of witches of different ages and colors raised their glasses cheerfully.

“Thanks, thank you.” Lucia felt her eyes become teary again, she sniffed and impulsively tried to restrain her tears. She raised her cup then drank a mouthful of wine, which didn’t taste as bitter as she remembered but was slightly sweet instead.

After have gone to see the Lord, and with Nightingale’s assistance, Lucia was able to wash Bell and take a bath herself. Afterward putting on a set of clean clothes. When her sister had been settled, Lucia once more followed Nightingale into the castle hall. Here, the witches had prepared a welcoming party for her.

This was the first time Lucia ever saw so many of her kind, subsequently also dispersing the last trace of doubt in the bottom of her heart. In case the witches had been imprisoned here or forced to serve the Lord, they would never be able to reveal such a light-hearted and bright smiles.

Recalling the sentence, Nightingale had previously said, “This is the home of witches”, she suddenly understood her feelings. In contrast to those witches whose identities were exposed and were thus hunted down and killed by the Church, finding a safe place to live in wasn’t easy. Since the bandits had attacked Valencia a month of suffering and constant fleeing had followed. But now, with the warm welcome of the Witch Union, she could finally let her constantly alarmed mind relax a bit.

At the same time, she also realized how magical a banquet with many witches participating could become.

Using black flames, the raw goat’s meat roasted perfectly within a flash, while the basin containing it was completely unharmed.

A little girl with short blond hair flew in the air, holding jug to fill everyone’s cup.

While a witch with an exotic look simulated a broad range of musical instruments, which all eventually converged into beautiful music.

...

With Nightingale introducing them one after another, she was quickly able to remember each of their names. In this way becoming one of them and diluting the sadness in her heart even further.

In the Witch Union there were mature and steady witches like Scroll and Wendy, and there was also Leaves and Echo, who kind of resembled older sisters, as well as Anna, Soraya, and others whose age was similar to her own. But no matter who they were none of them treated her as a stranger. For this, Lucia’s heart was filled with gratitude.

After the banquet, she and the witches wished each other a good night and then she returned to her new home. Although Bell was not a witch, the Prince did not order her and her sister to separate. Instead, he gave them the last furnished guest room on the second floor of the castle all to them.

“Elder sister?” Hearing her moving, Bell opened her eyes.

“You awoke!?” Lucia felt immediately delighted in her heart, quickly rushing to the bedside, “How are you feeling?”

Bell looked like she had only been asleep for a long time, not having any trace of the plague or the pain it brought left on her body. With her eyes still a little cloudy, she opened her mouth and muttered: “I feel so hungry.”

“Wait...” Lucia hurriedly took out a bag from her pocket and opened it, releasing the scent of grilled fish. This bag of fish slices had previously been given to her by Nightingale, “There’s some food for you.”

Sitting on the bed and seeing how Bell ate the fish, she was so gratified that she began to pat the little fellow’s head. This year, her sister only just turned ten years old, and now, without parents, she was the only one Bell could rely on.

After eating two fishes she became more sober, curiously looking around she asked, “Where are we? It didn’t look like the ship had such a big bed.”

“Western Region’s Border Town, we reached our destination.”

“Have already arrived?” She touched her cheek. “But am I not... sick? Will they agree to let the plague-stricken people enter the town?”

“You are right, that would be indeed be unlikely,” replied Lucia. Seeing the blank expression on her sister’s face, she began to laugh, “However, the Lord’s witches have already cured you.” Afterward, she gave her a summary of what happened at the docks, “and from now on we should stay here in the castle.”

“Witches?” Bell asked, tilting her head, “Are they the same as you, sister?”

“That’s right. Furthermore, everyone is very kind to me, especially a witch called Nightingale,” Lucia softly poked her head. “She also helped with giving you a bath.”

“Oh, but you have always said that the nobles would loathe witches? Why would the Lord be willing to shelter witches?”

Taken aback by the question, Lucia coughed twice. “This... Occasionally there are also one or two good people within the nobility.”

While taking out the last piece of dried fish out of the bag, Bell asked. “Does that mean you need to work for him? Like those maids at home, sweeping the floor, cooking, and attending upon the Lord?”

“What nonsense are you talking about,” Lucia said, grasping her younger sister’s face, “I am a witch! It is only naturally that I have to help the Lord with my ability! As for maids having to do those things, who told you that?”

“Mommy...” she sadly whispered, “She said that’s also the reason why she never allowed daddy to recruit a beautiful maid.”

Hearing her mention their family, Lucia's face suddenly darkened a lot. Instead of blaming Bell for bringing it up, she pulled her younger sister into a hug and softly sighed.

She wasn't worried about her sister's theory, during the conversation with the Lord, she could see that besides of simple inquiries about her life experiences, the only other thing of interest to him was her ability, making it evident that he cared more about whether a witch's ability could serve useful to him or not.

But, when thinking about her ability, Lucia felt deeply worried and sick at heart.

She had never been ignorant about the witches' world; she knew that six months ago many witches had come through Valencia, and afterward the others had one after another left the city. She had heard that they were leaving for the Fjord's, wanting to find a new home. But Lucia didn't want to leave her parents and because of that she hadn't agreed to travel with them. However, with her repeated contact with them, Lucia at least became aware that witches are used to dividing themselves into combat and noncombat types.

Her ability to restore an object to its original state could be said to be useless. Not to mention using it during a fight, even using it during peaceful times it was already difficult for her to control.

Her father had been a merchant, operating the family's papermaking workshop, so it was often that the living room was filled with the prepared straw paper. But on the day when she became a witch, she unwittingly chanced upon using her ability, turning the paper back into a pile of grass and fine powder. After the event, although her parents severely rebuked her, they did not give her away to the Church. Instead, they repeatedly warned her to hide herself carefully and if necessary, even go so far as put on a God's Stone of Retaliation, disguising herself as devoted believer.

At first, Lucia was full of curiosity about the ability, often secretly hiding in her bedroom to restore all kinds of test items. But she quickly discovered that this ability was extremely difficult to control. For example, restoring the straw paper again, she sometimes got the same grass bits as the first time, but other times there were only black granule left. In case she would continue to cast her magic on an object, it will only become less and less, and the final product was not a fine powder but rather a grit, which meant that her restoration ability couldn't be used to restore a heavily damaged object. She was only able to destroy what other had carefully produced.

The other witches had also thought that her ability was useless. In case she wanted to use it in battle, she would have to get too close. Furthermore, her ability was also ineffective on a living body, so not to mention using it to fight against a trained knight, even the average farmer would already be terribly difficult. And so, considering to become a combat witch was out of the question for her, but also as a non-combat witch, she couldn't think of any uses, it was almost like her ability was on the lowest level.

Coming to this conclusion, she had been depressed for a long time.

But now... what Lucia was now more anxious about was, if His Royal Highness also believed her to be useless, will he cast her out of the castle?

With an uneasy feeling, she blew out the candles, took her sister who was perfectly satisfied gnawing on the finished fish bones into her arms, slowly closed her eyes then awaited the arrival of a new day.

Chapter 220 Decomposition and Restoration

Early on the next morning, Roland had filled the office floor with a variety of test items.

From solid to liquid, from minerals to ingots, from inorganic to organic matter, simply everything that should be here was here.

"It seems you are euphoric." Nightingale squat down, took a small steamed dumpling from a meal plate and threw it into her mouth.

"Of course, there is a new witch in town, and even better, her ability is so incredible," Roland rose his eyebrows. "Also, do not think that I didn't see that, you just slyly ate one of the test objects."

"There are still a few left," Nightingale said while wiping her mouth. "Is Lucia's ability really that useful?"

"It's of the greatest usefulness, not matter if it's decomposing or restoration, they both would bring significant improvement to the smelting and manufacturing industry." Roland said excitedly, "In case she paired up with Anna, they could easily upgrade the machine's strength by several times. Even if they couldn't be mass produced, as long as they made several machines by hand, the level of the town's production would definitely receive a qualitative improvement."

Right now, the machines produced for Graycastle Industry by Anna are still working extremely accurately, but they were limited by the materials own flaws. During the production process, their abrasion and deformation problems would become increasingly evident. For example, seeing the cutting tool break into many pieces is a frequently observed phenomenon. If it wasn't for Anna supplementing maintenance parts, these machines could only be used for one or two years at most.

But if Lucia's uses her ability to control the parts the materials turn into precisely enough, it might be possible to use high strength iron, steel, and even alloy for manufacturing the machine tools. Not only would it increase the tool's lifetime, their processing efficiency and processing standard could take a step further. By then items like the revolver rifle, which at the moment could only be produced by the Anna, would be able to enter the state of reaching mass production.

"Is it so?" Nightingale skipped back to the table, "But she does not seem to think so."

"Because she hasn't really recognized the value of her ability, it the same with Mystery Moon." Roland further explained unconcerned, "When Lucia finished studying 'Theoretical Foundations of Natural Science,' she certainly won't think this way any longer."

"..." Nightingale kept silent. Not knowing how to reply, she instead put two dried fishes into her mouth.

When Lucia finished her breakfast and came to the office, her ability test officially began.

With his heart full of expectations, Roland followed closely how one test item after another changed and if there were any differences between them. For example substances like iron ingots and iron ore both changed into a silver-white granule, but when he took a closer look, he also discovered that at their edges there laid different kinds of powder. Grapes and meat didn't change at all, while the dumplings turned into water, flour, and meat residues.

When she was halfway through the test objects, she suddenly stopped and said with some embarrassment, "I seem to... have exhausted my magic."

Roland looked to Nightingale, only to see the latter nod. "The amount of magic her body stores is very small, it just looks like a cloud of drifting smoke, but it is for the first time that I see a color like hers."

"What kind of color?"

"... gray," Nightingale said.

Roland returned to his desk and waved to Lucia, calling her over, "The witch's magical capacity grows with their age and training. You are still not an adult, so being able to do so much is already quite good." Waiting until the young woman had walked to the table, he pushed the already prepared parchment over to her, "Since you decide to stay in Border Town, please sign this contract."

When Lucia came to the end of the contract, she couldn't help but grasp a mouthful of air, "A whole gold royal a month? Your Highness can... but my ability hasn't been thoroughly tested?"

"This has nothing to do with your ability," Roland smiled and shook his head. "As long as you are a member of the Witch Union, this contract will always be effective."

"Even in the case that the witch's ability is useless?" She asked in disbelief.

"You can also interpret it like that," The Prince spread out his hands, "But I do believe that the power of any witch has its own unique use, it's only a matter of unleashing that power. So you really don't have to worry about being useless." He paused, "Also, you should already have heard of the real reason for the demonic bite from the other witches. So to ensure that you can smoothly pass through your Day of Awakening, you have to practice your skill every day. After dinner, Teacher Scroll will give lessons in the living room; you also have to attend the lecture. Although you have already mastered your reading and writing skill, you still have to study Primary Mathematics and Natural Foundation."

"Yes, Your Highness," Lucia nodded vigorously.

"You have a younger sister, right?" Roland asked with a smile. "When attending class, take her along with you, she should be at the right age for receiving an education."

Lucia was slightly stunned, then, after raising her head to confirm that His Highness wasn't making fun of her, she happily bowed, "As you say."

After Lucia asked to be excused, Roland put the signed contract into the drawer, then thoughtfully looked at the broad range of test products on the ground.

"What is the result?" Nightingale asked curiously.

"Awe-inspiring," he said, picking up the plate with the steam dumplings, which now contained meat pieces and flour, "For example this... When kneading the flour, the gluten will form a ramified structure, letting the flour dough become strong but flexible. Once cooked, due to the high-temperature the gluten protein will denature, even when reground into powder, it is impossible to restore it to its previously smooth and exquisite appearance. This transformation is considered irreversible, but..." Roland pinched into the small cluster of powder in the palm of his hand, and felt a silky feeling, just like from freshly ground flour. "She was able to bring the meal back to its original appearance."

"Well, I can't say that I understand you," Nightingale curled her lips, "But putting it that way, can her ability be seen as restoring a material back to its original state?"

“It is not really like that,” Roland pointed to the iron ingot. “In the case that it was merely restoration, the iron ingot should have been returned into iron ore, but in fact, it was broken down into iron powder and other impurities.”

“... So in the end, what is her ability?” Nightingale asked confused.

“For the time being I still haven’t fully understood it, but if I had to speculate, I would say that her ability has two effects, as for its appearance, it manifests according to her knowledge and experience.”

“Knowledge and experience?”

“Essentially, there is no significant difference between meat and iron ore, they are both composed out of a variety of particles, but Lucia can only break down iron ore with her ability, but not the meat. I believe the reason for this is because she is unable to understand organic matter... or so to say, the constitution of life in generally,” Roland explained, even though he wasn’t sure whether this was correct, he still had no doubt, that right now what Lucia needed the most was learning new knowledge.

...

Three days later, when the second convoy carrying refugees from the Eastern Region arrived at Border Town, the same disease had broken out on the ship. But this time it was much more severe, with almost half of the people being infected. After questioning some of the patients, Roland learned, that the black spots had appeared the first day after boarding. Which meant that they had been infected by the parasite earlier, and because of this the incubation period had been shortened a lot.

At the same time, Roland also received a letter sent from King’s City, which was sealed with the mark of Margaret’s Chamber of Commerce.

When reading the content of the letter, his brow wrinkled.

When the demonic disease spread through King’s City, the Church declared that it was all a witch’s conspiracy. They furthermore told the people that they had a Holy Elixir which could repel the evil spirits.

Furthermore, even outside of King’s City, many ill people had started to appear, and because of this Theo had chosen to temporarily stop the delivery of fugitives.

If he wasn’t calculating it wrong, the first fleet would return to King’s City in four days, bringing with them the news that Border Town was able to cure the demonic plague. However, with nearly one week spent traveling, it would still be too late for those people who were already infected by the disease. Moreover, the public proclamation of the Church also had the smell of a conspiracy in the works.

After thinking it over again and again, he decided to send a small team to escort Lily to King’s City. Otherwise, more than half of King’s City population and the Eastern Regions’ refugees would die, and those who survived in the end would become devoted believers of the Church.

Roland had to do his utmost to prevent the birth of that kind of situation.