

Witch 471

Chapter 471: A Reunion

It was evening. Ferlin Eltek was in his study looking over the newly issued textbooks when he suddenly heard someone knocking on the main door.

"Dear, I'm busy toasting bread. Why don't you get the door?" Irene shouted from the kitchen. "It could be Miss May."

"Okay."

He closed the book, walked to the front door in the living room, and unlocked the latch. The person standing outside caught him completely by surprise.

"Father! What brings you here?" Ferlin exclaimed.

"I followed His Highness here," the old knight said while brushing off the snow on his shoulders. "In fact, I arrived in Border Town yesterday. Though I told them that my son is living here, they still arranged a house for me in a residential area near the castle."

"Come in. It's cold outside." Ferlin hastily moved out of the way.

"Yes." The knight seemed surprised as he stepped into the house. "You have... central heating in here?"

"You know central heating?"

"I only found out about it today. The last time I was here, I'd already felt that the city was inexplicably warm. I'd thought that the heating equipment mentioned by His Highness was a new type of fireplace. When I visited the City Hall this time, I discovered that it could be equally warm indoors without fire. Only then did I realize that it made use of steam to produce heat." He took off his coat and hung it on the stand next to the door. "Wait... I recall that the last time we went together to the City Hall, you weren't sure what it was as well."

"I only understood after reading a City Hall bulletin." Ferlin poured a cup of tea for his father. "Before they do anything, they would always spend some time to explain it to the citizens. The bulletin area in the square is now even more popular than the Convenience Market."

"Does it mean that, within two months, His Highness was able to install the device in the homes of ordinary citizens?" The knight said approvingly. "Wouldn't it have cost thousands of gold royals?"

"Our residential area was among the first to be installed with it. The western and northern zones are still in the process of ditching. It's said that water and heating supply are part of the Three Supplies Project. When the construction is completed, we'll be able to do things at night as we do in the day."

"Nights like days?" The knight's eyebrows were raised. "Does it mean more candles or oil lamps?"

"Neither. The City Hall officials claim that electricity will be delivered to every home."

"Electricity?" The old man was stupefied.

"I also think that it's beyond reason, but that's what His Highness' propaganda states." Ferlin agreed with his father. "With electricity, nights will be as bright as days." Curiously, the news sounded utterly absurd when he had heard it, but deep down in his heart, he had a feeling that since it was His Highness' words, it was not completely impossible.

After all, Roland was always creating new miracles.

"Good evening, Knight Eltek..." Just then, Irene scurried out of the kitchen, and in her hurry, she almost dropped the plate of half-baked bread she was carrying while bowing.

The old knight laughed gently at the sight. "Hello, Miss Irene. Don't panic. I'm not yet hungry."

Ferlin saw his wife's cheeks begin to blush.

"Ahem." He cleared his throat before adding, "There'll be just two more dishes today. Take it easy, the night is still young."

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The small family had an enjoyable dinner together. Irene was finally able to recover from her initial panic, and after the three of them chatted for a while, she began to clear up the utensils. Meanwhile, Ferlin's father beckoned him into the study. Ferlin could sense that his father had something important to say.

Just as he expected, when the old knight sat down at the study desk, he calmly asked, "Do you know what has happened in Longsong Stronghold over the past few days?"

"I know a little..." Ferlin tried to phrase his words tactfully. "I've heard that there has been a rebellion by the four families. His Highness left Border Town to suppress it. It was publicized on the bulletin board."

"The City Hall even mentioned this?" The old knight was astonished for a brief moment before he explained the whole matter to Ferlin. "Though I sent someone to inform His Highness, I didn't expect him to arrive so quickly. The result was guessable. The four families were no match for His Highness' troops. The Maple Leaf, Wolf and Wild Rose families were completely crushed, leaving only the Elk Family in a critical state. Our family was nearly implicated in the event."

"What?" Ferlin was greatly surprised. "Father, you..."

"Of course it wasn't me." The knight sighed. "I'm already so old and don't wish to participate in such risky affairs, but your brother's different. He's eager to exceed your achievement and prove his qualities as the heir. Regrettably, he took the wrong stand."

"Are you saying that Miso participated in the rebellion?" Ferlin's face sunk.

His father nodded. "After the rebellion collapsed, he was captured by His Highness' soldiers. On the day of judgment, I went to the square to see him for the last time."

"..." Ferlin closed his eyes. He thought of how, after he had become a superstar knight, his brother constantly tried to make life difficult for him. Yet, Miso was his younger brother after all, and thus it was saddening to see him come to such a tragic end.

"Because he had no blood on his hands and surrendered compliantly, he was sentenced to 10 years of labor. He should be in the North Slope Mine now."

The latter part of his father's words made Ferlin regain his spirits. "10 years of labor? I thought you meant that he was..."

"Executed?" The knight shook his head in disagreement. "When I said I saw him for the last time, I meant the last time he was a member of the family. From that moment, he was no longer a part of the Eltek Family."

"You... severed ties with him."

"Correct." The knight inhaled a deep breath. "I'd warned him long ago, but he never took my words to heart. Someone who fools around with the family's future and risks the fate of every family member is definitely not suitable to be the successor." Even though he spoke assertively, his facial expression betrayed his sadness, and the wrinkles on his forehead deepened. "Now, I only have you as my child."

"Father..." Ferlin felt his eye sockets tingling, and he involuntarily held his father's hands.

"I've never begged in my life. But this time, I hope that you'll succeed the Eltek Family. I have a premonition that it'll prosper again in your hands." The old knight said slowly. "I'd agreed to follow His Highness here also in order to occupy a good position in the upcoming reforms."

"But positions can't be inherited, Father... the Knight's position will also become an honorary title."

"I know, but you've ignored the benefits of connections and experience. His Highness has stated that the positions will be given out based on merit and outstanding ability. With the experiences and relationships that your predecessors have built up, your chances of getting a good position are far greater than that of the average person." He patted the back of his son's hands. "Even if you still wish to become a teacher, I shan't stand in your way, as long as you continue the family name."

Ferlin remained silent for a long before he finally nodded and said, "I understand, father. I promise you."

"If that's the case, I can rest assured." Knight Eltek seemed greatly relieved. "By the way, if you have the choice, which department do you wish to work in?"

"Well..."

"How about the Second Army? I've heard Chief Commander, Iron Axe, say that apart from the battlefield soldiers, the army also wants to form a strategy department. This plan will be tested out in the Second Army first." The old knight fixed his gaze on his son. "Actually, I know that your current job isn't your favorite line of work. If you were truly happy with reading books all day, you wouldn't have chosen to be a knight in the first place." His eyes seemed to pierce insightfully into Ferlin's heart. "You're still the Morning Light that I know, my child."

Chapter 472: A Pledge of Love

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"Garments, shoes, mugs, spoons and forks." May checked off each item by counting with her fingers. "Is there anything else I should take with me?"

The floor was littered with an assortment of household supplies, everything from a water kettle to a wooden bowl.

"The bedding is the most important," Irene thought and then said, "you'd better take a set of the pillow, sheets, and blanket."

Hearing these words, Rosia and Gait both burst out in a fit of giggles, but they were soon silenced, however, when May shot them a cold glance. "The bedding isn't necessary. Carter says he'll buy a new set from the marketplace. It's rumored they once belonged to the four families and were dug up from their mansion's basements."

"Wow, then they must be made of fine silk," Irene commented enviously. "I've heard there's a tailor in King's City retailing fabric and garments made of pure silk. It's unfortunate that only great nobles and wealthy merchants can afford them." If they came from the four families, they must be just as good."

"Yes, pretty much," May replied nonchalantly. "I remember he said one set was worth five gold royals."

"Wow..." The three girls gasped in surprise.

"Five, five gold royals! God Almighty!" Rosia smacked her lips. "It would take me nearly two years to make that much money."

"How can you compare to the Star of the Western Region?" Gait said derisively while tapping her on the head. "Miss May is a celebrity who has performed in King's City! As for His Excellency Carter, he's Chief Knight of His Highness. You can't compete with either of them!"

"That's really awesome, May," Irene said, looking at May with her radiant eyes. "I envy you so much."

May knew only Irene felt genuinely happy for her, and her sincerity was why Morning Light was attracted to her in the first place. May also wondered how a girl like Irene, who grew up in the theater, was impervious to worldly temptations and desires all the while retaining the innocence and kindness of childhood. Although she had put her past romance out of her mind, May was still delighted to see Irene was a little envious of her. "When you rise to fame, you can buy a set for yourself... You'll be paid several gold royals for starring in King's City just once, not to mention the tips you'll get from the nobles after the show."

"But how long will it take me to become as good as you?" Irene asked in frustration, mouth pulled tight.

"Looks like you're pretty busy here. Are you rehearsing?" Right then the door was swung open abruptly. A good-looking young man poked his head in and asked, "Am I interrupting?"

"His, His Excellency Carter!" Gait and Rosia immediately bowed.

"Good morning, Mr. Knight." Irene turned to smile at him. "We're discussing what May should take to your place and we were just talking about you."

"Really? What did you say about me?" Carter asked curiously, scratching the back of his head.

"Nothing!" May stared at him and thought silently that he always appeared to be the perfect gentleman when his mouth was shut, but the illusion was shattered once he started talking. "Why did you come here today? Today isn't your day off, is it?"

"Um... don't worry. His Highness gave me some time off today. So... I brought you a gift."

"A gift?"

May glanced about the room. Gait soon took the hint and said, "Oh, Miss May. I just remembered that I've got something to take care of. Feel free to let me know when you've finished packing."

"Me too. I have to do the laundry. It's been there for a few days now." Rosia also took her leave with a bow and pulled Irene away with her as she walked out of the room.

"Huh? I don't need to do anything. Hang on... I want to see May's gift too..." When the girl's voice gradually faded away, May sighed in relief and bolted the door. She turned to Chief Knight and asked, "So, what's the gift? I hope it's not a new invention of His Highness' again."

Carter glanced around before breaking the silence. "Your father... "

"He's busy. Do you think everyone has 'free time' like you?" May snapped impatiently. She had thought it would take a while for her father to become familiarized with the new surroundings after he moved from Stronghold to Border Town. However, to her surprise, he had found a clerical job at the City Hall in only one week, and there was nothing she could do about it. Now he was a regular employee at the Ministry of Construction.

"I'm busy, too." Carter threw up his hands in defense. "His Highness transferred one of the most efficient employees from the Ministry of Justice to Longsong Stronghold. Now I have to deal with all sorts of tasks. On top of interrogating spies and verifying the status of the residents, I also need to hunt for criminals at large. I don't even have time for meals these days. You have no idea how fierce these criminals are. Unlike any of the locals in Western Region, these guys are gangsters, initially hiding among refugees. Now, as things have gotten a little better, they've started to make trouble. But don't worry, they only stir up on the outskirts of town where the temporary camps are to the west and they won't get into the inner city easily. And, I'll catch any of them when they're found messing around."

Seeing Carter describe the matter so passionately, May broke into laughter. "Alright, I got it. So, Mr. Knight, as you're so devoted to the peace and order of the town, would you like to have lunch and a few drinks here before heading back to your business?"

"I'd love to, but I'm afraid my break is almost over." Carter put down the parcel in his hand. "Try this on to see if it fits. I asked His Highness to design it."

"His Highness?" May was a little surprised.

"Yes. When I told His Highness about our wedding date, he mentioned a type of gown specifically worn for weddings. The only thing is that it takes a lot of effort to make one. I begged His Highness for quite a while, and even bribed Miss Soraya with ice cream bread before I finally got this dress."

When May unfolded the fabric, she saw a snowy dress in the parcel.

May's heart stopped beating for a moment when the knight spread out the garment. It was a simple gown with elaborate and sophisticated details. The dress was simple in the sense that it was not ornamented with any jewels, nor was it hemmed with a gilding of gold. Instead, it was purely layered with white muslins. However, the cut of the dress was rather showy. It was tightened with a girdle and flared out into a contrasting, voluminous skirt below the waistline. The skirt rippled like waves, perfectly showcasing the ingenious handicraft embedded in its design.

She knew any girl, whether noble or peasant, would be fascinated by and obsessed with a gown like this just at the sight of it.

May gently caressed the snowy white gown that weighed almost nothing and retired to her bedroom to put it on.

When she was back in the living room, Carter's jaw dropped, struck by the breathtaking beauty he saw. "God, you are... stunning."

"Really?" A rare, vivid blush rose to her cheeks. She could imagine what she now looked like without even looking into a mirror. Chief Knight's gaping expression had already told her everything.

May went up to Carter and gently pressed her lips to his cheek. "Thank you for your gift. I really love it."

The knight flung his arms around her in response.

Watching Carter's face slowly approaching hers, May closed her eyes.

"It doesn't sound too bad to be called May Lannis," she thought.

Chapter 473: The Third Step of City Construction

After two weeks' learning and exploration, Barov, the governor of the City Hall, held the first municipal plenary session in the castle hall at the end of the first month in spring of the new year at His Highness' request. Aside from the directors of all the departments, some of the nobles in Stronghold were also invited to the session, bringing the total number of the attendees to 65.

Barov knew the learning process itself was also an evaluation. After working as a City Hall governor for a year, he could now easily distinguish capable nobles from useless dandies and idlers. It was why half of the nobles had already failed the assessment.

As His Highness described, he had offered these petty nobles an opportunity to "catch the express train", but the reality was ruthless. People who were unable to keep pace with changes would be naturally obsolete as time went by. Barov shared the same thoughts. Whether His Highness was a demon or a god, it did not change the fact that his territory had manifested an atmosphere entirely different from those in other kingdoms. If this was a new era, he would be happy to dive into it with the prince.

The main topic of the discussion for today's meeting was the final vote on the unification act which would be enacted after the city construction. He would also need to inform the nobles in Stronghold of the act's contents. Barov had prepared for this moment for a long time, and now it was finally the time to uncover the details.

Everyone was given a thin hardcover book with gilded letters on its cover, which read Basic Laws of the Kingdom. It contained some core subjects of law drafted and edited by His Highness himself. He could tell just by its name that His Highness had big ambition, and he also believed the prince had the capacity to make towns beyond the Western Region flourish.

"Let's get started." Roland, who seated himself at the end of the long table, instructed with a nod.

"Yes, Your Highness." Barov cleared his throat and ventured. "Perhaps all of you have heard that we're going to build a city in the Western Region. The book in front of you is the unification act to be enacted in His Highness' territory once the construction of the city is completed. Feel free to read it through by yourself, or you can listen to my presentation. If you have any questions or concerns, interrupt me anytime, His Highness will answer them."

A slight rustle of pages swept over the hall. Barov flipped over the cover, revealing the first page of the book made of fine parchment.

"The first thing you see now is the outline of the contents, which contains the structure and institution of the new territory..."

"Article One: Roland Wimbledon shall reserve all the rights with respect to the territories under his jurisdiction."

"Article Two: The City Hall is the highest authority of the territory, administering all the matters concerning the territory under the supervision of Roland Wimbledon."

"Article Three: Every person, upon entry to the territory, shall have the right to gain the status of citizenship through multiple channels. The City Hall has the obligation to guarantee the provision of at least three such channels to the public."

"Article Four: Every individual, upon gaining the status of citizenship, shall not be discriminated based on gender or their former status, namely freeman, farmhand, servant, and slave. Every citizen of the territory has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law, and has the legal obligations to pay taxes, defend the territory and serve in the military."

"Article Five: Every noble shall be treated equally as a regular citizen and shall no longer be privileged based on his/her title. Titles shall be honorary without granting the subject noble executive power, and they shall be conferred by inheritance in accordance with the law."

"Article Six: Every citizen has the right to seek protection of life, security and personal properties from Roland Wimbledon."

"Article Seven: Every citizen has the right to education, liberty of work and marriage."

"Article Eight: Commercial interactions and free trade are encouraged in the territory, provided that such activities are carried out in accordance with the law."

"Article Nine..."

Barov ran his fingers through the pages while explaining the articles one by one. Few codes drafted by the nobles concerned civilians. Even freemen in the city were viewed as subjects of exploitation by great nobles. It was indeed a rare thing that the laws made by His Highness involved so many rights and

protections of civilians. The prince probably believed they could only win the Battle of Doomsday with the help of people's power.

Barov didn't care who His Highness relied on. To him, nobles and civilians were the same. He only cared about trying his best to complete His Highness' tasks and keeping a firm grip on power. In King's City, he had been transferred from the Astrology Association to the Ministry of Finance, serving as an assistant to Treasurer. He had thought he would soon stand on the highest level of authority in the Kingdom of Graycastle, only to realize a decade of waiting had turned his ambition into a desolate, hopeless dream. He had obeyed King Wimbledon III's order to accompany Prince Roland to Border Town due to a faint and tenuous promise made to the past king, and also due to his morbid disappointment brooding for years. Yet, he had never expected his long-awaited dream would somehow come true in another way.

Barov had not seen a real demon, but he knew well the strength and power of the armored knights. If His Highness could defeat the knights at a single blow, he could certainly sweep away all his obstacles in the Kingdom. Eventually, the prince would ascend to the throne and become the reigning sovereign of the state, and he would be the Hand of the King. If the Treasurer was still alive by then, what a bitter countenance would he show to Barov?

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As most of the contents in the outline had been read out to subjects in plain language before, none of the directors were surprised. However, when he read the part that stipulated the prohibition of human trafficking and the abolishment of slavery, the nobles began murmuring. All the other articles were passed unilaterally.

No one questioned the article on the reform of the noble. These petty nobles had not benefited much from their territories since most of their lands were in deserted areas, so they did not care much about the so-called feudal power and legislative power. Besides, after two weeks of study, many of them had planned to sell the territories to the City Hall and use the proceeds to start a new business, such as a machinery factory and a chemical plant.

The conference started in the morning and did not stop until the afternoon. Everybody was focused on the presentation. When it was time for lunch, the servants placed the food on the table to let the attendees eat while reading. Barov had a lot of water. Although he had a sore throat, he was happy to explain every detail of the articles to the people present.

Finally, they entered the last topic of discussion, which was the only article in the Basic Laws of the Kingdom that required everybody's opinions. It was the flag and the name of the new city.

The conference hall was soon filled with a buzz of debate.

Barov asked everybody to come up with a name and an ideal design for the flag. The attendees would have to place their work on the table and pick the best one.

After several rounds of voting, the flag and the name of the new city were nailed.

The design of the flag was based on the emblem of the royal family of the Kingdom of Graycastle. Its basic pattern was a gun and a tower, above which was a big pentagram with three smaller ones below.

The big pentagram represented Lord Roland Wimbledon, while the smaller ones each represented the City Hall, the Army, and the Witch Union.

As for the city name, they picked "City of Neverwinter".

Chapter 474: The Killing Machine

Two days after the enlarged meeting, Iron Axe was ordered to test new weapons again.

Since the northwest side was vulnerable to the attacks of demonic beasts, the new shooting range was set on the other side of the Redwater River. When Iron Axe got there, the prince's guards had already surrounded the place with hemp ropes and red flags, and set a checkpoint at either end of the steel bridge. Unauthorized personnel were not allowed in that area.

Obviously, His Highness took the test on new weapons seriously.

Iron Axe walked quickly in the uneven snow, and every guard he met gave him a friendly glance. Seeing this, he could not help but remember his first time participating in a test of flintlocks. Back then, he was a nobody, and the people of the Kingdom of Graycastle were vigilant and suspicious of him because he was from the Sand Nation. He had lived in the town for five years by then, but only had built up relations with huntsmen living near him because of his expertise in archery, and no one knew him beyond the Old District.

At the time, he believed that he would live in seclusion in this desolate town as a hunter until he died of old age, or got killed by demonic beasts or prey. He didn't expect that His Highness would hand-pick him and show him the power of fire and thunder. Then, fast changes began to happen. He fought against demonic beasts in the Militia, which was then turned into Border Town's First Army. He was promoted rapidly from Head of the Hunter Squad to Commander of the First Army. To his great surprise, and to make up for his greatest regret of his life, he had met the heiress of the Osha clan, Lady Drow Silvermoon, again in the town because of His Highness' open attitude towards witches. Due to this trust, recognition, and improvement of his fate, he swore allegiance to his new lord deep within his heart.

In the middle of the shooting range, Iron Axe saw His Highness Roland, Chief Knight, and unexpectedly, several Sleeping Island witches.

"Your Highness, Iron Axe reporting to you!" He walked forward and saluted the prince.

The prince nodded and said, "Everyone's here. Let's get started." He gave two long guns to Iron Axe and Carter. "It's one of my newly developed weapons, still in the prototype stage. The numbers are limited, so take turns trying them, please."

Iron Axe carefully studied the gun in his hand. It looked similar to a revolving rifle except that it had no cartridge.

This made him wonder if its bullets had to be reloaded through the muzzle like the oldest flintlocks.

"It's called a bolt rifle," His Highness quickly explained. "It uses the newest smokeless gunpowder. The caliber is 8 mm, smaller than the 12 mm of a revolving rifle, but it's more powerful." He turned the gun over to give a demonstration. "The ammunition is inserted from the front of the trigger, and each clip

can be embedded with five bullets. However, it cannot fire continuously like a revolving rifle, so you need to reload it after ejecting all the bullets."

Soon after the prince's demonstration, Iron Axe understood how to operate the new rifle and shot a clip of bullets. The kickback of the rifle was quite strong. Every time the gun was discharged, he felt a heavy kick on his shoulder from the butt, and it was much louder than a revolver.

Five bullets shot out of an old gun would usually cause thick smoke that blocked his sight, but now there was no smoke in front of the muzzle, which might be due to the "smokeless gunpowder" that His Highness had just mentioned. Apart from that, there was nothing special about this new bolt rifle. Iron Axe thought there was a substantial improvement from the flintlock to the revolver, but the bolt rifle seemed to have no improvement and even wasn't as good as a revolver. Its most obvious shortcoming was the low rate of fire.

He could fire continuously while standing with a revolving rifle, but it was inconvenient to do so with the bolt rifle, since he had to reload the gun by hand and then raise it back up to aim at the target again after each shot. Though this process took much less time than a flintlock, it wasn't effective in suppressing the enemy in a short time. For example, it was obviously less practical than a revolver in battles—like the ones against the noble rebels in Longsong Stronghold with close combat in the streets or indoors.

Iron Axe told Roland his honest opinion, and Carter voiced a similar view.

The prince nodded and said, "Yes, it's not as convenient as a revolver, but it also has a great advantage. Andrea, come here and show them." He gave the rifle to the witch and said, "Remember to shoot using your ability."

"Uh-huh." The blonde witch picked up the gun and skillfully reloaded it. They could tell that this was not her first time operating this new weapon. "Now, watch me!"

With three deafening shots, Iron Axe was shocked to see the three farthest wooden targets fall down in turn. Her bullets shot the targets that looked as small as fingernails at the distance, on their thin sticks below the target boards.

They were standing at least 400 meters away!

"Your Highness, it's..." Carter stuttered in disbelief.

"Andrea's derivative ability enables her to accurately hit the target with a gun or a bow," the prince explained with a smile, "but her ability works on neither bullets nor arrows. It only gives her proficiency for using weapons. For example, she'll hit a target ten meters away if she throws a stone at it, but if she throws a bird at it, her ability just won't work."

"You mean... ordinary people can also achieve that kind of proficiency through training?"

"Exactly. The greatest merit of this bolt rifle is its greatly improved shooting range and accuracy. Unlike the guns before, there's no gap between the barrel and the cartridge, so there's no air leak in this new rifle," Roland nodded and answered. "With a telescopic sight on it, any ordinary soldier can use it to precisely shoot down enemies around 400 to 500 meters away, while a revolver can only shoot accurately within 100 meters."

Iron Axe instantly realized why this weapon was so deadly. Most people would never be on guard against attacks from this long distance. If the shooter hid himself inside a residential area or at a higher point, he could easily kill his target. And if the shooter was Lady Nightingale, nobody could survive bullets coming from an invisible source.

"Your Highness, you agreed to give me one when it's put into mass production." Andrea reminded Roland, covering her mouth.

"Of course," Roland said and put the two rifles away. He walked to the other side and removed a cloth covering something. "In fact, bolt rifles are just the beginning. This one is the focus of today's test."

Iron Axe took to the newly unveiled weapon as soon as he saw it. Different from rifles made of steel and wood, this new, black gun seemed to be made of pure metal. It was also bigger than all the other guns. Including the tripod beneath it, it was about half of his height. Its long barrel was half as thick as his wrist. Connected to the big gun, a long, thin piece of cloth carried shining bullets. It was obviously nothing like the guns before in both design and size.

Chapter 475: The Light

"This is a heavy machine gun. It uses the same bullets as a bolt rifle. You can pull a bullet out of this pouch and shoot it from the new rifle," the prince said and patted the big machine gun. "Its mechanism is far more complicated than a rifle, so I won't bother giving you all the unnecessary details. I named it Mark I type HMG. I'll show you how to use it."

He sat behind the firearm and pulled the trigger. What happened next was hard for Iron Axe to comprehend.

All of a sudden, flames shot out of the muzzle, and the strong airflow caused by the gunfire shot the fluffy snow into the air. The strip of bullets seemed to be constantly pulled into the gun. Simultaneously, hot, empty bullet shells were rapidly ejected from the other side one by one. Several dozen shells fell to the ground in just a second.

This machine gun sounded fiercer than a whole team of riflemen in the Flintlock Squad. No pause could be heard between the gunshots. The prince aimed at the ground in front of him instead of the distant targets and shot continuously into the snow. Before the snow in one place could fall back to the ground, the snow in another place was propelled upward, making the snowy ground look like the surface of boiling water. The hail of bullets formed a web of death and anyone attempting to break through it would be riddled with bullets.

"It's, it's amazing," Chief Knight murmured.

Carter was not the only one who was astonished. Iron Axe glanced around and saw that all the witches were dumbfounded, and only Lady Nightingale, who always stayed beside Roland, seemed quite calm. Ashes, the black-haired witch carrying a giant sword, showed a mixture of shock, confusion, and frustration.

Iron Axe could not help but feel the same way. He had become Chief Bodyguard of the Osha Clan because of his proficiency in knife work and archery, skills he had honed with regular practices since

childhood. Like him, the most powerful warriors with outstanding talent were popular among clan leaders in the Southernmost Region. However, even the quickest and strongest fighter in the world could never escape these bullets that moved faster than sight. Astoundingly, the Mark I didn't even have the flaw of requiring a pause to reload bullets. If the First Army was equipped with 20 heavy machine guns, the enemy's fighting skills acquired from more than ten years of hard work would become a joke.

A fighter would naturally find it hard to accept the fact.

Fortunately, he found a new path.

Leaf moved rapidly through the heavy undergrowth of plants to drive the demonic beasts that had intruded into the Misty Forest towards the city wall.

Now, she could control an area almost as large as the town. The trees and foliage in the area were like her eyes and limbs. They could grow according to her will and form a defense line against enemies, but His Highness kept telling her to inform the army whenever she found any demonic beasts or demons instead of directly fighting against them, especially demons. If demons sensed her existence and destroyed the whole forest, it would be a significant loss, as the town now counted on her to provide early warnings, and a forest that could be adjusted on demand was a great asset.

Leaf reclaimed an empty lot near the town and planned to grow "Golden Ones" wheat on it as soon as the Months of Demons ended. This time, with the Heart of Forest to provide her with magic power, the seeds of the wheat would grow continuously and produce enough seeds for all the farmers in the Western Region.

Suddenly, she sensed a group of demonic wolf hybrids approaching from the edge of the forest.

Leaf immediately turned to look at these invaders and saw eight strong demonic beasts fleeing into the deep forest. As she was about to send out a carrier pigeon to inform the First Army and meanwhile drive them to the city wall, she felt something strange.

They did not look as ferocious as usual. Instead, they seemed to be driven by something. Even her branches and vines could not stop them now.

Could it be demons returning?

Leaf frowned, and as she was about to widen her range of sight, she felt a hint of warmth on her head.

She promptly looked up and saw golden rays of light peep out from several cracks in the cloudy sky, shining down on the snowy white land of the Western Region.

"How do I deal with this one here?" Tilly pointed at an equation in a book.

"Well... you put in equation four to create a new equation, and then you'll derive it to get the one in the book." Anna quickly wrote down the derivation process on a piece of scrap paper. "That's it."

"I see." Tilly clapped her hands and said, "If you put this variable in, the result should be close to 1."

"Impressive! You can calculate the result in your mind," Anna gasped with admiration.

"That's just because of my ability. You're the amazing one. You can learn everything in the prince's new books so quickly," said Princess Tilly with a smile.

Anna gave her a soft smile. Only the mention of Roland Wimbledon could bring a smile like that to her face.

Every time Tilly saw that smile, she could not help but think that it was impossible for a simple, honest girl like Anna to like a wicked man. "Roland must be different now," she presumed, regardless of whether he was the real Prince Roland or not. Actually, Tilly herself felt that the new Roland was totally different from all the nobles in this world as if he were from another world. However, at the same time, she felt comfortable around him and liked his unique charm more and more as time went by. Looking up at the cloudy sky, Tilly even hoped for the Months of Demons to continue like this so she could learn all his knowledge. That way, she might be able to truly understand the new Roland, even if he never wanted to talk about himself.

She shook her head to dismiss these thoughts. Tilly pointed to the next question. To her astonishment, the book was suddenly lit up.

The two witches looked out the window simultaneously. Traces of light had mysteriously appeared in the snowy sky, and the long lost sunshine now rimmed the clouds with golden light. The locals bustling about in the town sensed the change, too. Soon, a growing number of people poured into streets, cheering.

Tilly looked at the sky in a daze, all sorts of emotions welling up inside her.

When the gunfire stopped, empty bullet shells were piled up beside the prince's feet. A dull, light tint of red could be seen on the muzzle of the gun, and white smoke was coming out of the barrel.

Even the drop of a pin could be heard now as nobody aired their opinions. Words were unnecessary since the fixed look on their faces told the shock brought by this new weapon.

Iron Axe could not control his excitement any longer and knelt down in the manner of the Sand Nation.

"The world is yours, Your Highness."

He firmly believed that his new path was to lead the First Army which was equipped with brand new firearms to expand the territory for His Highness Roland.

A hand reached in front of Iron Axe.

The prince pulled him up and did not look as content as Iron Axe had expected. Instead, he looked at the Impassable Mountain Range and said in a deep voice, "Our real enemy is demons."

"Even so, I'll still fight for you until I die." Before Iron Axe could speak his thoughts, a dazzling ray of light pierced the cloudy sky, illuminating the world below. The witches behind exclaimed in amazement, and Roland looked up and smiled. More and more rays of light came down from above and became brighter

and brighter. Soon, it was hard for them to stare at the light. Meanwhile, dark clouds silently melted away as the ice did with fire. The sun appeared again in the sky.

The Months of Demons ended.

Chapter 476: The Victory Day

...

It was still dark outside, and someone had been knocking endlessly on Cacusim's door. He yawned and subconsciously reached out to grab his coat, and then he realized he no longer needed a coat.

The thick brick wall kept the chill away, and the incredible heating made the inside warm. No matter how heavy the snow was outside, the house no longer let the cold in like it used to, and the roof no longer leaked. Such a high-quality house was only fit for the nobles in Valencia. Of course, it was a little smaller.

He opened the door and found a young boy, his assistant Pike, standing outside. "Why aren't you up yet? We have to hurry, Captain! Otherwise, we won't get a good spot!"

"Do we need to leave so early?" Cacusim stuck his head out and looked at the sky. The dawn was peeking through the clouds, and soft morning sunshine lit a small section of the sky.

"Of course!" the boy exclaimed. "My neighbors told me there would be a performance from the Star Flower Troupe during the celebration, and we won't get into the square if we're late!"

"All right, wait a minute." The old man shrugged and returned to his bedroom to change. He looked at the other empty bed and sighed softly. "The Victory Day... Is there any celebration like this in Longsong Stronghold? If not, Vader would miss it."

They went to the square and found that there were banners strung up on ropes and tied to the trees on both sides of the street. The small town looked bright and new under the morning sunshine. Every now and then, people joined them from the pathways into the main road and walked alongside them. It seemed that they were going to the square too.

Cacusim had heard about the celebration from Pike. The prince had named the first day after the Months of Demons as the Victory Day to celebrate passing the months safely. On that day, everyone in the town had the day off and enjoyed a grand bonfire party in the square. Cacusim's assistant had learned about this and invited him to go to square with him. After some thought, the old man agreed.

As they entered, they found a fenced-in area in the center of the square and policemen with black uniforms maintaining order. Quite a few people had arrived early and were standing around waiting. The two quickly found a place near the stage and chatted as they waited for the celebration to begin.

At noon, crowds gathered in the square and the prince appeared in the center of the theater. As soon as he showed up, Cacusim heard overwhelming cheers. The people around him excitedly raised their hands and shouted, "Long Live Your Highness!"

Prince Roland smiled. He waited for the cheers to pass, raised his fist, and said loudly, "We have defeated evil once again!"

The square exploded in instant cheers, the deafening sound shook the old man's heart. He had not seen such a respected lord in a very long time.

"My people, no matter where you come from, the Western Region, the Northern Region, the Eastern Region or the Southernmost Region, as long as you have made a contribution to our town, the glory belongs to you! This glory belongs to everyone who gave their blood and sweat to Border Town!" The prince's calm, emotional voice seemed to have magic power and could be heard without him having to shout. "Today is the Victory Day. It was set by all of you. Evil has not been completely eliminated and will come back sooner or later, but no matter how many times our enemies come, victory is ours as long as we unite and work together!"

The old man had never heard a nobility refer to the civilians and himself as "we", but His Highness didn't seem to mind. He looked at the people naturally, without arrogance or scorn. In the prince's eyes, he and his subjects were together as one.

It was incredible, but unexpectedly... harmonious.

"Now, let's cheer for this hard-won victory and raise our glasses to celebrate!"

"Long live Your Highness!"

"Long live Victory!"

The cheers rang throughout the square, and the people raised their right hand to show their respect, including Cacusim.

"This is a Lord who is worthy of my loyalty!" Pike said passionately while thumping his chest.

Next, it was the Star Flower Troupe's turn, and many people whistled excitedly.

"We haven't seen their performances in such a long time."

"Ms. Irene is still so beautiful!"

"But compared to Miss May, she still lacks lasting appeal."

"It's Ms. May now. Haven't you heard the news? She's about to marry Chief Knight, and the prince has already sent a wedding gift."

Listening to the people around, Pike asked in wonder, "The name of a troupe is usually either the same as the theater or the name of the town, so why does the troupe of Border Town have such a strange name?"

"You aren't a westerner, are you?" asked someone immediately. "Ms. May and Ms. Irene are both from Longsong Theatre, and Ms. May is called the Star of the Western Region, while Ms. Irene is called the Flower of Tomorrow. Now, they both live in Border Town, so the troupe's name is Star Flower Troupe."

"Look, it's beginning!"

This was not Cacusim's first time watching theatrical performances, but the story was quite unique. Instead of a normal love story between nobilities, it told the history of the Western Region. The actors played ordinary people living in Border Town. In the beginning, they were helpless, confused, and chased around like lambs during the Months of Demons. Then they decided to stay in the town and fight against the demonic beasts. The whole story was full of twists and turns, which were very gripping. When the characters died from hunger and cold or were killed in the line of defense to protect their families, the audience felt as if they were there.

The old man was quickly captured by the performance, and even people who had just come to the Western Region could feel the sacrifices that citizens of Border Town made and their unremitting efforts for survival.

When the play was finished, a thunderous applause rang above the square.

Cacusim was dumbstruck by what he saw next. A girl with long flaxen hair held a black line in her hand. She cut the wood stage into various parts, and used them to light a giant bonfire.

The crowd wasn't scared by this, and they even chanted her name. "Miss Anna! Miss Anna!"

As sheep baked on the bonfire, the atmosphere in the square reached its climax. The locals spontaneously stood in a long line and then began to dance strangely, the last part of the celebration. According to the people standing around Cacusim and Pike, as long as the dance continued, the barbecue would continue until midnight.

"Captain, let's go together!" Pike gulped. He was eager to join.

"I'm too old to dance," Cacusim shook his head. "You should join them."

"I'll go then." He stuck out his tongue. "I'll share some barbecue with you when I get it."

Looking at the boy dancing with the crowd, the old man couldn't help but laugh. He had been wondering how to make the name of the Concrete Boat assigned to him memorable and unique, and now he had an idea.

"I'll name it Victory," he thought.

Chapter 477: Love and Affection

...

Just like last year, the witches held the feast in the castle.

Leaf turned the backyard that had been expanded several times into an open-air campsite fenced by olive trees. Around the raging bonfire, the witches could appreciate the starry night sky anytime.

Compared with the last BBQ feast which was only attended by five witches, this one was much more crowded, reaching a total number of 25 witches. All the witches from the Witch Cooperation Association came, along with the seven witches from Sleeping Island, as well as Maggie, Lucia, Agatha, Spear, Paper, and Summer.

Plates of finely cut food and various sauces were put on a small table by the bonfire for the witches to eat freely. After the territories of the rebel nobles were completely cleared, the supply of meat and cloth in Border Town had greatly increased. Also served on the table was the low-alcohol fruit wine brewed by Evelyn, as well as the ice cream provided by Agatha.

While Lightning was enthusiastically demonstrating to the crowd how to grill a chicken foot, Maggie had begun to enjoy a hot-roasted steak. Having spent a year in the mountains and jungles with Lightning, Maggie had got familiar with all sorts of grilled food, and she filled her waist pocket with various spices, just as Lightning did.

"I think this is a waste of time." Agatha smeared honey on the roasted meatballs in her hand. "The demons are bound to attack us, but we're not seizing this precious time to prepare... instead, we're just celebrating the latest victory. When the enemy breaks into our city... everything is done for," she said while chewing the food.

"Take it easy. It'll be OK." Roland handed her a bunch of stuffed beefballs—obviously, she was very fond of the juicy meatballs. "A proper balance of work and rest will increase the work efficiency. Besides, resting for one day won't prevent us from defeating the demons, and even if we lose, at least we've enjoyed the sweetness of life."

"Nonsense!" Agatha said while rolling her eyes. She then took the beefballs and put them over the bonfire after dipping it in a bowl of oil—with the help of her freezing ability, she could keep the meatballs at just the right temperature regardless of the heat from the fire. Clearly, her recent work with the process of cooling nitrogen had helped her to perfect control of her magic powers.

On the other side, the newcomer Summer apparently hadn't seen so much meat in a long time. Although she could not stop swallowing saliva, her hands kept still. Fortunately, after noticing Summer's timidity, Wendy pulled this newly awoken sister to her side and shared the food that she roasted with Summer and Paper.

The three witches from Sleeping Island, Ashes, Andrea and Shavi, began to play poker games while waiting for their food to be grilled. In the past few months, they had learned all the variations of poker that Roland was familiar with. As long as there was no attack from the demonic beasts, they would get together and play poker in the castle hall.

And the other witches from Sleeping Island, such as Candle, Evelyn and Sylvie, who had got familiar with the witches in the little town, were having a good time talking with Leaf, Echo, Soraya and others, just like a family did.

Looking at the harmonious scene, Roland felt quite gratified—after a year's effort, changes in the Western Region began to emerge. The people's enthusiastic cheers at the square at daytime and the heartfelt smile on the witches' faces were all payback for his efforts.

Such kind of payback was so sweet that Roland could not help but feel intoxicated by it.

As the bonfire gradually died out, the time approached midnight. Roland asked Nightingale and Ashes to escort Nana and Summer home respectively, while he stepped onto the second floor of the castle, waiting for Anna to appear.

He decided to take the initiative instead of waiting passively, or rather, postponing.

Silver moonlight cast into the castle through the corridor window. In the moonlight, Roland saw Anna's blue eyes. The scene was quite familiar to him, but their positions were reversed from the last time. Half hidden in darkness, Anna's pupils reflected a faint luster, like stars in the night sky where all the other stars could not be seen. The sky only belonged to her tonight.

Roland did not speak, but walked forward. Holding Anna's hand, they went to the third floor.

This was not the first time that Roland had kept this close to Anna, but still, his heart beat fiercely. Through the hand he was holding, he could tell Anna was nervous too. Nevertheless, she followed him without any hesitation.

They entered Roland's bedroom. When Roland closed the door, turned around, took a deep breath, and wondered what to say, Anna kissed him.

The tip of her tongue softly pried open Roland's mouth. Roland felt lost in her luscious breath.

At that moment, the title of a song popped into his mind, Sealed with a Kiss.

When you don't know what to say, kiss; when you've no idea how to express your feelings, kiss. Kissing is the speech without a sound and kissing is scorching affection.

When their lips finally parted, Anna's cheeks had turned red.

"I have a present for you."

From his pocket, Roland took out two red Magic Stones, which had been polished, rimmed with gold and strung together by a thin, red thread at the top.

"Is this... a Sigil?"

"Yes. After being connected together by magic power, a Stone of Pathfinding and a Stone of Positioning make a Tracking Sigil." Roland helped Anna to put the Stone of Pathfinding around her neck. "Now no matter where I go, you can find me with the help of the stones."

Anna must have sensed something unusual because she stared at Roland, motionless.

Just then, Roland carefully spoke each word while softly holding her cheeks with his hands, "Will you marry me, Anna?"

The peacefulness of the clear blue lake was interrupted by a pouring rain.

After a long pause, Anna nodded and said, "Yes."

...

What followed next was so natural—the long held emotions broke through the last barrier at that very moment and entangled with one another.

Roland picked her up by the waist and put her on to the bed. He kissed her from her forehead down to her neck with tenderness, and clumsily unbuttoned her buttons. With her eyes open, Anna stared at Roland as if she wanted to imprint every single move of his into her brain.

When the girl's fair and smooth body was exposed, Roland hugged her gently in his arms and covered them up with a quilt.

Without the barrier of clothes, he clearly felt Anna's rhythmic heartbeat, as if her heart was about to pop out of her chest.

"This time..." Anna whispered in Roland's ear.

"What about it?"

"I won't fall asleep again..."

Roland couldn't help but burst into laughter, which eased the tension between them. He lightly brushed her nose and said, "Even if you fall asleep, I won't leave you alone."

Their mouths searched for each other once again, their bodies became one, and their hearts merged together.

...

Chapter 478: Witnessing the Establishment of the New City

After m*king love, Anna rested her head in Roland's arms and nuzzled up against him like a cat.

"Your Highness, it's so good... to have met you," she whispered to him. Her breathing had just returned to normal from all the excitement.

"Call me Roland." He stroked her long hair and smiled. "There isn't anyone else around anyway, and I've never heard you call my name."

"Ro... land."

"Good girl." He tickled her ears until she laughed, and then he exclaimed, "Actually... it's me who should have said that. In the past, I never imagined that I would meet such a brilliant girl like you."

"Not even in the palace?"

"No." Roland shook his head faintly. "Sometimes, I even think I'm dreaming."

Anna remained silent for a while, and then cuddled closer to Roland before saying, "I'm right here and I'm not going anywhere."

These words aroused his thoughts. He recalled that she had said the same thing to him before.

"...living like a normal person, but I do not care about that. I just want to stay at Your Highness' side, nothing more."

"What are you talking about? I'm not going anywhere."

She's the petite and frail lass who was rolled up in a corner of a prison cell, the diligent girl who practiced her ability in maids clothes, the daring young lady who conjured a huge fire and sealed up the

city wall, the diffident maid who raised her head and kissed me, and the lovely young woman who asked me to accompany her on the Day of Awakening...

Such scenes flashed in front of Roland one after another.

Without realizing it, the two of them had built up so many memories together.

"... it's true." He slid his hand down Anna's silky hair and caressed her slender back. "You're right here with me."

"Feelings are really intriguing," he thought to himself. "Though these are nothing but meaningless and silly words, they warm and melt my heart like nothing else can."

An even longer period of silence followed. Then, just as he thought she had fallen asleep, she spoke,

"I'm a witch."

"I know."

"Sister Wendy told me that witches are infertile," Anna muttered. "This will be troublesome for you."

"I'm not afraid," Roland replied assertively. "Compared to the impending third Battle of Divine Will, this is nothing." He once spent time considering how to arrange his succession, but discontinued it after hearing Agatha's report. The battle that would decide Man's fate was around the corner. All kingdoms would be completely decimated if they were unable to defeat the demons. Compared to this, the succession issue was not important.

He paused momentarily when he thought of this. After a while, he continued, "Actually, I was a bit worried earlier on."

"About what?"

"I was worried that you would use this reason to reject me."

"Why?" Anna looked puzzled. "I want to be with you, no matter I'm a witch or not."

Roland guffawed when he heard her reply. "Indeed, since I met Anna, she's always been like that... straightforward, never beating around the bush, and expressive of whatever idea she had. With her, there would never be a Korean drama case of 'I mean well for you, but I can't tell you' misunderstanding. I've thought too much."

As they chatted, Roland began to feel his body revitalize. Sensing the changes, Anna kissed him on the neck and climbed on top of him...

The night was still very young.

...

The next day, Roland woke up much later than usual. When he opened his eyes, the sun was already directly above the castle.

He looked beside himself and was slightly shocked. Anna was nowhere to be found. "Could it be that... what happened last night was merely a dream?" He bent his body down and breathed a sigh of relief.

Strands of flaxen hair were left on the pillow, and he could smell a faint fragrance on one side of his clothes.

"What're you doing?" Anna's voice suddenly came from overhead.

Roland raised his head and felt awkward—he must have looked unglamorous sniffing all around while lying on the pillow. "Ahem, I was just counting the strands of hair you left. Hey, when did you get up?"

"I went to bring breakfast to you." She placed the plate she was holding on the bedside table. Her actions and movements seemed a little unlike her usual self. "I saw you sleeping soundly when I woke up and didn't want to disturb you."

"Sorry," Roland said apologetically, "I should have helped." After so many physical activities during the night, Roland feared that she was feeling uncomfortable despite her exceptional recovery capabilities.

"What nonsense." Anna laughed meekly. "You're a prince."

He shook her head and did not say one more word. Instead, he pulled her into his arms. After embracing for a while, she patted him on the back. "Alright, that's enough. Since you're awake, hurry up and eat your breakfast. I still have work to do today."

"Shouldn't you rest for a few more days?"

"That won't do," Anna replied earnestly. "We have to face the demons soon. Miss Soraya and Miss Agatha are working really hard, and thus it won't be right for me to slack off." She smiled sweetly. "You too... Roland."

...

After kissing goodbye to Anna, the prince strode to his office in buoyant mood. When he pushed open the door, he was surprised to see Tilly waiting for him and sitting by the table.

"Good morning," he greeted. "Is there an issue?"

"Look, it's already noon." Tilly smiled back at him. "And you look like you had a good dream."

"Do, do I?" Roland placed a hand around his mouth.

"Of course, you're all smiles today." She shrugged her shoulders and the smile on her face disappeared. "This time I came to say goodbye to you."

Roland was stunned. "Goodbye? Are you returning to Sleeping Island?"

"I've stayed here for too long. Even though I've kept in touch with the Fjords by letter, but... I've to go back sooner or later. Now that the Months of Demons are over, the objective of my trip can be considered done." She stood up and walked over to the French window. "Don't worry. Even though I'll be across the sea, I'll give you my full support in fighting the church and the demons."

"Can't you settle here in the Western Region?" Roland made a last-ditch attempt to persuade her to stay. There's a huge amount of vacant land on the south bank of the Redwater River. It can accommodate all of the witches."

"We've discussed this before." Tilly sighed lightly. "This is not a problem of finding residence."

"It seems like she has made up her mind," Roland reckoned. Though he understood that the decision was a sign of her political maturity and responsibility as a leader, he was very unhappy about it. "At least stay for another week. I'll prepare a few useful things for the witches in the Fjords."

"Oh?" Tilly turned and faced him. "What are they?"

"Books, courseware, and a few exercises." He said while flicking his fingernails. "This will not only save you the trouble of making copies but also enhance their learning effectiveness. Also, I'll pack a few revolvers. These can be used for self-protection in case you encounter enemies equipped with the God's Stone of Retaliation. There'll also be two steam engines which can be used to pump water for irrigation and salt extraction."

"I see..." Tilly turned away and said. "Thank you very much."

"And there's the Groundbreaking Day." Roland said, emphasizing every word. "I hope that on that day, you can join me in witnessing the establishment of City of Neverwinter."

Chapter 479: Choice of Nightingale's Heart

Recently, Wendy spent her life in an exceptionally fulfilling way.

True to her name, Paper had quickly absorbed the knowledge regarding witches and magic power. She made great progress in learning how to read and write as well as knowledge about the natural world. At present, she was already able to learn new vocabularies on her own. There was only a bit of concern about her tutoring. On occasions, she would raise questions that even Wendy could not answer, and that meant either Anna or Roland had to be consulted.

Compared to Paper, Summer's progress was much slower. This was perhaps a matter of age. Every word had to be recited a few times to her before she could remember its spelling. Furthermore, she seemed confused by natural knowledge. But Wendy was okay with it. After all, what she did not lack at the moment was time and patience. In fact, it would be more problematic for her if her students were all as smart as Anna.

Every morning, she would call her two students into the living room to go through the homework that was assigned the day before. This was in line with what His Highness had told all of the Department of Education's teachers: The knowledge that was learned without practicing would be forgotten quickly, and only through regular practice would the knowledge be committed to memory. Wendy agreed very much with this statement.

The next lesson was practicing magic power. For this, Paper could assist Agatha to produce acid, or go to the shipyard to help in accelerating the hardening of cement. Hence, Wendy mainly tutored the newcomer, Summer. She had heard that Summer would soon be joining Nightingale in the Security Bureau and help His Highness to recreate crime scenes. Thus, the most important thing to learn was how to precisely control the reversal of time.

Fortunately, using magic ability was as natural as breathing to witches. Even the slowest students could not go very wrong once they felt the operation of magic. Wendy often raised the example of Maggie in order to encourage Summer not to be disheartened by her lack of natural proficiency in magic power. If even a pigeon was able to evolve, surely a regular witch could also do so? Of course, after that, she would secretly bring a few pieces of honey roast meat to Maggie as compensation.

Elementary classes were conducted in the evenings. In consideration of the different learning paces of incoming students, His Highness had sorted the Witch Union into two classes. The early comers would continue to receive lessons from Scroll and also begin to learn knowledge about elementary physics and chemistry, while the new arrivals would receive extra tuition from Wendy after their usual lessons.

This was the most relaxing part of Wendy's day.

As the earliest witch from the Witch Cooperation Association to join the Union, she had increased the gulf between herself and the other top-scoring sisters after a period of learning. She would feel a great amount of pressure on her shoulders whenever she remembered that His Highness had conferred on her the role of manager of the Association.

Only while teaching the newcomers did she feel free and able to put her heart and soul into the tutoring.

After assigning homework to the two students, Wendy went to have a hot bath. When she returned comfortably to her bedroom, she was surprised to see Nightingale sitting by her bed and dazing while holding a copy of Natural Science Theoretical Foundation.

She's definitely dazing. If she was focusing on the book, she would have fallen asleep within minutes.

"What's the matter?" Wendy uncovered her quilt and climbed on to the bed, sitting next to Nightingale.

The latter shifted her head slightly and briefly glanced at Wendy, who gasped when seeing Nightingale's vacant expression. Wendy had seen such an expression on Nightingale's face only in Silver City, which was the first time they met. At that time, Nightingale was walking alone spiritlessly through the snowy streets, in complete disregard of the snowflakes that fell on her shoulders.

"His Highness Roland's together with Anna already..." she muttered, "and it was I who encouraged him."

"..." Wendy was at a loss for words. She had also noticed that Anna and His Highness had grown closer recently, but this was acknowledged by everyone and thus it was not surprising. Anna was the first witch that His Highness met, and was impeccable in all respects. Apart from her inability to give birth, she was considered by Scroll to be the most suitable person to be Queen. The only surprising thing was that the recent development was facilitated by Nightingale.

"I had made preparations and knew that this would be the outcome. Yet, seeing them together, why... why do I feel so painful?" Nightingale grasped Wendy's hand tightly. "I'd resolved about this long ago..."

Wendy also began to feel bad as she looked at Nightingale's appearance. Her deepest impression of Nightingale was her strength and courage. Whether it was stabbing and capturing her own distant relative in Silver City, or fighting against the church, she was able to keep her cool and fight on despite the difficult circumstances. She even showed no sign of fear while facing the menacing Cara. Yet, on this

relationship matter, she once again became a helpless child. And Wendy was unable to provide any help.

There's no right or wrong with regard to feelings.

All that Wendy could do was to embrace her and pat gently on her shoulders. "If you feel bad, cry it all out and you'll be fine."

Nightingale shook her head in disagreement and mumbled. "Since I left the Gilen family, I vowed... never to cry again, never again..." Her voice progressively lowered until she became inaudible. Wendy gradually felt a warm and moist feeling in her bosom, but even so, Nightingale did not make a whimper. Because she was restraining herself greatly, her shoulders began to shudder and she held on to Wendy even more forcefully.

"I didn't cry..."

"Yes, you didn't.... I know." Wendy closed her eyes and started to regret what she had once said to Nightingale. Staying around His Highness was a simple solution. In fact, the majority of witches would choose to stay around him... because they did not have anywhere else to go. They were also aware that there was only a minimal chance that Roland would accept and marry a girl who could not give birth and thereby could not carry on his bloodline. However, the problem with staying around him was the distance. Just like with the sun, anyone can bask in the warmth and glory of the sunshine, yet it was easy to get burned if one tried to move closer. And Nightingale's intention was obviously not to gaze at him from a distance.

This was not an easy road to follow.

"How about giving up?" Wendy asked softly. "If you take a step back, you'll still have the sisters to accompany you."

The ensuing long silence made time appear to freeze. Wendy felt as though she was awaiting a trial, and even though she was not the defendant, it was still extremely difficult for her to bear. A few times, she almost opened her mouth to ask more questions, but her words would slip back just before she said anything.

This continued until Nightingale raised her head.

Her eyes appeared slightly red, but tears could not be seen—the wetness on Wendy's bosom seemed to be her own false perception. Seeing the expression in Nightingale's eyes, Wendy could tell that there was a conclusion to this trial... but it was not the end.

"I won't give up." Nightingale shook her head and said, "No matter what, I'll stay beside him until the very end..."

She did not mind being burnt to ashes by the sun.

This was her answer.

Chapter 480: The Wedding

Three days later, the wedding of Chief Knight Lannis Carter and Star of the Western Region May was held on castle grounds.

Besides family members, there were also members from the Star Flower Troupe, the City Hall and the Witch Union.

In this age, a wedding ceremony was always witnessed by the church. Weddings of royal families and the nobility were witnessed by a regional Bishop, while nobles and businessmen High Priest or Priestess. Ordinary citizens needed to go to the church by themselves and pay several silver royals to ask the Priest to preside over the wedding. Of course, people who could not afford it just lived together unwed.

Since there was no church in the Western Region, the City Hall was the wedding witness. Roland planned for the City Hall to dispatch officers to issue marriage certificates and do the registration for free. Carter's wedding would be a great role model—he had already thought of the slogan, "Convenient, legitimate and free of charge".

When the bride appeared in her wedding gown, everyone was impressed. She was not a witch, yet she was a big star, and this drew crowds. Even Roland had to admit that Carter had a good eye. If it were not for the publicity and pleading from the knight, Roland would not have shown the wedding gown.

Dressed in his handsome black attire, the bridegroom Carter Lannis looked extraordinary. The two of them standing together were like a heaven-made match.

"They look so great together." Anna said.

"We'll have our day eventually," Roland squeezed her hands gently and said, "by then, everyone will know you."

"Mmm." She smiled sweetly.

Marrying a witch was easy, however, getting the recognition of subjects was difficult. It could only be achieved by those with absolute might and great prestige. Hence, the most fundamental thing was to subside the civil war within the kingdom and become the only king of Graycastle. After that, he could marry Anna—he did not want others to think that Anna was his hidden plaything, like previous nobles.

However, Roland believed that it would not be too long. Since the Months of Demons had finished, the town was fully preparing for the coming spring attack. Soon, there would be a fierce attack and Timothy's throne would be destroyed completely.

"The rings, please. Er, next..." The officer from the City Hall was unfamiliar with the new wedding process written by Roland. He lowered his head to look at his notebook, "you may kiss each other now."

"Wow!" Assembled guests broke into a round of applause, especially Irene, a member of the Star Flower Troupe. She excitedly grabbed Morning Light and swayed from side to side, and then grabbed others to clap and cheer for May.

"Just kissing," Lightning twitched her mouth, "each time, my father returned from an expedition, he was kissed several times."

"Coo..." Squatting on Lightning's head, Maggie turned her head away. She put her wings in front of her face, however, the eyes of a pigeon are on both sides of the head.

"Is this wedding procedure really suitable, Your Highness?" Scroll put her hands on her forehead.

"It's a particular case. Not every couple needs to do this," Roland smiled. "After all, it's used for publicity, the more attractive, the better." Speaking of this, he turned to Soraya. "You need to paint this moment in detail!"

"Rest assured, leave it to me." The latter watched the two newlyweds without blinking, the Magic Pen in her hands was shining.

Carter was obviously nervous. After his initial shock had subsided, May stood on tiptoe and kissed him.

Applause broke out in the yard.

"Please welcome His Highness. He'll give his blessing!"

Roland left the crowd and joined the newlyweds. He patted Carter's shoulder and said, "Well done." Then he turned to May, "May you be forever happy."

"That, that's it?" Carter hesitated.

"Of course! Now go home and rest. I'll give you two days off." Roland smiled. "Vader should arrive in the town this afternoon. Leave your work to him."

"Thank you, Your Highness," the newlyweds answered in harmony, smiling at each other.

The wedding ended in the sounds of fireworks, which were simulated by Echo.

In the afternoon, Barov and Karl came to the castle office to report the progress of the Three Supplies Project to Roland.

"So far, the water supply equipment has been installed in all the living quarters and more than half of the heating pipes have been laid," Karl said. He pointed to the town planning map and continued, "but the power supply will need more time. Except the factory district under your guidance will complete the installation soon, the four residential areas are still in the phase of trenching and slotting. After you went to Longsong Stronghold, this part of the work almost stagnated."

Roland nodded and knew they could do nothing about it. No one other than him understood what a circuit was or how electricity operated. Maybe in April, possibly May, all the townspeople would have electric lighting. Roland said, "It doesn't matter. Now that the Months of Demons is over, the heating can wait for some time. Next, the most important thing is the power supply program and the building of Kingdom Main Street. The former concerns the efficiency of time use, and the latter is the key to strengthen the relationship between the two areas once the city building is completed." He continued, "In addition, don't dismiss the redundant workers after finishing the construction of Kingdom Main Street. We need them to build the road to the shoal."

"Do you mean the spot towards the southern mountain area?"

"That's right. It'll be the entrance to the sea." Roland affirmed. After Tilly and her group returned to Sleeping Island, Lotus would come back to the Western Region. At that time, with the help of Countess Spear, it would take less time to break a new path in mountains. "In addition, once the City of Neverwinter is established, these redundant workers will be my subjects and I want to confer citizenship

on them as soon as the construction of Kingdom Main Street is finished." He turned to Barov, "I'll leave it to you."

"Yes, my lord!"

"Don't stop the construction of communities. You can expand them to the space between the town and Stronghold or the south bank of the Redwater River. The population expansion remains to be a major priority, and I want to triple the urban population by the end of the year."

Barov sucked in a breath. "My lord, that will be close to 100,000 people."

"I believe we can afford them in the Western Region," Roland said with a deep voice, "you can take it as your goal."

Indeed, the Kingdom of Graycastle had population potential. A big city of 20,000 inhabitants could afford a suburban population of at least 100,000. The more prosperous a city was, the bigger scale the latter was—this phenomenon could also be seen in modern agriculture. There was no limit in the Western Region, plus since the steam engine had come into use, there was no need to have so many people working on the material supply.

"Lastly, since electric lighting is now available in the factory district, you'll need to switch to working eight hours a day in three shifts once the city construction is completed, especially the ammunition processing department," the prince said to the supervisor of the City Hall, "The salary of each shift should be calculated according to the past daily wage. The more they do, the more they get. You can promote it from now on and I hope the factory can operate constantly until we unify Graycastle."

"Yes, Your Highness." Barov answered and made a bow.