

Witch 51

Chapter 51 Her Majesty the Queen

Sunlight fell through a narrow window into the room and was reflected as dark red stripes on the wall.

There were only a few places within the Kingdom where you could still see the sun, and the Port of Clear Water was one of them. In this place, the Months of the Demons, with its cold wind and strong snowfall, only had a tiny bit of influence. With the exception that the Blacksail-Fleet couldn't leave the harbor, the entire city was still as busy as usual.

The city governor and harbor master Garcia Wimbledon was sitting at her square table under the window, seriously studying the contents of a letter. Her gray hair was caught in the sunset and had a golden touch. Her face produced shadows from the light, adding definition to her facial features and, giving her a unique charm full of heroic spirit.

Ryan had been standing by her side for quite a while.

Although she had already exceeded her usual time for reading a letter of this length, he still chose to wait quietly for a little longer – he didn't want to interrupt the silence.

Eventually, Garcia sighed softly, put the letter down, and then told him, "My father is dead."

Hearing this, Ryan was startled, and he had to ask, "What?"

"My father, Ali Wimbledon, King of Graycastle."

She rarely repeated anything she said, he thought, because when he usually asked her again, she would merely look at him like he hadn't said anything. However, she really wasn't kidding, right? The king is really dead?

"..." Ryan opened his mouth, trying to say some comforting words, but in the end he just asked, "How did he die?"

Fortunately, she didn't care about this – she was the daughter of the King, the Governor of the Port of Clear Water, and the Commander of the Blacksail Fleet, she didn't need anyone to comfort her, "The letter says that my brother Gerald killed my father, but he was caught by the guards. He didn't commit suicide to escape punishment, so in the end he was put to trial by several ministers, there he was sentenced to death by beheading."

"That doesn't sound right," Ryan subconsciously couldn't believe it.

"Of course that isn't the truth," said Garcia, expressionless, "It's true that my first brother is a relatively stupid man, but he isn't so foolish to go on a suicide mission. If no one led him in that direction, he would never do such a thing."

"Someone framed him?" asked Ryan.

"Let me guess ..." The 3rd Princess closed her eyes and thought for a moment before she answered, "Someone probably put this detailed plan in order, and tempted Gerald by saying that they would help him – bringing people into my father's courtyard. This must have been arranged by someone in advance,

including the eradication, exchange and bribing of the guards. But those aren't areas where Gerald has his strong points, since he is just too lazy to arrange something like this. The rest would be simple, it was only important to acquire a person who had Gerald's trust, but would still betray him in the end."

Ryan could add nothing. After all, these were only guesses. What truly happened was not important, the important part was only the result. He believed that this was also the thought of the 3rd Princess.

Sure enough, Garcia opened her eyes and continued, "I am 90% sure that it wasn't the 1st Prince, he was a person who only knew brute force. His brain is one big muscle so it was regular that he was fooled. Only ... "when saying this, her voice had some spunk," my 2nd brother would be this cruel. "

"You mean Timothy Wimbledon was the true culprit?"

"Apart from him, who else would know so much about Gerald? Also after this matter, he is the person with the greatest gains." while speaking, Garcia was unconsciously tapping her finger on the table, "Even a blind person can see this! But he was father's favorite, so he really didn't need to do this!"

Her Highness was truly angry, Ryan realized. Seeing the Princess this heated up was truly rare. It seems that even though she had been complaining that her father was too eccentric, in the end she still didn't want to see her father dying like this.

Ryan was able to understand this feeling, more or less. In a large family, the younger generation would always have such a feeling towards the master of the house – a mountain they would have to surpass, both revering and hating him. If she was right and this was truly planned by the second prince, then his actions could indeed be considered bloody and cruel.

"But he ... Why would he do this?"

"Because he was afraid of me," Garcia took a deep breath, trying to control her emotions, "he is afraid of my BlackSail Fleet."

Realizing that Ryan wouldn't answer, she continued to explain, "Timothy seems to have a spy in our city, which in itself isn't surprising, I myself also have arranged eyes and ears in Valencia. When he discovered the existence of my BlackSail Fleet it became easy for him to imagine what I would do later. Valencia isn't able to support an army that is capable of facing my fleet. So, he came to the conclusion to use Gerald as bait to get what he wanted."

"So you mean, he wants an army?"

"He wants the throne," said Garcia, "With my father's death and now even Gerald's death, he has become the first heir. I am afraid that he will press the ministers to crown him as fast as possible. Only when he becomes Wimbledon IV will he be able to mobilize all his vassals with their armies. "As she said this she shook her head, "However, as I have already said, as father's favorite son he really didn't need to do this!"

"Wouldn't that be worse?" asked Ryan, worried, "If your 2nd brother gets crowned, won't he declare the battle for the throne finished and call you and your siblings back? What will you do then?"

Garcia answered as if she felt it was completely beneath her dignity, "This step would be too straightforward, just because he was our father's favorite son, it doesn't mean that he will have the

support of the ministers, especially because of his move to kill the former king – although he pushed the murder on Gerald and may be able to fool the civilians, I estimate that it will take a long time until he will be able to grasp full authority in Graycastle. So ... “she looked cunningly at Ryan and said,” I have to change my plan a little. “

Ryan immediately fell on one knee and said, “I’m willing to serve.”

Garcia stood up, walked to the window and spoke to Ryan with her back to him, “The first thing he is bound to do after he claims the throne is to deal with me. However, his only possibility to pressure me is to command Joe Kohl, the Duke of the Southern territory. I estimate that the latter will use the king’s mourning period to delay sending out his troops – that old fox has always been reluctant to do business where he would make a loss. At most he will summon his feudatories and send them out to surround Port of Clear Water. “Garcia paused slightly and then spoke further, “However, this move will give us unnecessary trouble, so we will set sail tomorrow. “

“Sail? Your Highness, don’t tell me you want to ...”

“Eagle City lies more inland and is almost undefended. We can reach the Town of Clear Spring by using the tributary of the Sanwan River, from there we will only need one day to arrive at Eagle City. After we seize Eagle City, the entire Southern territory will be under my control. The situation after Timothy claims the throne will be different than what he thinks it will be. When Timothy wants to know the Duke’s progress but discovers that the whole South is under my control, I really want to see his face.”

“But, you also said that Wimbledon III just passed away, and following this -“

“What, do I need to shed some tears first?” Garcia turned around, the light of the sunset fell on her body and covered her with a red veil. Her face was hidden in the dark, only her eyes were reflected by the light. The emotion shown within her eyes was as solid as a boulder, Ryan thought. Even if she is angry or feeling regret, she will never show sorrow.

Showing sorrow wouldn’t be suitable for a King or Queen.

“No, you don’t need to do that,” Ryan seriously said.

Garcia nodded with satisfaction, “Go and tell the Captain that I want to speak him. Since Timothy was unwilling to wait until the end of the five years, I will not let him down. After I conquer Eagle City, I will declare the independence of the Southern Territory.”

All this didn’t matter to himself, he thought, Garcia will always find a solution for every possibility. Once she decides on a path for herself, she will walk down the path courageously. This was where her charm laid and was one of the reasons why he followed her.

“Yes, Your Highness ... no,” Ryan corrected himself, “Your Majesty.”

Chapter 52 Heart of Fire

Roland knocked on the door, and when he heard Nightingale’s response he entered the room.

The windows in the room were closed and had thick curtains. They were only open during the early morning and evening to let in fresh air. At any other time the windows were closed to keep the room warm.

The only light in the room came from two candles at the end of the bed. The candles burned quietly and threw out many crisscrossing shadows throughout the room.

Roland went towards the bed. Seeing that the woman resting on the soft pillows and bedding still had her eyes closed, he sighed softly.

“Is Border Town’s defense still holding?” asked Nightingale while coming over to Roland and handing him a cup of tea.

“At the moment everything is going smoothly,” answered Roland while taking a small sip, but then he gave her the cup back, “From that day on, a big group of demonic beasts like last time hasn’t attacked us. Also, all of our injured members of the militia are now healed and back, ready to fight. Their fighting passion has become ... somewhat high.”

“What is with the damaged part of the city wall?”

“Karl rolled logs under the carapace of the mixed beast to move it towards the hole in the wall. There, he will use a capstan to get it up and use a wooden frame to hold it upright, making it a part of the city wall,” Roland knew that Nightingale was trying to distract him by questioning him, so that he wouldn’t worry himself too much. However, when he stepped into the room, all his attention would always stay on the woman who was lying in bed.

If we say that the last time we confronted the large scale invasion we obtained a victory worthy of pride, there is no doubt that the biggest contributor for the victory was Anna. If she hadn’t used her wall of flames to block the gap in the wall, the consequences would really have been unthinkable.

However, she hadn’t woken up since she fainted in his arms.

“It has already been one week,” whispered Roland.

Theoretically, if a person laid in a coma for one week without food or water, with no possibility of supplying her with nutrition through external measures, such as injection, the body’s functions will shut down and the brain will gradually go into shock and die. However, Anna did not have any signs of poor health – in fact her appearance now was better than when she fell into Roland’s arms. Her cheeks were rosy, her breathing was smooth, and when Roland put his hand on her forehead he could feel that she had a normal temperature. Everything showed that Anna was at full health, but ... she wouldn’t wake up.

“This is also the first time I have encountered such a situation,” Nightingale stood at Roland’s side, shaking her head while explaining, “She depleted all her magic within her body, but now her magic power is already at the point of saturation, even more rich than it has been in the past. If I did not calculate it wrong, today at midnight will be her day of adulthood.”

“Do you mean she’s going to be an adult while in a coma?”

“No, she will die while in a coma,” Nightingale said bluntly, “You must use your will to overcome the suffering on your day of adulthood. If your resistance is broken, the bite of the witch’s magic power will irreversibly destroy her body.”

Roland moved a chair next to the bed and sat down, “I remember that you once said that when facing magic backlash, no matter how painful it becomes, you will always stay conscious and clear-headed. Either you will be able to cross this hurdle or you will choose to terminate your life.”

“Indeed, it is exactly like this. Within the Witch Cooperation Association we also had someone who believed to draw support from being unconscious when passing through the bite of the evil spirit ... only having to bear the torment once a year,” Nightingale hesitated but then continued, “she said that she relied on alchemic substances to sleep, but in the end it was meaningless ... when the moment came she was immediately devoured by the magic without any chance to resist.”

“The pain does not slowly increase?”

“No. When your time arrives, the pain will strike you just like lightning, but how long you have to resist varies from person to person. My sister was not strong enough, but ...” she trailed off.

Roland understood what she meant, not knowing how long they had to suffer the pain was already a kind of torture in itself, not knowing how long they have to resist – it was similar to being on an abandoned ship in the middle of a heavy storm. It would be easy to let people give up the desire to live on.

During the moment of silence, Roland felt a hand on his shoulder.

“During my homeless and miserable years, I had seen too much death. I saw witches being treated like cattle, hanged, burned, or tortured to death just for the entertainment of the nobility. The only way for a witch to survive was to live far away from other humans, living a cloistered life. I do not know where the Holy Mountain is located, but in our hearts it is an unattainable paradise.” Nightingale’s voice became softer than it had ever been in the past. “but Anna is different. In addition to the help we sisters can give her, I have never seen someone else being so concerned about a witch as you. She is needed by people, she is valued and treated like a normal person ... Your Highness, Anna has not even made it through her adulthood yet, but she has already found her Holy Mountain.”

However, this was not the outcome Roland had hoped for. He closed his eyes, and recalled the scene when he had meet her.

She was barefoot, and was only wearing tattered clothes. She had been living in a cage, but there was not the slightest hint of fear in her face. Her eyes resembled an unpolluted lake surface, clear and calm.

She was the flame, but she wasn’t flickering like a flame.

Memories began to appear like the pictures on a film reel.

“I have satisfied your curiosity, Sir, so can you kill me now?”

“I have never used my power to hurt someone else.”

“I just want to stay near you, Your Highness, nothing more.”

“The Demon’s Bite will never kill me, I will beat it.”

“Are you dreaming? I’m not going anywhere.”

.....

Roland had to restrain his surging thoughts and whispered, "I will stay here and accompany her until the last moment."

"I will also stay ... thank you."

After dinner, when Nana heard that Anna would go through her day of adulthood, she insisted on staying. Roland set aside a room for her and her father who would accompany her during the night.

Like this, Roland and the two witches were sitting besides the bed, quietly waiting for the approaching midnight hour.

Regarding Nightingale and Nana, they would also have to face the Demon's Bite this winter, but fortunately their magic awakened on different days. Otherwise, the three witches would have to suffer their test of life and death at the same time. Roland estimated that if that was the case he wouldn't be able to stay calm in the room.

The town had no clock tower, so with only the light of the candles, the passage of time became blurred. Cold wind blew against the window, so from time to time they could hear the screeching wind. When Roland felt a trace of weariness attack his heart, Nightingale suddenly said, "It has begun."

Only she could see the magic flow within Anna's body. She saw that it became restless, and the cluster of green flame became unusually rich, but the white incandescence in her center turned dark, while all of the irritable magic converged inward. It seemed to be pulled towards the center while struggling and rolling wildly, but it was of no use.

Roland couldn't see these changes, but he was also aware that something was wrong.

The candle flames began to shake, even though no wind was blowing inside the room. The light emitted by the flames got darker, it seemed like all the shadows were swallowed by the flame as it changed its color – the orange-red glow turned into a jade-like green flame.

He looked at the woman lying on the bed, but she was still sleeping, without even the slightest changes on her face, as if all this had nothing to do with her.

At this point the flame of the candles almost disappeared – but the flame was not extinguished. The green flames were just like phagocytic cells eating up the orange flames, plunging everything into darkness.

But soon, the fire was lit up again. However, this time the flame of the candles had turned into a pure green. The three people sitting around the bed were submerged in green light, looking quizzically into each other's eyes, but in the end no one could understand what was happening.

However, at this moment, everyone's eyes turned towards the bed, they had heard Anna groaning.

Anna slowly opened her eyes.

"Anna ..." Roland was shocked, she woke up?

Anna blinked a few times to clear her eyes, but then she smiled at him, stretching out with the open palm of her right hand, reaching for the Prince.

A mass of green fire was leaping up from her palm, quietly burning.

Roland didn't know why, but he could understand what Anna wanted. He hesitated for only a moment, but then he slowly inserted a finger into the flame. The anticipated burning sensation didn't come. Instead, it was just like being wrapped up in lukewarm water, it felt soft and warm.

Chapter 53 Heart of Fire (Part 2)

The day after Anna woke up, Roland and the others bid Nightingale farewell.

"Although the reason why is still unclear, but Anna is probably the first witch who has spent the day of awakening without pain," Nightingale excitedly said before leaving. After Nightingale had followed Roland for a long time, she got used to the term 'awakening' when describing the transformation of witch. "When I come back, I will bring my sisters with me. At that time I hope you will accept us, just as you had accepted Anna."

This would be exactly what Roland wished for. With only Anna's ability he was able to revolutionize the forging process, allowing the town to see the dawn of the industrial age, so what would he be able to do with a bunch of witches? Of course, he also had to take into account safety issues, since crossing the mountains during the Months of the Demons was very dangerous.

But apparently, Nightingale was quite eager to bring her sisters back because she said, "During this winter, many of my sisters will have to face this difficult period. If I can bring them the news only a little earlier, I might be able to save at least some of my sisters. Rest assured, normally the demonic beasts aren't able to find my whereabouts. "

Finally, Roland asked, "When do you have to face your day of awakening?"

Nightingale turned around and mounted her horse, "At the end of winter or early spring." While leaving, Nightingale waved back towards the prince, "Do not worry about me, in the previous years the bite of the demons gotten lighter and lighter for me."

This answer gave Roland something to think about.

He had already thought about how Anna could survive her day of awakening. After all, Anna said afterwards that she hadn't felt any pain. This was completely against the Nightingale's concept – "the power of Witches come from the devil, so the power is contaminated by evil." This could be seen when their blood turned black and flowed out of every pore. Their skin would look burnt, leaving the body in a miserable condition. This was unshakable and irrefutable evidence.

However, since the beginning, Roland had thought this was wrong.

He rummaged through the memories of the old 4th Prince, but he didn't find any proof that God or the Devil existed in this world. Since it isn't a divine power, it shouldn't be regarded as a standard to distinguish between good and evil. In fact, even if there were gods who would frequently interfere with the mortal world, it was still the believers who choose their own camp. Only then would the gods get their power, rather than vice versa.

According to the Nightingale's description, a witch would gather the magic gathering within her body. However, when the magic had no way to be released, would it damage its own vessel? Roland thought that the possibility of this theory being right was very high. After all, most people who were confronted with hostility and pressure would certainly choose to hide their own abilities, pretending to be normal while hoping to leave the battlefield alive. This would lead to the point where before they reached their adulthood they would rarely have the opportunity to use their magic.

Roland certainly did not think that his castle would block the Demon's Bite. He asked Anna if she had an unbearably painful experience before this. If anything was different during this year, then it was because she came to the castle and was able to use her magic almost every day.

So, with Nightingale's final answer his guess was confirmed – her stealth ability wasn't very noticeable, so she could even use it often. In addition, she had been forced into training her ability by other people and was forced to use her ability recklessly. Thus, the backfire of her magic power only had little impact on her.

When Roland were back in the Castle he immediately started Nana's enhanced training. If no one was injured while defending the town, she had to treat a variety of small animals. If he was able to confirm his theory with Nana's help, the significance for the witch community could be described as earth-shaking. The devil's curse would change into a present of the divine. As long as he could ensure that his territory was a safe haven for witches, endless masses of witches would come to Border Town.

He didn't know how, but after the last attack everything was back on track, without any big waves.

Roland began to intensify the production of his steam engine II, but also gave Anna enough time to get familiar with her new capabilities.

He built another shack in his backyard, but this time it was cover from the snow. It was used as an experimental area, since he still felt it was safer to build one in his own backyard.

Nightingale had previously said that witches, when reaching adulthood, would stabilize their magic power and probably produce new branch capabilities. However, until now he hadn't seen Anna show any new capabilities, but her control of fire, had become completely differently than before.

No, whether or not it could be called a flame was still a question ... Roland thought, the former flame was still in the range to understand with common sense, but now the green flame wasn't understandable with common sense.

He named it "Heart of Fire"

It could exist away from Anna but at the same time stay influenced by Anna's will, capable of changing its shape. Just as she was doing it right now – the Heart of Fire was burning on top of an iron panel two yards away from her, swaying lightly back and forth, as if it was saluting her. However, Roland knew that Anna was still controlling it. Normally, the Heart of Fire had a temperature close to one's body temperature, but when Anna wanted to heat it up, it would instantly raise its temperature to a comparatively higher temperature, changing its color from a jade-like green into darker green. Similarly, it could also turn into a big cluster of flames from a small flame, or even change its movement speed.

Unfortunately, it couldn't be moved too far away from Anna. After repeated testing they discovered that when the flame moved more than five yards away from Anna, it would disappear.

Another new feature of the Heart of Flame was that Anna could call more than one flame – but until now she had barely been able to operate the two flames simultaneously.

Even so, the situation at the wall was described as calm. The demonic beasts would still appear one after another outside the wall, but there was no presence of a mixed species. Without them it was nearly impossible for the demonic beasts to break through. Just like Roland had said, they became stronger and faster, but they were still just beasts. Due to the huge wall length, they had to direct the demonic beasts to the middle section of the wall, so that the militia with only two hundred members could hold the wall.

So in addition to his daily routine of patrolling his territory, Roland had plenty of time to spend on construction.

He had set aside a site south of the castle, and planned to use it as living area for the arriving witches. As the investor of the project, he appointed Karl as the head of the workers, building a batch of two-story brick houses. At the same time, a reasonable and beautiful layout was considered, allowing easy entrance and exit, and a good drainage system strove to create a well-planned neighborhood.

He also considered whether the witches would be distributed to the old areas or only the new urban areas, mixing them with the common inhabitants, but after thinking about it, he gave up the plan. Although this would help accelerate the acceptance of the witches by the normal people, before he could erase all the misunderstandings, the consequences were likely irreparable. After all, the witches only had a certain influence within the militia.

In addition, there was also no guarantee that the witches brought by Nightingale were harmless and behaved people – most of them had suffered the pain and suffering of the world, so Roland was afraid that the situation wouldn't be so easy to summarize. After all, all the witches couldn't be like Anna and Nana.

Also, when the witches lived in one area it would be convenient for collective management. Before they came, Roland had to draw up all the relevant rules and regulations. Until now, Roland had no experience he could refer to, after all, he had neither the personnel nor capacity of the National Security Agency, nor was he the creator the Avengers, who knew how to manage a group of people and had the abilities for it! He was without any better option than to press for a basic system used for personnel management by companies, slowly wading through the river by groping for stones.

Of course, Roland knew that this program had loopholes, but as a pioneer, what else could he do? Retracing his tail and only staying in Border Town could take decades to be able to touch the threshold of industrialization, but he wasn't a cultivator, so how could he wait for decades?

Wanting to lead this era into the next, being at the forefront of the reform, it was necessary to have a spirit of adventure.

Just when he was recording these thoughts on paper, Barov opened the door and walked in.

Shaking the snow of his coat and saluting the Prince, he informed him: “Your Highness, a messenger of Longsong Stronghold is coming.”

Chapter 54 Bad News

Petrov didn't think that he would visit Border Town again so soon.

He had not intended to travel during the cold winter. In particular, he had not intended to leave his warm house when the demonic beasts were ravaging the countryside. However, when Duke Ryan personally gave him the mission to deliver this letter with hot news to the hands of the 4th Prince, he had no way to refuse.

He certainly knew the contents of the letter – in fact, the entire aristocracy in the Kingdom of Graycastle were discussing the amazing news: The King of Graycastle had fallen because of murder committed by his eldest son, Gerald Wimbleton. Immediately after the news spread, the 2nd Prince stepped forward, announcing that the Kingdom could not survive without a King. Since he was previously the second in line, he was now the heir and with this would be the next King.

However, this behavior wasn't approved by everyone. It was said that the process of Gerald's trial was very strange, because during the whole interrogation, the Prince was only seen a few times, but he hadn't said a single word and his hands were tied tightly. So, most Ministers were hoping to look into the matter thoroughly before deciding who would inherit the throne.

It was also rumored that the second son Timothy Wimbleton played a self-guided drama, where he was the real killer and was only placating a sad look, but in truth couldn't wait to inherit the throne.

In the end, the debate about the true culprit was meaningless. Since the 2nd Prince had the full support of the Imperial Prime Minister, he could temporarily take over the position of King, so he was still able to grasp the right to be the Supreme Ruler of Graycastle. At the same time he took over the throne, he issued an order to recall all of his competitors – the battle for the throne was over, so the King's sons and daughters should return to Graycastle before the end of the winter after receiving the Prince's edict. Based on the ruling of their conferred territories during the last 6 months, the new King would then be officially canonized.

Petrov could clearly detect the urgent mood within the letter.

Through this, Timothy Wimbleton could firmly secure the throne. Everything depended on the reaction of the King's other children. If they behaved and gave up the fight for the throne, and returned to Graycastle, Timothy would naturally become the undisputed Wimbleton IV.

All documents sent to Border Town would be transferred through Longsong Stronghold first. When Duke Ryan saw the recall order, his first reaction was to snort disdainfully. The former King was always fair towards the nobles, and gave them lots of freedom, but as for the 2nd Prince, his ascension to the throne by force would need to be incomparably harsh. This could be seen when Gerald was sentenced to death by the guillotine, so now, no one would go back to Graycastle, fearing to get the same treatment.

However, in the eyes of the six families of the Longsong Stronghold, this was a well-timed command.

Two months ago, Earl Elk set an unauthorized plan into action and made Duke Ryan very unhappy, especially since the plan failed. The Prince's reaction was very intense, sentencing Dmitry Hill to death by hanging. With this, both sides could be regarded as having an public and acrimonious conflict.

Duke Ryan had originally intended to wait until the end of the Months of the Demons so that he would have a free hand to solve the awful problem, but now he had this document. With this, he had a legal option. Roland Wimbledon was called back by the soon-to-be King, so when he left, Border Town would naturally be owned by Duke Ryan again. However, if he didn't go back to Graycastle, Duke Ryan would be able to send him back by force – everything under the name of the new King's banner.

In the end, the Duke didn't care which hands the crown would fall to.

Thinking of his return to Border Town, Ambassador Petrov naturally didn't feel very comfortable. Last time, he had vowed that by his next visit he would bring a new trade agreement, but in the end the result was that they were attacked by the Elk Family. Now he was back, bringing bad news once more – whether it was the death of his father Wimbledon III, the new king, or the recall order, Petrov believed that the 4th Prince didn't want to see any of them.

Since the Kingdom of Graycastle laid in the South of the continent, the way to Border Town was smooth sailing because even in winter, the river didn't freeze.

From time to time, Petrov went to the window and took a look outside. During the journey he didn't see any person dead, starving, or even fleeing, which indicated that Border Town had yet to fall.

This made him a little surprised. After all, the last time he had visited, he had seen that the wall had yet to be built. Petrov didn't have much confidence in them since they were building a stone wall out of mud.

Then, an even more surprising situation appeared, he saw a boat with the banner of Willow Town hanging on its mast slowly passing them on the right side of the river – this would usually be a familiar scene, but not during the Months of the Demons! Even when Border Town was fighting with the demonic beasts they were still able to do business? Without transferring all of their mining workers towards defending, how could they withstand the brutal attacks of the monsters?!

Three days later, Petrov's vessel arrived at Border Town's pier.

It was still the same dilapidated wooden dock, but now at its end was wooden shed. After the ship docked, two guards emerged from the shed, staring at the boatmen's every move.

Petrov immediately understood what Roland intended with this arrangement.

Obviously, the 4th Prince didn't want anyone to secretly leave the town by the river.

After identification by the guards, someone immediately brought him a horse and then took him to the castle while accompanied by guards.

Just like the previous time, Prince Roland Wimbledon met Petrov in the living room. Moreover, although the time was not the regular meal time, the Prince still commanded the attendants to prepare a rich meal.

Grilled ham, dried fish slices, an unknown salad prepared with wild herbs, as well as butter, bread, and vegetables that could be seen at any dinner party were prepared.

It seemed that the Prince liked to talk business during dinner.

While Petrov had such thoughts, his hands did not stop for a single moment. After all, in the last few days he hadn't had much of a chance for a meal. Even his own Honeysuckle Family, when they had no dinner guests, would basically eat only bread with bacon.

After dinner, the dessert was served. During this time, Petrov respectfully handed over the letter.

Roland took the letter and opened the wax seal with his dining knife. Out of sight, he rolled out the letter and took a quick glance, then he became stunned.

The king was dead?

Roland had no feelings for this nominal father at all. Since his crossing over, he had been living in Border Town, so he had never seen his father face to face, let alone that in the 4th Prince's memories of his father, his father had only blamed and resented him. Because of this, he felt that he was caught in a very embarrassing situation – should he have a sad look on his face?

Reading the following contents, he could smell a conspiracy. Wimbledon III was murdered by his eldest son? Under the identity of the new King, the 2nd Prince announced the end of the battle for the throne and immediately ordered all of his siblings back to Graycastle?

Roland coughed, and raised his head, just to see Petrov's apologetic eyes.

So, he thought, I'm afraid Duke Ryan will be happy regardless what I do. No matter whether or not I comply to the new King's orders, both are a dilemma of their own.

He didn't bring the trading agreement, but instead brought a letter of bad news. I think at the moment he feels very sorry. Roland secretly smiled, then folded the letter again, "I got it."

"Well, Your Highness, then what are you going to ..."

"Even if I want to go, I will have to wait until the end of the Months of the Demons. Right now in the ice and snow, if I'm gone, then what would the people of Border Town do?"

If it was someone else, Petrov would certainly say something like, "Do not worry, my Longsong Stronghold will help you to handle this situation properly", or any other diplomatic responses. But in front of the 4th Prince who he had only seen twice, he couldn't speak carelessly. It was the first time that Petrov loathed his own identity as ambassador. In the end he merely nodded, "I understand; should I pass a reply for you?"

As an answer, Roland called his attendants to bring over a pen and paper. He wrote a quick reply and then sealed it with wax and his own stamp, and handed it over to Petrov. The latter glanced at the envelope. It was clearly written to Prince Timothy Wimbledon of Graycastle on the cover instead of King Wimbledon IV.

Petrov thought, now Roland has made his statement.

Chapter 55 A once in thousand years opportunity

Roland opened the door to his office, seeing that Barov was waiting for him.

Roland threw the letter towards his assistant minister, then sat himself on his chair, with his feet on his desk.

If he had not been in the presence of an outsider, he would hum a ditty.

“Your Highness, it’s okay to grieve.” Barov began to frown while quickly reading the letter. “The death of the King is such a tragedy, and he was even murdered by his own son. This is really a tragedy, I don’t know what Your Highness should do next.”

“The trial leading to Gerald’s death was just too strange. I want to wait and see what my elder sister and my younger sister decide to do,” Roland said, “but in any case, there are some things we should do in advance, even if we do it only to be on the safe side.”

Barov looked at the Prince, waiting for him to continue.

“Because of the replacement of the King, the next few months or even years can become turbulent, so the first thing we should do is safeguard our loved ones and family members.” What was more important was the fact that the 2nd Prince could kidnap these people to threaten them, now, if he wanted to maintain Border Town’s administration and financial affairs functionality, his assistant minister was indispensable. Roland sipped his tea and then continued, “You and Carter, as well as your subordinates should all write them a letter, I will have the guards deliver them while they deliver my response to the King, then they will arrange for them to take shelter in other towns.”

“Not in Border Town?” Barov wasn’t a fool, after twenty years of political experience he immediately understood the prince’s meaning.

“No, they won’t come directly to Border Town.” Roland didn’t want the other side to use the families of his subordinates to threaten them, and he also didn’t want his subordinates to think he himself would threaten them with their families, so he chose a compromise. He would first bring them to a more secure town, and after he had a strong foothold in Border Town, they could be migrated.

“I understand, I would like to thank Your Highness for your concern.” The Assistant Minister spoke while nodding in agreement, which let Roland feel relieved. It seemed that his subordinates were intelligent people who could think for themselves.

Roland declared, “Another thing we have to talk about is the ore trade. After the last iron ore trade, we will put a stop to the ore trade and sell only rough stones to Willow Town. I need the iron ore saved for our own usage.”

“That wouldn’t be good. As a result of that, our revenue would decline, Your Highness.”

“Yes, but it will not drop too much. Recently the miners found a new deposit of gems, so with this we can make up part of the gap.” explained Roland, “And winter isn’t really the time for business, the peddlers hesitate to come trading when they always have to fear an attack of demonic beasts, so we will most likely only have two to three transactions during the next four months. Thus it is obvious to trade rough stones to make up for the less trade, since they are the more cost-effective choice.”

“I see.” Barov accepted the explanation and recorded the orders down.

After his Assistant minister had left, Roland called for Carter and told him, “I need to expand the size of the militia, so you will be responsible for it and will give out recruitment orders. You will need to quickly evaluate their abilities, and if you find strong members they will be appointed as team captains. You will also implement the same training methods like last time.”

“Your Highness, if I train them according to those training methods, I am afraid the new team will need a very long time before they can be deployed to the battlefield.”

“As long as they are stronger than the mob.” Roland dismissed his concerns and told him to do what he said. Despite his input, the training level was far away from that of the army. He was afraid that this level of training was only on the level of a college student military training, but sometimes it was only important to have better combat effectiveness compared to their opponents. In addition to fighting against the brainless demonic beasts, most of the time they would fight against a noble’s private army, mercenary soldiers, or if needed, turned into a mixed arm. So as long as they used cross-era weapons and equipment, even an army on the level of college students would be able to cope with it.

After Carter left, Roland could not stop himself from laughing.

He did not think that such a fortuitous situation would fall into his hands! It was simply like someone sending him charcoal during a snowstorm or handing him a pillow when he was sleepy.

Was this bad news for me? Was this a dilemma? Wrong! He didn’t know much about Garcia Wimbledon, but he was sure that she wasn’t a woman who would allow men to trample on her. The 1st Prince was sentenced to death in such a short time, even if there was no insider, she probably wouldn’t easily return to Graycastle only because the 2nd Prince had ordered her.

It was the same for himself. He would just stay in Border Town, so someone would be bound to come out – most likely it would be Duke Ryan from Longsong Stronghold, since he was such a restless person. Otherwise, he wouldn’t send someone in this horrible weather during the Months of the Demons, only to deliver the letter to his hands.

One day Duke Ryan would want to confront him, since until Roland left Border Town, Ryan could not rest or eat in peace.

Choosing to stay in Border Town would be equivalent to defying the new King’s edict. If Roland would only wait until the end of the Months of the Demons, Duke Ryan would in all likelihood, under the name and banner of Timothy Wimbledon, try to teach him a lesson. That was exactly what Roland wanted.

If you asked someone what they needed for faster industrialization, the answer would be without doubt people.

Large-scale production required a large number of staff devoted to it, after all a lot of people were needed to drive huge machines. In that time the term “sheep ate people” came into existence. It described, that when tenant farmers in Britain were thrown

off their land to starve so that sheep could graze and produce wool for new mills, turning them into free laborers.

The Industrial Age was a cruel time. So long as they unceasingly invested into the education of the laborers they could archive a generous payment. The more developed the industry, the larger would be the population.

If Roland had a problem, then it would be Border Towns low population.

Border Town had around 2000 inhabitants. Even with the newly invented machines, it was only a small type of workshop. There were not many free laborers, so many projects couldn't be expanded. But from where should he snatch so many people?

Should he buy slaves? Not to mention, he didn't know from where he could buy so many slaves, adult slaves would cost a lot of money, and they would have little sense of culture. Buying slaves under the age of ten and teach them would take too long, granted that he would allow child labor, so he would have to wait for many years.

Recruit talented people? To this borderland, how many people would be attracted to this town? And for them he would need to spend even more than for slaves.

Encourage his people to increase the birthrate? Forced marriages? Forget it...

He also couldn't hope to get more people from Longsong Stronghold, the kingdom was in a steady state, so if he tried to lay his hands on the surrounding lords, he would become a joke in the future. For the same reason Duke Ryan didn't dare to face Roland openly, he could only take actions in secret.

But now it was different, after Timothy took over the throne, he would be eager to have all his competitors disappear, all this could be seen from the recall order. Duke Ryan apparently was able to see this point, once the old King was gone, and he had the control over the west border, so if he didn't try to enforce his rule it would be strange.

This was a long-awaited opportunity for Roland.

Longsong Stronghold was already for hundreds of years the business center at the west border, with nearly ten thousand residents. But behind the stronghold lay the big cities, without any strong defense. He would just have to beat Duke Ryan, take over the city, and get a large number of freedmen and at the same time he could accumulate a lot of wealth

What would be easier than the annexation of the population? What way would be faster to get wealth than to plunder it?

This message was just like a beacon to dispel the mist, illuminating the future path of Roland.

He definitely would not miss this golden opportunity.

Chapter 56 Between the Mountains

Nightingale was slowly moving forward on the mountain path.

The path under her feet was only shoulder width. On either side of her was a huge rock wall, separated by ten feet. But between them was a bottomless ravine and the shoulder wide path she was walking on, so directly next to Nightingale's feet was a steep cliff and a huge wall out of rock. When she looked into the deep ravine she could only see darkness. While traveling on her shoulder wide path, Nightingale was

always carefully leaning on the rock wall next to her, trying to avoid losing her footing and falling into the ravine.

When she looked up, only a thin shimmer could be seen from the sky, like a silver thread hanging in the night sky. However, she knew that it was just a little after noon – even during the day, she still needed to hold a torch. The light coming down the cliff was not sufficient enough to illuminate the road ahead. Walking on this path for a long time even gave birth to the illusion that she was walking in the mountains.

The only advantage here was that not much would fall down the gorge, despite the cold wind whistling through the mountains and lifting up the fallen snow.. Occasionally there were a few natural snowflakes that fell on her head from, and landed on the mountain walls or on the trail, turning into water vapor. Down here, the temperature wasn't the same as it was in the outside world, occasionally she could see the hot air rising up from below the cliff.

If it weren't like this, she wouldn't dare to pass the Impassable Mountains during the Months of the Demons. She could hide herself in her own world of fog, but there, it would be still the same temperature. If she were to brave her way through the snow, she estimated that she would freeze to death after an hour of walking.

Nightingale didn't want to spend an extra minute down here – she could always feel something in the dark, always watching her, making her blood run cold.

If she could, Nightingale would stay in the fog the whole way, but it was a pity that her strength wasn't enough to do that. When she used her ability for a long time, she would quickly become exhausted.

Nightingale raised the torch and let it illuminate the opposite cliff. In the faint firelight, she could occasionally see dark shadows on the walls. Nightingale knew that those were caves, which were so deep that light couldn't reach the end of each cave. They looked like orbs of darkness. But on the other side, nearly at the same position, was also a deep hole. It reminded her of the North Slope Mine's rumors, which said that the mine used to be a monster's underground lair, with many forks in the road that extended in all directions, dug out by monsters. The Northern slope was part of the mountain range, but it was so far and wide with so many caves, who could say that the caves weren't connected to the mine?

The idea made her shiver.

To the West of the Impassable Mountain range was the abandoned barbarian wasteland. It was known that the Impassable Mountain range extended for several hundreds of miles, with countless undiscovered caves. Nightingale was afraid that this wasteland could give birth to countless monsters.

She did not dare think of going into the caves and only concentrated on moving forward.

Finally, she could see a change in the road further ahead. The shoulder-wide path split into two, one leading slightly upwards and the other one leading downwards, leading deeper into the darkness without end; no one knew where this pit lead to. While standing on the bifurcation point, the feeling of being stared at had become very intense, as if countless eyes were motionlessly looking at every move Nightingale made, making her have a dry mouth and tongue and giving her a creepy feeling.

Nightingale grit her teeth as she opened her world of fog and quickly stepped into it. Soon, the creepy feeling began to disappear.

While following the path leading upwards, the surrounding air temperature soon begun to fall, but above her head the small thread of silver became bigger. A quarter of an hour later, a huge cave opened up directly in front of her, with its entrance slightly higher than the path she was following. When she set foot into the cave she could see a faint fire deep within.

Finally, she had reached the Witch Cooperation Association's hiding place.

When Nightingale left her world of fog, she was immediately detected by the witch in charge of defense, who instantly set up a wall of black smog to block her. However, soon the wall disappeared and a surprised voice could be heard from the darkness, "You're back!"

Nightingale thought, "Yes I'm finally back," but when she noticed that the girl had two bands tied around her arm, Nightingale's good mood turned directly into grief, "Once again two sisters were..."

The other witch's voice stalled for a moment and then she sorrowfully said, "Uh ... ah, yes. Airy and Abby had their day of adulthood five days ago and didn't survive it." She forced herself to smile, "It happens often, doesn't it? But let us not speak about them, you have to go back to the camp, Wendy is always talking about you."

Airy and Abby, a pair of twins who left their lives in a wealthy family from the Fallen Dragon Mountain only to die within the Impassable Mountain range. Nightingale sometimes wondered if what they did was alright. If the twins hadn't left their town with the Witch Cooperation Association, they could have at least enjoyed their lives with their family, rather than following everyone, wandering from one place to another, without any fixed home.

However, when she thought of Wendy, Nightingale's heart was filled with warmth. If she hadn't given her a helping hand when she desperately needed it, she was afraid that she herself would still be living a life as a puppet, always fearing to be disposed of just like every other tool. Yes, she should tell her the news as soon as possible, and she should tell it to all her sisters. They weren't required to hide like little mice any longer. Someone was willing to accept all of them, and there maybe... they could come out unscathed through their annual Day of Awakening!

When she stepped into the camp, Nightingale saw that a familiar figure was squatting near the campfire handling the food. Until now, the other person hadn't seen that she had arrived, so she couldn't help herself and shouted, "Wendy, I'm home!"

The other witch turned away from her meal and looked towards Nightingale, welcoming Nightingale with her usual smile, "Veronica, welcome home."

Wendy was the embodiment of a good woman and also one of the first witches of the Witch Cooperation Association. Now she had turned 30, but still any wrinkles couldn't be seen on her face. She had red-brown hair which fell straight down, almost reaching her waist, with mature and charming facial features, which gave her the appearance of a big sister. She was always concerned about each and every sister of the Witch Cooperation Association. Whether it be about their daily life or psychological counseling, she would always try to help no matter what happened. If it wasn't for Wendy, there was a big chance that the Witch Cooperation Association wouldn't have gathered so many witches.

She was precisely the reason why Nightingale decided to run away from her family when she met her, embarking with her on a journey into the Impassable Mountain range, trying to find the Holy Mountain. She was also one of the few people who knew her original name.

“How many times have I already told you that I’m no longer that cowardly little girl from the past?” said Nightingale while smiling and shaking her head, “I’m now a powerful witch, Veronica doesn’t exist any longer.”

“You will always be you, breaking away from your former nightmares doesn’t mean to part with important and happy moments of your past.” said Wendy softly, “Of course, I’m glad you like your new name. Nightingale, I’ve been waiting for you to come back, surely you had to suffer throughout the whole journey.”

“Well,” Nightingale stepped forward and hugged her friend, “Thank you.”

After a moment Wendy opened her mouth and asked, “What happened to the girl, you ... were you too late to save her?”

When hearing her speak of this, Nightingale’s spirit immediately began to rise again. She grabbed the Wendy’s arm and said excitedly, “No! She did not need me to save her. On the contrary, maybe she is able to save us all!” Then she began to describe in detail her experience of her time living in Border Town, “Border Town is governed by Lord Roland Wimbledon, 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle. He is willing to shelter all of us, and he also promised, that one day, that all witches in his territory could live the life of a free person, just like everyone else!”

Chapter 57 Cara the Snake Witch

However, Wendy wasn’t as excited as Nightingale had thought she would be. Instead, she asked in a skeptical tone, “Did he really say that?”

“Yes, even before I arrived in Border Town, he had already rescued two witches, Anna and Nana. From the beginning, the Prince never thought that the power of the witch came from the devil; he said it was our own strength -” Nightingale suddenly stopped, realizing that the other didn’t believe anything.

Good stop, she thought, this isn’t Wendy’s fault. They will probably only believe it when they hear it directly from the Prince, but maybe even then they will doubt it. After all, it would be exactly what every witch’s heart was longing for. We witches were oppressed for far too long, even on the way from the east to the border of the Impassable Mountain range, we could see many living examples where witches were betrayed and abandoned, without any person who would reach out to them with a helping hand.

When thinking about all this, her excitement gradually subsided. Perhaps this trip wouldn’t go as smoothly as she had thought.

“Wendy, you know what my magic had evolved into on my day of adulthood. In addition to being able to see the magic flow within a person, I’m also able to identify if a person is lying or not,” stated Nightingale seriously, “So when I asked him, why he would take such a big risk to save us witches, he replied, “In Border Town we don’t care about your background.” He just wants all the witches to be able to live as free people.”

“But while doing this, he will become a thorn in the side of the Church,” Wendy frowned and asked, “Even if the Prince does not understand what it means, you do know it, right?”

Nightingale could not help it but she began to chuckle loudly, “My initial thoughts were almost the same like yours, so I asked him: Do you think you can really achieve this? And guess how he answered me?” She paused, and then repeated verbatim, “If you do not step out, you will never know the answer.”

Wendy was surprised when hearing this and had to ask, “That wasn’t a lie?”

“No lie.” confirmed Nightingale.

“It sounds unbelievable.” Wendy’s voice became slightly relaxed. She and Nightingale were already friends for many years, so she couldn’t think of a reason why she would try to deceive her.

“Yes...,” Nightingale deeply sighed. If she hadn’t personally heard it, since she could verify it with her ability, she probably wouldn’t have believed him so quickly. Now in retrospect, just like when they stood on the city wall and talked about it, Roland really seldom lied. During the two months she stayed at his side, beside the moment they stood on the wall he had sometimes tried to deceive her once, but Nightingale was still very satisfied with his answers.

After all, she didn’t care that he was trying to deceive her a little. Instead if you would just tell an unknown witch all of your secrets, that would be too ridiculous.

“Tonight, when we all come together, I want to tell this important news to all of our sisters!” Nightingale looked pleadingly at Wendy and said, “And I want you to help me convince them.”

When the evening came, the witches who were busy outside the camp returned one after another. When they saw that Nightingale had safely returned, the witches became very happy, coming towards her and asking her how she did. Seeing that their arms were wrapped in a white cloth, Nightingale felt heavy within her heart; at the beginning she still casually answered a few questions, but with time she turned more and more silent.

But then she began to tell her long story. She talked about how she had sneaked into Border Town, how she met Roland, Anna and Nana, the construction of the city wall, the construction of the steam engine, how they had resisted the attack of the demonic beasts, and finally about Anna’s adulthood. Nightingale even took out the drawing of the construction plans for the steam engine, to prove to everyone that she wasn’t lying.

Most of the witches, after they entered the Witch Cooperation Association, would live a cloistered life. For them, it was difficult to imagine the life in the outside world, so they listened attentively. But when Nightingale said that Anna hadn’t suffered any pain during her day of adulthood going through it unscathed, the crowd suddenly began to rage. This was a great concern, the day of adulthood bothered witches for all of their lives, and lead to leaving a sheltered and warm life. They even went into the Impassable Mountain range, losing everything only to look for the legendary Holy Mountain. If what Nightingale said was true, that there was a territory lord who was willing to accept them, who even knew how they no longer had to suffer from the Demons Bite, wouldn’t that have been even more perfect than the Holy Mountain?

At this point, a path began to spread through the crowd, and a witch with a head full of green hair and half of her body plastered with snake tattoos walked in front of Nightingale.

When she saw her, Nightingale bowed and greeted her respectfully, "Respected mentor, hello." The witch who came was the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, Cara the Snake Witch. When speaking with her, all the witches called her their mentor.

"I heard the story you just told," when Cara spoke her voice hoarse and hollow, "Do you want to tell everyone that what we are doing is wrong?"

"No, mentor, those are not stories, I mean – "

"Enough," Nightingale was interrupted by Cara who was waving impatiently, "I do not know what happened to you, but when you went to this Border Town, it made you say such words. A prince, that sympathises with a witch? It's practically as laughable as sympathising with a frog," She turned around with a cold smile, and raised her arms in the air shouting, "Sisters! Have you all forgotten how those mortals treated you all!"

Not even letting Nightingale say something, she continued to shout, "Yes, that group of mortals, the group of incompetents who pretend to fight in the name of God, who are always aiming a sharp blade or whip at us. If there wasn't a God's Locket of Retribution, how could they step on us witches? Our ability doesn't come from the devil, instead it is a gift given by God! The one who take charge of God's authority shouldn't be them, but we! Us the sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association! The Holy Mountain recorded in ancient books, is the residence of the gods!"

What ... Nightingale couldn't believe what she had heard, though the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association was always considered as an eccentric. She was strongly attached to the search for the Holy Mountain, with a passion exceeding that of any ordinary person, but she was always very far from madness. Although Cara wasn't as approachable as Wendy, at least she had always treated the concern of her sisters with sincerity. But Nightingale had never thought that she could be so hostile to ordinary people.

Could it be that over the past few years she had always been suppressing her hatred and anger? The so-called not to get involved into profane affairs, merely in order to save power, only so that we can one day impose a thunder-like retaliation in the future? Nightingale thought to herself, was that the true reason why Cara hid herself?

"We have found a clue to the gate of the Holy Mountain, it is just like it is described in the ancient books! It's only twenty more days until the red moon will appear in the night sky just like a drop of blood, raising from the direction of the great Shimen, we will eventually arrive on the other side!" suddenly Cara stopped to speak and turned back to look at Nightingale and exclaimed, "You've been fooled by mortals, since we have been born we had lived in a huge scam. The suffering during the day of adulthood is a test by God, only the strong-willed, with indomitable talent and genuine power can pass it. As for the Church," she sneered for the second time, "They are a group of mortals who dare to borrow and act in the name of God, sooner or later they will have to go to hell."

"And you... Child, now it's time to come back," Cara paused for a moment and then continued, "If you forget those stories you just told, I can forgive your ignorance and mistakes. As a member of the Witch

Cooperation Association, you will get help from us, and together with us, you will go on the search for the Holy Mountain, to obtain eternal freedom.”

Nightingale’s heart had turned completely cold. The pain was only a test? That suffering during the day of awakening, the sisters who weren’t strong enough to hold on, they weren’t worth it, they were only losers? This argument was simply exactly the same as that of the church. While the surrounding witches unexpectedly exposed an expression of resonance, even Wendy didn’t come out to express her disapproval... Nightingale suddenly felt dull, and within the blink of an eye, the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, every witch’s mentor, had turned into a stranger.

Nightingale shook her head, “So, I’ll be willing to take every sister with me who want to leave, but if you decide to stay... I wish you good luck.”

Just as Nightingale was ready to leave, suddenly a slight tingle could be felt in her lower leg. When she looked down, she could see that a fine, shining blue and black striped snake had bitten her into her calf – this was Cara’s magic of the snake, it was silent and she could use a variety of toxins.

The paralysis quickly spread through her whole body, so when Nightingale tried to open her mouth to say something, she fell into darkness.

Chapter 58 Escape

Nightingale didn’t know how long it lasted, but when she woke up she discovered that her hands were tied to a stake. The same could be said about her waist and feet, they were also tied to the stake. She tried to free herself by struggling, but her body was tied to the pole so strongly, that she was totally immobile.

The next step was to try using her magic ability, but she couldn’t feel the familiar feeling when reaching for her power – she seemed to be also cut off from her magic powers, so she was completely tied up. When Nightingale looked down along her body, she saw that a transparent prismatic stone was hanging down from her neck.

“You’re finally awake.” Cara walked in front of her and begun to talk to Nightingale, “What do you think about my petrifying venom? Honestly, I had high hopes for you, Nightingale. However, sadly you couldn’t live up to my expectations.”

” ... ” Nightingale didn’t know how to answer first but then she took a deep breath and spoke reproachfully, “You were actually hiding a God’s Locket of Retribution. Cara, do you still know what you are doing?” This stone was originally shackles used by the Church to suppress witches, but now even their own mentor used it to deal with her, just like the Church! Though what made her even more angry was the callous look on the faces of the surrounding crowd, it seemed that there was nothing wrong with what they were seeing. Damn it, cried Nightingale at the bottom of her heart, don’t you think that you turned into the kind of person who us witches hate the most?!

“This is only a tool, which will be occasionally used to punish bad girls who won’t listen.” Explained Cara indifferently, “And you, Nightingale, are such a person who need to be punished, or... should I call you Veronica? Born within a noble family, got reduced to a witch, but still thinking about how to climb the social hierarchy.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You let me down. When Wendy saved you from the clutches of the aristocracy, I thought you would stand firmly on the side of us, the Witch Cooperation Association. But, look at what you’re doing right now, when we will soon discover the Holy Mountain, you want to stop us from achieving our goal!” Cara shook her head and laughed loudly, but then continued, “Trying to take us sisters with you to the Prince? Were you kept captive for too long and now servility has deeply rooted itself into your being, so that you can only live on when you find for yourself a master; or else ... do you just want to sell them to the nobles, in exchange for receiving a good position for yourself!”

“Everything I do is for my sisters.” Nightingale had to swallow down her anger, after all shouting would be meaningless, so she said calmly “I hope that no one will have to die during their day of awakening, hoping that they can live without worrying where they get clothes and food for their daily life. I never intended to stop your plan, but us sisters should have the right to freely choose our own way of life. At the moment Border Town is undergoing tremendous changes, I brought even the construction plan for the steam engine. It can operate on its own, with a nearly infinite force. With this kind of machine, the water within the mines can be directly pumped out, so that people don’t need to do it every day any longer.”

Cara sneered once more and asked pejoratively, “Are you talking about this?” She turned around and pulled a roll out of the stack of parchments and rolled it out, so that everyone could see it, “Although I don’t understand everything painted on this parchment, but who would believe that a bunch of dead, cold iron can be pieced together so that it can work independently like a living creature? Do you think we are all three years old children!”

She walked to the front of the brazier and threw the roll into the charcoal.

“No!” Cried Nightingale in vain, only able to stare blankly while the blueprint turned into ashes within the brazier.

“My patience has been exhausted, I will only give you one last chance.” while she threatened Nightingale, Cara took an iron skewer out of the brazier, whose end had already turned bright red from the heat. “If you plead guilty in front of all your sisters of the Witch Cooperation Association, admitting that you have been bewitched by the aristocracy, I can spare your life, but the whipping is unavoidable! After all this will be your lesson for cooperating with the enemy. But if you will still be stubborn, I will have to use this iron skewer to pierce your heart, nailing your body at the stake, so that everyone can learn from your wrongdoings.” After waiting for a second she said, “Do not miss my last offer of mercy, tell me now how have you decided?”

Holding the iron closer to Nightingale, so that she could have a better look, holding it so close that she could even feel the scorching heat coming from its tip. If she was still her cowardly self from before, she would have bowed and admitted defeat. But she had already bid farewell to her past self, no longer being that timid girl. Now she was Nightingale, a powerful witch, even in front of death she wouldn’t yield!

So she only closed her eyes, awaiting the arrival of her last moment. She didn’t know why, but an image of Roland appeared in front of her eyes.

“Stop!” Shouted someone suddenly, for a moment Nightingale hesitated, but then she opened her eyes. Nightingale could see that Wendy walked out of the crowd and said to Cara, “Mentor, look at the white cloth wrapped around your arm. We already have experienced so many deaths, do you really want to add another one?”

“What, even you are being deceived by her? Wake up, Wendy! What she said are all lies!”

“I do not know.” Wendy shook her head and continued, “I do not intend to go with her to Border Town, but I think that one of the things she said was right. We sisters should have the right to freely choose our own way of life.”

She turned around and loudly asked the crowd, “Which of you want to leave with her?”

No one within the crowd answered her, the scene fell into silence.

“So there is no problem when she is leaving alone.” said Wendy. “She didn’t harm the Witch Cooperation Association, so I really cannot watch you kill her.”

Nightingale had fully understood the meaning of Wendy’s words. She couldn’t help but get a sad feeling within her heart. Even Wendy didn’t completely believe what she had said. So because of this she kept silent when she needed her help when trying to convince everyone. But she was still the good-hearted and caring witch, even if she didn’t agree with her point of view, she would still lend a helping hand.

After Wendy’s remark, some whispering voices could be heard from within the crowd, and then a few people spoke up for her.

“Yes, since she is willing to return to the secular world, just let her go.”

“The Church and the pain have already taken so many sisters away from us. Respected mentor, please think about her punishment once more.”

“Everyone shut up!” Cara raged and shouted, “If I let her leave, what will we do when a second or a third Nightingale appear? Also if she sells the position of our camp to the Church, then we will have nowhere to escape!” the voices didn’t quiet down, so she lifted her arm to hit Nightingale with the iron skewer. But Wendy was a step faster, producing a strong breeze of wind, throwing Cara onto the ground and stopping her striking attempt.

Then she threw a coin into the air, raised and waved her hand, leading the rapid airflow to wrap around the coin and shooting it in the direction of Nightingale. When the airstream came near Nightingale it instantly disappeared. Yet the coin still maintained its speed, accurately hitting the God’s Locket of Retribution around Nightingale’s neck.

The transparent and prismatic stone released a hitting sound and instantly broke.

“Traitor!” Cara screamed furiously while standing up from the ground, Wendy and Ann belonged to her inner circle and were her right hands, but now one of them had betrayed her! Out of anger she threw out a shadow snake which flew with its mouth open in the direction of Wendy, biting her ferociously at the back of her hand.

At this moment the ropes fell to the ground, still maintaining their wrap up formation around the stake, only Nightingale wasn’t any longer at her place, bonded to the stake.

When thinking about Nightingale's ability, Cara felt cold sweat running down her back. She instantly mobilized all of her magic, creating magical snakes, gleaming with all possible color variations, which then poured out of her chest. Ordering them to form a wall, she herself rushed backwards – but Nightingale was still faster than her.

Only one step ... just after one step, she already appeared behind Cara. Thrusting her hands forward, the iron hammer, which actually should have pierced her own heart, went straight through Cara's body.

Chapter 59 Explorer

"Respected Mentor!" When they saw that Cara had fallen, all the witches around her began to panic.

"Idiots! Ahem..." Cara tried to cover the wound with her hand; she could no longer feel her lower body, "Quickly, go and kill the traitors for me!"

However, at that time Nightingale, who was carrying Wendy, had already turned into fading mist.

When they arrived back at the fork in the road, Nightingale realized that Wendy had fallen unconscious and her arm had turned black, the venom was spreading within her. Now, no hesitation was allowed and every second counted. She gnashed her teeth, ripped off the sleeve around Wendy's injured arm and then used it to bind the arm as tightly as she could. Then, she drew a dagger from the sole of her boot, and opened Wendy's wound.

After less than half a quarter of an hour later, she had cut open Wendy's arm. As long as the arm wasn't cut off, Nana would be able to heal her. When she had done everything she could do, Nightingale took out two straps and bound Wendy on her back. As long as Nightingale was able to bring Wendy to Border Town alive, Nana would be able to completely heal her.

But to keep her alive for so long... was it possible?

She alone already took three days on the way here, but now while carrying a person she would naturally need longer. If she were to go faster and accidentally slide down the trail, she wasn't sure if she could climb up again.

Wendy's arm was still losing blood; she would never last three or four days, but Nightingale had no other choice. She would never be able to leave Wendy – after all, she was only injured because of her.

"Do you need help?" Suddenly, a voice could be heard out of nowhere.

Nightingale was frightened and almost simultaneously opened her own world of fog, and assumed a defensive position.

However, there was no person in front of her.

"You don't need to be nervous, I didn't come to fight."

When Nightingale looked up, she could actually see a person flying in the air. Then, she asked, confused, "Who are you?"

“My name is Lightning, I just joined the Witch Cooperation Association recently. Since I’m always away, it is normal that you don’t know me.” She tried to smile easily, “However, I know you, the famous Nightingale, the Shadow Assassin.”

“Did Cara send you?”

“No, no, don’t misunderstand me,” Lightning slowly came downwards, setting her feet on the earth in the end, “I want to go with you.”

Nightingale couldn’t believe what she heard so she asked, “What?”

“You said, ah, we should have the right to freely choose our own way of life,” Lightning paused for a second and then said, “I choose to go with you, it’s that simple.”

“What is ...?” Nightingale was already completely disappointed by the reaction of her sisters; even Wendy hadn’t fully believed in her, but now this girl in front of her – she was actually still a child, around fourteen or fifteen years old, like Nana. She had fresh and neat short blonde hair, a face full of high spirits, and speech and self-confidence that didn’t match her age. Also, she didn’t wear the usual Witch Cooperation Association uniform. Instead, she wore a set of long trousers tailored to match her personal preferences, with many pockets and patches. This could also be said about her vintage leather jacket. The last part of her attire was a crude-looking belt that was fastened around her waist, only God knew where she had picked it up. At first glance, this just looked like a man’s clothing.

“You said that there’s a machine that huffs and puffs out black and white smoke, and that you can also create stones out of gray powder and even have powder that breaks apart mountains with a thunderous bang. I want to see everything!” Lightning was talking full of enthusiasm, “I’m determined to become an explorer who, of course, only goes to interesting places.”

What kind of a reason was this... Nightingale was startled, and she couldn’t make a sound, but even in this kind of conscious she could still tell that Lightning was not lying.

“I do not understand... If you want to be an adventurer, why would you leave the Witch Cooperation Association and join me?”

“Not an adventurer, I want to be an explorer!” Lightning stressed, “I’m not one of those who are only driven by money, who say that they are risk takers, but in fact are only doing the dirty work of others. Explorers only act out of interest! Are you asking why I don’t want to be with the Witch Cooperation Association...” explained Lightning confidently, “who are looking for the Holy Mountain, which should be the dream of every explorer? Cara doesn’t understand the spirit of adventure, she is completely immersed in the old book, only looking along the road for the characteristics described in the ancient book. She is walking through the Mountain range only searching for two weathered pillars rising out of the ground. If this is the way she does it, she will never find the real holy mountain. My father always stressed the point that an explorer must honestly record everything they see when looking for a fine horse by using only a picture! That’s just the way a explorer should handle the matter.

Although Nightingale would have loved to know what kind of father would teach such ideas and raise such an absolutely strange daughter, now wasn’t the right moment to chat. After all, Wendy’s life was at risk. Since she didn’t mean any harm, an additional helper would be appreciated.

In the end Nightingale only asked, “Your ability is flying?”

“Well yeah,” Lightning nodded and said proudly, “I can even carry you both, and flow forever forward, just like the wind.”

“Then I will have to trouble you.” Nightingale made sure that Wendy was strongly bound to her back and then she held on Lightning’s shoulders, and wrapped her hands around Lightning’s chest.

“Uh ... really heavy.” Lightning grit her teeth, and slowly rose upwards, “I think we probably won’t be as fast as the wind.”

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Thus, they began their strange form travel. When Lightning was exhausted, she would be carried by Nightingale, who took everyone through her world of fog. When Lightning was physically recovered, Nightingale would then climb onto Lightning’s back, so that she could fly forward again.

When both of them were exhausted and compelled to rest, Nightingale would find the time to ask her some basic questions – for example, who her father was, or the situation with her family.

Lightning said that her father was the world’s greatest explorer and that he even traveled across the ocean. He had an ocean sailing fleet and was affectionately called Thunder by his crew. However, she had lost her mother when she was still very young, so she didn’t have many memories of her. While on a sea voyage, her ship had run aground and capsized during a storm. Lightning was lucky and was rushed to an island by the ocean currents, but she lost all contact with her father. On the island, Lightning used the knowledge and skills her father taught her. She nearly spent two months alone on that island before she had awoken during the winter.

With her new ability she flew westwards across the channel to the south of Graycastle. After going through numerous setbacks, she joined the Witch Cooperation Association in the end. She felt that as long as she adhered to exploring, one day she would be able to come across a miracle and see her father again – as long as he was still alive.

Nightingale didn’t gain much useful information from this dialogue. Her ability could only be used to distinguish if the other side was lying, but she couldn’t determine the authenticity of the spoken content. In other words, as long as the other person said that the sun was square and didn’t doubt it, her ability would still show that they were telling the truth.

However, there was actually some information that could be inferred. For example, she must have been born in a wealthy family – families who were struggling with poverty wouldn’t have the time to explore. The fact that her father had an ocean-going fleet was also consistent with this judgment. Therefore, Thunder’s true identity was perhaps a wealthy ocean-crossing businessman. Lightning had blond hair, unlike the descendants of the Kingdoms of the mainland and more like the sea people from across the fjords.

Wendy had awoken several times. During these times, Nightingale would always try to let her drink as much water as possible, but after drinking, she lost her consciousness again. Nightingale could feel that Wendy’s body temperature was falling lower and lower. This made Nightingale feel increasingly anxious.

The two had no other alternative than hurrying, and the normally three-day-long path took them one and a half days to finish. At the entrance, the horses the prince had left for them were still tied to the ground, and the heap of straw in front of them was still only half eaten.

Nightingale climbed on one horse while carrying Wendy and let it run, followed by Lightning as she rushed non-stop towards Border Town.

Chapter 60 Arrangements

Border Town's second militia recruitment went much smoother than the first one. After all, during the winter, the food was rationed so the members of the militia would be given more and better food. On the weekly visiting day, there would be many soldiers who would secretly transfer bread and meat, which they had saved during the week, to their loved ones. Roland told Carter and Iron Axe to overlook these matters, because when those loved ones happily stayed at home with food, they would surely tell their neighbors where they got it.

This would be a perfect example of word-of-mouth recommendation, executed by his militia. The conversations between neighbors were much more effective than information announced by the city hall. At this point, most of the urban areas of the town already knew about it – His Highness' militia wasn't only well paid, but would also eat three meals every day. In addition, the fight with the demonic beast didn't seem so dangerous as previously thought. So during the second recruitment, there were many more candidates than during the first one, and even residents of the better districts came for registration.

The number of people who matched the requirements were much higher than the Roland had expected, so the second recruitment accepted 200 new members who would be trained by Carter during the weekdays. When the horn sounded, the new recruits would also rush to the wall to stand as auxiliary forces on standby.

The Chief Knight and the Assistant Minister raised some objections, like that at this point the new batch of militia wasn't qualified to fight against the demonic beasts, or that the newly recruited unit had more than twice the number of soldiers of the first unit, which wasn't necessary. Increases of the general public food rations and salary would lead to the increase of their financial expenditure, but even so, if they gave out more gold royals they would not achieve a significant effect.

However, Roland kept to his decision even though these people were not prepared to deal with the demonic beasts.

Yet he didn't dare to inform his men about the plan he came up with. No one was allowed to know that he intended to attack the Duke's stronghold – if he told them about his idea now, he was afraid that Barov and Carter would find it totally unacceptable.

The difference between the Longsong Stronghold and Border Town was just too big. As the official border stronghold of the Kingdom of Graycastle, its walls were ten feet tall, and was built brick-by-brick by stonemasons. With the Duke's private army and the six noble families' private armies and also the city's own soldiers, they could mobilize more than 1000 soldiers. In theory, it was impossible to win a siege when one could only rely on his own army of 300 – even if they were equipped with cross-era guns.

And because of the God's Stone of Retribution, the witches couldn't be used as an assassination squad; Roland had confirmed this point several times with Nightingale. Duke Ryan and the important people of the six families would purchase these stones, not leaving anything to spare – of course, for the outside world this purchase was called donation. If someone wanted to buy such a stone, they had to donate several dozens of gold royals. Banning the power of the witches within a certain range was the most powerful weapon against the so-called devil's servants and was the biggest annual income source for the Church.

Roland only had a chance when it was an open field fight.

Thanks to this era, most of the soldiers were drafted before a battle. So if the lord didn't want his drafted army to flee halfway, he was required to travel with his army, which would present a perfect opportunity to implement Roland's annihilation plan. However, he was still unsure about how he could take advantage of this opportunity. After all, his experience of war tactics came only from movies and television works, or historical stories, so he had no experience of his own.

In the end, he thought that since he didn't understand it, he should first do the things he was good at.

Roland wanted to stretch out a little and left his office to take a walk in his backyard.

The steam engine II was assembled and standing quietly in the middle of the field. At first glance, the new steam engine looked much cleaner than the previous one, and the welding marks were no longer as uneven as before. This masterpiece was possible thanks to Anna's new capabilities. Her green fire could drill into the tiniest gaps for welding, allowing for the individual parts to fit better together than in the past.

However, the most important difference between the steam engine II and the older steam engine wasn't the overall look, but the integration of a centrifugal governor. The first set of the automatic control system and feedback system in human history could be considered as a big milestone. Roland's governor's structure was very simple, consisting of two iron balls connected with a string to a main rod. At first glance it was just like the bamboo dragonflies that children played with during their childhood. If someone quickly rubbed the bamboo pole, the two rotating blades would be forced to automatically rise due to the centrifugal force.

For the governor, the equivalent for the fan was the two iron balls – when the steam engine worked, the main rod would be driven to rotate, and when the output increased too high, the balls would spin faster, gradually increasing their height under the influence of the centrifugal force, closing the valve bit by bit. When the output decreased, the ball's speed would also get slower, lowering their position under the influence of gravity, thereby increasing the valve output again. This always kept the steam engine running at a relatively fixed power level.

With speed control, it was now possible to let the steam engine II take over some of the more sophisticated processing tasks.

The gears produced by the blacksmiths were delivered and neatly placed in a corner of the shed.

Looking at them with the perspective of an industrial production line, none of these gears could be called qualified to work with and all of them would be thrown into the defective box, waiting to be recycled. But in terms of this age, they were rare works of art – the design of involute gears were

created with a sense of harmony. The gears that had been immersed in lard emitted a unique metallic sheen.

In addition to produced gears, carpenters who were responsible for the planning had already built the foundation as well as other parts that were already prepared. He let the door guards call for Anna so that they could begin to assemble the first steam-powered borer together.

They began Roland's plan, which he thought was the most effective plan to mass-produce rifles.

Relying only on blacksmiths who had to manually knock out a barrel was extremely time-consuming, but also very boring for the blacksmiths themselves. Now, he only had to take out an iron bar and he could directly drill the barrel out with the borer. So in one day, he would be able to produce more than ten barrels.

At the same time, by replacing the head, the boring machine couldn't only be used to cut but also to engrave the rifling. With rifled flintlocks, the firing accuracy would be further improved.

Thus, he was confident that before the end of winter, the two groups of militia, nearly 300 people, could all be armed with rifles.

However, Roland couldn't guarantee that his army would be able to calmly load, aim, and shoot at their targets in the face of charging knights. It was more realistic to think that they would rather drop their weapons, turn tail, and run away. After all, the training time of the two troops were too short, they had no combat experience against other humans.

So, he had to bring out a more powerful weapon onto the battlefield, a weapon which could defeat the enemy even before they could start their own assault.

That was artillery.

As the God of War in the history of human warfare, the destruction and deterrence brought by artillery wasn't reproducible by guns. A six-pound field artillery had the range to attack the other side before they were even able to gather. The mixed-up armies of this era would surely be unable to maintain discipline in combat while being under constant fire. As long as he could get three or four field guns, his enemy would never have the chance to charge.

Roland was following a step-by-step plan – with his manual milling machines, which could be used to process usable steering gear, he would be able to produce the speed-controllable steam engine II, and with this machine he could create his own borer. With steam boring, he would be able to process a variety of gun barrels and cannon barrels.

There was still at least two months until the end of the Months of the Demons, so as long as his plans played out smoothly, Border Town's militia would have the power to compete with the Duke in a full out battle.