

Witch 531

Chapter 531: The Romance

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"Is this really okay?"

"What?"

"Sending Iffy, Softfeathers, and Lotus to Border Town," Ashes hugged Tilly from behind while Tilly sat at the desk, and said, "It must have been Heidi Morgan's idea, am I right?"

Ever since she had heard about the existence of the Sealine, Princess Tilly spent almost all her time in the study room. Stacked on her desk were piles of books, some of which were from Roland, and the others retrieved from the ruins. Seeing Tilly's figure behind all these books, Ashes felt sorry for her.

"Um." Putting down the quill, Tilly slowly leaned back. "Morgan didn't want me to have connections with the commoners all by myself, and I had no reason to refuse her."

"But the commoner is your elder brother. What makes her think she can choose for you?"

"Because she's also one of the royal members." Tilly shook her head, smiling. "The higher the status is, the looser the blood ties are. It's true in every kingdom." Heidi knew full well about it, and that was why she had made the decision.

"She intends to fight for His Highness Roland's support with you?" Ashes frowned...

"Not just yet. This time I think she only wants to probe the situation."

"Then why did you agree with her?!" Ashes loosened her arms and said with a low voice, "It seems like I need to talk to her."

It was Princess Tilly's affinity and leniency that won her the trust of the witches who used to be abused and suppressed by the church, and now they could bond together. But it didn't mean someone could regard her lenience as weakness, and test her on the basis of her trust...

Ashes was about to turn when Tilly grabbed her arm. "Why not? As I said, I had no reason to refuse her. Sleeping Island is our home. All the witches here are freewomen. I won't stop them from doing anything as long as they don't harm anyone. And..." She let out a sigh. "Sending them to the Western Region isn't a bad idea."

"Not a bad idea?" Ashes asked with bewilderment.

"Have you ever thought about why the witches at the Bloodfang Association were initially the same as other witches, but gradually became different?"

Ashes pondered for a while. "Because their lives became stable?"

"Exactly." Tilly nodded. "In the past, the church posed a heavy burden on their hearts. Everybody had to stick together in order to survive. But now the churches in the Fjord Islands have been eradicated and

Sleeping Island has offered a relatively relaxing environment, so people think differently. This is quite normal. The Witch Cooperation Association is different. We're a compound group made of several witch organizations, so blindly suppressing them won't work. In order to let them cooperate like in the old times, we need a powerful enemy."

Ashes frowned and asked, "Do you mean... demons?"

"The enemies deep in the Fertile Plains, the fiasco of the Union, the upcoming third Battle of Divine Will... they can learn all these by themselves, which will be more effective than me telling them." Tilly smiled and said, "Besides, in Border Town, there're much more to be seen."

Princess Tilly stood up, and walked through the door towards the castle in the backyard and opened the door. "They'll see that non-combat witches can play irreplaceable roles, commoners can be as capable as witches, and they'll witness the amazing effects when everybody works together. Just like this door. When it's pushed open, a broader world can be seen."

Ashes quietly stared at this woman bathed in sunlight, and could not utter a word. Tilly's gray hair flew with the sea breeze, reflecting the shining light. She was astonishingly beautiful even viewed from behind. Time stood still. What was left in this narrow study was only her and Ashes.

After a long while, Tilly turned and smiled slyly. "I have some special reasons to have chosen Iffy and Softfeathers. This must be perceptible to Roland."

Anna nudged Roland sleeping beside her.

"Time to get up."

"A moment." Roland turned over, cuddled her, and smelled her hair.

After returning to the City of Neverwinter from King's City, he had spent the whole night with Anna. The temporary separation had made their reunion particularly passionate. As a result, neither of them got out of bed the next morning. For the first time, Anna skipped her magic power practice, not because she did not want to, but because Roland would not let her leave.

Of course, she did not want to reject Roland's wooing either.

From noon to the dusk, their bedroom was filled with romantic atmosphere. When taking breaks, they just sat in bed and talked about the things that had happened in the two cities recently, and their lunch was brought to the bedroom by a maid. Of course, when the maid came, Anna sank her head into the quilt. Lowering his head, Roland could see a pair of sapphire-like eyes sparkling at his chest area.

When he gently caressed Anna's back, she involuntarily moaned as lightly as a cat purring. After a year's growth, Anna was not the weak, thin girl he had met in prison a year prior. Now when curling up her body, she could perfectly embed into Roland's arms. When he kissed her earlobe from the back, he could see her cheeks gradually flush and her eyelashes tremble. It made her look very cute.

After a long while, she pushed Roland away once again.

"Wendy and the other girls will be coming back soon. This time there'll be new witches. You need to go wash up." Anna turned around and faced him with a serious look.

"Mmm." Roland briefly replied. He knew that he could not postpone anymore, so he kissed her lightly on the lips and rolled out of bed. First, he helped Anna get dressed, and then put on a coat for himself.

The basin of water on the table had already cooled down, but this was not a problem for Anna. A line of Blackfire shot into the water, and steam began to rise in the blink of an eye. After washing up, Roland sent Anna back to the bedroom and returned to his office on the third floor. At least he could make it look like he was working diligently, before the other witches came back.

Fifteen minutes later, Lightning and Maggie flew into his office through the French window.

"Your Majesty, they're here."

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"Who could have thought that you'd become the king of Graycastle in only a month." Breeze entered the castle hall first, followed by another four witches, among whom were Lotus and Honey. Roland was familiar with them, but he did not know the other two. "If Wendy hadn't told me, I really wouldn't have believed it. If Tilly finds out, she'll be very surprised."

Roland walked up to welcome them. "I haven't held an enthronement yet, so it's okay if you just address me with my old title."

"But you're indeed a deserved king," Breeze said, bowing.

Lotus and Honey imitated Breeze's move and bowed exaggeratedly, but yet the other two witches only greeted him by putting one hand on the chest. Two showed the joy of reunion, while the other two showed skepticism.

Roland felt surprised.

However, under these circumstances, he would not show his emotion. Making a gesture of inviting them, he said with a smile, "However, you had an arduous trip. Now enjoy tonight's feast. Make yourself comfortable. This is your home too."

Chapter 532: A Tempting Idea

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After the banquet, Lotus and Wendy were called into Roland's office.

"Did everything on Sleeping Island go well?" he said to Lotus with a smile, "I hope I didn't bring you any trouble during Tilly's absence."

"Of course not." Lotus nodded and then whispered, "Oh... well, you gave me a scarf as a present last time, and I haven't thanked you yet."

"Don't be so formal." Roland waved his hand slightly. He knew that they would become less familiar with him after a period of time away, but this did not mean their personal relationship would be broken. Actually, this unfamiliarity was just temporary... He believed they would soon be able to be comfortable in this union again as long as he treated them as usual. "It seems that a lot has changed here, but it basically remained the same as when you left—please just make the City of Neverwinter your home."

"Yes." Wendy touched her head. "You're still our sisters."

"Okay." Lotus lowered her head in a show of embarrassment, however, she seemed to be more relaxed.

"After you arrived at the castle, I saw something weird... Aren't Iffy and Softfeathers witches from Sleeping Island?" Roland changed the topic because he had noticed that, whenever they discussed and talked about the old days, the two witches seemed alienated from others. Although they would speak now and then, they appeared to be less communicative than Sylvie, Evelyn, Candle and other witches who talked with each other joyfully. He did not know if it was just an illusion, but he felt that Evelyn and Candle feared these two witches a little.

"Yes, they did come from Sleeping Island, however, they're a little different..." Lotus briefly introduced their background. "I don't know why Lady Tilly sent witches from the Bloodfang Association here, either."

"Iffy is a combat witch?" Roland asked a little shocked.

"Yeah. She can summon a cage made from magic power and thereby capture more powerful enemies than herself. Even Ashes, if she's not wearing the God's Stone of Retaliation, would find it hard to get out of, once trapped.

"What about Softfeathers?" Wendy asked with curiosity.

"Although she is not a combat witch, she is also powerful," muttered Lotus. "Any object she is touching becomes sticky as long as she touches it, and they can't be separated once they're stuck together unless the magic power fails—but according to what she said, the stickiness can last for a long time as long as she uses enough magic power."

"This kind of ability could be widely used, right?" Roland was very surprised and exclaimed. "That's unbelievable! The Wolfheart Kingdom's witch, Heidi Morgan, agreed to send these powerful witches to us?"

"Well, the members of the Bloodfang Association are very powerful. They not only have many combat witches but the rest of the non-combat witches have superior abilities as well. They did a lot for the quick construction of Sleeping Island." Lotus sighed and appeared to be very reluctant to admit this. "However, they always feel they're superior to others, and often bully the witches with less abilities. The number of witches in the Fjords would have dropped by more than half if it wasn't for Lady Tilly's great efforts to stop them."

"So, this may be the reason why Evelyn and Candle looked afraid in front of them," he thought. "OK, I got it. Just have a good rest today." Roland comforted Lotus and then looked at Wendy, saying, "Well, please arrange for their accommodation and keep the witches of the Bloodfang Association away from them. I'll test their abilities in detail tomorrow."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Wendy said while stroking her chest.

After the two witches left, Nightingale appeared beside him with a fillet in her mouth and asked, "Do we need to ask someone to keep an eye on them?"

"There won't be much of a problem since they still belong to Sleeping Island." Roland shrugged and said. "The witches to the Fjords have never had to experience life and death together like the witches of the Witch Cooperation Association. They're blended with many other witch groups. In reality, it isn't strange for them to have such opinions." As the saying went, it was very odd for a party to form without any smaller factions. Things like this will also happen in the Witch Union sooner or later when it expands. However, the competition among factions also has its merits. Internal competition will make the Union become stronger as long as the competition is benign. I'm just puzzled about why Tilly sent combat witches here. If she just wants me to train them on behalf of her, she can also send assistant witches here, not to mention the fact that Breeze still stands by her."

"She probably clarified it in her letter." Nightingale guessed.

"Oh, you remind me of the letter." Roland patted his forehead and took the envelope from the drawer. He spread it out on the table. In addition to the five witches, Tilly also brought a stack of ancient books and a letter in her own handwriting. Due to the banquet, he had yet to check them.

In her letter, Tilly introduced the background of the ancient books and the odd parts of these books in detail. Then, she put forward her ideas about Sealine and hoped that Roland could help Thunder build a ship that could go against the current. Actually, Thunder had told Roland himself about the latter part. What Roland was shocked most was about the first half. He thought to himself, "The books are from different ages and places and they were collected and put into these remains. Some of the contents of these books had even disappeared for hundreds of years, which meant someone had come across the remains on the seafloor. Who were these people?"

On the back of the letter was a brief introduction to the ability of the two new witches, and what Roland cared about most was the last paragraph at the end of the passage.

"What we know about this world is still vague and obscure, and our knowledge is not even as thorough as the Unions four hundred years ago. If we want to defeat our enemies, we should know about our enemies first—In this regard, their abilities could probably help us."

After reading the letter, he couldn't help but fall into his thoughts.

"Know about your enemies... offer help... what's Tilly trying to say?" He thought.

Roland read the introduction to their abilities again, and suddenly he came up with a shocking idea.

Does Tilly want...

"Oh, no, that would be insane," thought Roland. He shook his head quickly. However, once the idea had crossed his mind, it would not leave. "Though risks do exist, the reward would be very handsome. In fact, those boxes of magic stones left by Agatha are really tempting. If they are made into sigils, then they would be as significant as a steam engine..." Actually, he had thought about it before, but it was very difficult to put into practice. So, he had to give it up. Now, with the help of Iffy and Breeze, he seemed to suddenly get closer to his goal.

"What does the letter say?" Noticing his strange look, Nightingale bent down and touched his forehead. "Hey, are you all right?"

"Not very good. I almost have a heart attack." Roland laughed helplessly. "Unfortunately, Tilly just left me to make the decision without any explanation."

"What kind of decision?" She asked curiously.

"To capture the demons," Roland said slowly, one word at a time.

Chapter 533: An Unexpected Incident

The next morning, Roland took the witches and other related personnel out of the city. They went to a place located in the North of the city wall near the Misty Forest to conduct a magic power test for Breeze, Iffy and Softfeathers.

Nightingale, Wendy, Carter and Iron Axe tagged along. The First Army sealed off the grasslands nearby and Leaf guarded the forest.

Softfeathers was the first to take the test.

She looked as tall as Honey, was at most 1.4 meters in height and had long, brownish-red hair with bangs just nicely covering her eyebrows. Around the age of 16, she had already been awakened for four years, which was quite early among witches. It meant she had experienced the Demonic Torture four times. As a result, she had much more magic power than most of the young witches. The amount of her power was about half of the amount Anna possessed before her adulthood.

Softfeathers turned out to be very skillful in controlling her magic. She could turn an entire object into something very sticky or precisely make one side or a spot sticky. Softfeathers did this without consuming much of her power. Nightingale could hardly notice any changes in her power during the test.

"How long can this object stay sticky?" Roland asked.

"If I use all my power to make one stone adhere to another, it'll last for decades," she answered and then further explained, "but I've never tried that. It's my own guess based on the consumption of my magic power."

"Then what's the biggest thing that you've applied your power to?" Roland asked

Softfeathers answered, "A seawall." A little satisfaction could be seen on her expressionless face when she was talking about her accomplishment. "During a high tide, there was an arm-thick crack in a section of the wall on Sleeping Island. As Lotus was not there, I immediately turned the crack sticky and filled it up with linen and pebbles to seal the break. Otherwise, the wall couldn't have sustained the shock of the waves." She finished.

Listening to her, Roland somehow felt that she was asking for praise.

"Great job," he said while nodding.

Softfeathers quickly turned calm after she was recognized. From her words and actions, it was hard to tell that she was an underage child. Unlike other children, she was used to concealing her feelings. "It may be caused by her past. What kind of life had the witches in the Bloodfang Association lived before they went to Sleeping Island?" Roland thought and sighed.

Breeze was the next to take the test.

She gave a graceful curtsy and said, "I've regretted for a while that I couldn't stay longer in the Western Region. I'm so happy to get this chance now to come here again. If you need my help, just let me know."

"To make up for it, you must fully enjoy your stay here in the City of Neverwinter. If you need anything, you can ask Wendy for help," Roland explained with a smile.

Breeze was about 25 years old, a little older than Nightingale. She brought comfort and happiness to the people around her, like a spring breeze. No one would guess she was actually a combat witch. Her power was called "field control". She could control the bodies of anyone within five meters.

Her ability was of no use when facing long-distance attacks, such as crossbow bolts and spear throwers. However, she remained almost invincible in any close combat.

As an ability of summoning type, it would also be affected by the God's Stone of Retaliation. She could summon the "field control" over 10 times a day and each time she would only use half of her magic power. While performing it, she would not be hindered from freely moving around either. The "field control" was invisible to naked eyes, which made it extremely hard for the enemies to defend themselves from her surprise attacks. Once she got within five meters of her enemies, she would have the full control of the situation.

Obviously, it was an excellent ability to observe demons in the short distance.

The last witch to take the test was Iffy.

She seemed to be around 20 years old, lean and fit, and wearing a tight black leather outfit with knee-high boots. Her waist-length, chestnut brown hair looked shiny in the sunlight.

Iffy did not know that Tilly chose her to come to the Western Region because she possessed an indispensable skill to capture demons with her "magic cage". In a blink of an eye, she could conjure up cages formed by her magic to capture the enemies close to her and squeeze the cages to crush them. Anything in her cage was weightless as well. This meant, even if she captured an elephant, she could also easily carry it back to the City of Neverwinter.

As the "magic cage" ability was crucial to the success of his plan, Roland carefully asked all the details about her ability, "What's the biggest thing we can capture?"

"Different sizes have different demands for my magical power," she answered. "But even a whale in the sea can't escape from my grasp."

"How many can you capture a time?" Roland continued.

"Two," she said and then spread her hands. "I only have two hands, Your Majesty."

Roland continued his enquiry, "Can anything escape?"

"No, even Ashes can't get out of it unless I release her," Iffy explained.

"Uh..." When Roland paused to think about other curiosities he wanted the answer, Iffy took an initiative to make a suggestion. "Why don't you find someone to test my ability? I think Maggie is a good choice. I've heard that she's evolved and can transform into a strong monster. If you witness that even something like her can't get out of my trap, you won't worry about my ability anymore."

Roland could not help but agree with her since the monster Maggie transformed into was just like the mount of demons, which the witches would probably encounter in their quest to capture them. After thinking for a while, Roland nodded at Nightingale and said, "Tell Leaf to call Maggie here."

Maggie and Lightning would fly over the Misty Forest when they were not on patrol. Guided by Leaf, they could both have fun and eat delicious food, such as picking tasty Bird Beak Mushrooms and taking eggs from birds' nests in the forest. Because of all the treats, when Maggie was turned into a pigeon, she now was as big as a bald eagle. However, when she transformed back into her real self, she was still a little girl with very long white hair.

Soon, they appeared in the sky.

Maggie landed on the prince's head as usual and said, "Maggie is here. Cool! What can I do for you?"

Roland briefly told her about the test and said, "Please turn yourself into a giant bird demon and try to break free from Iffy's magical cage."

"I see, Cool!"

Maggie flew up. She instantly changed into a huge bird and obscured the sun. Looking at her, Roland somehow felt her monstrous bird form now seemed much bigger in size than the initial one she had during her first evolvment.

"Let's begin," he said to Iffy.

Iffy sneered, with a flicker of contempt in her eyes. She opened her right hand, spreading all the five fingers. Meanwhile, a dozen of purple light beams immediately appeared over Maggie's head and swiftly formed a sphere, trapping Maggie inside.

The "cage bars" were not very thick, but they were so stagnant that no matter how hard Maggie tried to bite or scratch them, she could not free herself. Iffy controlled the cage with great ease and seemed to be able to capture a demon with her left hand at the same time.

When Roland was about to tell her to stop the test, Iffy suddenly squeezed her right hand into a fist.

The cage instantly contracted to tie up Maggie tightly, making her scream in pain.

Chapter 534: The Value of Witches

"What're you doing?!"

"Let her go!"

Hearing so many complaints, Iffy twitched her lips and raised her right hand. The cage was gone and Maggie fell onto the ground.

"Damn you!" A fast-flying golden figure lunged at Iffy. It was Lightning!

However, just as she raised her fist, the magic cage locked her inside. It was impossible for her to touch Iffy even though she was only an arm's length away.

"Get out of here. This is none of your business!"

Iffy angrily tossed the cage away, sending it tumbling over and over on the ground. Lightning bumped inside the cage until it rolled out of the area that Iffy could affect.

She wiped the dirt off her face and was about to bound towards Iffy again, when she saw Roland walking toward her, hand raised.

WHACK!

The sharp slap left everyone stunned, especially Iffy.

She did not bother to cover her red cheek, staring at Roland in disbelief. After a while, she slowly lowered herself on one knee and said, "Pardon me for my lack of manners, Your Majesty."

Roland was also surprised by himself. He had been reluctant to slap a girl, but seeing Maggie fall onto the ground, he had burst into anger and stepped forward uncontrollably as if witnessing his own daughter being bullied by some mean, naughty kid.

"Why did you do that?" He shouted at Iffy.

"Your Majesty, her potential will explode during a crisis, giving her much greater strength. I just want you to have accurate test results." Iffy said in a cold voice as if it was simply something trivial. "It seems that even an evolved non-combat witch still can't compete with a combat witch."

Roland was speechless in shock. What made Iffy think that it was reasonable to hurt her own kind just to get the test results? What kind of environment had she lived in?

He then turned and looked toward Wendy carrying the white-haired girl in her arms. "How's she doing?" he asked.

"She's alright. She's not heavily injured, except for some reddening welts and swelling," Wendy answered. She rolled up Maggie's sleeve with a frown, revealing red bruises on her white arm from the magic cage.

"Coo." Maggie buried her head into Wendy's arms, sounding rather grieved.

"Relax, Your Majesty," Iffy said plainly, "I'm always aware of how much power I use. Those areas of redness will recover within two days..."

"Apologize to her!" Roland angrily interrupted.

Iffy opened her mouth in surprise and blushed with embarrassment. "I'm sorry, Your Majesty"

"No, not me. Apologize to Maggie."

She bit her lip and lowered her head, without saying a word. Looking at Iffy who was insisting on not apologizing to Maggie, Roland felt so annoyed he wanted to laugh.

It looked like the situation on Sleeping Island was worse than he had imagined. If the Bloodfang Association witches dared to behave like this in the territory of a Lord, they must be even more arrogant on Sleeping Island.

Roland now found himself in an awkward situation. He could neither change Iffy's attitude towards non-combat witches, nor send her back to Sleeping Island. He believed that no matter how hard he punished Iffy, she would never see anything wrong with her own deeds and attitude. If he simply punished her and asked her to go back, he would lose Tilly's trust because he would fail to solve the problem for Sleeping Island. He had promised Tilly that she could always count on him with any problem.

He would have to break her pride of her power, in order for her to realize her fault.

"You think you're more powerful than the non-combat witches, so you can despise them?" Roland asked in a cold, hard voice. "You're not that strong."

Hearing this, Iffy promptly looked up at him defiantly.

"You think combat witches are superior to assistant witches because you're the ones who can protect your kind, right?" Roland said, "This is ridiculous. You can't win a fight, entirely by yourself."

Iffy frowned tightly and looked angry. "Your Majesty, do you mean to say that a non-combat witch can defeat me?"

"Yes, you don't believe it?" Roland sneered. "Most witches in the Witch Union could easily defeat you, even if they've never used their power in a fight." He looked at Lightning who was standing aside, startled by his words at first. She quickly understood and nodded to him.

"That's just your imagination."

"OK, how about a duel between you and Maggie, " he said in a deep voice. "She'll show you why you should never look down upon the assistant witches."

"What?" Iffy's eyes widened in surprise. "You mean a fight between me and the dumb pigeon?"

"The duel is set for tomorrow, " Roland said each word slowly. "You'll see that you're not as strong as you think."

Returning to their place, they saw lunch awaiting on the table in the living room.

There was meat soup, bread, mushrooms and stewed vegetables.

Apparently, they did not need to go to the hall for lunch.

"Wow? We get meat and bread?" Softfeathers asked in surprise. "I thought we would only get cold water."

"Is this for the duel? He doesn't want me to fight in hunger?" Iffy sneered. "He has too much faith in that stupid bird."

"Maybe the dishes are drugged with something, like laxatives." Softfeathers suggested.

Completely ignoring the other witch's words, Iffy grabbed a piece of bread and stuffed it into her mouth. "If you're worried about that, you can always just not eat it."

"I don't care. I'm not the one going to a duel." Softfeathers rolled her eyes. She climbed up to sit on a stool and took a dish of roasted mushrooms, saying, "Hey, do you have to do this? Lady Heidi asked us to confirm the situation here, but she never told you to irritate the lord."

"It's an exciting opportunity," Iffy said.

"Really?" Softfeathers asked with great interest. "That's why you're doing this?"

Iffy turned and stared at Softfeathers coldly until the little girl dropped her head and mumbled. "Fine, forget about it."

Ever since a group of Sleeping Island witches had come back from the Western Region, the atmosphere was bad for the Bloodfang Association. According to the returning witches, Lady Tilly's elder brother had built a domain where witches could live like ordinary people and even the assistant witches were well treated. This story had made the useless assistant witches on Sleeping Island very excited. Lady Heidi thought that it was Tilly who made up this story to gain the support of the many assistant witches. A lord would naturally value combat witches more, they could conquer and bring lands and power to him.

During today's test however, Iffy was really surprised to find that this lord seemed to treat all the witches equally,

But it was not what surprised her the most.

She was most surprised by Maggie.

Iffy could not believe that a stupid bird so clumsy in speech was so popular among the witches and liked by the lord, and that everyone was really beaming with a smile when they saw the fool. On Sleeping Island, Maggie was just a pet, a dispensable role!

Seeing Maggie, Iffy was full of anger and jealousy.

Iffy thought it was a betrayal that Maggie had left Sleeping Island and was living happily together with the witches here.

This was the real reason Iffy had targeted Maggie.

However, things had really gotten out of her control.

She still found it hard to believe that His Majesty had made such a ridiculous suggestion and arranged a duel between her and a pigeon.

She had to accept it. After all, getting information about the Western Region was one of her tasks here. Another task was to attract the lord's attention by showing her value and ability.

She was confident that she could make it clear to His Majesty that there was a huge gap between the combat witches and the weak assistant witches.

Chapter 535: The Gun of a Protector

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It was twilight when Roland returned to the castle with the duel affairs settled.

"Do you really think Maggie will win?" Nightingale appeared behind Roland the moment he stepped into the office.

"What're you worried about? You know that she's been learning marksmanship all this time from Lightning, your own apprentice!" consoled Roland. "She's brave enough, and she dared to fight with the demon in her beast personification at the critical juncture of Devil's Town exploration last time. The only thing to be concerned is whether she'll shoot at her peer."

Maggie would suffer more startle than pain, and Iffy was not doomed to death. Nevertheless, this disdainful attitude towards non-combat witches was no different from a bomb in the platoon. Until she learned this impressive lesson and repented thoroughly for her misdeeds, Roland did not dare to bring her out to catch the demons.

The most profound lesson would be Maggie defeating Iffy.

Undoubtedly, the gun was a weapon that could enhance the ability of assistant witches so that they could acquire more power for fighting. To avoid accidental death, Roland had deliberately had Soraya produce a batch of rubber bullets. The metal head had been replaced with a multi-layer wrapped coating. This softened the bullet from interior to exterior and prevented it from entering a human body without weakening its full power. Its huge kinetic energy would be totally imposed on a human body as the bullet was gradually deformed, causing a pain severe enough to make the target lose any ability to defend. That was why it was also known as the Ability-losing Bullet.

"I want to see her." With discontent, Nightingale disappeared into the Mist.

Roland sighed gently as he clearly heard the crack of an arming gun from his side. He would have called for Nana if Iffy did not loosen Maggie as was expected.

It was rather obvious that Maggie dreaded the witches of the Bloodfang Association, which proved that they were used to doing such things on Sleeping Island. When considering Cara of the Witch Cooperation Association and then the inferior feelings Evelyn and Candle had when they had initially arrived, or even the Witch Union more than 400 years ago, there was no doubt that the idea of combat witches being nobler than others came naturally. In other words, the capable combat witches would certainly grasp more power when oppressed by foreign enemies. However, the force of gunpowder and firearms was strong enough to shorten the gap, Roland mused. Tilly might believe in him further if he could convert their thoughts.

"You should remember there is nothing to be worried about and you shall shoot directly at her until you empty the cartridge. You need to make her burst into tears and kneel down begging for mercy. Do you understand?" Lightning shouted in a high pitch, "Even if you were using normal bullets, Nana is here, ready for any accidents. Plus, there is the coating head made by Soraya. Only by shooting more bullets towards her, can you release yourself!"

"Hmm..." Maggie was leaning on the bed with her hair shielding her cheeks. "I understand."

"Not yet!" Lightning pushed her long, white hair aside and said, "You don't want to beat her, do you? If you show her any mercy, I'll never take you exploring. A coward can never be an explorer!"

Maggie looked to be struggling. "I'm not..."

"She's definitely not a coward." Another voice came from behind them. "A coward does not dare to fight with a demon. Not to mention, she saved my life."

Appearing from the Mist, Nightingale walked to the bedside and strongly struck Lightning in the forehead. "Who has taught you to speak this way!"

Lightning held her forehead and then curled her lip. "I'm just worried that she'll have cold feet."

After heaving a sigh, Nightingale took Maggie's hands in her own. "Listen, this isn't just about you and her. His Majesty has made these arrangements with the purpose of making witches in the Bloodfang Association change their attitudes towards other witches and regret their mistakes. Remember Evelyn and Candle? There're many witches who had experiences similar to theirs on Sleeping Island. If you can teach Iffy a lesson, you're actually doing them a favor to some extent."

After a pause, Nightingale continued, "So, you're not just fighting for yourself. You're also fighting to protect us, just like what you did when fighting against the demon last time."

"En..." Maggie nodded gently, blinking her eyes.

"One more thing. His Majesty Roland also promises that if you win, the ice cream and pepper barbecue shall be supplied without limitation for one week, just for you."

"Coo!" Her eyes suddenly lit up.

The next day, in addition to the guards responsible for site-clearing, there were more than ten witches standing on the grassland outside the city wall. They were centered around Roland, congruously making bright cheers for Maggie.

"I won't cheer for you." Yawned Softfeathers. "You can't hear it anyway."

"You don't need to do that." Iffy scoffed as she slowly walked to the divided central field and looked at Maggie without emotion. Maggie stood opposite her, capped by her long hair. If victory was judged by the number of supporters, the church would have already unified the whole continent. "It's not too late to give in. I trust you don't want to let His Majesty down."

"I'll never give in, coo!"

She was slightly stunned. Since when did this bird dare to speak so affirmatively in the face of her?
"Really? Then get ready to fall from the sky into a cage like a dog!"

"You can't trap me," Maggie raised her head and said. "The only one who can catch me in the sky is Lightning!"

The moment the start whistle rang, Iffy went straight towards Maggie. She was sure that Maggie could not beat a person with combat training like herself, even though Maggie was helped by the power of God's Stone of Retaliation. His Majesty Roland had wrongly judged the fighting ability of combat witches. They relied not only on their power for fighting, they could also convert their body into a deadly weapon. By virtue of extraordinary physical fitness and restorability, witches could always withhold harsher training. She was confident that she could make her opponent throw in the towel in ten movements, even if it were a knight armed to the teeth.

With her wings rapidly spreading, Maggie changed into a bluebird and aimed skyward.

"Is this the stunt that you mentioned?" Iffy stretched out her arms in the direction Maggie had escaped. Her magic power did not reach anything. "This is a duel. Do you think you have anywhere to flee?"

"Chirp, chirp." Flying higher and higher, the bird soon faded away. Only a series of silvery tweets remained.

Frowning, Iffy looked to the sky and suddenly a faintly discernible shadow in the direction of the rising sun appeared within her sight.

"Is she going to give me an unexpected attack hiding under the sunlight?" Iffy could not help but sneer. This might have been a good idea, but even with her eyes covered she was still able to sense any object within ten steps by using her magic power—a derivative skill that had awakened at her adulthood.

Moreover, what harm could a fist-sized bluebird do to her? To win, her opponent would inevitably have to change into that ferocious monster again!

While waiting for Maggie to return, the earth suddenly darkened as a cloud shielded the light of sunshine. Iffy then saw a bird falling from the sky.

What a wretch! It looked like Maggie was not lucky at all!

She extended her hands without hesitation. The victory would soon be hers!

But there was nothing... In front of her was only magic power. She felt no sign of Maggie whom she had expected to rush forward.

Maggie had abruptly stopped moving when 20 steps away from Iffy!

To Iffy's surprise, Maggie recovered her human avatar in midair and pulled a short silvery stick from her pocket.

Was she mad?

Despite not having wings, Maggie did not drop directly to the ground. Her white hair had lifted and opened in a wing shape allowing her to descend slowly. Meanwhile, the stick sputtered a ball of flame with a loud bang!

Iffy was clear that something had intruded the boundary of her magic power, but it could not have been Maggie, a crossbow, bolt or stone. It was not until she fetched out her cage that her belly was severely assaulted by something like a hammer, followed by her thighs and then calves. The loud sound rang continuously with the mud on the ground continually splashing. She could not make any sound due to intense pain and her seemingly broken feet were unable to support her body.

Iffy fell to the ground and clutched her stomach with her whole body huddled up. Her consciousness was becoming blurry.

Dimly, she saw a white figure falling in front of her. With one last effort, she poised her hands, but the magic no longer responded to her summon.

"You lost, coo."

These were the last words she heard before she fainted.

Chapter 536: The Dream (Part I)

"Annie, I'm tired." Iffy complained.

"Hold on for a little longer. We're almost there," Annie said.

They were walking on hard gravel. Each step they took would cause a drilling pain in their feet. Iffy really wanted to stop but Annie was strongly pulling her forward and tightly clutching her hand. Annie did not even slightly slow down her pace no matter if they were crossing through the brambles and thorns or the ice cold stream. From behind, she looked as determined as a mountain.

"Annie, I'm really tired..."

Iffy begged again.

She felt as if her soles were on fire, her entire body was in unceasing pain, and her chest was feeling compressed no matter how hard she inhaled. She felt as if she was dying.

Annie softly sighed and leaned forward to listen to the ground, and she pointed at a raised stone not far away and said, "Let's take a rest over there."

The very last trace of strength rose from the bottom of Iffy's heart once she heard that it was time to take a rest. She clenched her teeth and quickly walked to the giant rock and collapsed there; she even wished to stay there for eternity at that moment.

Annie did not instantly sit down. She surrounded both sides of the rock with the broken branches that she found nearby for camouflage. It felt like a cozy nest with both of the branches and the natural ceiling-like tilted rock. Unfortunately, they were still on an uneven, rocky ground that hurt their butts and the small space was not big enough for both of them to lie down.

"The church won't find us since we've run this far."

"Don't let your guard down, and it's still not far enough from them."

Annie was as alert as a wildcat, always with her ears up, listening and monitoring everything around her. However, she was a lot tougher than the wildcat. She was accustomed to the pain and compared with the cruel Judgement Army, Annie was more like a silent predator.

"Does the Bloodfang Association... really exist?"

They were two of the five witches who were searching for the Bloodfang Association. After leaving Graystone Stronghold, they had been intercepted by the church, so they had decided to act separately. Iffy had been walking towards the east for three days and nights before bumping into Annie while the others were totally out of contact.

"Of course," Annie said while rubbing her toes. "I heard that they're on the Wolf Tooth Island across the sea."

"But, how could we cross the sea?"

"Just walk towards the shore and look for a boat." Annie comforted. "Don't worry, just leave it to me."

"Okay," Iffy softly answered.

Annie took a piece of dried pork skin out of the baggage and held it in her hands. Some white smoke instantly sprung out of it while it became boiling hot and soft as the cloud. "Let's eat first, we'll continue the journey after eating," Annie said.

That was Annie's ability, whose palms could set the branches and sticks on fire and cook the food as well. Iffy devoured the skin like a wolf and then drooled over the skin in Annie's hand. Annie smiled and threw half of hers to Iffy and said, "You eat more. I'm not very hungry yet."

It was time to continue their journey after Iffy finished eating the other half of the skin and licking each of her fingers.

Iffy was struggling to get back on her feet, but before she could get out of the cave, the branches around it suddenly started to tremble.

It was not the swaying motion of the autumn wind, but a series of light and fast-paced trembles, as if something was coming in their direction.

Annie's eyes instantly widened in fear and said, "Horses! They're approaching on horses! Run!"

Iffy felt as if she was being pulled up and started to run subconsciously. The drilling pain below her feet returned. As her body did not really recover, it was very difficult for her to even stand, not to mention running.

She turned around and saw more than ten galloping horses appeared at the end of the rocky beach. Their speed was not too fast which might be because the soldiers worried about hurting the hoofs of their mounts. However, it was still fast enough to catch both of them who were running on bare feet.

Iffy thought that they could not escape.

Or rather, she could not escape.

Iffy wrenched her hand away from Annie's grasp and said, "You go first."

"I'll carry you."

"You can't run fast enough that way!"

"Just listen to me. Be quick."

The Judgement Army on the giant horses was approaching when Iffy was hesitating. Iffy noticed that some had lifted their hand crossbows and thrown spears.

The bumpy gravel ground suddenly collapsed at that moment and the riders in the front fell into the pit, screaming. The platoon hurriedly spread out to avoid the trap, but the horses suddenly knelt down on the ground one by one. A group of red-dressed silhouettes unexpectedly popped out in front of the church soldiers as if they were rising from the ground. The mass shooting of the close range arrows caught the Judgement Army off guard, and the soldiers who were lucky enough to avoid the arrows could not escape and were hunted down in the ambush. More than 10 soldiers from the church were all lying dead on the stone beach within seconds.

After that, they quickly stripped the armors from the soldiers, taking away their dry food and baggage, along with the God's Stones of Retaliation.

One of them walked towards Iffy and Annie.

"Are you looking for the Bloodfang Association?"

"How do you know?" Iffy asked in surprise.

"Yes, my Lord," Annie quickly pinched Iffy's hand and said. "We're both witches. The other three of us were lost on the way. Could you please help them?"

"We don't have the manpower to attend to the other witches." The woman took off her hood and revealed her short fiery-red hair. "If your partners couldn't reach here by themselves, they're not qualified to join the Bloodfang Association." She paused and said, "Of course, not everyone who gets here can join the Bloodfang Association either."

Iffy could feel that Annie was holding her hand tighter.

"What're your abilities? Show me."

After seeing their abilities, the red-haired woman looked at Iffy and nodded. "You can go to the Archduke Island." And then she looked at Annie and said, "But you can't."

"Why?" Iffy asked.

"My Lord, I..." Annie said.

"I'll be sending you to another witch association, but not the Bloodfang Association." The red-haired woman interrupted Annie in a cold, hard voice. "You can't become a combat witch, and the Bloodfang Association doesn't need a cook."

...

"What're you crying for?" The red-haired woman impatiently reproached Iffy. "The Lord's going to be angry if she sees your crying face."

"I... want to be with Annie..."

"Hopeless little brat, she's nothing but a burden."

"She's not, she saved me!" Iffy swallowed her tears and said, "Annie is the true combat witch that you need..."

"Pfft... Whether you're a combat witch or not is determined by the ability you got in the awakening, not strong limbs," the red-haired woman said relentlessly. "You think that she's more powerful than you. That's because she's five or six years older than you. In fact, you have far more potential than she does."

"Where are you... going to send Annie?"

"It's none of your business."

Iffy felt like crying again.

The red-haired woman frowned and said, "Listen, the Lord doesn't like cowards. You can't mention about the past if you want to survive in Archduke Island."

...

Chapter 537: The Dream (Part II)

Deep inside the burrow, the crowd knelt down, worshiping a woman dressed in luxurious finery. Countless candles were silently burning, faintly glowing stars covering the ground.

"Is this the new kid? Lift your head and let me see your face."

Iffy lifted her head timidly, but could only see a mask reflecting cold light. She was almost screaming out loud at that moment.

"I'm Heidi Morgan. Don't be afraid, the mask was just to protect my identity." The woman's voice was softer than Iffy imagined. "You're a member of the Bloodfang Association from today onwards."

"Why... can't you accept Annie?" Iffy summoned up her courage to ask.

"Presumptuous!" The red-haired woman shouted.

The other witches were chuckling as if sneering at her stupidity.

"It's okay," Heidi said, waving her hand. She walked down from the stage to approach Iffy and said, "Because there's no way for me to support so many witches."

"She, she can find her own food."

"To live like a rat? Hide in the gutter all day and eat others' leftovers? Living that way will gradually make you more like a savage by the day," Heidi shook her head and said, "The Bloodfang Association needs beasts, not rats waiting to be slaughtered by others."

"B-beast?" Iffy could not help but repeat after her.

"Yes. Have you ever seen a cliff wolf?"

Iffy shook her head.

"They're the symbol of the Kingdom of Wolfheart and master of the mountains. They can give birth to three or four cubs every time, but not all the cubs can survive. Do you know why?" Heidi slowly explained. "Because the mother wolf will kill some cubs that she can't find enough food to support to make sure the rest of the cubs are well-fed. The future generation that was grown up in such circumstances could continue to live within the tough environment."

Iffy opened her mouth, but she did not know what to say.

"Cutting down the amount of feeding to each cub can also keep all the cubs alive. However, it's simply being alive—the young wolves without sufficient nutrition will not be able to hunt for themselves when they grow up. They would not be able to step out of the nest, neither would they have a chance to reproduce. The cliff wolf clan would completely vanish in the long run. What do you think of that?"

"I..."

Heidi lifted Iffy's chin up with her finger. "My child, this is the inspiration the God sends to us: Witches must act like the beasts in order to survive in the oppression. And strong combat witches will naturally become the symbol of the entire race, for example... who you are now!"

The candlelight started to flicker. Iffy did not hear any cheering but she could feel their emotions. The combination of the emotions of excitement, inspiration, and joy was like the unspoken volcano.

After a while, she hesitantly asked, "What, what if there is sufficient food for every single wolf?"

"In that case, they're no longer the wolves," Heidi laughed and said, "but dogs".

...

The whip slashed on Iffy's back, making a crisp noise.

"Idiot, you can't even complete such a little practice, wasting all the food that was fed to you. Tell me, how many whips is this?"

"24" Iffy clenched her teeth and said.

She was responded to by continuous whips. Blood and sweat were flowing down from her back, drenching her pants.

"That's all for today. You'll get double flogging if the same happens for tomorrow's training." The red-haired woman threw a huge piece of rib into the middle of the four witches who were punished. "The dinner time is over. This is the extra food I asked Lord Heidi for. You divide it amongst yourselves. Remember, no magic power allowed."

The amount of the rib was enough to fill up four of their stomachs.

However, the fight training consumed a great amount of energy. The possibility to complete it would increase if they had extra food supply as supplement in between meals.

Like a beast...

Only strong witches can survive.

Iffy stared at the meat in front of her and pounced onto the witch nearest to her.

...

"The Secret Association was destroyed by the church. I heard that none of them escaped."

"Even the leader of the witches."

"The church is camping by the eastern coast!"

"The damned nobles." Heidi did not look well. "I'm going to tear them into pieces sooner or later!"

The influence of witches within the Kingdom of Wolfheart was eliminated one by one, leaving only the Bloodfang Association to barely support itself. Although Iffy did not quite understand why it was related to the nobles on the island, she could sense that the situation was getting critical.

"In this case, send Shaji and me to get rid of them." Iffy suggested.

"It's too late! The church has noticed the Archduke Island. We can no longer stay here," Heidi clenched her teeth and said. "Let's go to Sleeping Island."

"You're talking about... the witch association which sent the pigeon to deliver the letter last time?" Iffy asked.

"Exactly. We can draw some manpower from there to strengthen ourselves. It's only temporary; I'll be back here sooner or later! The Kingdom of Wolfheart is mine!"

...

"Damn. Why are these people willing to listen to the orders from a little girl?" Heidi angrily threw the glass onto the ground.

Iffy was speechless. The witches on Sleeping Island were like sheep in her eyes, as they did not have much power of resistance when they were facing enemies, including the so-called leader, Tilly Wimbleton. Without the Extraordinary beside her, she would not be able to hold the position.

"It's probably because she's preaching the equal importance of non-combat witches?" Shaji interrupted.

"No one wants to be excluded."

"Ridiculous! She didn't even think about who defeated the church in Fjords! Who'll believe such a nonsense?"

"Tilly's elder brother, Lord of the Western Region seems to agree with that."

"That was all made up by them! No one knows what a lord really wants better than I do!" Heidi angrily said. "You thought that I built the Bloodfang Association for..." she suddenly stopped for a while and then continued, "No, I can't allow them to continue talking nonsense. You have to go to the Western Region and expose Tilly's lies! Bring my words to the lord. I can offer double for what Tilly Wimbledon has to offer!"

Somehow, Iffy felt that Lord Heidi at the moment was nowhere like a beast but an exasperated lamb.

"That's why you abandoned me?"

Annie's figure suddenly appeared in front of her. "You left me for this kind of master and such a ridiculous life, betraying my trust towards you?"

"No, Annie..."

Iffy was horrified to notice the blank space on Annie's face.

"Do you... forget about me?"

She quickly opened her eyes and everything that had been in front of her eyes just now suddenly disappeared, leaving the gray-white colored ceiling of the room and the hanging light.

Is this a dream?

She quickly closed her eyes again to recall Annie's face. Fortunately, Iffy still clearly remembered her look.

Iffy turned around and sat up on her bed, feeling slightly relieved. However, she saw a little girl curiously looking at her by the bed.

Iffy could tell from her eyes that she must be someone who had not experienced any suffers and struggles... someone who was also called the sheep.

"Who're you?"

"Nana," the little girl tilted her head and said. "Did you have a nightmare?"

Iffy could feel that her back was drenched in her sweat at that moment. "Did I... say anything?"

"Oh, yes. You kept mumbling that 'I'm a beast... I'm a beast...'," the little girl said with her arms open, "Why did you say that? You're not a beast."

She bit her lips and said, "You... have no idea."

"I have," Nana said, while covering her grin with her hand. "You're just like me. Aren't we both human beings?"

Chapter 538: The Wheel of Time

After being supplied with food and equipment, the First Army was ready to set out once again.

This was the mission for the latter half of the spring offensive: seizing Willow Town and Fallen Dragon Ridge. Capturing Willow Town would unify the Western Region, and taking control of Fallen Dragon Ridge would enable them to have the easiest access to the Southern Territory.

Since these two towns were well fortified, Roland entrusted the command to Iron Axe and he himself would not partake in the expedition. Because they just conquered King's City, the soldiers were having high morale. Besides, those professional soldiers had gradually formed a prototype of soldiers in a modern army, which meant they could faithfully carry out combat orders without being led by Roland personally. Therefore, Roland was sure they would take the two towns. As long as they made a thorough investigation and used the artillery troops to steadily push forward, they would not face great resistance from the enemies.

The reconstruction of the post-war order should be his focus of attention.

Fortunately, Willow Town was not a large-scale town. He did not need to set a fully-functional secondary City Hall as the one in the Longsong Area, but only to set up offices for each department correspondingly. Nowadays, the Border Area could offer a batch of fundamental management staff, so it would not be hard to add Willow Town to the political system of the City of Neverwinter.

As for Fallen Dragon Ridge, he would hand it over to Countess Spear for management. After the fall of Timothy, Spear had sworn allegiance to Roland and agreed to accept the overall management model of Western Region. In order to help her take over the city and cleaning up the rebel nobility, Roland believed it was necessary to garrison the first army there.

Plus, in the future, whether to further annex the Southern Territory or to conquer Iron Sand City, Fallen Dragon Ridge was the key traffic artery. So, the other purpose of the garrison was to prevent accidents. No matter what, Roland had to take hold of this city.

"In this way, there won't be many left in the First Army," after knowing the plan, Iron Axe said, frowning. "500 of them are guarding King's City, 1,000 will be dispatched to Willow Town and Fallen Dragon Ridge, and the number of soldiers I can freely mobilize is no more than 1,500, most of whom are artillery. Given that, City of Neverwinter probably will temporarily lose the ability to launch the attack."

"How is the training for the new soldiers recruited during the Months of Demons going?"

"Not even close to the regular troops," Iron Axe said while shaking his head. "They need to be trained for at least two to three more months."

Roland could not help laughing. He remembered when he originally set up the Militia to resist demonic beasts, it went to the battlefield only after one and a half months' training. Now with the increasingly comprehensive construction of the army, the criterion of acceptability also greatly increased. In fact, as long as the soldiers could line up based on the order and take aim to pull the trigger, even in this era it was a strong army—After all, they only needed to aim and shoot without necessarily being under the attack of the enemies and risking their own lives.

"Don't worry. By then the garrison could be replaced by those new recruits, and it'll be a sort of training for them to fight against the guards of the noble." Roland said in a leisure tone, "When the emissary delegation for recruiting refugees returns, the population of City of Neverwinter will reach another peak. We can continue to expand our army then."

Seizing King's City was far from an end, and seizing Fallen Dragon was only a start. If everything went well, he hoped to annex the whole Southernmost Ridge before the arrival of the Months of Demons this year.

If he could get a stable supply of black water, he might be able to lead the industries of City of Neverwinter to a new stage.

Soon after Iron Axe left, Nightingale quietly appeared in front of Roland.

"Iffy wants to see you."

...

Looking at the witch from Bloodfang Association slowly walking into the office, Roland could feel some changes.

Her steps were not as firm as the time when she first arrived here; her maroon long hair was a little messy, which showed that she apparently did not care to take care of it. She did not look as vigilant and proud as before; instead, she looked rather confused and at a loss.

At this moment, she looked more like a girl at her real age.

Iffy bowed first, and then after a long silence, she opened her mouth. "Your Majesty, what's... the weapon that Maggie used?"

Roland had expected that she would ask about it. He nodded at Nightingale, and then Nightingale took the revolver out of her waist and put it on the table.

"What she used was a gun. It kills enemies with projectiles fueled by gunpowder." He skillfully removed the cartridge and poured out the bullets. "The projectiles used to shoot at you were modified in a particular way, otherwise you would have been killed on spot."

Iffy's lips moved as if she wanted to say something, but yet she swallowed her words in the end.

Roland picked up a bullet and raised it in front of everybody. "Do you see it?" It is not much bigger than a finger, but yet it requires an extremely complicated procedure to manufacture it. The whole procedure required the joint work of hundreds of ordinary townsmen and three witches. Neither of the two groups is dispensable. And those are the non-combat witches who you think are useless. Do you still think so?"

"I..." She looked hesitated, but could not utter a word in the end.

Roland did not give her too much time to think. He continued, "Maybe they cannot compete with you in terms of abilities, but that doesn't prove anything. Although a commoner can't knock down a fierce beast with his bare hands, it's the human beings that rule the world, not the beasts."

"I prefer to call the non-combat witches as assistant witches. Through their own abilities, they can give the vast majority of ordinary people new forces, such as those guards who fight with long swords and shields—with the help of them, human beings can easily beat the beasts. In a sense, assistant witches are greater than combat witches."

"But the weapons you invented... can play a more powerful role in the hands of the combat witches," Iffy said in a low voice.

"The difference isn't very obvious, at least not obvious enough to change the outcome of a war." Roland shook his head. "Imagine this: while faced with ten ordinary soldiers armed with such weapon, what's the odd for you to win? In my territory, they can produce seven to eight such guns every day, but how many combat witches are there? Moreover, owning the weapons alone isn't enough. We also need to maintain them. To this end, we need a massive production and logistics team, in which assistant witches play irreplaceable roles."

He reassembled the gun and returned it to Nightingale. "I know that it's hard for you to understand the fact instantly. But the reason human beings are greater than the beasts is that human beings can use their wisdom to create power that the world has never had. To this end, magic power is undoubtedly the best tool, and yet you're wasting this talent." He paused for a moment. "Right, the First Army reserve will have a maneuver using loaded rifles this afternoon. I suggest you watch it so that you can use your own eyes to observe what the real power is."

"The time has changed, Iffy."

...

Chapter 539: The Melting Ice

Agatha had a busy day. By the time she returned to the castle, the sky had turned completely dark.

Pushing the door open, she was surprised to find Wendy waiting for her in the living room.

"Why did you work till so late again?" Wendy asked, frowning, but in her tone, there was not the slightest meaning of blame. Only a little bit of concern. "I hope you can come back earlier next time so that we can at least have dinner together."

"Sorry, I lost track of time," Agatha said as she took off her coat and hung it by the door. "My mind was all on producing the last batch of nitrogen, so I didn't notice the sky already turned dark when I left work. You should blame the Lord, turning on the lights in the chemical plant, making it as bright as daytime."

"I brought you dinner," said Wendy as she sighed helplessly. "It's on the table. It's still hot. So, hurry."

"Thank you," Agatha said, feeling touched. "Wendy is the most respected witch in the Witch Cooperation Association and is deeply trusted by the Lord. If she were in Taquila, she would have been at least an executive officer under the Three Chiefs. It's absolutely impossible in the Union for such a person to bring me dinner."

"You're welcome." Wendy patted her on the shoulder. "If you feel tired, don't hesitate to ask Echo to sing a hot spring song for you... Don't forget you're also a member of the Witch Union."

The Witch Union...

After the door was closed, Agatha kept still for a moment, and then went to the table and opened the metal insulated box.

The box contained three dishes and one soup: a fragrant barbecue steak, fried mushrooms, sliced bread, and egg soup. To her surprise, in a corner of the box was stuffed a small dish of honey.

She could not help but swallow her saliva.

Even Wendy noticed that...

During their decades of fighting against the demons in Taquila, all kinds of materials became more and more scarce. Naturally, that included food. Although Agatha was a relatively high rank, her daily meals consisted mainly of grains and fruits planted by assistant witches. Of course, she could eat meat, but its supply was not very stable. Things like spices, sugar, and honey were out of the question—the first two were a luxury exclusive to the high-level Federation officials; as for honey, witches who were able to keep bees were all sent to the battlefield. This was because the Federation would not "waste" them on producing such unessential sweet stuff.

In fact, she was very fond of eating sweet stuff, especially honey.

During the barbecue feast, when most people would choose pepper powder and salt as a seasoning, she just quietly brushed a whole jar of honey. She did not expect that Wendy had noticed that.

She suddenly felt something strange happening in her heart—because she could not feel coldness, she was not very sensitive to warmth either. Also, she had rarely used hot water while bathing because she did not want to bother Anna. Considering her own identity and origin, Agatha asked Roland to arrange a separate room for herself, just as her residence on the top floor of the test tower.

But now, she felt a little cold in the room.

Perhaps living with others was not a bad idea...

Agatha took out the honey, evenly smeared it on the bread, and slowly put it into her mouth. At that moment, she genuinely felt the warmth brought on by the fragrance and sweetness of the food.

...

After dinner, she planned to read "Elementary Chemistry" for a while before sleeping. The knowledge within might not be able to help her to further promote, but at least it could save her from feeling embarrassed in front of the common people.

Recently, a batch of strangers came to the chemical plant. Paper told her that they were all from the Alchemist Workshop of the king's city. Every day, Agatha could see them walking between the laboratory and the chemical plant—sometimes led by Kyle Sichi, and other times by Kyle's student, Chavez. But, whenever Agatha saw them, their faces had an expression of disbelief—one could stuff an egg into any of their mouths—as if that was the only expression they could show. Besides, several of them were excessively curious and seemed to take her as a famous alchemist. Whenever they got a chance, they would pose questions to her. In the beginning, the questions were extremely simple, but gradually became somewhat difficult to cope with.

In order to maintain the dignity of the Senior Witches and the honor of the Quest Society, Agatha decided to keep her image in their eyes.

After spending those days with the commoners, she once again confirmed that what the Union did was wrong.

Roland has proven the wisdom of the noble, and the wisdom of these ordinary people is no less than that of the witches. It only took these ordinary people a few days to master the operation of the nitrogen equipment, while at the same time understanding the process of extracting nitrogen. In the beginning, they were arguing about the number of elements in the air, but now they were already discussing the composition of synthetic ammonia. Even a few white-haired old men, while smiling shyly, consulted with Paper, who was greatly startled.

Obviously, they're rapidly learning everything around them.

At this thought, Agatha felt overwhelmed with emotions. "The witches are neither the fortunate chosen by the deities nor the unfortunate abandoned by the deities. Essentially, they're no different from the common people, which is a certainty of the destiny." In this Battle of Divine Will, all should bare their corresponding destinies, and the witches are only a small cluster of people."

Perhaps this is the original intention of the deities. With any part missing, human beings can't win in this battle of destiny.

Suddenly, there came a knock on the door.

"Come in," Agatha said and turned around. "The door isn't locked."

Then, a tall, blonde, unhooded woman came in, but Agatha felt this woman was always shrouded under a shadow.

It was Nightingale.

"Anything you want?" Agatha asked her.

"His Majesty Roland wants to see you."

"If he wants to emphasize the theory of balancing work and rest and convince me to come back earlier, I already knew it and will pay attention to it in the future," Agatha said, twitching her lips. "No need to waste his precious time on me."

"Really..." said Nightingale, she blinked and felt Agatha was not bad-natured if one did not make an enemy of her. "This is only one of the reasons. His Majesty also said he wants to fight the demons."

Agatha was startled for a moment. "What?" Tossing the book on the table, she said, "Quickly, take me to him!"

...

Agatha rushed into the Lord's office. Before Roland could say anything, Agatha asked anxiously, "For the moment, we can't even put together ten Longsong Cannons and you want to attack Devil's Town? Do

you think they're as fragile as human beings who throw away their helmets and flee after thousands of them are killed? You'll ruin the city and the good situation here!"

"Huh?" Roland looked astonished. "What're you talking about?"

"Aren't you planning to fight against the demons?"

He looked at Nightingale and chuckled. "No, that's not my plan. I don't want to destroy their camp. I only want to catch a few living demons."

Chapter 540: Different Concerns

"Is that all?"

Upon hearing it, Agatha felt slightly relieved.

The demons' strength lay in their numbers. If faced only with a few Mad Demons, one or two Senior Witches would be able to defeat them.

"Have you found a way to confine them?" Agatha asked.

"The newly arrived witches are perfect for that," Roland told her their abilities. "After Iffy catches the demons, the cage can be easily carried by the balloon. Of course, I'll prepare some shackles, so it's not a big problem to tame them either. What I want to know is how long the Red Mist carried by the demons can last, and can the demons' blood be used to produce Sigils after they die?"

"No wonder..." Until that moment, Agatha had fully understood what Roland was up to. "In general, a can of Red Mist can last for about a day. Demons will decide the number of mist cans to carry based on different tasks. For example, to carry out a surveillance or patrol mission, a demon's mount will carry three to four cans which is also its ability limit."

"Why so?" Roland asked curiously.

"After leaving the strange Blackstone Pagoda, the mist will gradually lose effectiveness," she explained. "Otherwise, the Quest Society would have been keeping demons and Chaos Beasts and mass producing sigils. The Three Chiefs of the Union also tried that before. For example, they took the initiative to attack some of the demon's outposts to seize the small Blackstone Pagoda, but the enemies would always destroy it before their defeat, leaving the Blessed Warriors a withered stone pagoda."

"Withered?" Roland asked in great surprise, "Could stones wither too?"

"Nobody knew exactly what that thing was, but judging from the stone we brought back, "withered" was the proper word to describe it." Its once smooth surface became rough and dark; a lot of stone chips fell off when it was rubbed. It was totally different from its original appearance when the warriors first saw it."

"I see..." Roland pondered for a while. "If we can bring back a demon, can you produce the Sigil of Magic Stones?"

"If you can provide me with sufficient experimental materials, an independent laboratory, and 20 common people as assistants," Agatha said while counting on her fingers, "I have an 80% chance to produce simple Sigils, as to advanced Sigils... Ah, anyway, you don't have the related Magic Stones to produce them."

"These aren't the problem." Roland hesitated and then asked in a low voice, "The problem is, what if the entrapment mission draws too many demons?"

Agatha could not help but laugh. "You looked very confident. I thought you never worried about it."

"Ahem, I just want to be absolutely certain about everything."

Agatha then said with a relaxing tone, "Just take Miss Anna and me with them."

"You and... Anna?"

"You still lack a full understanding of the witches in your territory, Your Majesty." Agatha sighed. "You know, the Union, whose power covered the entire Fertile Plains, had just over 100 Senior Witches. Not more than 40 of them were combat witches. They held high positions in the Union and were the backbones of the Blessed Army. On the other hand, in your Witch Union, there're quite a few Senior Witches, and together with your strange weapons, their strength can be compared with the Wing of Holy Army. Defeating a group of demons won't be difficult for us. Even if we run into the Lord of Hell, Miss Anna can activate the Sigil of God's Will twice."

"Ah... I almost forgot about it." Roland suddenly understood, so he said, "Thank you for the suggestion."

"You're welcome. Defeating demons is my lifetime aspiration. Please don't let me down, Your Majesty."

When Agatha was about to leave, Roland stopped her.

"Well, there is another thing I don't understand."

"What's it?"

"Why did you resolutely oppose me attacking Devil's Town?" Roland raised his eyebrows. "Your previous attitude was very different from now... I remember at that time you not only demanded to attack the demons actively but also wanted to seize Chaos Beasts that may live in their camp at any cost, didn't you?"

Agatha suddenly felt her cheeks burning up. She knew they must be red even without checking.

"At that time, I didn't believe that you had the ability to defeat the demons, but you were bragging about your military forces, so I was saying that in a fit of pique." But it would be awkward to tell Roland the truth. But now the situation in the domain was sound. Given enough time, she believed the powers of humans would be increasingly stronger, so of course, her attitude had changed. "Did I? I don't remember saying anything like that."

"But you were..."

"Ahem, Your Majesty, I feel very sleepy." She forced a yawn. "Please excuse me now." Then she immediately left the office.

While she walked through the corridor leading to the Witch House, Agatha could feel the cool breeze gently blowing on her face, which gradually cooled her mood.

Looking at the numerous stars in the sky, she suddenly remembered what Wendy said.

"One day, he'll become the King of Graycastle and lead us to defeat all our enemies. This is what I believe."

When looking at Wendy's convinced expression, Agatha felt both envious and slightly sad. She envied that Wendy had not been overwhelmed by the brutal reality, and she was sad to the fact that Wendy's conviction could not reverse the strength gap between humans and demons.

But now, she began to believe it too.

Iffy did not remember how she got back to the bedroom.

Her mind was full of the memories of guns and cannons firing and roaring—hundreds of soldiers, neatly arranged in rows, aimed at the targets in front of them and pulled the trigger. She could see nothing but thick white smoke, and even if she could feel the bullets with her magic power, she did not have enough time to trap them with her cage.

"His Majesty didn't lie. The metal bullets are much more powerful than the special bullets Maggie used when she fought with me. The metal bullets can destroy wooden targets 100 steps away, while in that distance, all the witches can do was to wait to be beaten.

As for another weapon called cannon is even more terrible. Its attack range is several times of the guns, and one even needs a telescope to observe its shooting results. Moreover, the head of the guards said that's only the old-fashioned field artillery, and a weapon called 152 mm Longsong Cannon is the real trump card of the artillery troop."

Various sounds of explosion echoed in her head, which led to one thought.

"Heidi Morgan lied to us."

Iffy murmured.

"Maybe Heidi Morgan doesn't even know such a power is possible." Softfeathers looked complex. Apparently, she was also shocked by the army training scenes she saw in the afternoon, "What should we do next?"

Iffy did not answer. "No matter what purposes Heidi had previously held, at the moment, it means nothing because the Bloodfang Association simply can't afford what His Majesty wants—Tilly Wimbledon's assistant witches are more useful than the combat witches of the Bloodfang Association."

Looking back at the past few years, she found her abilities and growth experience which she was once proud of now looked more like a joke. Except for Annie, there was nothing else worthy of cherishing in her memory.

After quite a while, she raised her head. "I don't want to go back to the Bloodfang Association."

"..." Softfeathers nodded with an almost unperceivable movement. "Me neither." And she was shocked. "Are you crying?"

Iffy then tasted something salty flowing into her mouth. Wiping her face, something wet reached her fingertips.

"I don't know."

It had been a long time since she tasted tears.

Beasts never cry.

Even if they do, they don't do it for themselves.

If only Annie and I had run into the Witch Union from the very beginning.

Closing her eyes, Iffy felt the salty rain trickling out from her heart.

Annie, forgive me.