

Witch 61

Chapter 61 Return

Just when Roland squatted down to install the base for the new steam engine, three figures suddenly emerged out of thin air. They landed, staggering, in front of his feet and took him with them when they fell to the ground.

Anna was so scared that she immediately jumped back and set up a wall of green flames to try to block the strangers.

When Roland looked up, he found that one of the women was the long-awaited Nightingale. From her face, she seemed very exhausted. Her cheeks were abnormally red, so obviously she had been running in the cold and windy weather for a long time, but despite the wind, her forehead was covered with dense sweat.

Nightingale lifted her head and cried with palpable anxiety. "Your Highness, please call Nana and have her come over! We need her immediately!"

Now, Roland noted that the woman tied to her back was very pale and had her eyes closed. She was wrapped in clothes which were dark red from the oozing blood and had a nearly cut off arm.

He immediately reacted and shouted toward his guard. "Cardin, run to the medical center and fetch Nana!"

"Yes, Your Highness!" answered the guard as he dashed away immediately.

Aside from these two, there was also a young girl caught in Nightingale's armpit. She looked like she wasn't in a serious situation, and was looking around with eyes full of curiosity.

"You aren't hurt, right?" Roland stepped forward to untie the woman with the injured arm from Nightingale's back.

"I'm fine, Your Highness, Keke ... I'm very sorry, I couldn't bring back my sisters from the Witch Cooperation Association." Nightingale gasped for air, her voice was very weak. Apparently she had had a very long journey and had almost physically overextended herself.

"Say nothing more, you need to rest first." Roland picked up the unconscious and injured woman and let Anna lead Nightingale. Like this, the five people returned to the castle. Nightingale had the room next to Anna's, so when they came to the castle, he immediately ordered the maids to build a fire in her room and to also deliver a vat of hot water. After Nana arrived, he first explained to her what had happened before she began to clean the wound and treat the injury while Roland stepped out of the room.

As long as she wasn't dead, Nana would be able to heal every injury like they had never happened, so the problem wasn't if she could save her life. Although Nightingale had carefully tied up the arm, the blood circulation had been cut off for far too long, so he did not know if it could be saved. The following cleaning and treatment required the patient to undress, so as a gentleman, Roland consciously chose to step out.

But how could it have developed into this? Asked Roland himself. Could it be that the Witch Camp was attacked by demonic beasts and there was no one else she was able to save? If that was true, then that would really be a great loss.

Roland was nervously hovering at the door. About half an hour later, the door was pushed open and the first person who came out was the unknown girl who looked unharmed and who had come together with Nightingale .

When she saw him waiting in front of the door, she nodded and said, "You're exactly the same as Nightingale had described you."

" ... " Roland didn't know what to make out of this sentence, "What did she say about me?"

"A prince who would care about us witches." while answering his question, the girl lightly shut the door, "Unfortunately, the news was so unbelievable that most of the witches didn't believe what she said. In fact, I also couldn't believe her, but it is exactly like my dad had always said, 'the world is so big, and it has all kinds of people'. My name is Lightning, Your Highness, glad to meet you. "When she finished speaking, she bowed her head and laid her right hand on her left shoulder – it probably was her way to salute.

However, Roland didn't think any longer about the salute, the part "most people did not believe her," was the important information. "The Witch Cooperation Association wasn't attacked by demonic beasts?"

"Attack? No, ah ... Why would you think this?" She nodded her head while thinking but then she suddenly put her index finger on her forehead and revealed an enlightened expression, "Yes, I see. That big sister with the broken arm is Wendy, she was injured by our respected mentor Cara." Then, Lightning began to tell the story.

After hearing what had happened, Roland fell silent and thought, so it was actually like this ... I really have underestimated the cruel oppression the witches have to face. Now, after being accumulated over many years, the hatred between the witches and the upper nobility of the Church has reached its peak. This Cara, is one of the extremists. Then, Roland got the impression that the first thing the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association would do when she had the power to do it was to eradicate people with the same attitude like herself.

But fortunately, Nightingale was still able to return safely.

And not only that, but she even brought back two new witches with her to Border Town. As for the witch house, Roland thought, he would still let Karl build it. Even if they didn't need it at the moment, there was still the possibility that the number of witches would increase.

"So you were also a sister of the Witch Cooperation Association?"

"Not anymore." Lightning sighed and then continued, "It's the same for Wendy and Nightingale. Since we left, it is now impossible to ever go back. I'm afraid Cara won't be able to swallow her pride."

"Will she survive even though Nightingale pierced through her body?" Roland asked disbelievingly,

“Probably. In the camp we have a witch called the Herb Witch, who can increase the effectiveness of herbs several times,” explained Lightning, “by multiplying the effect of some hemostatic grasses and turning them into a blood replenishing medicine, rescuing Cara’s life should not be a problem, but compared to your witch who has the ability to heal, the effect is inferior.”

Hearing this, Roland thought, this will really be a nuisance, it seems like it wasn’t enough to just worry about the Church, now I also have to look out for the witches. Fortunately, their purpose is to look for the Holy Mountain, so I hope the trouble of looking for Nightingale is too much for them.

“Previously you had said that you didn’t believe in what Nightingale had said, so why did you go with her and leave the Witch Cooperation Association?”

“Because you have a machine that huffs and puffs black and white smoke, and you can also create stones out of gray powder and even have powder that breaks apart mountains with a thunderous bang.” Lightning repeated the exact same words she had said to Nightingale, “Maybe there wasn’t be a Prince who was good to the witches, but she wouldn’t have lied to me, it is impossible to make up such lifelike ideas – at least this was what my intuition of an explorer had told me, and just seeing the monstrosity in the yard which is capable of ejecting white gas shows me that I was right. This monstrosity? Nightingale seems to call it...a steam engine, right?”

“Explorer?” Roland automatically ignored the last question.

“Yes, explorer!” Lightning emphasized the word, “This is the reason why I choose to follow Nightingale. All explorers are curious about the unknown.”

“...” Roland secretly sighed. What should I do with this witch? Someone like her could only survive in this age if they were born in a rich family. Anyone only had to look at her once to see that she was a tomboy, not only because of her clothes, but also her short golden hair, “Are you sure your name isn’t Izawa Riel?”

“Who would that be? My name is Lightning.” the little girl proudly explained.

At this point, the door opened once more and Anna and Nana came out.

“How was it?” asked Roland, “Did the healing go well?”

Seeing Nana nod, Roland could finally feel relieved. Generally, a limb needed to be reconnected within six to eight hours. When this time limit was exceeded, the success rate would be greatly reduced. Since Lightning said that they had taken more than one day to travel from the camp to Border Town, the chance to save the limb was actually already very small. It would almost be impossible to reconnect the nerves by conventional surgery. This once more showed how unbelievable Nana’s healing ability was.

Now the young witch was also tired; it seemed that the treatment also cost her great effort. So Roland encouragingly said to them, “You all have worked hard today, so after eating dinner, you both should sleep here with Anna.”

Of course, he thought that would also mean that Sir Pine would also sleep here.

ED note: Izawa Riel is the chinese name for Ezreal from League of Legends

Chapter 62 Oath

Today was such an exciting day with so many surprising matters that Roland didn't want to continue the boring work with the steam engine. Instead, he had his chef prepare an exceptionally great dinner of black pepper steak and fried eggs without any limit to the amount everyone could eat. After eating, Lightning and Anna had to pat their bloated bellies while Nana, chewing on the last piece of meat, was still full of vitality. In addition to the dinner, he had asked the maid to prepare and deliver a stew out of soft meat and waxy porridge in a heat-preserving porcelain dish to Nightingale. Once Nightingale and Wendy woke up, they could immediately eat hot food.

After dinner, the next step was to arrange rooms for everyone. Fortunately, the lords of Border Town loved exquisiteness and grandeur. Even though this small town was only built for mining, as an early security point, the castle was still built to the standards of a medium sized town. Thanks to this, Roland now had a nine hundred square meter living area spread over three floors, along with watchtowers and arrow towers in the form of pagodas in the four corners of the castle. He also possessed his own vestibule and back garden.

Roland arranged the room opposite of Anna's room for Lightning while the room next door went to Wendy after her rehabilitation. When Roland saw Nana walk into Anna's room with a sugar stick in her hand, he could not help but shake his head in amusement.

Back at his office, Roland poured himself a cup of ale. A plan was only good until the first deviation. He had thought that with the help of Nightingale, he would have gotten a batch of new witches, getting a boost in science and technology and upgrading agriculture etc., but he had never expected that the leader of the Witch Cooperation Association would have such hostility towards non-witches. Witches like Nightingale seemed to be a minority. Wendy... after the talk with Lightning he knew that Wendy actually didn't want to leave the Witch Cooperation Association. She only intended to save Nightingale, but after her intervention, she was treated as a traitor by Cara and the other witches.

After his first drink, Roland poured himself a second one. Even if the ale wasn't the best, it was still better than nothing.

During the meal, Roland had asked Lightning about her and Wendy's abilities. Lightning said she could fly like a bird and fly freely through the air while Wendy was able to control the wind. Hearing this, Roland couldn't think of a good use for a technological upgrade, but for the upcoming war they held great potential.

He also asked her about the abilities of the other witches at the camp and found out that their abilities varied strongly and seemed not to follow any rules. Some effects could hardly be described with science while some were completely bizarre.

For example, Cara the Snake Witch, the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association. She could condense her magic into snakes – these snakes were not illusions, they could be touched and also attack an enemy. The different colors of the snakes represented the different venoms. Lightning herself had only seen two types of snakes, paralysis and toxic.

Roland found that it wasn't only Anna, but Cara and the other witches could also only use their magic within a small range. For example, when Anna's Green Fire left a range of five meters, it would suddenly disappear. Cara's snakes also couldn't stray too far. For Nightingale, it was an even shorter distance. When she wanted to influence a foreign object, she would have to leave her fog and become visible.

For this reason, they were always equipped with crossbows in case they had to face the Church or any other army who possessed God's Stone of Retribution. Otherwise, they could only flee in all directions.

Roland worked until midnight, and the fire in the fireplace had already dimmed. When he began to sneeze he thought it was time to sleep.

When he opened the door to his bedroom, he thought that he had gone into the wrong room – it was the already familiar scene again, where a woman was already in the room, sitting on his bed. Her figure was half shrouded in darkness, her shadow reflected by the fire was only displayed in mosaic, like a mural. However, this time there was a big difference to the previous instances, namely that the woman was no longer wearing her body-hiding robes. Instead, she had replaced them with ordinary civilian clothes. Her appearance was no longer hidden from the outside world, and now everyone could directly see her appearance.

Nightingale.

Roland became a little nervous, this kind of battle, would ... it be a lucky one?

When Nightingale noticed that the Prince had come in, she got up and slowly walked over. Even only after half a day of rest, her face looked better than how most people would ever look. Her pale cheeks were replaced with rosy ones, and her hair didn't give her a dull appearance. He thought, I have to say, the resilience of a witch is really amazing.

"You worked hard in the past few days." Roland coughed, breaking the silence and then continued, "Why don't you rest longer? Lightning has already told me everything."

Hearing this, Nightingale shook her head, giving a solemn impression. This gave Roland the feeling that something was wrong, and in her eyes he could see an indescribable dedication. Roland realized that she had made her decision and was converging her emotions towards him. This look of determination was difficult to see in many other people, so Roland waited until the other had found the right words.

However, Nightingale didn't begin to speak immediately. Instead, she took a deep breath, got down on one knee while holding a dagger in her hand, and slightly bowed her head – this was the etiquette for the standard knight ceremony, when someone part of the aristocracy swore allegiance to a superior, they would often do it this way.

"Your Highness Roland Wimbledon, I, Veronica, also known as Nightingale, swear," she said in a formal tone, "As long as you will be kind to the witches, I will be at your service, whether as a strong shield against the demons, or as your personal sword during the night, without any fear of regret, until the last moment of my life."

Roland thought, so this is her decision after the Witch Cooperation Association became such a disappointment to her and destroyed her hope of leading the witches into a better future herself. If it went like he wanted, he would refuse her offer, since he was more accustomed to hiring or working together. If there were further ambitions and a common ideal, they could become comrades.

However, he knew that sometimes it was meaningless to emphasize equality and freedom. As long as there was no suitable soil, even the best seeds would decay. As a prince, he wouldn't be able to depart from his role as a prince until he unified the kingdom..

After a moment of silence, Roland acted accordingly to the court etiquette in the memories of the former prince. He took her dagger and then touched her shoulders three times with his own sword, "I accept your allegiance."

Nightingale's shoulders trembled slightly. It seemed she could finally relax.

Then he stretched out his right hand, holding it in front of her.

Nightingale took his fingers and delicately kissed him on the back of his hand. With this the ritual came to an end.

Although the allegiance ceremony exercised by the witches was extremely nondescript, following through the whole set of actions couldn't be archived with an ordinary background. And she also called herself Veronica... "Is Veronica your real name? Don't you have a last name?" Roland pulled her up and asked.

"Yes, Your Highness. I have no intention to hide anything from you. Five years ago, I had left the house of Gilen. Now the house and I have nothing to do with each other." Nightingale told him everything, and put down even the last barrier to her heart by telling him of her own past.

She was born in Silver City, the city whose name came naturally from their rewarding silver mines. Her father was a viscount, but her mother was born as a commoner. Such marriages were not common, but the two had hit it off well. In addition, Nightingale also had a brother named Hyde. She had spent her whole childhood in Silver City, and that was the happiest period of her life.

Chapter 63 Old Story

Nightingale had spent her whole childhood in Silver City, and that was the happiest period of her life.

However, this wonderful time only lasted until the winter she turned fourteen. In that winter, refugees started a riot in Silver City. Her parents went out to distribute food but they never came back.

Nightingale and her brother were sent, to the home of her father's brother, another branch of the Gilen family.

This was also the winter that Nightingale had awoken to her witch powers.

She carefully hid her abilities, but in the end she was still discovered by Mr. Gilen, who immediately separated Nightingale from her brother and used her brother's life to threaten her into doing his biddings, so Nightingale had no choice. Mr. Gilen sent her to the thieves' guild and made her undergo their training. Later, he had her do some shady things, like breaking into the homes of his enemies to steal trade contracts or other important things, and eavesdropping on the town hall meetings. She even had to go to some potential competitors' homes and put poison in their water tanks.

The Gilen's family business grew bigger and bigger, but Mr. Gilen's attitude toward Nightingale gradually turned worse and worse. If even the slightest thing went wrong, she would be kicked. Every time when she wasn't doing something for him, he would shut Nightingale in a room in their house which had its door replaced with iron bars. The part which made Nightingale the saddest and most puzzled was that she wasn't able to see her brother Hyde. She began to suspect that Mr. Gilen had already killed her brother.

Having had enough of her repeated requests, he finally brought over her younger brother. However, when Hyde saw Nightingale, he had a look full of disgust and said that he never wanted to see her again because as a witch and the devil's companion, she should go to hell.

Hearing this, Nightingale's world collapsed, but the nightmare wasn't over. Mr. Gilen gave her the final blow – the fact that she became a witch was a secret, but he still told Hyde, and even told him that the farther he got away from a witch the better it would be.

After Hyde bid Nightingale farewell, Mr. Glenn grimly warned her that Hyde would inherit their father's title, but if she wouldn't continue to obey his orders, he would make her brother die quietly.

In this way, Nightingale fell deeper and deeper into sorrow and despair and turned into a puppet manipulated by the Gilen family. On her coming of age day, she had to complete a task for the family and was on the way home when she met Wendy. Or, more precisely, Wendy found her.

Wendy told Nightingale everything about the Witch Cooperation Association, and told her that there were many people who had gone through similar experiences like Nightingale's, but these sisters had not given up. Hearing this, Nightingale's shattered heart suddenly ignited with a new spark of life.

She didn't need much time to change from confusion to determination. One week after her coming of age day, she had already overcome the torture, forcing her magic to undergo great changes. Her fog no longer hid only her figure, but also kept the iron bars from holding her back.

On the day that she had finally recovered from the afflictions of her coming of age day, she entered her world of fog to step into Mr. Gilen's bedroom to take a knife and slit his throat. . Mr. Gilen let out some high pitched breaths, and then only the sound of popping blood bubbles could be heard. During the whole situation, Nightingale found out that she was much calmer than expected.

Then, Wendy and Nightingale left the Gilen household. As for her brother Hyde, she ignored him and did not want to see him again.

After this, she and Wendy started their journey towards the Witch Cooperation Association.

When Nightingale came to the end of her story, she waited for a moment, but when she felt that Roland was still immersed in her past, she left the room to retire for the night.

As for Roland, after a long time, he had finally collected himself and remembered that Nightingale once said that every witch had a long history of bitterness. If they could reach their day of adulthood, they could even be considered lucky.

While Roland crossed over, it was fortunate that he had become a prince.

The next morning, Roland went to visit Wendy in Nightingale's room.

After a night of rest, Wendy's color looked a lot better, and the previously injured arm looked totally healed. Despite her still being weak, she sat up and bowed to pay tribute to the Prince.

"I already know about you, thank you for saving the life of Nightingale." Roland took a parchment out of his pocket and went straight to the point, "There is no doubt that with Cara as their leader, it will be impossible for you to return to the Witch Cooperation Association. So, it would be better for you to stay

in Border Town and work for me. If you agree, you only need to put down your signature on this contract. You will get the same salary like Anna, and every month you will get a gold royal.”

“Your Highness ...” Nightingale blinked hesitantly.

Roland knew what she wanted to say. After all, this would change her life. In addition, after Wendy had saved her life in the mountains, Nightingale didn’t want Roland to force her to make a decision immediately. In Nightingale’s view, as long as Wendy stayed in Border Town for some time, she would certainly come to their side.

“I would like it too if I wasn’t forced to talk about this in such a hurry, but some things become a little more dangerous with every day of delay.” Roland paused for a moment, but Wendy didn’t interrupt him and quietly waited for him to continue, “I think I may know a method to how a witch can survive her day of awakening without any pain.”

This remark brought a loud outburst from the two witches who asked with one voice, “What?”

“It’s just my speculation and there is no tangible evidence.” appeased Roland, “But I think I know the reason why witches in the camp suffered less pain compared to their life in hiding. The only difference between both situations was, while they were hiding their identity as a witch, they didn’t use their magic power, but during their life within the camp, they had to use their ability to maintain daily operations. “

Wendy nodded her head, “You’re... that’s right.”

“And in Anna’s case, she trained her ability daily before her day of adulthood, and she even fell into a coma because of overdrawing her magic power. When she finally regained consciousness, she had overcome the most difficult hurdle as a witch, and even without any injury.”

“So, I think this is probably the key to conquer the Demons Bite that attacks your body. I believe that a witch is a kind of magic container, and during adolescence, the witch is always accumulating magic. When this magic exceeds the body’s tolerance level, it causes harm to the witch’s own body, and the Demons Bite itself is dated with the witch’s day of awakening, the witch’s most powerful moment.”

“So if a witch can continually release her magic, constantly keeping her magic on a safe level, maybe the torture the witch would have to go through during the day of awakening would be greatly reduced, or even completely disappear.” Roland paused for a moment to let them think, and then he said, “As the lord of Border Town, I can offer your witches a safe place to use their magic. No one will arrest, send you to a trial, or even put you to death for using it. If my guess is correct, then there is no doubt, that Border Town will be the end of your long pursuit of the Holy Mountain.”

A witch was taught from the beginning that her dangerous capability was given by the devil. After endless suffering, the witch would feel that it wasn’t her own strength but instead that her power was a curse, starting a vicious circle. The more the witch didn’t want to use her magic, the stronger the bite would be. Directly after the crossing, Roland’s attitude towards this force was the completely opposite. After going through the memories of the old 4th Prince and ruling out the existence of a God, he had simply seen the magic as a kind of energy, an energy which was controlled by their own willpower.

Wendy was silent for a long time, but then she asked, “When I sign the contract and agree to work for you, then I want to know first... what will I need to do for you?”

During the past few centuries, because of their unique abilities, some witches were bought by a few ambitious people and were secretly imprisoned, used as consumable tools. Although the Church would look for and punish such behavior, it was still difficult to ban. In addition, they used to be ruthless towards the witches. Once they had lost their value, their fates could be described as a spectacle too horrible to endure.

Of course, Roland had also heard of these cases, but he took a fancy to the long-term interests and believed that this was a win-win situation for everyone. So, he smiled and replied, “The first thing you need to do is practice your ability repeatedly until you fully grasp it – just like Anna.”

Chapter 64 Curiosity

Three days later, in the castle back garden.

“Sister Anna ...” Nana pulled at Anna’s gown and called her name to get her attention.

“Yes?” The latter turned around and asked.

“What do you think about Sister Nightingale ... don’t you think she has been behaving a little weirdly?”

“Weirdly?” Anna was confused, “Do you mean how she has been dressing herself lately?”

Nightingale stood at Roland’s side, just like the many times before, but this time she was not wearing her usual gown with the strange pattern. Instead, she was now dressed like Anna and wore the strange clothing His Highness had invented. Although Anna did not want to admit it, the new attire accentuated Nightingale’s tall figure— her shapely legs, slim waist, as well as her long curly hair most vividly. Together with her cloak and pointed hat, anyone would let their gaze roam all over her body.

“I wasn’t talking about her clothes.” Nana muttered, “Don’t you think that her tone of voice when speaking with His Highness and the expression in her eyes when she looks at him have become different compared to before?”

“Have they?”

“...” Nana didn’t know what to say, but then she gave up, “Well, sister Anna, later when it’s too late, don’t come to me and say that I didn’t warn you.”

Unable to make head or tail of it, Anna shook her head and ignored Nana, focusing on the two new witches’ bodies instead.

The first one she looked at was named Lightning. Her general size was the same as Nana’s, but she wore particularly unusual clothes. When Anna roughly counted, she discovered that Lightning had at least twelve seamed pockets on her piece of rag-like coat.

As for the other witch Wendy, she didn’t wear the same body-concealing clothes Nightingale wore before, but on her ordinary and casual womens clothes she had the exact same pattern that Nightingale’s previous clothes had printed on them. However, she had something that didn’t sit right with Anna. The other one’s chest was ... too grand.

“Since you both have agreed to sign the contract, we can now start with your training for the first time.” Roland was finally at ease and started the training of his two new witches, issuing instructions.

“Lightning, you go first.”

“Yeah!” Lightning was so happy to start first that she threw her hands in the air as she stepped out of the shed.

At the moment, only a few snowflakes floated in the air and no wind was blowing, so the little girl gently floated in the air and waited for Roland’s next command.

“Show me your fastest speed!” Roland looked upwards and shouted to her.

“All right, look at me.” she gave him a thumbs up, went into a starting position, and then quickly flew around the castle.

Roland visually calculated her flying speed and came to the result that her flying speed should have been between 60 and 80 kilometers per hour. These numbers were based on his own experiences of driving back in his old world. For a single flight, this speed couldn’t be counted as fast, since it was similar to an ordinary dove. However, Roland had heard that she could carry Nightingale and Wendy during their journey back to Border Town. That feat was a lot more impressive compared to her speed.

What would that mean if she could lift up a weight of more than 100 kilograms? In Roland’s eyes, he could already see Lightning carrying a 100 kilogram bomb...

However, the next trial broke his wishful thinking.

When the weight was more than 50 kilograms, Lightning’s flying height decreased sharply. From the previous hundred meter altitude, she suddenly fell down to only ten meters. While carrying nearly 100 kilograms of weight, she could only reach a height of 2 meters.

That is to say, if he turned Lightning into an incarnate bomber, even when only carrying a few kilograms of explosives, she would enter the range of crossbows and become an easy target to shoot down.

So Roland came up with new ideas for this young witch – whether it was as a scout or as an investigator for the right place for a bombardment, she would be an excellent candidate. Previously, Roland seemed to have hit a wall with his plans, but now he could see a glimmer of hope again.

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While the Prince tested Lightning’s flying abilities, Wendy stood by quietly at his side, closely analyzing Roland’s every expression.

In the fifteen years of wandering after her departure from the monastery, she had seen many different kinds of people. Commoners, farmers, artisans, soldiers and nobles, it didn’t matter who it was, but they would all have the same reaction. As long as they didn’t know that she was a witch, they showed her desire and love, but when they became aware of the fact that she was a witch their desire and love would instantly convert into fear and hatred. Every time she saw this despicable behavior, Wendy wanted to vomit.

She thought she would only be partnered with witches for the rest of her life and never be accepted by a man. This was also the reason why she refused Nightingale's offer ... not out of mistrust, but because she was afraid of getting her heart broken once more.

However, Roland Wimbledon had already changed her opinion.

He looked at them with the same expression as he looked at common people – like he had already seen witches thousands of times. When she met Roland for the first time in Nightingale's room, she had thought that he hid his aversions towards witches extremely well. She also believed that another reason he didn't show any contempt was because Nightingale stood directly beside her. However, during the next few days she discovered that the expression on his face was still the same.

Could it be that the ability of a member of the Royal Family to hide their true intention is much better than us commoners?

Another changing point was the contract. Previously, Wendy had thought that it would only be a formality. But when she began to read it, she found it filled with dense clauses. It didn't only list their responsibilities, but it also stated their own rights.

This is simply inconceivable! It still put the witch in his army, but it didn't deprive them of their liberty. Instead, it was quite generous to them. Could this still be called a contract?

For example, Article 2.1 (It was the first time that Wendy saw such a structure), the witch could have paid leave, which meant that she would still get money even on the days she didn't work.

Next, the witch should complete experimental projects according to the employer's orders, but when part of the project was too difficult to complete, wasn't timely possible, produced discomfort, or caused the witch to feel that it was too dangerous, the witch could ask for changes or reject the experimental project.

Then, the next clause said that the employer should provide for and guarantee the safety of the witch. The employer was responsible for the witch's accommodation, food, and salary. When one part of the condition was not met, the witch was allowed to unilaterally suspend the contract.

Wendy thought these articles were a bit prolix, but they expressed their meaning very clearly. After signing the contract, the witch wouldn't be turned into the Prince's possession. Sure, she had to do his biddings, but she also had equal rights and was always able to say no. Due a contract like this, she finally felt the sincerity of the other side – if it was only for appearance, it wasn't necessary to write such a detailed list of treaties.

Coming to this conclusion, Wendy couldn't help herself from looking at Nightingale. Wendy was very clear of everything Nightingale had to go through, and she also knew how deep the other one's disgust of nobles sat. But now, when Nightingale spoke with Roland, her tone and demeanor showed so many different kinds of emotions – I'm afraid even she isn't aware of these changes.

Two months ago, she left the camp of the Witch Cooperation Association in the direction of Border Town. Only in two short months, Nightingale has already begun to completely trust this man.

She would rather cut off all her relations with the Witch Cooperation Association than to never see Border Town again. In her heart it was very likely that she already saw the place beside Roland Wimbledon more as her real home than the Witch Cooperation Association.

It's very sad about what happened to Mentor Cara. She, as the founder of the Witch Cooperation Association, had forgotten how important every surviving sister was.

Wendy knew that there was no way she could ever go back. Since fate had brought her to this place, why shouldn't she believe in the choice Nightingale had made? Just the same, like she always believed in the choices I made –

“Wendy?”

“Ah ...” With this shout, Wendy was brought back out of her daydreams, only to discover that Lightning had already finished her tests and that now everyone was waiting for her.

Giving everyone an apologetic smile, she walked out of the shed.

You have already made your decision, so now you have to go through with it. Plus, you cannot lose to the younger generation, right?

But at this moment, the horn call could be heard from the west again. The sound echoed in the mountains, breaking the tranquility of the town.

Chapter 65 Ominous Sign

There had already been several instances before when the horn was blown. Each time, several dozens of demonic beasts had attacked, mostly one after another, but every time the skilled militia had been able to push them back.

So when Roland heard the sound of the horn once more, he did not panic. He calmly suspended the training and sent Wendy and Lightning back to the castle to rest. He also ordered Anna to protect Nana who would go to the medical center to wait for the arrival of wounded soldiers. Roland himself rushed to the walls with Nightingale.

Unexpectedly, when Lightning heard Roland's orders, she began to protest, “Though I'm already such an experienced explorer of the western border of the continent, I have yet to witness a large-scale attack by demonic beasts! If I don't grasp this chance, I'm not worthy to call myself an explorer any longer. So, I plead you, Your Highness, let me travel together with you!”

Roland did not hesitate for the slightest moment to reject the young witch's plea and told Wendy to make sure that Lightning would behave. After all, they weren't allowed to lose any time when a horde of demonic beasts attacked.

Then, he looked at Nightingale and asked her if she was ready to go. She nodded, took hold of Roland's hand, and took him into the fog with herself, moving straight in the direction of the wall – once he knew that Nightingale could bring any other object she was in contact with along with her into the fog, Roland immediately became hooked to this kind of travel. In the fog, they could travel straight through obstacles and ignore terrain. They were able to cross several meters with one step, so this kind of traveling was very enjoyable.

When they arrived at the foot of the wall, Roland found a corner where no one could see him and stepped out of the fog to walk to the outlook alone. Looking into the distant wilderness, he could only see a world of white instead of the expected grand demonic beast invasion. Was this a false alarm? He could also feel the confusion coming from the direction of the militia, who had already taken their defense positions.

When the Prince finally found Iron Axe, Roland saw that he had a serious expression while staring into the distance with his hands tightly grasping the horn.

When Roland arrived next to him, Roland immediately asked: "Did you sound the alarm?"

"Yes, Your Highness, you see ..." Iron Axe voice was much drier than usual, "That guy came."

That guy? Roland looked carefully in the direction Iron Axe pointed at. There in the far distance, he could make out a faint black spot that was nearly invisible even in front of a pure white background, very difficult to be spotted. The rule was that only if it was determined that the patrol couldn't resolve the problem, they were allowed to sound the horn. Knowing this, Iron Axe as a seasoned hunter must have had his reasons.

"That is a hybrid species," Iron Axe had to swallow and calm himself before continuing, "The last time I encountered this bird was six years ago."

Is it really a hybrid species? Roland frowned. Theoretically, evil beasts would attack Longsong Stronghold until the point that all of them had died – possessing no intelligence, the beasts had no concept of retreat in their minds. The defense of the Longsong Stronghold had never been broken, but this hybrid beast not only survived, but was even able to live after six years? Thinking about what this could mean, Roland could detect a faint feeling of foreboding within his heart.

However, the demonic beast was so far away that Roland could only vaguely see a black spot while Iron Axe was able to clearly distinguish the type of demonic beast. Iron Axe's vision had to be really amazing. Perhaps he had misinterpreted it, the Prince thought hopefully.

The demonic beast didn't make Roland wait too long, it soon began to move closer to the walls, allowing everyone to notice its unique body.

It didn't have the large body like the previous hybrid beasts had, but instead, it looked like an enlarged version of a cat at first glance. However, on its back, it had a pair of wings that covered its body on both sides when they weren't spread out.

Its head looked like that of a lion, but with an extra pair of eyes – if the extra eyes it had weren't for decoration, then it wouldn't need to turn its head to see every movement made in the area at its rear.

Carter and several hunters had loaded their flintlocks and were prepared to take the challenge.

However, the Lion Hybrid didn't attack straightaway, but instead stopped outside of the crossbow firing range, carefully taking in everything.

The distance it stopped at was within the effective range of their flintlocks, but the probability that the first salvo would hit was almost zero.

Not long after it stopped, it suddenly leaped towards the left side, spread its wings, and took off with its huge body. As Iron Axe had previously said, it could fly or glide a short distance. After it crossed over the barriers, the hybrid demonic beast quickly flew towards the western end of the walls, attacking the unguarded area of the wall.

Seeing all this, Roland's heart madly began to thump. It felt like a nightmare come true. It had observed its enemy and judged their strength, detected and attacked their weakness, proving that it possessed high intelligence – which was previously the weakness of demonic beasts. They occasionally attacked the weakness of their prey, but that was an instinct honed by many generations over thousands of years. When facing an unknown opponent, they would not judge or even more, attack their target after long analysis.

What did having intelligence mean? Humanity relied on its remarkable brain with outstanding capabilities to climb to the top of the food chain from nascent prairie life. For the moment, Roland did not dare to reflect on it. Instead, he waved his hand, and told his Chief Knight, Iron Axe and his hunter squat to follow him to shoot down the demonic beast.

It rushed towards the unmanned segment and jumped straight over the wall, easily leaving the wall behind it, and ran straight towards the residential district, disregarding the whole hunter team as if they were nothing.

“The Beast!” Roland shouted loudly, “The second militia team go to the wall and temporarily defend the wall. The first team will come with me!”

At this point, the new team had not had enough time to get trained. With this move, he could lead them away from the battle, but if the demonic beast came back, they could attack it separately. Carter led the guards to follow the prince. They were the group with the strongest individual strength and were ready to face the enemy at any time. Behind them followed Iron Axe who was leading the team of hunters equipped with guns. After entering the old areas, they couldn't see very far since their view was blocked by the houses. With narrow roads covered by snow, they had to be careful and limit their actions. Hoping to find traces of the demonic beast, Roland was afraid that there was no other possibility than to disperse his team into many small ones and let them walk through the streets.

He regretted that he didn't let Lightning follow them. If he had a witch who could investigate the situation from the air, he wouldn't need to split his team and send them into every direction.

After searching for around ten minutes, they suddenly heard some townspeople scream from deep within an alley.

Changing their direction, the team rapidly advanced toward the source of the sound. Because most of the militia were people from the old district, they immediately found their way through the many small streets, making it appear as if they were taking a walk in their backyards. Finally arriving at the source of the sound, Roland saw a man bitten into two parts with his internal organs scattered all over the ground, obviously dead.

“My God ... it's Iron Fork, I know him!” someone shouted.

“Damn, in which direction did it run?” asked another.

“Look! The beast is right over there!” Suddenly someone shouted. Shortly after the voice fell, a dark shadow swept out from the house on the right side. Accompanied by debris from scattered wood, it flew directly through the wooden wall of a hut and directly attacked the first line of militia, pawing and biting them.

Iron Axe was the first one to react. He wanted to shoot the beast with his gun, but he discovered that his view was blocked by the other members of the militia. Trying to get the right opportunity to shoot, he squeezed himself through the crowd and walked step by step in the direction toward the hybrid species. Other hunters also discovered that they had the same problem and took their guns under their arms before jumping on the eaves or climbing up the roofs.

The hybrid species didn't care about the approaching men. It spread its wings, stood up on its hind legs and began to shake around the soldier it had bitten, spraying blood everywhere. Seeing this scene sent the crowd into a panic, causing the crowd to fearfully step back. When the hybrid species got some space it tried to jump, but in this moment a shot hit it.

Suddenly, several black flowers bloomed on the monster's fur.

The hybrid species which was hit by several lead balls roared in anger, threw away the prey in its mouth, and jumped in the direction of the hunters on the roof. When the demonic beast appeared above the crowd, it came directly into Iron Axe's view, who quickly raised his gun and aimed at the beast in front of him and pulled the trigger.

It was nearly impossible to miss a shot this close. It was even so close that the gunpowder entered the nose of the demonic beast. The velocity of the bullet wasn't reduced as it went straight through the target's eyes and penetrated its brain.

The body of the demonic beast became stiff and suddenly fell towards the ground.

Chapter 66 (Battle of Hermes Part 1)

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As the freezing cold rain fell, it diluted the smell of blood that covered the whole of New Holy City. While in these inhuman conditions, Alicia was fighting for her life by swinging her great sword while violently panting.

It wasn't her first time participating in the battle to defend Hermes, but she had never thought that there would come a day when the New Holy city could fall.

The walls were completely destroyed.

In her whole life, Alicia had never seen such a horrible monster. A huge worm-like hybrid beast came out of the ground and pressed its body close to the glacier cliff, drilling its bone claws into the cliff and climbing up the wall step by step. Even when it had reached the top, its lower body still hadn't left the ground completely.

If it had only a huge body it wouldn't have been such a disaster, but none of them could expect what had happened next. When the huge hybrid species opened its mouth, a horde of demonic beasts rushed out and turned the wall into hell within seconds.

Originally, it could still be said that everyone in her team was calm and prepared, but when the demonic beasts attacked, everything was broken and turned into disorder. During the chaos, Alicia was separated from her squad, so she could only helplessly watch as one of her comrades was swallowed by a demonic beast. Warm human blood and black monster blood mixed together and flowed along the grooves on the stone-paved floor.

When the horn gave the signal to retreat, Holy City's mangonels began to fire, dropping granite blocks the size of half a person from the sky, totally disregarding that many defenders were still fighting on the city walls.

Alicia could still clearly remember the image when her Captain was hit on the side of his head by a stone. When she got up from the floor and was finally able to look at him, she saw that he was embedded into the stone floor together with his armor. Folded together like a parchment, his intestines were dripping out of his opened abdomen, and his hot blood pooled into small puddles.

Alicia thought, If I hadn't thrown myself onto the ground at the last second when I discovered the stone, I'm afraid I would have ended up just like him!

As for how she exactly archived to stay alive and return from the walls, Alicia wasn't able to clearly remember it. She was only surrounded by yelling and cursing; everyone was frantically waving their arms, trying to defend themselves, but in the end, who they were hitting was unknown and it didn't matter if they hit a demonic beast or one of their own.

From her own team, which started with one hundred soldiers, only twelve survived, including herself.

"What to do next, Captain!"

"Captain Alicia!"

Since Alicia had survived, she was to take over the post of captain, as per the military regulations. If the captain was killed during the battle, the vice-captain would take over the post of captain and lead the team to continue the war.

To clear her head, Alicia bit her lips until an iron taste filled her mouth, then she finally decided, "We will go to the North Gate. If the demonic beasts want to leave the New Holy City they have to pass through that point." Following this order meant that they gave up the area between the walls and the whole inner city, but she had no other choice. There was no place comparable to the Central Church – nothing was more important than the Hermes Cathedral.

She didn't say it aloud, but everyone knew that with only 12 people, they couldn't play an important part in defending the walls.

In her heart, Alicia prayed, Maybe today will be the day I will die while defending the kingdom. May God be kind to me. However, to the outside world, she shouted, "Verdict will never give up! We will march!"

"Verdict will never give up!" shouted the others in union.

Alicia's team of twelve followed her and trotted in the direction of the Northern Gate. During their run, the sound of the war became less and less clear under the rain and blowing wind until it completely died down.

Upon her arrival at the North Gate, Alicia saw that there was already a crowd of survivors from other squads in front of the drawbridge. Evidently, they were thinking the same thing. This made her heart feel a little better.

However, in this time of crisis, they actually let down the drawbridge. Seeing this, Alicia began to frown and walked towards the handsome warrior in charge who was wearing the standard red robe of a presiding judge. She gave him a salute, "Presiding Judge, Sir, I'm the captain of the fourth battalion advance team, Alicia Quinn! "

"I'm Tucker Thor, responsible for the defense of the North Gate. You've worked hard," the man nodded acknowledgingly and said, "We have set up the emergency area at the other side of the gate, if your team has any injured you can send them there."

"Your honor, I don't understand why you aren't raising the drawbridge in this time of crisis? The demonic beasts on the wall can attack us at any moment, we must ensure that they don't conquer the inner city."

"Calm down, captain! I know that you and your team are not afraid to sacrifice yourself for the greater cause, but that sacrifice would now be meaningless. We are still far from the Church's point of no return," he tried to calm Alicia down, and wiped the rain from his brow then continued, "We have to work together. If you run out of pills to expel the cold, remember to ask the quartermaster for more."

When the Presiding Judge reminded her, Alicia finally recognized that she was totally frozen. After she left the heat of the battlefield behind her, the cold rain and the sweat on her body mixed together, almost turning her into an ice puppet. Facing the forever blowing ice-cold wind, she couldn't suppress her body from shivering any longer.

She grasped into her sheepskin vest pocket to pull out a bag whose contents she then dumped into her hand, only to find a viscous liquid flow out. It seemed that she had accidentally damaged the pills during the battle. Finding nothing valuable, she sighed, raised her head disappointed, only to discover a new cold expelling pill in front of her.

"Take and eat it." Tucker Thor said while reassuringly smiling at her, "When the moment comes again I may ask you for the favor to be returned."

Alicia didn't try to be polite, she immediately took the pill and swallowed it, "Maybe we won't have a next time where we need this kind of stuff."

"Yes, well, that would also be alright," Tucker actually nodded in approval, "If I have to choose I would choose death instead of eating the pill."

Just when his voice fell, a strong smell of fish washed up from Alicia's stomach. Even the stomach-churning smell of death in the city didn't have such a disgusting taste. She didn't feel like she had eaten a pill. Instead, she thought she had eaten a mixture of flesh and blood, releasing an unbearable tingling feeling from her abdomen into her body. However, the chill faded suddenly, followed by a hot flow of blood through her whole body. Alicia's body temperature was slowly restored to her normal temperature so that the already frozen sweat began to fall down. Her head also began to release water vapor and then finally she could feel her numb toes again.

“But we won’t die today,” seeing her eat the pill, the presiding judge waved his hand, “ At the moment, the God’s Army of Punishment is rushing over from the Cathedral. When they arrive here, the demonic beasts won’t be able to pass the North Gate. Take your people and send them to the assembly, and also remember to let them check if they still have their pills so that they don’t end like you and discover that their pills were destroyed when they needed it the most.”

The God’s Army of Punishment is the strongest elite arm in the Church! Alicia had already heard of them long before, but she had never witnessed them fight. But ... even if the God’s Army of Punishment was as powerful as the rumors said, they were still humans right? With a human body alone, no matter how hard they trained, they couldn’t easily beat a crowd of mixed species.

But since the presiding judge said so, she had no way out from sending her eleven survivors to the north gate, close to the western side of the assembly.

Hundreds of troops had been gathered here after their retreat. They were standing in groups of two or three in the cold rain, disregarding the cold water that was flowing down their cheeks. Some of them even sat on the ground with a listless look on their faces. Only a small number of people had lined up a neat row, waiting for the enemy to arrive at any possible time.

If it were still some days ago, Alicia would certainly have stood up and scolded them, but now, she was at a loss. In order to establish this New Holy City, countless people were buried here. It could even be said that each brick was built with the blood of believers and people sent by the military trial. The Bishop had often said that Hermes was built on holy ground, the Capital of the Kingdom of God.

Today, however, the Kingdom of God seemed to be falling by the hands of the demonic beasts.

“The demonic beasts are coming!” someone suddenly shouted, “take your positions to meet the enemy!”

Alicia shouted loudly to raise the spirits of the soldiers, lifted her sword, and gazed at the fast-approaching horde: “For Hermes!”

“- For the New Holy City!”

Chapter 67 Battle of Hermes (Part 2)

The expected final battle didn’t happen.

A soldier went to a woman standing in the front line and pressed against her sword to keep her back.

“Stand back.” His voice wasn’t loud, but it was still clear and strong. Alicia noticed that even after the intervention of this unknown person, her side was still holding their positions. Looking closer, she could see a “I” on the man’s sleeve and under it was written “God’s Army of Punishment”

She tilted her head, and not far from them a team of tall warriors rushed out of the North gate. They were all dressed in the same whole body armor, which had a silver sheen under the rain, and their red cloaks waved in the wind. However, all of them had different weapons, some were holding swords and shields while others were holding halberds or Iron Axes. After they crossed the bridge, they didn’t march as a team. Instead, they spread out and went straight against the incoming demonic beasts.

What kind of tactic is this? They are creating a total mess! They faced the demonic beasts with power and speed that exceeded what was humanly possible by far. Do they want to fight the demonic beasts completely alone and without any order? Moreover, how could we let the God's Army of Punishment fight alone against the demonic beasts?

"We have to support them!"

"No," the unknown man shook his head, looking somewhat gloomy, "You have to stay back. If you rush into the fight, you will only drag them down."

Drag them down? Alicia angrily stared at the man, could it be that her impression of the man was wrong? Was this person just a cowardly man? She clenched the hilt of her sword, ready to immediately join the battle – although the future of the New Holy City was unknown, at the moment of their biggest crisis when they had to face the enemy, she was only allowed to stand by as others fought for them.

Before she could even take two steps forward, an incredible scene happened in front of her.

Something came flying down from the sky; its shape was just like a Fallen Angel. Its huge wings were covered in gray feathers, and completely open, it had a wingspan of more than twelve feet. It had a head like a bird, but also a pair of long horns and barbed claws capable of cutting through a warrior's breastplate like they were butter.

A vertical drop from the sky was the beast's preferred kind of attack, covert and difficult to defend against. Even when holding a heavy shield, soldiers wouldn't be able to defend themselves; the huge impact force would shatter their arms and crush their rib cages. Many soldiers had already died from their attack without any chance to retaliate. Their only chance to shake it off was by throwing themselves towards the ground, diving away from the dangerous blow.

But the members of God's Army of Punishment didn't think about dodging. A warrior wearing silver armor took a firm stand against the enemy, and at the last moment he reached out with his hands and grasped the incoming claws with his hands. The impact force was so strong that a screeching sound could be heard.

The warrior bent his right foot while straightening his left foot, stretching out his arms and forming so a straight line with his body, creating a counterpart with enough power to repel the impact. When another warrior saw that the demonic beast came to a stop in the air, he threw a javelin. The javelin was so fast that Alicia could only see a silver flash. It precisely went through the beast's head, directly shattering it at the moment of impact.

The warrior who was still holding the beast's claws threw the twitching body away. His arms were abnormally bent, it seemed that the bones in his arms had been broken. Apparently, he hadn't survived the impact without any injuries, but he calmly took his iron ax and began to kill demonic beasts again.

They were only relying on manpower to withstand this herd of monsters. Seeing this, Alicia could not believe her eyes. Hundreds of soldiers of the God's Army of Punishment poured into the herd of demonic beasts. Due to their red cloaks, it seemed as if they had merged into a powerful flood of blood, abruptly stopping the enemy from moving forward. She now understood what the soldier meant when he said they would "drag" them down. These warriors seemed to have the ability of ten men. Each of them had the strength, agility and reaction time comparable to that of a demonic beast – no, they

seemed to be even stronger. In front of them, ordinary demonic beasts seemed to be almost like little children.

“They are too much!” Alicia could feel joy from the bottom of her heart. With such a strong group of warriors, Hermes’ Cathedral would never fall! “Ah, yes, I never asked you for your name, my name is Alicia Quinn, and what is your name, Captain? It appears that you already knew the fighting abilities of the God’s Army of Punishment?”

The Captain looked Alicia directly in the eyes, his look was as freezing cold as the rain. When he finally responded, he didn’t give her his name, he only muttered: “My brother is a member of the God’s Army of Punishment.”

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“It appears that we will win.” said Bishop Mayne, who stood at the topmost level of the Cathedral, looking out of the window. Here, at the highest point of the New Holy City, he used a telescope to look over more than half of the battlefield. “Let the mangonels stop their attack, our army will soon start an attack to reclaim the city walls.”

“You know that winning wasn’t the main point, right?” Suddenly, another voice could be heard. The possessor of the voice wore the same gold clothes like Bishop Mayne, but the only difference was that his voice was much older, “The important part of this fight was that the armies of the four Kingdoms were destroyed.”

“That’s right. This way, their defensive lines will be rendered useless.” said the last person. She seemed to be the youngest person in this trio, appearing to be around her early thirties and also the only woman within the three archbishops. “Their standing army of more than 5,000 well-equipped and well-trained soldiers and also nearly a thousand knights were immediately taken out of the picture. They will need four to five years to rebuild their troops. Ah ...” She let out a moan, and happily continued, “It’s really such a wonderful day.”

“But in order to achieve this purpose, we had to sacrifice many of our own soldiers, they were the backbone of the Church,” Mayne sighed, “If this wasn’t the fastest plan to achieve our desired goal, I really didn’t want to sent all of our soldiers into this purgatory.”

The old man stroked his beard thoughtfully and then said, “We had no other choice, the wild beasts had appeared, which was described in the Holy Book. Following the descriptions in the book, there is not much time left. So, if we do not unify the entire continent and force all the Kingdom under one rule, only death will await us.”

“Destruction is actually nothing bad.” said the woman while laughing frivolously, “Humans are always greedy, have malicious intent, and only see nothing but personal profit. Under the name and banner of righteousness they do much worse things than even the demonic beasts, maybe even the devil from hell would treat us better than we humans each other.”

“Heather!” shouted the man angrily while pulling his beard, “Your comments can be counted as treason and heresy against the will of God, do you want to die?!”

“You don’t need to take it to your heart, Tayfun,” Heather shrugged disregarding, her face full of disapproval, “The person in charge of this tribunal is me, not you. Besides, do you really think that it’s important to God whether we survive or not? How do you know that he is more caring than the devil?”

“You ...!”

“Enough! Tayfun! Heather!” shouted Mayne in displeasure, “That is enough for today. I need to report to the Pope, you both will go now and complete the mission.”

.....

After they left, Mayne stood in front of the window overlooking the north – with the Mountain of despair in the background, a never ending snow-covered winter land, and in the west, laid the barbarian territory. There laid the beginning of everything.

He knew that Bishop Tayfun was right, the soldiers in the God’s Army of Punishment were too precious. To join, one not only needed to be faithful but also a strong willpower to survive the transformation afterwards. After nearly a century of accumulation, the Church was only able to save one thousand soldiers. If they wanted to fight the demons, this number was not enough.

But the North could only support so many warriors. If they wanted more warriors, they had no other choice than to unify the continent.

Of course, Bishop Heather was also correct. She served as the Church’s judge, holding trials for thousands of witches. Whether they were good or bad witches, they were all gathered and killed with the most savage methods.

The higher your position was within the church, the more you could clearly feel, God wasn’t good but he also wasn’t bad.

“How do you know that he cares more for us than the devil?” When he thought about Heather’s words, Mayne couldn’t help himself from laughing out aloud. I am afraid that only she has the talent to annoy Tayfun until he has nothing left to say. God didn’t bless the world, nor did he show concern and care for the devil.

God will only love the winning party.

Chapter 68 Funeral

The funeral was held within an area south of Border Town, on the edge of the wasteland.

To call it a wasteland wasn’t correct. Van’er didn’t know when, but one day someone had built a small stone fence around this area. Since then, no one showed any interest in the piece of land. The wall was covered with thick snow, and when observed from afar it looked like it laid under a coat of silver. Although the wall wasn’t high, it was easy to step over it. Whenever Van’er saw this wall, he couldn’t help himself from thinking about the city wall – they both had the same color and shape.

Until now, he had only heard from the traveling merchants about such a ritual. When an important member of the aristocracy or royal family died, the deceased’s family would go to the cemetery together. There they would play some sad music, and everyone would be

allowed to mourn the dead until the coffin was buried underground. The greater the deceased's noble status was, the greater the funeral would be.

Even after their deaths, they still get better treatment than us commoners, thought Van'er enviously. He asked himself, what will happen to my body after my death? Will they just dig a hole at the edge of the forest and throw me into it? Also, no one knows when the Months of the Demons will end, so there will be no guarantee that no demonic beast will come and dig out my body to eat it.

To the people of Border Town, death wasn't something unknown. In particular, each winter when they were forced to live in Longsong Stronghold as refugees and live in shacks, many of them died of hunger and cold or died of diseases and injuries. That was already the norm. Nobody had the time and power to grieve for the deceased, the question of where to get the next piece of bread to eat was much more important.

But today, His Highness actually wanted to hold a funeral for a soldier!

I heard he unfortunately fell during the pursuit of the mixed species, his head was bitten off along with half of his body.

Van'er knew this unlucky guy, he could be considered as one of the known faces of the old district. No one knew his real name, everyone just called him Ali. Van'er knew that Ali left behind a wife and two children; the older one was around six and the younger one had just learned to walk.

Under normal circumstances, the family would be finished now. The widow could still find a new man to live with, but what man would also take in the two stepchildren? Because of this,

many children were thrown on the street to let them fend for themselves. Most of these children would then go to a bar to attract customers and sell their flesh and die from strange diseases in the end.

But His Highness really seems intent on honoring the promises he gave during the militia recruitment. When a soldier falls during the war, his family wouldn't only get his full payment, but also extra compensation. What had His Highness called it? Van'er had to think for a moment. Ah ... yes, he had called it a pension. And the money his wife gets is

actually five gold royals! In addition, His Highness will provide them with enough food and charcoal every month, which means that even if his wife doesn't go to work, she will have enough to care for herself and her children. Well, it could be that these are only empty promises, but at least the gold royals are real. He had seen how His Highness had given the money to the Chief Knight, who later gave the money to Ali's wife.

Hell, could it be that I'm a little envious of Ali? No, no. Van'er shook his head again and again, trying to expel this stupid thought. With my talent I don't have to sell myself so cheaply to care for my wife ... after all, it is most likely that she will become someone else's wife then.

After giving out the money, His Highness gave a short but captivating speech. In particular, the phrase "while protecting his loved ones and the innocent, we will always remember him," made the blood burn hotter within him. So that was the way it was, he thought, no wonder that in the recent days apart from bread and silver royals, I always thought to follow a greater goal – at least during this winter, we will be able to survive by relying on our own power instead of hoping for the Longsong Stronghold's charity.

The last part was the burial. Ali's coffin was let down into the previously dug pit. Then, the Chief Knight made all the militia members line up in front of the grave. Regardless of whether they were from the first team or the replacement, everyone had to step in front of the grave and throw in a shovel of earth into the grave. While queuing, the 200 hundred militia members stepped into their already all too familiar four columns. When it was Van'er's turn, he suddenly felt that the shovel had become somewhat heavy as he

took it. He could feel that all the members around him were watching every movement of his, making him slow down.

When he finally stood to the side, Van'er could see with his own eyes that the next person in line was now under the same pressure he previously felt.

The tombstone was a rectangular piece of white stone, and there were also some words written on it, but he couldn't read them. Ali wasn't the first one who was buried in this place. Next to his grave stood another similar tombstone, covered by snow. When Van'er was leaving, he saw the other new Vice-Captain Brian standing in front of a stone, slowly pouring a pot of ale on the tombstone.

Van'er couldn't help but think, if this becomes my last destination, it wouldn't be so bad.

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"Your Highness," during the return back to the castle, Carter suddenly began to talk, "what you did..."

"Was inappropriate?" continued Roland.

"No," Carter thought for a moment, but in the end he only shook his head and answered, "I don't know how to say it, but I think no one has ever treated his employees like this – they have neither a title nor a family background, and most of them don't even have a last name."

"But in the end, do you think what I did was right?" asked Roland once more.

"Well..." Roland smiled and laughed, he certainly knew that this kind of ceremony had a strong appeal to Carter, who was also always fighting for and protecting him. When people start to think who they are fighting for and why they are going to war, such a ceremony could be good motivation. For Carter, this change had an even greater meaning, now this kind of honor wasn't just a privilege for the nobility. During these times, the common people could already get the same training and teaching the nobility got, but now the civilians could also receive the honor of defending their homeland. The doubled sense of achievement was

absolutely inexplicable.

Of course, the introduction of the public funeral was just the beginning, Roland thought, he still had many ideas that could be used to enhance the collective sense of honor, such as

using flags, playing military songs, establishing a heroic example and so on.

It wasn't possible to produce such spirit out of thin air. Roland would only to be able to increase their sense of belonging step by step and always instilling the idea, until it gradually took effect. In order to ensure that the pension project was set in motion and reliable, Roland had arranged all of it by himself.

Within the Town Hall, he had set up a group of people who were responsible for the payment of the food and charcoal.

The further along Roland got on his way of upgrading Border Town, the heavier the pressure became on his shoulders. Even so, it seemed that the mining project and upgrading the people's living conditions was on the right track. With sufficient grain reserves, so far no one had starved or frozen to death. Compared to other towns and cities, this seemed to be a miracle, even in Graycastle, some people had to die during the winter. Even knowing all this, Roland thought that Border Town was still lacking in many places.

His goals were much higher than this, but his range of operation had already reached his limit. His Assistant Minister Barov and his more than a dozen apprentices who he had brought with him were now controlling all the financial and administrative management of Border Town. If Roland wanted to further expand the department, just recruiting some management staff wasn't possible. Roland had already asked Barov if he still knew some protégées colleague or favorite pupils, but the answer he got poured cold water on him:

"Even if I knew some, they wouldn't want to come. After all, Your Highness should know what kind of reputation you have right?"

Well, that sounds kind of reasonable, but it was really depressing.

When they were back in the castle backyard, Nightingale emerged out of the fog immediately giving Wendy, who was standing in front of the shed, a warm hug. Lightning was walking around the unfinished steam engine, looking at it, but when she saw Roland, she immediately pestered Roland to assemble and install the autonomous machine.

Seeing all this, Roland thought that all his hard work was worth it.

Chapter 69 Cannon System

Four days later in the backyard.

Two deep holes were dug in the ground. Each hole was in a circular shape, and the deeper it went, the narrower its radius became. At ground level, its diameter was around 40 cm but its deepest part expanded to only 26 cm. These holes were the molds that Roland intended to use to produce his cannon prototypes. The inner walls of the holes were baked and hardened by Anna. She burned it so long that its surface was without any flaws, just like a shell. She began to harden the shell at the bottom and took all the air bubbles and scum with her as she moved upwards. During history, there were several sizes of cannons; Roland roughly remembered that the so-called six pound and eight pound cannons got their name from the weight of their shells. Roland's first step for producing a cannon was to produce several twelve-pound balls, and then calculate their sizes according to the diameter and the wall thickness of the cannon's shell.

In the absence of measurement tools, Roland simply created his own custom standard. He took an iron rod and separated it into many small parts with the width of the smallest phalanx of his ring finger, hoping to come close to one centimeter. After that, he created many copies of the iron rods.

The diameter of a twelve-pound iron ball, when measured with the new iron ruler, was around twelve centimeters. Because of this, the thinnest wall of the shell had to be four centimeters, and the rear end which was used as the detonation chamber would need to be seven centimeters thick to prevent self-explosion. As for length, there were many different kinds of cannons, like the cannons used on battleships, modern tanks, or antique front-loading artillery, so he really did not know which to choose.

Taking into account that the shorter the tube, the lighter the cannon would be and the more materials could be saved. Roland dismissively waved his hand, I will just build a cannon with a length of 1.5 meters; if the tests results aren't satisfactory, I will adjust the length later.

When the cannon was originally invented, it was built with a wooden core and strengthened with iron rings, just like a barrel. Roland still remembered that this kind of cannon had the risk of air leaking and self-explosion, thus it would be better to mold the cannon bodies completely at once. When drilling out the cannon with a steam engine, there was no difference in producing a 6-pound cannon or a 12-pound cannon.

The so-called caliber was just a concept to differentiate between their sizes. If the muzzle was bigger, it became a 12 pounder. Everything beyond that couldn't be used as field artillery. But the exact weight of the shells or the cannon balls wasn't important as long as they shoot in a straight line. After all, he was only getting ideas from history and not replicating it.

Roland took a deep breath, then he gave Anna the signal to start "start now". The latter nodded her head, took a steel ingot, and placed it over the hole. Under the power of her green flame, the ingot quickly turned red and began to melt, forming a small waterfall out of molten iron which flowed into the hole. The molten iron glowed red-orange and became so bright that it was hard to look at. In order to protect Anna's eyes, Roland specially set up a support frame at the edge of the hole. She just had to take a good position first and then she could lean against the support frame to produce the cannon without looking into the hole.

The ingots were normally only used up slowly. After all, Anna alone couldn't start the era of hot steel, but producing a small batch wasn't a big problem – the most difficult problem to solve was to hold the temperature at the same level, but with Anna's help he was able to produce a small batch of excellent quality steel.

This was also the reason why Roland dared to produce a cannon of the size of five meters. Compared to the cannons produced out of bronze or iron, the cannon made out of steel was clearly much stronger. Even if Roland built the cannon in the wrong size, the probability that it would self-explode was much smaller.

The amount of molten steel was continuing to rise within the hole, but the numbers of ingots were also becoming less and less. Seeing this, Roland couldn't help himself but feel some heartache. In the end, he only could wait until the time when he would be able to build some blast furnaces on his territory. The number of steel and iron ingots a noble could produce was one of the criteria used to measure strength and power during this time.

When the two molds were filled, Anna's cheeks were bright red because of her effort. So, Roland took out his handkerchief and gently wiped the sweat from her nose away. Unable to accept this

embarrassing care, Anna showed some resistance at the beginning, but after a few seconds she obediently closed her eyes and let Roland take care of her.

Her face had a red shine from the light of the molten steel, causing Roland to think about taking a bite out of her. However, when he looked further down her neck, her exposed, slender clavicle entered his view. The both of them were so close together that Roland could smell her delicate fragrance.

“Ahem, well ...” Roland embarrassedly took the handkerchief away while trying to control his restless emotions, “that was everything for today. Well done! I will tell the kitchen to specially prepare a pepper steak for you.”

Now wasn't the right time, Roland thought, if I take action now, everyone will think that I am taking advantage of a vulnerable person. I will have to wait until she is completely free...

When Anna opened her eyes, she could feel that Roland had wiped away all her sweat, but his face seemed to be redder than before. She gently nodded to Roland and expressed her thanks.

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In the next few days, Roland traveled between the castle and the North Slope Mine several times.

In addition to cannons, he also needed to make a sufficient amount of boring tools.

The production method of the boring tools for gun barrels and cannon barrels were quite similar. After their removal from the mold, Anna would heat them up again, so that they could be processed with a hammer. It was quite different from producing an ordinary knife. At first glance, it looked like a blunt iron rod. However, the only difference was that it had a gap on its head, which was used to discharge metal debris. At the last step, the iron was quenched to increase its hardness.

The production method was quite different from modern high precision drills. After all, Roland only needed them to drill into iron. Taking their high wear rate into account, Roland and Anna produced five boring tools within a week. Thanks to this boring tools and the usage of the steam engine for drilling – the production of the gun barrels rapidly increased from 2 each month to ten each day.

After everything was ready, the miners would dig out the two cannon embryos, then clean the scum from the surface and transport them onto the carriage smithy.

For the production of these two cannon embryos, nearly all of Roland's steel ingots were consumed, a priceless test. So Carter and his whole guard were responsible for the protection of the transport, which let the Chief Knight feel a little superfluous. Who would steal so much inflexible stuff?

According to the requirements of the Prince, the blacksmith began to polish and flatten the appearance of the embryo, after the grindstone. When they had finished it, the embryos were delivered into the castle backyard. At this time they just looked like two solid iron bars with dark gray and rounded appearances, exuding a heavy metallic luster.

Roland couldn't wait to start the drilling, so together with Carter he brought the embryo to the right place, and placed the tip of the cutter head at the top of the steel bar.

With a face full of expectation, Roland pulled the valve on the steam engine. The boring tool slowly began to operate, but not much later it was already running at a steady speed.

“Begin!” the Prince loudly shouted.

Hearing this, the Chief Knight pushed the sliding base down so that the boring tool came in contact with the embryo. When the tip of the boring tool came into contact with the embryo, a harsh noise which even overshadowed the noise of the steam engine could be heard. As lubricant they used lard, which was packed into the drilling, coming out of the wire as black foam. The onlooking witches withdrew from the wooden shed, and only Lightning insisted on staying. It seemed to her that looking at this machine was much more beautiful than any landscape.

Please vote on the future of the commenting system!

Chapter 70 Spy (Part 1)

“Groundhog” Kohl was somewhat anxious as he looked out of the window.

In this hell-like place, it was snowing without end. He thought that the sky looked exactly like his grandmother’s sheets which she hadn’t washed for years, both of them dirty and gray. Even though he couldn’t see the sun, he still had another way to judge the hour.

That ‘way’ was the militia training; as long as the weather permitted, the militia would run every morning (at 8 am) around the town square. The group of idiots had already started it a month before the Months of the Demons, but they were still doing it even now.

Don’t these people know that it’s most important to save as much strength as possible during the winter so when the time comes that they truly need to run, they won’t need to pray to God to lend them stronger legs?

However, thanks to this bunch of idiots, he could now determine the right time to leave.

That’s right, Kohl wanted to flee this possessed town! Although he was ordered by the 2nd Prince to stay in Border Town to observe everything that the 4th Prince did and then send the gathered intelligence back to Valencia, But now, he had reached a point where he didn’t want to stay any longer.

His thoughts were, I’m afraid that in less than two weeks I, along with this town’s inhabitants will all become the Devil’s sacrifices.

This wasn’t him being paranoid!

Since the beginning of winter, one strange thing after another had happened. Perhaps other people weren’t aware of it – which to him, wasn’t surprising.

These townspeople don’t have any experience; they’re all country bumpkins! As long as they have enough to eat, they don’t care even if the heavens were to fall down on them. But I’m different, I’m “Groundhog” Kohl! Because my skills in stealing information and snooping for news are the best, His Highness Timothy himself hired me for this job.

One night, when he had climbed over the city wall, he had discovered a strange weapon that was able to knock down demonic beasts, but of course, this wasn’t the most startling discovery.

The 4th Prince was openly working together with a witch!

Merciful God, could there be anything more unholy than this? There can't be any other explanation, the Devil is controlling the 4th Prince!

Even if the Prince only wanted to have a taste of a witch's flesh, he would surely only do that if he was hidden in his castle. It wasn't the first time for Kohl to hear that a noble had become addicted to the taste of witches – after all, there were many aristocrats with strange habits, but it turned into a completely different matter when it was done in public.

But this wasn't a delusion; he had seen it with his own eyes!

Based on the principle "those who are paid have to do the work", every day, when the snow wasn't too high, Kohl walked towards the nearby city walls. There, he could often see the figure of the 4th Prince, doing his work. In the beginning, he had asked himself the question, what gave the incompetent and spoiled Prince the courage to stay in Border Town during the Months of the Demons, not piss in his own pants in terror, and run back towards Longsong Stronghold? But now he finally understood; the Prince had already been replaced by the Devil!

He had been at his hiding place when the big demonic beast burst through the wall, which was then killed by the Devil's Thunder. The following rush of the demonic beasts was held back by the flames summoned by the witch. And it was exactly this witch who later threw herself into the arms of the Prince!

He also had heard constant rumors from his neighbors. They talked about a witch who supposedly had the ability to heal wounds. The witch was said to have cured an injured boy; supposedly she had also cured the broken foot of the old lady from across the street.

But to Kohl, this was only a blasphemous rumor! How could someone accept treatment from a witch? What would be the difference between them and all the witches who accepted the Devil's corruption?

However, the last straw for Kohl was two days ago, when he saw a witch flying two rounds around the Prince's castle and then going down into his backyard. What did the Church's father always say? A witch will only get her powers after she had fallen to the Devil's temptation. And by now he had already seen a witch with the power to summon flames and another witch with the ability to fly around the castle. Together with the rumors about the witch with healing ability, he came to the conclusion that at least three witches had gathered!

Undoubtedly, the Devil has turned the castle into his own lair, and now he's gradually beginning to turn the townsfolk into his minions. I have to leave this town as soon as possible! Anyway, I'm holding the alchemic formula for the gray powder used to build the city walls in my hands. As long as I deliver this to the 2nd Prince, not only will I not be punished, but I might even receive a reward.

From day to day, Kohl regretted more and more that he hadn't left when the other aristocracy had left Border Town for Longsong Stronghold.

But now, if he wanted to leave this place, the way above ground wasn't a viable possibility. During the whole of winter it would continue to snow, making it impossible to either walk or ride to Longsong Stronghold. His only way was by booking passage on a merchant ship from Willow Town.

According to Kohl's observations, every first day of the month, a boat from Willow Town would deliver food to Border Town. After two to three hours of loading and unloading, it would set sail again and leave the harbor. He only had this small time frame to get on board. Otherwise, he could only wait until the next month.

Today was finally the start of the month's first day.

"One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four" Just then, Kohl heard the already familiar slogan again. He could see a group of men in brown leather uniforms running in full spirit. If Kohl hadn't seen through the Devil's plot, this would have been a remarkable scene to look at.

Finally, it's time to leave, he thought.

After putting on his fur coat and fastening his belt, Kohl moved away from his cabin. At this moment a neighbor who sat outside of his cabin saw Kohl and greeted him, "Good morning. Where are you walking to so early in the morning?"

Kohl had to acknowledge that, although Border Town was now controlled by the Devil, thanks to this, the life of these souls became a lot better compared to their former lives. They even dared to dry their fish outside of their houses – after all, if the people were hungry enough, even if the fish were as hard as a stone, they would still try swallowing it raw.

However, Kohl didn't respond to the man's question. Instead, he took a probing look towards the militia and when he saw them running around a corner; he went straight towards the pier. Residents here regarded him as the younger brother of Iron Paddle, who came from the Fallen Dragon Mountain range to visit his family – of course, all of this was nonsense. Previously he had caught the real Iron Paddle, questioned him for his name and address and then killed him. He had then taken Paddle's clothes and masqueraded himself as his brother. This was just one casually created identity, so Kohl didn't care whether they believed in it or not.

Within the last few days, the fallen snow had been cleared from the streets until there was nearly no snow beneath his shoes. He kept a constant speed so that he could save as much stamina as possible – as for the footprints he left behind, he wasn't worried. Within a day the snow would cover all of his footprints. Maybe even by the time he reached Valencia, they would still be in the dark about his whereabouts.

As he approached the marina, Kohl saw the long-awaited merchant boat.

Under the watchful eyes of the guards, bags of wheat were being carried out of the storage room. Kohl checked the contents of his pockets again, inside he had two gold royals and sixteen silver royals which was all of the possessions he had. Seeing that there were six guards, Kohl thought that it wouldn't be enough even though he had two gold royals. So, his only way out would be bribing the porter. As soon as the unloaded goods could provide him with protection from being seen, he would immediately go towards the porter, and ask him whether he would like to have a good future life or if he wanted to get knocked out. As long as he could get on board, Kohl believed, that in all likelihood, the temptation of the gold royals would be enough and the captain would take him away.

At the moment Kohl was ready to take action, he heard shouts from behind him.

His heart immediately became gloomy, when he turned around he discovered that some militia was rushing towards him, coming from all directions and leaving him no way to escape.

When seeing that there was no way to escape, Kohl immediately put his hands in the air and fell to his knees. One of his mottos was to not show pointless resistance, as long as he spat out all of his employer's information, he would be safe, or probably they would even... try to hire him for an even higher price as a double agent.

As long as he got money, he would do anything; this was the principle of "Groundhog."

But there was one point he didn't understand. How were they able to find him?