

Witch 1

Chapter 1: From today onwards, I am a Royal Prince

Cheng Yan could sense that someone was calling him.

“Your Highness, please wake up...”

He turned his head away, but the sounds he’d heard didn’t disappear, they actually proceeded to get even louder instead. Then, he felt someone gently tug on his sleeve.

“Your Highness, my Royal Prince!”

Cheng Yan’s eyes snapped open. His familiar surroundings had disappeared, his work desk was gone, and the familiar walls filled with post-its were gone. They’d all been replaced by a strange landscape. A round public square that was enclosed by small brick houses, and the gallows that were erected in the center of the square now dominated his field of view. He himself sat at a table across the square from the gallows. There wasn’t a soft rotating office chair under his butt, but a cold hard iron chair instead. There was also a group of people sitting with him and watching him intently. Several of them were dressed as medieval lords and ladies from those Western flicks, and were trying to suppress their giggles.

What the hell? Wasn’t I just rushing to finish my mechanical blueprints before the deadline? Cheng Yan was at a loss as he thought to himself. For three consecutive days, he had been working overtime. Thus, he was both mentally and physically at his limit. He could only vaguely remember that his heartbeat had become unsteady, and that he’d just wanted to lie down on his desk and take a break...

“Your Highness, please declare your ruling.”

The speaker was the one that had secretly tugged on his sleeve. His face was old, seemingly in his fifties or sixties, and he wore a white robe. At first glance, he looked a bit like Gandalf, from The Lord of the Rings.

Am I dreaming? Cheng Yan thought as he licked his dry lips, Ruling? What ruling?

As he quickly glanced around, his confusion was swept away. The people surrounding him were all looking in the direction of the center of the square, at the gallows. Many townspeople were also in the plaza and were waving their fists while they shouted and even threw an occasional stone towards the gallows and the figure on it.

Cheng Yan had only ever seen such an ancient instrument of death in movies. The gallows consisted of two pillars extending upwards about 4 meters from a raised base, with a crossbeam extending between the two pillars with a thick yellow hemp rope around the middle of the crossbeam. One end of the rope was tied to the gallows, and the other end was tied into a noose around a prisoner’s neck.

In this strange dream Cheng Yan thought he was in, he found that he was able to see everything clearly. Usually, he’d even need to wear his glasses to see the words on a computer screen, but now Chen Yang could see every detail of the gallows, which were fifty meters away, without his glasses.

The prisoner atop the gallows had their head completely covered with a hood and had their hands tied behind their back. They wore dirty grey clothes that were little more than rags draped over a frame so

thin, it seemed you could easily wrap your hand around their exposed ankle. Cheng Yan judged the prisoner to be female by her faintly bulging chest, and looked on as she stood there shivering in the chilly wind, but still trying to stand up straight to face her fate on her feet.

Alright then, Cheng Yan thought to himself, what crime did this woman commit that caused so many people to be so outraged, and to wait for her to be hanged with such rage and hostility?

Cheng Yan's memories appeared, almost as if they'd suddenly been turned on and he realized the cause of the situation, and the answer to his question, at almost the same time.

She was a "witch".

She was considered to have fallen to the temptation of the devil and was known as an incarnation of evil.

"Your Highness?" The Gandalf lookalike cautiously urged.

Cheng Yan glanced at the old man. Well, Cheng Yan's new memories told him, the old man wasn't called Gandalf, his real name was Barov, and he was an Assistant Minister of Finance dispatched by the Roland's father to assist in the governing of the territory.

Cheng Yan's identity was that of the 4th Prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Roland, and he had been sent here to govern this region. The residents of this border town had caught and seized the witch, immediately turning her over to the local guards to question. Questioning? No, She was immediately sent to be sentenced with no opportunity to defend herself. The execution of suspected witches was usually overseen by the local lords or bishops, but since he'd assumed control of this territory, issuing such orders had become his obligation.

Cheng Yan's memory answered his questions one by one, it was unnecessary to filter and read through them, it was as if they had always been his own experiences. He was momentarily confused, there was absolutely no way a dream could have so many details. Then, Cheng Yan thought, was it possible that this wasn't a dream? I've really traveled through time, to the dark ages of medieval Europe, and have become Roland? I've gone from a pitiful mechanical engineer with his nose down in his papers to a grand 4th Prince overnight?

This piece of territory that looked so barren and backward was in the Kingdom of Graycastle, a name that he had never seen in his history books.

Well, then how do I want to handle this? Cheng Yan thought to himself.

Cheng Yan decided he would try and examine how an unscientific thing like being transported through time and space had happened later, his immediate concern was with how to stop the farce taking place in front of him. Assigning the blame for the disasters and misfortune that befell them onto these "witches" was the act of ignorant barbarians. He really couldn't bring himself to do anything as stupid as hanging another person just to satisfy the watching masses.

He grabbed the formal written orders held by Barov and tossed them to the ground and slowly said, "I'm feeling tired, we will give our judgement another day. Court dismissed, now disperse people!"

Cheng Yan knew he couldn't risk being reckless, so he rummaged carefully through his memories and reflected the former prince's behavior. He had to continue on with the former prince's dandyism and roguish behavior. That's right, the fourth prince himself was messed up, had a nasty character, and did whatever he wanted with no thoughts to the consequences of his actions. Anyways, Cheng Yan mused, could they really expect an uncontrollable twenty-something year old to have good behavior?

The members of the nobility who sat with him maintained their equanimity at his unexpected statement, but a tall man wearing a suit of armor stood up and argued, "Your Highness, this isn't a joke! All known witches should be put to death immediately upon being identified, or other witches might be tempted to try and save her! Do you want to force the church to get involved when they hear that we have allowed a witch to live? We have no choice in this matter!"

Carter, this dashing man, was actually his Knight Commander. Cheng Yan frowned and said, "Why? Are you scared?" His voice was full of blatant mockery and wasn't a complete act. A man with an arm thicker than the waist of the so called "witch" actually feared a prison raid from women. Were witches really the devil's messengers? "Wouldn't it be better to catch more witches than to settle for only one?"

Seeing him no longer utter a word, Cheng Yan waved his hand to call his personal guards and left. Carter hesitated a moment before going down and catching up with the troops walking by the 4th prince's side. The other nobles got up and paid their respects to the prince, but Cheng Yan could see undisguised contempt from the eyes of those in the crowd.

Back in the keep, the castle was located to the south of the border town, he dismissed the anxious Minister Barov outside the door to his chambers, allowing him to finally breathe a sigh of relief now that he was alone.

As a person who'd spent ninety percent of his time dealing with people through a computer, facing everyone like he just had already surpassed his comfort zone. Cheng Yan found the location of his bedroom from his new memories, took a seat on his bed, and got a moment of real rest as he tried to suppress his violently beating heart. At the moment, the most important matter was to clarify the situation. Why was the prince, who couldn't stay in Wimbledon City, the capital of the kingdom, sent to this barren land?

The unexpected answer he came up with left him stupefied.

Roland Wimbledon was actually sent here to fight for the right to succeed the king.

Everything had originated from King Wimbledon III of Graycastle's wonderful proclamation to his children saying, "You want to inherit the kingdom? The first-born prince doesn't necessarily have the right to become king, only the person who proves themselves as the most capable of governing can inherit the country." He placed various territories under the rule of his five children, and after five years he'd decide who would become his successor based on the level of skill they displayed in governing their respective territories.

While turning the decision of who should inherit the throne into a meritocracy and providing equal opportunity regardless of gender might sound like very enlightened concepts, the real problem was with the actual implementation of said ideas. Would there be any guarantee that all five of them received the same starting conditions? This wasn't like playing a real-time strategy game. To his knowledge, the

second son had been given a better territory than this border town. Actually when he thought about it, it seemed that among the five regions they'd been given, none of the others were worse than his frontier town. His starting point was simply inferior.

Also, Cheng Yan wondered, how was one to assess the level of governance? By the population? Military power? Economic standing? Wimbledon III hadn't mentioned any standard, nor did he put the slightest restrictions on their methods of competition. In case someone secretly assassinated the other candidates, what would he do? Would the queen stand by and watch her children kill each other? Wait. He carefully recalled the next memory, all right, another piece of bad news; the Queen had died five years ago.

Cheng Yan sighed. Obviously, this was a barbaric and dark feudal era he had found himself in. Just the way they seemed to wantonly kill witches was enough to give him a few hints. Also, Cheng Yan thought, why would he want to become king? With no internet and none of the comforts of modern civilization, he'd have to live the same life as the native people. Burning witches for fun, living in a city where everyone dumped their excrement wherever they wished, and finally dying from the Black Death.

Cheng Yan being a prince could already be considered a very high starting point. Even if he didn't become king he was still of royal blood and had already been knighted. As long as he managed to stay alive he would be considered as one of the Lords of the Realm.

Cheng Yan suppressed his wandering thoughts and went to his bedroom mirror. The man looking back at him in the mirror had light gray hair, which was the royal family's most distinctive feature. His face was slightly pale and with his regular facial features, he seemed to be completely without personality traits. He appeared to be lacking in physical exercise and as for wine and woman, he recalled indulging in both with some regularity. He had had several lovers in the King's City, but all had been willing participants, he hadn't forced anyone.

As for the cause of his own crossing over... Cheng Yan guessed that thanks to the company's inhuman urging to progress forward, his boss had arranged for him to work overtime, which in turn actually led to the tragedy that was his sudden death. The victims of cases like these were usually coders, mechanical engineers, and programmers.

In the end, no matter what, at least I got the equivalent of an extra life. I really shouldn't complain too much, in the coming days, I might be able to slowly improve this life, but my first task is to play a convincing 4th Prince, so that other people don't find something amiss with my behavior and think I'm possessed by the devil, leading to my being burned at the stake, Cheng Yan thought to himself.

"So, in order to live well..." Cheng Yan took a deep breath, looked in the mirror, and whispered, "from now on, I'm Roland."