

## Witch 17

### Chapter 17 Ambassador (Part 1)

"This is such a rotten place." When stronghold emissary Petrov stepped out of his cabin, the smell of decayed wood hit him in the face. The surrounding air was damp and oppressive, causing people to feel entirely uncomfortable. He lifted his head up and inhaled through the nose. The sky was completely overcast, and it seemed that heavy rain was incoming.

"The last time you came here was a year ago," said the assistant to the ambassador while he graciously put a wool coat on the ambassador's shoulders, "There is nothing here, except stone."

"It was a year and a half." Petrov corrected. "Every season the Duke chose a different person to come around. The last time I was in Border Town, it was summer. But in addition to ore they have more, like a good variety of furs, and..."

"What?" His assistant had a blank look on his face.

Petrov shook his head and did not answer. He crossed over the side of the ship, stepping on the pier covered with moss, and a plank gave off a creaking sound from under his foot. The wood would probably continue to support the dock for a few years, but then it would break down, he thought. Border town not only had stone and fur, but even... land.

But speaking about this hadn't any meaning, the assistant was only an unknown city hall officer, he was unable to see this point.

Between Longsong Stronghold and Border Town was a large area of wild land, which still needed to be cleared for cultivation. On one side was the impassable mountain range, while on the other side was the Chishui River, long and narrow like a corridor. As an outpost for the stronghold, if they assumed responsibility of the defensive line, it would also bring the wide expanse of land into the possession of the stronghold. The land had not been cultivated, so it didn't require any recuperation before plowing. Instead, many circles of crops could be planted, and on top of that, it had a natural line of defense on both sides. In the end, to produce enough for everyone to eat, it was not required to expend much effort. The food shortage in Border Town was just a way to relieve the stronghold of the problems caused by a growing population. In the future Border Town and the stronghold should become one territory, rather than the two separated territories they are now.

The only drawback was that it would need a three to five year-long operation, as well as large sums of money in advance.

Unfortunately, when talking about the foresight of investment, most of the nobility were bad businessmen.

"Hey, how can it be that the yard is empty?" The assistant pointed to a distant piece of land. "Shouldn't they have the ore ready?"

Petrov sighed softly, "We will go to the castle, and have an audience with His Royal Highness."

"Wait... Mr. Ambassador, do you know if he will receive you?"

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He didn't know if His Majesty would, but in his heart he didn't want to say it.

"Let's go, the stables are just in front."

Trouble came now that the stronghold and Border town were divided into two separate territories. Because of the King's order to fight for the throne, the 4th prince was left in solitude. How would a normal aristocratic or royal member ever be here? Of course they would take all of this land for themselves.

Selling minerals and jewelry in exchange for food and bread? I am afraid that the prince's eyes only can see gold royals.

If it was himself, he would do it. To helplessly watch as one's own territory output is exchanged for only food... The ambassador was afraid that nobody would accept this situation. In addition, the products didn't have to go to the stronghold. Most of the nobility forgets the fact that the Chishui River didn't end at the Longsong Stronghold. He could sell the ore at market price in Willow Town, in Dragon Mountain, or even in Red City, then take people from their cities as new refugees – it was nothing more than a little further down the river.

What could the Longsong Stronghold do then? Block the river, and cut off the prince and his party? It would simply be a defiance of the royal family of Graycastle! Everyone knew that the 4th prince was least likely to become the king, but without a doubt, it would still not be good to defy him because he was still of the king's blood. .

The Ambassador and his assistant rode on rented horses, coming slowly forward on the stone road along the river. The stables only had old horses of mixed colors; even if they rode slowly, the horses would still tremble. And for these two stupid horses, he had still to pay a deposit of two gold royals.

"You see, sir, is that a boat from Willow Town?"

Hearing his aide shout, he looked in the direction he pointed, only to see a ship with a willow leaf on their green banner, hanging on their single pole, slowly sailing down the river. The hull waterline was very high, indicating that it was loaded with cargo.

Petrov blankly nodded, but his heart sank, the prince moved faster than he had expected. If the prince had begun to contact those towns and cities downstream, the bargaining chips in his own hands lost value. He originally intended to acquire the ore for 30 percent lower than the normal price, so that he would still earn something. Not to mention, after the stones were turned into polished jewelry, the price of luxury goods were several times higher. Unfortunately, this was not a monopoly, nor was it only his family who had the final say. Participating in the mining project in Border Town were six noble families. If they lacked majority consent, then there would be no resolution.

However, they were slow in reacting, thinking that the situation was the same as before... Or, they thought the mining project was not worth that much attention. Anyway, the remaining five were indifferent, even his own father confidently rejected him. In fact, they were wrong, the low reward of the mining output was mainly due to few other trading possibilities, if they transitioned to the normal trade, they could earn more. And if you earn more, you will be likely to produce more ore next year.

Could they achieve the monopoly scheme they thought out before? In all likelihood, no, it certainly couldn't be realized. Petrov thought, since he could see the empty yard, the prince did not intend to let these minerals be exchanged for poor quality wheat, he had to contact the other buyers.

If they still wanted to hold this line of business, a thirty percent discount was his best bargaining chip. Since the distance between Willow Town and Border Town was further, this would end in an increase of the transportation costs, but Willow Town had more than one source of ore; the first price they would offer would likely be lower than the market price by half. As for Dragon Mountain and Red Town, the price would be even lower, so the 4th prince would agree to Longsong Stronghold monopoly – especially for the gem trade.

But the problem was, if he signed a contract, would his father agree with it? The other five families believed that it would be a simple matter to let Border Town surrender, should he dismiss the interests of the family to get the contract?

After all, in their eyes, Border Town was still controlled by their own Longsong Stronghold, and everything could be given or taken away by them.

They slowly crossed the town, heading toward the castle located in the southeast corner. It was not Petrov's first time here, but this time the owner had changed.

When the guards saw the ambassador, they immediately went in and informed the Lord.

4th prince Roland Wimbledon quickly summoned Petrov, and when the two were guided into the hall; the prince was already sitting at the main seat waiting.

"Mr. Ambassador, please sit down."

Roland clapped his hands and let the maid bring hearty meals. Grilled whole chicken, a wild boar leg with mushroom stew, butter bread and a large bowl of vegetable soup. Obviously, in this borderland, the royal children hadn't the slightest impairment of personal enjoyment.

Petrov naturally didn't hesitate, he traveled by ship from Longsong Stronghold to Border Town, and even with favorable wind it took two days; if it was a multi-masted cargo ship, it would have been even slower, maybe three to five days. There was no kitchen on board, so it usually came with eating dried meat strips or wheat bread. Seeing the billowing hot dishes, he felt saliva surging in his throat.

But thanks to years of training in aristocratic culture, he could maintain perfect dining etiquette. On the contrary, His Highness' eating habits were a lot worse – in particular his use of the knife and fork. Petrov noted that in addition to the carving knife, the 4th prince used a pair of small sticks. When the slicing was completed, he used the sticks for all the other moves. And it looked like... two sticks were much more convenient than a fork.

"What do you think?" At the end of the meal, Roland suddenly questioned the ambassador.

"Uh, what?" For a moment the ambassador lost his spirit.

"This," Roland shook the hands with the sticks, before answering Petrov, "The iron fork, for most people it is a luxury, not to mention a silver fork. When you are eating directly with your hand, it is very easy to put dirty things together with the normal food in the belly. Disease enters by the mouth, you know? "

The ambassador didn't know how to answer, he didn't understand the meaning of 'diseases enters by the mouth', but according to his understanding of the previous sentence, Roland was probably referring to the dirt stuck on food, and it would be easy to get sick when eating it. But when someone tried to diagnose the sickness, no one knew the reason why they died.

"How many sticks do you think you can get by cutting down one oak tree in the forest? These sticks are clean and easy to get. I'm going to promote this in the town."

The prince sipped his wine and continued, "Of course, now my people don't get much meat to eat, but I will slowly change that."

Petrov felt relieved, he now knew how to answer. Routinely, he expressed his support and blessing, but in his heart he did not agree. Let all the people have meat? That would simply be whimsical, even Graycastle could not do this, and this Border Town was in this desolate land.