

Witch 3

Chapter 3 The Witch Named Anna (Part II)

Roland swallowed the last piece of fried egg from his breakfast, took a napkin and wiped his mouth before saying, "So you are saying that you are worried that the Witch Cooperation Association will hear the news that the witch did not die and hence will try to rescue her?"

"It is as your Highness has said," Barov stomped angrily as he exclaimed, "If the prisoner had died it would be bad enough, but now she is still alive! If those witches are even crazy enough to steal babies on the chance they might become future comrades, how far do you think they'd go for someone who has already become a minion of the devil? With how recklessly they behave, attempting a rescue wouldn't be surprising."

Roland was confused, he had always felt that there was something amiss about this situation. Why were the Assistant Minister and the Knight Commander so scared of witches?

The woman who should have been hanged was a witch, right? The woman who was so thin it was as if she would fall down when the wind blew? If she really had such a terrible power, why would she need to stand there and wait for death? No, she would not. According to the preaching of the church, she was the devil incarnate, to be executed without trial. Even the army would need to pay a hefty price when going against a witch. However, this "devil" was caught by the normal townspeople of this border town, was tortured, even fitted with a noose, but until now they had not seen a trace of that supposed terrible power.

"How did she get caught?" Roland queried.

"I heard that when the North Mine collapsed, in order to escape, she exposed her identity as a witch and was then captured by angry villagers." Barov answered.

Roland thought as he listened to Barov, Why do I have the impression that this happened the day before my reincarnation?

"How did she expose herself?" The prince asked aloud.

"I, well... I am not sure," the assistant minister shook his head and said, "the situation was very confusing, it could be that someone saw her using witchcraft."

Roland frowned as he asked, "you did not thoroughly investigate the situation?"

"Your Highness, to resume mining was the priority," the assistant minister protested, "The revenue from that iron mine accounts for half of the production of this town, and the guards confirmed that someone at the scene was killed by witchcraft."

"What kind of witchcraft?" Roland asked, interested.

"The head and a large part of the body were spread out on the ground as if they were melted. The corpse looked like a used up candle," the minister said with a look of disgust. "Your Highness, be glad you didn't see such a scene."

Roland started playing with a silver fork thoughtfully. Historically, most of the victims of the inquisition witch hunt were innocent, tools for the church to maintain control over the populace or possibilities for ignorant townspeople to vent their anger. Sure, a small part of the accused caused their own downfall. The kind of people dressed that oddly while mixing together all sorts of strange material, claiming that they could predict the future and knew the conclusion of life and death.

The truth was those people did figure out some tricks, such as the use of chemical reactions, but then they used that to claim that they had gained the power of the gods.

To modern eyes, these were just some simple chemistry tricks, but in medieval times, those could easily be misrepresented as incredible phenomenon.

As for melting people, the first thing Roland thought of was an acid solution.

But it would be a hassle to prepare those kinds of things, and you would also need to thoroughly soak the body with it, but it wouldn't look like a burned down candle, as for other methods they were out of the question.

Then how did she do it?

If she relied on alchemy, and that was rare, maybe...

Roland thought until there and then said in a determined tone, "Take me to see her."

The Assistant Minister was shocked for a moment before spluttering, "Sir, you want to see the witch?" Barov stood up in panic, knocked over the cup with the milk which he hadn't drunk.

"Yes, this is a command." Roland said looked back and smiled at the assistant minister, he was now really thankful for the fourth prince's unreasonable style.

Roland went over to the door but suddenly paused, asking, "Right, I have to ask, why would we use the gallows?"

"What?" Barov said.

Roland reiterated his question, "Why would she be hanged? Shouldn't witches be burned at the stake?"

Barov face seemed puzzled as he asked, "Isn't it true? But she is not afraid of fire."

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The dungeon was small, this barren land could not afford to have too many prisoners. Most criminals would face trial after a few days and either be released or killed.

In addition to Barov, the Prince was entering the dungeon with the Knight Commander, the prison warden, and two guards.

The dungeon had a total of four levels and the walls were built out of hard granite blocks. It was Roland's first time being at this kind of place and he noted the deeper he got, the narrower the hallway became. The number of cells was also reduced. He thought they probably they dug a pit in the form of an inverted cone first, and then build layer after layer out of stone.

This rough project would of course not have a good drainage system. The ground was wet and the muddy sewage was flowing down the stairs, down to the last floor.

Obviously, the witch was at the bottom of the dungeon. Each layer they went down, the stench in the air became thicker.

“Your Highness, you are risking too much by doing this, even though she is sealed with God’s Locket of Retribution, it isn’t safe.”

It was Carter who had spoken. As soon as he knew that the prince was planning on visiting the witch, he immediately went after the prince, advising him all along the road to stop going over. But it was all for naught, even the repeating the direct command of the king not to engage in any dangerous situations had no effect. Obviously, he wasn’t only a pretty face, he was also a chatterbox. After being subjected to this for some time, Roland only wished that someone would sew his mouth up. “You must look evil in the eye before you face it on the battlefield and stand toe to toe. I thought you knew that.” he said.

“In addition to fighting the evil with courage, it is also important to assess one’s capabilities and act accordingly; reckless behavior is not considered courageous.” Carter rebutted.

“You mean to say that if you ran into an enemy weaker than you, you hold justice, but if he is stronger than you, you will turn a blind eye?” Roland challenged.

“No, Your Highness, I mean ...” Carter stammered.

“Before you were already afraid of a witch raid, and now you are even afraid to see a little girl, my Knight Commander is indeed fearsome.”

Although the knight was a good speaker, he didn’t excel at debate, encountering a smooth talker like Roland he completely lost. Taking advantage of this effort, the group reached the bottom of the dungeon.

This floor was many times smaller than the one above, with a total of only two cells. The warden lit the torches on the walls and as the darkness faded, Roland saw the hunched over witch in a corner of her cell.

It was already late autumn and the temperature in the dungeon was low enough to make people see white fog when they took a breath. He wore a fur coat with silk lining inside, so did not feel cold, but the girl only wore coarse linen that couldn’t even fully cover her body with her arms and feet sticking out and turning blue.

The suddenly lit up torches made her cringe away with her eyes closed. But soon, she was able to open her eyes and looked straight at them.

It was a pair of pale blue eyes, like a calm lake before the onset of heavy rains. There was no fear on the witch’s face and you couldn’t see any anger or hatred. Roland saw a vision, it was as if what he saw in front of him was not a weak little girl. Instead, it appeared as if he was in front of a raging flame. He suddenly felt that the torch light from the walls was a little dim.

The girl tried to stand up while leaning against the wall, in slow-motion as if afraid to fall. But in the end, she ultimately stood up and hobbled her way out of the corner, allowing the light to cover her.

Already such a simple movement, yet it made his men suck in several breaths of cold air as they even retreated two steps back, only the Knight Commander could resist and stood in front of Roland.

“What is your name?” Roland asked the witch and patted the knight on the shoulder, indicating that he did not need to be so nervous.

“Anna,” she replied.