

Witch 411

Chapter 411: The Vow

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With no swaying candlelight or crackling burning fire, the room was made so warm and pleasant by the heater that one wouldn't feel cold even when only wearing thin clothes. The Stone of Light at the bed stand brightened the room—the stable and gentle yellow light shone on the bedsheet and carpet, producing a wonderful nostalgic scene.

Sitting at the bedside and listening to the occasional slight chirps from the caliducts, Roland felt as if he was in a dream. It was like he wasn't in a backward monarchy nor a modern society full of electronic products, rather somewhere in between... his childhood.

His childhood memories very much resembled the scene in front of him—everything was covered in a faint shade of yellow, whether it was a light bulb, a movie, or a developed photo.

The only difference was that Anna wasn't in his childhood memory.

At this thought, he turned and looked at the girl sitting at the edge of the bed.

She was reading a storybook. Her blonde hair on her forehead glimmering under light and her long eyelashes occasionally trembling, made her look extremely moving. Yet, the most extraordinary part was her sapphire eyes, which were still as blue as a clear lake even under the reflection of the Magic Stone. The only difference from one year ago was that this pair of eyes weren't such a peaceful lake anymore.

Her existence alone made the whole picture vivid. Anna is not only a different color from the rest of this whole setting, but also a marker that separates my reality from memory. Seeing her assumes me that everything is real.

"What are you looking at?" Anna had already put down the Book of Magic and was staring at Roland. "Me?"

"Ahem... " Roland shifted his eyesight eyes subconsciously, but quickly shifted them back again. "Uh-huh...That's right."

After spending about a year together, the two of them had been quite familiar with each other. Roland wasn't as passive as he had been, and since they were alone in the room, he was more open about the emotions he had been holding back all this time.

They looked at each other and burst into laughter at the same time.

"Do you think my demand is a little too stubborn?" Anna shook her head and smiled. "Clearly everybody cares about me, but I pushed all of them away."

"Don't worry about it." Roland said with his hands laid out, "They were only surprised by your reaction at that time."

"If it weren't for the 'ancient methods' suggested by Miss Agatha, I wouldn't have made this request," Anna said, sticking out her tongue - a cute move that she rarely made. "But I assume other sisters would do the same. You'll be busy then."

Roland smiled resignedly and said, "I think they would only ask for a few more pieces of ice cream bread."

After learning that Anna was going to have her Day of Awakening, Agatha instantly contributed her experience gained in the Holy City of Taquila—according to the research of the Union, on the Day of Awakening or the Day of Adulthood, a witch needed to drain her magic power to decrease the influence of bite. Additionally, the witch's emotions were also very important - positive emotions as happiness and contentment would greatly increase her resistance. For some outstanding witches, the Union even dispatched personnel to fulfill their wishes on their Day of Adulthood.

After knowing this, Anna requested that Roland accompany her on her Day of Awakening.

"Thanks to Miss Agatha, I'm having a good time." She confessed. "I couldn't spend my Day of Adulthood with you, but I can make up for it on my Day of Awakening."

Watching Anna's sincere expression, Roland almost blushed. He cleared his throat, took out a thin book tied with a colorful ribbon from his back, and handed it to her. "A gift for your Day of Awakening."

The reason why he rushed to write down the advanced calculus knowledge that he remembered was to finish it before this day. To a witch, the Day of Awakening was more important than a birthday and could almost be seen as a rebirth. Roland had always had difficulty choosing presents for holidays, and this time was no different. After racking his brains, he decided to give Anna new knowledge as a present—Anna had a talent for learning and an appetite for new knowledge, so he chose her gift accordingly.

However, after receiving the book with orange cover, she didn't open it instantly as she used to. Instead, she put it down together with the Book of Magic. "Thank you."

"The storybook... Have you finished reading it?"

"Not yet." Anna slightly shook her head. "But I want to hear something special."

"Special?" Roland was slightly astonished.

"Yes." She said with a smile, "Your story—last time I fell asleep too soon while listening to it and today I hope to continue hearing about it."

"Does she mean the day when we lay in bed together?" Roland pursed his lips. He suddenly had an impulse to tell her about his true identity, and to not hide it anymore. "Do you still remember that I once told you I used to live in a big city? By a big city, I didn't mean Kingdom of Graycastle."

"I know."

"Huh?" Anna's reply was shocking to him.

"When I thought about it, I found those stories you told me couldn't have happened in the palace of King's City," she said with a smile. "Don't forget, I have repeatedly read through Chronicles of Graycastle."

"Is that so?" Roland hesitated for a moment. "I actually ..."

"You don't have to say anything." Anna stopped him. "You are hesitating, which means it's not easy to tell, right? Then don't. Besides, it's not hard to guess. I believe I'm not the only one who has this feeling. The closer we get to you, the easier to feel this way—you are different from everybody else." She paused. "What if... we take a bet."

"Bet... on what?"

"Let's bet how much I can guess about your life story."

Roland suddenly recalled a game he used to play when he was little: time capsule. "The game works like this: write down your words to the future on a note, put it into a can, and take the can out a certain number of years later... Although most of the cans would be missing, a few of them would be retrieved, and looking at the note you wrote years ago would give you an unspeakable sensation."

He didn't ask about the wager. "It doesn't matter who wins and who loses, since she probably proposed it to comfort me, rather than to figure out my true identity." He must admit, among all the witches, Anna was the one who understood him the best.

"Deal." He nodded.

"Where did we stop last time?"

"I finished my study under the guidance of my mentor ..." Roland laughed. "Let's start from here."

When the light of dawn lit up the skyline, Anna peacefully passed through the first Day of Awakening since her adulthood.

Chapter 412: Sneaking into the Fallen Dragon Ridge

The entire world was gloomy, from the sky to the land and sea.

Although the south central area of the Kingdom of Graycastle wasn't covered by endless snow, the impact of the Months of Demons was inevitable—the sun was hidden by an expanse of gray clouds which filled the whole sky. A pale fog rose from the earth, shrouding the land, rocks, and jungles. All that was revealed was the black and gray mountain peaks above the clouds, which stretched towards the southern end of the continent, and acted as the visual guide for Nightingale and her companions.

While flying in the sky on Maggie's back, Nightingale intensely experienced just how terrible the cold wind was in the open air. Even with a set of customized windproof clothes on, which were given to her by His Highness before they left, she could still feel the cold penetrating her body from her scarf and cuffs. In particular, her ears and fingers would soon get numb due to hypothermia. They often had to stop and rest for a while, making the normally half-day journey eventually extend to the next day—even flying at full speed.

"Here we are." Lightning approached her.

Nightingale peered out and realized the ridge had become much lower, as if it was sinking into the ground. A city built on the hillside emerged faintly from the fog, which should be their exact target— Fallen Dragon Ridge.

"Let's land." She patted Maggie's back. "Be careful and don't let anyone see us."

"Awh!" Maggie nodded, folding her wings as she glided down. The Mist soon enveloped the three of them as they landed. Nightingale found that the visibility around them was so low that she couldn't see clearly what was only 50 steps in front of them, let alone over a great distance.

This was a good sign for the witches—at least they wouldn't be easily noticed.

After entering into the Mist, the true colors of the world would be revealed, but she wasn't worried about running into the church's Judgement Army due to the thick white fog.

"You just wait here, this shouldn't take long," said Nightingale.

"His Highness asked me to keep a lookout from the air." Lightning shook her head.

"And he asked me to be the emergency contact in case you kidnapped the target. Cool!" Maggie transformed into a fat pigeon, crouching on the top of the little girl's head.

"His Highness gave some meaningless commands," Nightingale thought. "In that case, let's go."

Suddenly, the world became black and white—the fog disappeared, or transformed into something else, which no longer hindered her vision. All of a sudden, the view became clear. The dark city wall was 200 meters away, extending out of the mountain side, and linked the city and the mountain like a dome. The stone wall was much shorter compared to the outer wall of Longsong Stronghold, and there were no sentry guards on it.

Nightingale went to the side of the wall and found the entrance through the curved lines. She stepped forward and realized that she was already on the other side of the city wall.

The city was half the size of Stronghold, and it was more like a small town in this area just outside of the mountain cliffs. But Fallen Dragon Ridge was located within the rocky mountains, and the Lord's castle built on the hillside could be seen from far away.

Nightingale assured that Lightning and Maggie were following her into the city, and then she went straight towards the castle.

This mission wasn't new to her and she was very proficient at it.

When she served old Gilen, it was a common assignment to infiltrate into other nobles' mansions and castles. Most of the buildings were similar in structure, and the owners always liked to live in the most spacious house right in the center. Back then, she was unable to go in through walls freely and could only conceal herself—while carefully avoiding any possible traps and the God's Stones of Retaliation—before stealing the letters and documents hidden in the cabinet.

Now with the help of the Mist, she could easily do these things, since the lightless black hole presented by the God's Stone of Retaliation, embedded at the corner of castle's aisle, seemed as attractive as the moon hanging in the dark sky. The hidden traps could be seen clearly, as their twisted contours were like

creeping earthworms, and she could easily destroy them after passing through the walls. While under the influence of her ability, Nightingale was perfectly free to move—the walls, doors, and roofs were just inconsequential to her.

Walking into the largest house at the top, she found her target.

Although they had never met before, Nightingale identified Marquess Spear Passi, the Lord of Fallen Dragon Ridge, at first sight because a magic blue light was rotating in her body, which was the only color visible in the world of the Mist.

Sitting in front of a desk with a quill in her hand waving back and forth, the Marquess seemed to be writing something. She was about 30 years old with wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, and the silver curls of hair and plain robes she wore made her look older. Nightingale examined the room carefully and found that there was no God's Stone of Retaliation or trap, and that Parcy's only weapon was a delicate and luxurious short crossbow hidden inside her sleeve.

After leaving a mark on the side of the window, she dissolved the Mist and revealed herself.

"Greetings, Marquess Spear Passi."

Shocked by the unexpected voice, Spear Passi raised her head swiftly and saw Nightingale. She quickly calmed down and asked, "Who are you?"

Nightingale remembered the scenario of her first meeting with Prince Roland—his first reaction was to try to escape and she had to stop him by using a dagger, which in hindsight was really funny.

"I'm Nightingale and I'm from Border Town of the Western Region. As you can see, I'm a witch."

"I thought so, as no one can come here without an invitation, except a witch." Spear Passi pretended to be calm, as she moved one of her hand slowly into her sleeve. "You should knock on the door before coming in."

"Then I'd be welcomed by your guard, not you." Nightingale laughed softly. "Don't worry. I don't intend to hurt you. I just want to have a talk—so you won't need that crossbow inside your sleeve."

This surprised Spear Passi and her face got more serious. "You know quite a lot." She took her hands out and crossed them in front of her chest. "Well, why are you here?"

"I bring you a message from Lord of Border town, Guardian of the Western Region, the fourth prince of the Kingdom of Graycastle, His Highness Roland Wimbleton." Nightingale bowed slightly. "He's creating a new order of the world that allows witches to live together with average people peacefully, and he hopes you can assist him."

"Prince... Roland?" Marquess frowned. "The incompetent nobility who was always laughed at by everyone?" With an absurd look on her face, she said, "This is ridiculous, Lord of Border Town? He's just a rebel banished to a waste land!"

"Timothy was the real usurper," Nightingale said, "and Prince Roland will soon dethrone him. But that's beside the point... His Highness needs your magic power to strengthen the ability of a witch. Would you mind making a trip to Border Town?"

Chapter 413: The Incident

Spear Passi was silent for a while before saying, "Are you threatening or inviting me?"

"I'm inviting you, of course," Nightingale said. "His Highness doesn't believe in coercing witches. In fact, I don't either."

"In this case, I refuse," Spear answered without hesitation. "If he really needs my help, he can bring the witches to the Fallen Dragon Ridge to visit me for the ritual of the nobility. No need to send someone sneaking in my castle. Of course, if a witch attracts the church's attention I can't ensure her safety."

The answer was just as Nightingale had expected. It was difficult to get a stranger to agree to such a difficult request. Generally, there were two means of handling the situation—coercion and inducement, but she didn't want to perform either option. Marquess Passi was the Lord of the city and would be the guardian of the realm once promoted. However, His Highness did not plan to flatter her in any way. Instead, he would withdraw power from the nobles. According to His highness, this was called the centralization of authority. In this instance, she would be degrading herself in the eyes of nobility if she was at His Highness' service.

In regards to following Roland, to create a brand new world and defend in the Battle of Divine Will, she would not believe it from word alone.

"I understand." Nightingale pouted. "In this case, I shall leave."

"Hold on..." Spear looked surprised. "That's all?"

"I'm responsible for bringing His Highness' messages to you. Now that the message has been delivered and you've given me your answer, my task is complete." She grinned. "Were you expecting me to tie you up and bring you back with me?"

"How did you know about my ability to channel magic?" Marquess hesitated. "Did you talk to the witches who planned to go to the Fjord Islands?"

"Yes. The leader of the witches is Lady Tilly Wimbledon. She's currently in Border Town, fighting the Demons with her brother." Nightingale shrugged. "His Highness heard about you from her."

"They didn't go to the Fjords?"

"No, they didn't know His Highness had gained such a firm foothold in the Western Region. They only got in touch after settling down on Sleeping Island." She gave a brief outline of the alliances on both sides. "Just like you, Lady Tilly was invited to the Western Region by His Highness."

"Prince Roland really established a system of coexistence for witches and ordinary people in his territory?" Spear frowned and asked. She was having a hard time believing it.

"Not only that, he also evicted the church from his territory." Nightingale smiled. "Currently there are more than 10 witches living in Border Town. The locals are accustomed to their existence. I'm not lying about this."

Marquis stood up and poured her a cup of tea. "Can you tell me more about it? How did he do it?"

"If you want to know." Nightingale turned and sat at the table. It might not change her decision but it was never a bad thing to deepen her understanding. Nightingale decided to tell her about the Witch Union His Highness had built, the war with Duke Ryan and the political run after the recovery of Longsong Stronghold. If Spear could understand the witches' situation, hopefully she would not resist too much when His Highness eventually unified the Kingdom of Graycastle.

A sudden rush of percussion was heard.

"This is..." Spear looked at Nightingale in shock.

Nightingale opened the window. It was Maggie squatting outside. "Danger, coo! Lightning discovered an accident, coo!"

"What happened?"

"A troop of Judgement Army soldiers is rushing towards the castle, coo!" The pigeon patted its wings and said, "There are at least 20 people, coo!"

"The Judgement Army from the church?" Nightingale turned around and frowned. "Did you summon them?"

"No... I didn't have an appointment with the church Priest today," Marquis looked particularly puzzled, "could it be your whereabouts have been exposed?"

"That's impossible." She shook her head. "Unless the church has the ability to monitor every bird in the sky."

"That's weird..." Spear murmured, "if they were coming for me, they wouldn't need so many Judgement Warriors. It's almost the entire force!"

"What are you waiting for? They're almost at the entrance!" A golden figure darted through the window and landed lightly beside Nightingale. It was Lightning.

"I'm not sure about the situation, I suggest that you avoid it," Nightingale said, "or get the guards to stop them outside the castle and find out why they're here before proceeding."

"This is my castle. Where would I hide? Don't worry, these people can't enter without my permission. Otherwise, I would not have been able to protect the witches." Spear sighed. "However, this meeting may have to end here... If you're not in a rush, I think..."

Before she could finish her sentence, a series of chaotic footsteps were heard just below the castle. The sound of swords fighting could be heard clearly in the castle, echoing in the mountains. Marquis expression changed. "Who let them in?! Guards!"

Spear called a few names but no one responded from outside. The footsteps were approaching closer and closer.

"It looks like they're here for you." Nightingale made a gesture towards Lightning, indicating she should leave first, "You still have time to leave, we can protect you."

"No, I'm not going anywhere! This is my territory; how could they be so presumptuous..."

She hardly finished speaking when the door was broken down by a group of heavily armed Judgement Warriors. The Lord was fully surrounded by warriors holding up their swords and shields.

Nightingale hid in the Mist, taking a step back into the corner where it was both convenient to escape and suitable for observation. She noticed that neither Lightning nor Maggie left. The former was peeking her head out from the top of a window, the latter was simply squatting on a beam, arranging her wings.

"These two brats are totally reckless. I'll get His Highness to discipline them well when we're back..." She shook her head helplessly and shifted her eyes to the Judgement Warriors. Every one of them was wearing the God's Stone of Retaliation. The dark holes were intertwined and totally obscured Spear. She could only hear the Marquess' angry rebuke. "Redwyne, are you crazy? You let them into my castle without permission?"

"Of course not, wise sister." A man's voice raised within the crowd. "Father was wrong to give the title to one of the Devil's minions. I'm simply correcting his mistake."

Chapter 414: The Conspiracy

"What... What are you talking about?" Spear asked in disbelief. "The devil's minion? This is a complete fabrication!"

"Fabrication or not, His Reverence will draw his own conclusion," Redwyne raised his voice and said. "Just because you managed to deceive Father, it doesn't mean that you can deceive everyone else! Soon, people will know who you really are. You belong in hell!"

"Did you make all these up?" Spear's tone suddenly became icy cold. "Or someone else put you up to it? I think the latter is true. After all, father chose me because you and our third brother were completely useless."

"Shut up!"

Nightingale heard a rattle and the Marquess groaned in pain.

"Enough, bring her to the church for questioning," someone said, "but she's still a member of the nobility before her verdict, so maintain your etiquette."

As Spear Passi was carted away, the Judgement Warriors followed right behind her, and soon there were only two people left in the room. Nightingale couldn't see their faces clearly because of the effects of God's Stone of Retaliation, but she could tell that one of the voices belonged to Redwyne, the man who spoke to the Lord. If she was not mistaken, this person seemed to be Spear's younger brother.

"You're doing really well, Mr. Redwyne; perhaps, I shall address you as Earl going forward."

"So that's it, Mr. Rosad?" Redwyne could not hide his excitement. "I really can inherit the title of Earl and become the Lord of the Fallen Dragon Ridge?"

"Of course. As long as you abide by our agreement, you may even go further," came the reply.

"So, what should I do next?" he asked eagerly. "Can I move into my sister's room? She won't leave her cell, right?"

"Spear Passi will soon be hanged to death as a witch in the square as per the terms of our cooperation." The other man hesitated for a moment, and continued, "As for what to do next, I suggest you relay this incident to all her ministers, knights and men and divide the rights of the Marquess."

"Do... do I really have to do that?"

"If everyone can benefit from the incident, your position will be much more secure, which will help our future plans to proceed smoothly," Rosad said. "If you're still confused, I can always assign a priest to you. He's very good at handling government affairs and can always advise you on any questions you may have."

"Yes, please," Redwyne replied quickly.

"It'll be very helpful for us if you can hold the Lord's position, so the church is happy to help with these issues." His peals of laughter filled the room.

After the men left, Nightingale emerged from the Mist, followed by Lightning and Maggie.

"We're in trouble." She stared at both of them and said, "How could the church show up at precisely the right time and place?"

"I thought they said her brother found her true identity and revealed it to the church," Lightning said, her eyes flashing with excitement. "Now we have something to do."

"Why didn't they find it out earlier? Why right now? I feel like something's wrong." Nightingale frowned.

"No matter what, we are not going to watch them execute Spear." Lightning held her head up high and said, "We must save her and annihilate the church!"

"Annihilate it, coo!"

"The confidence of this blonde girl has inflated since defeating the demons. This is not a good sign." Nightingale shook her head and responded, "We can't defeat the church for the time being. They must have participated in this conspiracy, so if we removed these people, Spear would naturally return to her position as Lord. This might be an opportunity for us. If we sneak her out, she'll probably agree to go back to Border Town with us under these circumstances."

"Awww, we're not fighting the church?" Lightning asked, disappointment in her voice.

"Battling will be the very last resort since they outnumber us and have a large amount of the God's Stones of Retaliation. It's pretty risky to try routing them all at once." Nightingale contemplated for a moment and said, "I'll go to the church first and find out what's going on."

There was one concern that she didn't mention. Spear Passi might be thinking that His Highness was the one framing her if the situation wasn't explained clearly. That, Nightingale knew, should be avoided at all costs.

"What about us?" the little girl asked.

"Just be ready to meet me outside."

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The church of the Fallen Dragon Ridge was located on the outskirts of the city. It was small and had a prayer hall, a residential area for the believers, and a three-story tower surrounded by a wall with only one exit. None of these obstacles posed a problem for Nightingale.

She had familiarized herself with the entire area by the time all of the faithful had departed in the evening. Although there were many more God's Stones of Retaliation here than in the castle, Nightingale still managed to find her way. There was a huge God's Stone placed right in the middle of the hall to stifle any magic in the room, and the same was true for some corridors. However, she could always take a detour or even hop over the floor.

Nightingale found the place where Spear Passi was imprisoned in the basement of the tower. She didn't seem too hurt, just a little frustrated. She intended to rescue the Marquess during the middle of the night.

Nightingale snuck back into the tower after sharing her plan with Lightning and Maggie. She ascended to the top floor and hid in a magnificent room.

"This," she thought, "would be the Priest's room. He would probably spill the beans if he found me here with a dagger."

When the bell of the Fallen Dragon Ridge struck nine, swung open.

She drew out her dagger stealthily but didn't attack. She judged from the footsteps that there were two people.

"What an unexpected joy!" said a woman's voice. "Little did we know that Marquess Spear is actually a witch. It seems that we need to tweak our plan."

"Uh... Lady Saint," Rosad answered with a very respectful tone, "isn't it more convincing if she's a witch?"

"It's different from before, because according to the will of the Supreme Pontiff, any new witch who comes to realization shall be handed over to be executed in the Holy City as soon as possible," The woman said. "As for the execution, let's not hang her, but burn a masked death-row criminal with a similar build."

"Yes," Rosad answered. "But why did His Holiness set such a troublesome rule of delivering a witch to Hermes?"

"I've no idea, but according to my superiors, it's simply returning to tradition," she replied.

"Returning to... tradition?"

"You don't need to know too much. Just fix the matter at hand hand." The Saint said brusquely. "I'll have to head towards the Redwater City once everything is done here."

"Understood," Rosad answered crisply.

"Who is she exactly? How come even the Priest is so respectful towards her? It seems they didn't know that Spear Passi was a witch before they captured her. Could it just be all a conspiracy to seize the throne of the Fallen Dragon Ridge?"

Nightingale couldn't help but come out from her hiding place and looked at the lady while hidden in the Mist, only to find that she was not wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation. The magic power inside of the Saint was as bright as a fluorescent light in her world of black and white.

"She's a witch!"

"Who's there?" She responded in an instant, and a dazzling silver light shot towards Nightingale!

Chapter 415: The Fight

Nightingale's years of fighting experience kicked into gear, and her body immediately responded before she could even think.

She leaned back instinctively, and the silver light grazed her cheek. Even in the Mist, she could feel the immense power of the light—extraordinarily scorching and intense. After dodging the sudden attack, Nightingale tucked into a roll and distanced herself from her opponent.

"What... what's happening, Lady Saint?" Rosad asked frantically.

"It seems like a rat has snuck in." The witch licked her lips. "Find somewhere to hide and protect yourself."

"You mean... there's a witch here?!" The priest's expression suddenly changed. "I'll summon the Judgement Warriors!"

"No need. I haven't hunted a witch for a long time. How could I let someone else have this priceless opportunity? Just stand by and watch me."

Nightingale was observing the so-called Saint during the conversation. Although she knew that the church was probably secretly raising their own witches, it still broke her heart to see the proof of this theory. This witch had entirely owned by the church, she may even have a high rank, and it sounded like she enjoyed hunting witches and did not see herself as one of them.

Nightingale could not help but remember the determined eyes of the witch who attacked them at the harbor outside the King's City and stabbed Wendy.

These people were no longer witches since they had chosen a completely different path.

With this thought in her mind, Nightingale did not hesitate to pull out her revolver—although she hated this kind of battle, she had no choice but to kill to stop the killing.

"Where do you come from?" The Saint tilted her head and stared towards where Nightingale was standing. "If the priest can't see you, you have the power to conceal yourself; if you can dodge my attacks, you have been trained for battle or you have fought in many wars. Either way, it's quite rare for wild witches like you."

"Wherever I come from is none of your business," Nightingale said coldly. She noticed the ribbon that blindfolded the opponent, and it was what a blind person would do. The "silver whip" in the Saint's hand was still curled by her side with its tip raised like a snake, waving at her.

Only magic power displayed color in the Mist. Was she using this strange whip to locate her?

"Maybe you are not aware, but the church has crowned a new Pope who is compassionate, forgiving, and believes that even wild witches deserve to be saved. As long as you are willing to serve the Lord, the church can cleanse your sins off and accept you as a Pure Witch," the Saint said with her hand on her chest. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you. If you didn't come alone and are accompanied by other fallen witches, you can all go to the Holy City of Hermes together to seek your rebirth."

"Wow, that sounds great." Nightingale chuckled. "But if awakening as a witch is a sin, and you had a way of cleansing it, why would you establish this law now instead of helping all my lost sisters from the beginning? Do you think I'm a toddler who has never heard a blatant lie before?"

She inhaled deeply and narrated. "I have not sinned!"

As she said this, Nightingale broke out of the Mist and pulled the trigger, and the barrel erupted in flames with a thunderous roar.

The "silver whip" immediately flicked upwards and blocked it off the Saint, spewing sparks everywhere. Then, the tip of the whip relaxed and tossed a twisted metal nugget onto the ground which was the bullet that Nightingale just shot.

This thing could block a flintlock!

"Oh?" Her opponent raised her eyebrow. "What kind of weapon is this?" Her voice cooled down suddenly. "I've changed my mind. It looks like you'll be dying here tonight."

The silver light lunged towards Nightingale once again, this time it was divided into dozens of whips that completely surrounded her.

Nightingale used her Mist to swiftly back away. Unlike common objects, the whips containing magic power were immune to the Mist, so she couldn't pass through them and could only try to avoid them. However, her enemy's range of attack was far too big, and the silver light struck by her side. She felt a slight numbness on her shin and she lost her balance, crashing onto the ground. The magic whips pierced into the ground behind her and pulverized the stone floor into dust. If she had been hit directly, she would have immediately lost her fighting power.

Nightingale ignored the wound on her shin and shot all the bullets in her gun at once from the ground.

The silver whips recoiled and turned into a spinning band of light, blocking all the bullets.

She knew she had no time to reload her bullets in the Mist and that once she wasn't able to hold off her enemy with her flintlock, she would be in huge trouble—it was too cramped to distance herself from her enemy, and not being able to dodge any attacks would only shrink her range of movement. She pulled out another gun in a panic, shot all the bullets randomly and ducked into the Mist, and fell two stories down through the floor.

"She escaped!" The Saint screamed. "Summon the Judgement Army to lock down the church, and send guards to the Marquess' cell as well since the witch might be here to see her!"

"Escaped?" Rosad glanced around him, not seeing any damage in the doors nor secret exits. "Through what?"

"The walls, the ceiling, or the floorboards—her powers go way beyond invisibility. There isn't any magic power left in the room!" The Pure Witch gnashed her teeth and said, "Do exactly what I told you to, She's injured and won't make it too far. Tell all your men to put on the God's Stone of Retaliation bolts!"

"Yes!"

After the priest left hurriedly, the Pure Witch immediately collapsed helplessly to the floor, her hands trembling powerlessly.

Damn, what kind of weapon is this?

Her abilities were all-powerful, and her defense power, the magic light that could block any attack, was seen as the strongest among Pure Witches—no sword or bolt could ever penetrate it.

In order to strengthen her powers, she was constantly using her magic light. After more than ten years, she was able to carry such an immense amount of magic power that hundreds of arrows were futile, and she had never exhausted her magic power due to blocking anything.

However, her opponent's attack drained her magic power instantly, and she was no longer able to even maintain her abilities. She felt an extreme fatigue that she hadn't experienced in years.

"I must get my hands on this Fallen Witch, dead or alive," she thought vengefully.

Chapter 416: Retreat

Nightingale followed the path she had scouted out before, passed through three rooves, and landed straight in the dungeon that the Marquess was held.

Spear Passi heard the sound and stared up with wide eyes. "How... did you get in?"

Nightingale raised a finger to her lips as a sign for silence and limped out of the steel door. Judging from their clothing, the two guards in the pathway were probably followers of the church. She used the Mist to instantly move behind the two men and slit their throats with a dagger—they would never have expected an attack from within the dungeon, so they didn't even turn their heads as they lay dying.

After returning to the dungeon, Nightingale finally had a chance to examine her wound.

The wind-resistant pants that Soraya made for her were cut open, and blood was gushing from a wound on her shin that was half an inch deep. Her enemy's magic whip must have scraped through the pants and cut through her flesh, but thankfully it had not damaged any bones. If not for the sturdy coating on her pants, she would have been injured even more seriously.

"You're hurt," Spear said with a frown.

"It's not too bad. We have to leave before you turn into a corpse." Nightingale did not tell the Marquess about the Saint's plans of taking her to Hermes, for it seemed just as bad as dying, or even worse. "They had no idea that you were a witch before they captured you, so it must be the church's conspiracy to gain control of Fallen Dragon Ridge."

"How about my brother..."

"He's probably already become the church's puppet. There's no time to waste, so I'll explain to you on the road." Nightingale tightly tied a sash right above the wound. "Where is the God's Locket of Retribution?"

The Marquess pointed at her neck. "At first, they only tied my legs with a chain, but then they replaced it with this."

Nightingale's heart immediately sunk upon seeing the metal ring as thick as her thumb—this kind of God's Locket of Retribution was made by stuffing magic stones into a metal tube and sealing it with a special technique, making it practically impossible for someone to undo it.

"Do you remember where the locking device is?"

"It's inside the dungeon near the entrance, where they brought me to be locked."

It was obvious that after discovering the Marquess' real identity, the Saint decided to use the strongest restrictions that could almost trap any witch except an Extraordinary.

She would have to remove this contraption in order to take Spear into her Mist and escape.

"Let's go to the first dungeon," Nightingale said decidedly. "Come with me."

She fought against the stabbing pain in her shin, returned to the fallen guards, took their keys, and opened the cell door.

Suddenly, the tolls of ringing bells broke the silence and echoed throughout the tower, which made her heart race.

"That's the church's alarm," Spear said with a panicked expression.

"I knew they would come eventually," Nightingale whispered. "Our only chance of surviving is to move faster than our enemy."

The alarm might have actually helped her because all the men in the basement would swarm towards the only entrance at once, making it easy for her to eliminate them together.

She descended on them with her Mist and aimed her gun at these men. After her bullets pierced her first target, they immediately struck her second, splattering blood everywhere. The God's Stones of Retaliation that they wore served as clear targets in her black-and-white vision, while her invisibility rendered the men clueless about where to attack. After two rounds of shooting, there was not a single living guard left in the dungeon.

However, she knew that these were the lowest-rank followers and that an armed Judgement Army was headed their way soon. If she couldn't take off the God's Stone of Retaliation before their arrival, it would be very difficult to escape.

"Come here!" She quickly spotted the locking device—a metal instrument resting against the wall with two rusty clamps stretching outwards, resembling a terrifying torture device.

Spear pressed her neck against the clamps, and Nightingale fastened the device onto her and furiously turned its handle. With the help of the pulleys, the clamps pulled in opposite directions and created an opening in the God's Locket of Retribution.

At the same time, the sound of the Judgement Army's armor rattled near the cell door.

"That's them right there!" Someone yelled.

"Take aim—shoot!"

"Let's go!" Nightingale brought Spear into the Mist, but small black holes shot towards her and tore her Mist apart.

There were God's Stones of Retaliation on the bolts! Nightingale felt a cold sweat break on her forehead as she and the Marquess became completely visible to the Judgement Warriors—it was clear to see that these men were trained very differently from regular followers. They shot their first round of bolts all throughout the passageway to close off their exit, and only half of the men participated in the first attack.

Meanwhile, the other half waited for the witches to expose themselves.

After spotting their target, the second wave of arrows flew towards them.

Nightingale heard the buzzing of arrows behind her and pulled the Marquess in front of her body, yelling. "Duck!"

A searing pain spread like fire through her back as she was hit by countless arrows, but she didn't stop running.

As they rounded a corner, Nightingale tasted blood in her mouth, probably from biting her lip in pain before. "Are you OK?"

"I'm... I'm fine," the Marquess said blankly. "Did, did you just block the bolts for me?"

"If you were shot, you would be gone for, but I might make it." Nightingale reached behind her and found that none of the arrows had pierced through Soraya's windbreaker—although her back hurt like it was on fire, there were only bruises, and no stone powder had entered her body.

The Judgement Warriors hurried towards them. They probably did not expect the two witches to survive the second wave of bolts without a shield, so they were a considerable distance away.

After escaping the binds of the God's Stone of Retaliation, Nightingale grabbed Spear and entered her Mist. She rushed upwards through the floorboards and soil to the outside of the tower, took a bamboo tube from her bag, and pulled the string on its end.

A blinding red light shot out of the tube into the sky and exploded into a shower of sparks that looked like stars dotting the sky.

When His Highness gave this to her, he kept boasting about how one flare would summon a thousand troops to her aid. Right now, she didn't need a thousand troops and only prayed that Maggie could see her signal.

Soon, a giant shadow descended from the sky as Maggie landed next to the tower, her large body crushing its walls and her wings fanning away the fog around them.

"What... what is that?" Spear Passi stared in awe.

"That's my friend." Nightingale had Lightning fastened the Marquess onto Maggie, used the last of her strength to crawl onto her back, patted her body, and said, "Let's fly."

"Aooooo... aooooo..." Maggie roared at the incoming Judgement Warriors, flapped her wings, took off, and disappeared into the night with the two witches.

Chapter 417: Strike back

On the Fallen Dragon Ridge, Lightning expertly set up a tent big enough for four beyond the wind's reach.

Nightingale sat by the fire to warm herself. She rolled up the cuffs of her pants and found her calves stained with blood. The places hit by the Saint were swollen. She had not felt it at the time with adrenaline coursing through her, but now, as she relaxed, she struggled to lift her legs. If Maggie had not come to her rescue, she probably would not have been able to run any further with carrying the Marquess.

It was extremely dangerous to move in the Mist in her current condition. The changing lines inside of it were staircases lined with sharp blades waiting to cut her to pieces if given the opportunity.

"Let me help you, coo."

Maggie took first aid supplies from a big backpack. Besides cotton and a small bottle of rubbing alcohol, she found an herbal remedy prepared by Leaf, the medicinal mainstay of the Witch Cooperation Association.

Try as she might, Nightingale could not stifle her gasp with accompanying grimace when the pungent alcohol was poured over her wounds. If His Highness hadn't mentioned that it could kill the bacteria that caused the demonic plague, she would think this was some type of torture.

To Nightingale's great relief, the scorching burn was relieved quickly by the herbal preparation. As soon as her wounds were bandaged, she felt much more comfortable.

"Your back..." the Marquess said in a low voice, "Is it alright?"

"What's about her back?" Lightning crawled into the tent with a bundle of firewood.

"To save me... she was shot by their bolts," Spear said forlornly.

"No big deal. It's like taking a couple of punches." Nightingale twitched her mouth. "It's not a problem as long as I don't sleep on my back tonight."

"It's better to apply some herbal medicine on it," Lightning said while fiddling the branches in the fire pit with the sparks flying. "Leaf's medicine, not only can stop the bleeding, but also is very effective for bruises."

"Lay down on me, coo." Maggie sat down and patted her lap. "Let me apply the medicine to your back, coo."

Seeing the serious look in the white-haired girl's eyes, Nightingale could not disobey and acquiesced without argument. "Alright."

She took off her clothes with her hands covering her chest and reclined in Maggie's lap. The Marquess let out a muffled gasp.

She knew without looking that her smooth back was now mottled with darkening red bruises. "But it just looks scary. Since witches have strong self-healing capacity, these wounds will heal after two or three days," she thought, shrugging it off the best she could.

During this tender evaluation and treatment, Nightingale coughed twice and said, "Marquess, do you have any plans for the future? Your brother Redwyne, deluded by the church, has betrayed you. Actually, before that military coup, neither he nor the church knew you're a witch." Then she briefly repeated what she had heard in the tower to the Marquess. "They worked in collusion to deprive you of your title. Even if you aren't a witch, you'll be put to death as a devil's minion. It'll be easy work for the church."

"If they dare to murder a marquess," Spear said, gnashing her teeth, "I'll make Redwyne and the church pay the price!"

"The church's deeds are far beyond your imagination." Nightingale shook her head. "They kill even kings without blinking. Think of the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart."

Spear was stunned for a moment and then opened her mouth to ask, "Does the church really dare to swallow all four kingdoms? I've only heard about it from merchants of neighboring countries, but most of the nobility in the King's City thought it ridiculous."

"The nobility in King's City also said Roland Wimbledon was a rebel king." Nightingale shrugged. "If His Highness guesses right, conquering the four kingdoms is only the first step in the church's plan, but unless you join the Witch Union, I can't tell you the conspiracy behind it. Besides, the church must spend some time plotting this military coup and most of your men should have already swung to Redwyne who has promised them more profits. If you want to take back Fallen Dragon Ridge, you can turn to His Highness for help."

"Will he really help me?"

"Of course, it's our solemn duty to wipe out the church," Nightingale said with a trace of a smile touching her lips.

Marquess was silent, and she looked like she was hesitating to say something.

"Believe me," Nightingale said, recognizing the Marquess' hesitation. "You're free to leave the Western Region anytime you want. His Highness never compels anyone to stay."

"Is he really establishing a place where witches and ordinary human beings live together?"

This was the second time she had asked Nightingale this question, and again Nightingale answered proudly, "Yes, His Highness' territory is a place like that. It's the witches' Holy Mountain."

In the firelight, the expression seemed uncertain on Spear Passi's face. After quite a long while, she nodded slightly and asked, "Are we going to set off tomorrow?"

"Not yet," Nightingale and Lightning spoke with one voice. Then they gazed into each other's eyes and burst into laughter.

"The local church will try to report to Holy City what happened here, so in the following two days, we must catch all the pigeons sent out by our enemy," Nightingale explained to the Marquess. "After that, Maggie will carry you to Border Town. I have some other pressing demands here."

She remembered what the Saint had said in that room atop the tower: she would leave for Redwater City soon after the military coup.

Apparently, wherever the Saint went, an undercurrent of tension soon followed. Troubles big or small were sure to find His Highness. If she could impede the Saint, she would not only sabotage church's plan but also collect a bounty of information from the Saint.

Nightingale took a deep breath and made a plan to kill every member of that church platoon, but she was not sure whether Prince Roland would agree to her plan. If he insisted on her giving up the plan and going back, she would do as he wished.

...

Three days later Maggie, who had already sent the Marquess on to Border Town, returned to Fallen Dragon Ridge bearing two witches from the Sleeping Island on her back.

"Why are you here?" Nightingale asked, the surprise evident on her face.

"Prince Roland sent us to help you," Andrea said, gracefully hopping off the big bird's back, doffing her hood and giving her blonde hair a nice shake. "We'll get two pieces of ice cream bread in return."

"Wiping out a church platoon, you can never do that without me!" Ashes said with a smile.

"His Highness said you can do what you've planned, but take safety into account first, coo." Maggie changed back to a girl and continued, "He said he was waiting for you to return to the castle."

"Really..." Nightingale mused, suddenly aware of warmth in her heart. "I get it."

"So how many are there?" Ashes raised her eyebrows slightly. "I heard there's a witch among them?"

"I don't know the exact number yet, but there are at most 20 Judgement Warriors along with their servants and some believers," she said in a measured voice. "You take care of the others and leave the witch to me."

Chapter 418: Finish the Fighting

They had been on the ridge for a week when Lightning detected the platoon at the north gate of Fallen Dragon Ridge.

As Nightingale had expected, the church's emissary delegation was composed of 25 fully armored Judgement Warriors, who were riding stallions at the head of the platoon. There was a transport corps of around 100 mercenary fighters and believers walking behind the Judgement Army.

Among them, there were two coaches. She assumed the Saint was in one of them.

The five witches secretly followed the platoon, as it headed toward Redwater City.

According to the plan, they would initiate the attack when the platoon was out of the monitoring area and thus would be unable to call for backup quickly.

Nightingale quietly watched a coach in the platoon from her mist and vaguely saw a silver light of magic power coming out through the distorted silhouette of the carriage.

If Nightingale acted alone, she could probably kill the Saint of the church, but it was not guaranteed that she could kill all of the enemies here. But now, with the help of the witches from Sleeping Island, it was highly possible that they would be able to block the news in the Southern Territory.

Once this platoon was eliminated, Hermes would not know anything, at least until next spring. And by then it would be very difficult for them to investigate what had happened to the emissary delegation.

Nightingale did not like killing, but this time it was an intentional decision.

It would lighten the burden on His Highness and help to defend the witches' Holy Mountain.

She would not regret it.

When the emissary delegation entered the forest, Nightingale saw a dark shadow coming close.

It was Maggie. She folded her wings and swooped down, roaring. Horses suddenly neighed in fright and went off uncontrollably. All the people were shocked, dumbfounded and only stared goggle-eyed at the scene.

But the giant beast did not burst into the crowd to bite and stomp on them as they had expected. Instead, it spread its wings just over their heads and flew away close to the ground, leaving a storm behind it. The strong wind made it hard for them to open their eyes. Suddenly, a person jumped off the beast's back and landed on the ground.

"Enemy attack!" the Judgement Warriors shouted among the emissary delegation.

Hearing this, the believers began to recover themselves, drew out their weapons and struck at the unknown enemy at the center of the platoon.

Nightingale's vision filled with black and white lines. They were fully covered with lightless black holes which could protect them from ordinary witches, but not from Ashes the Extraordinary.

She cut all the believers within her range in two, at their waists, like reaping wheat. All the people around her fell swiftly. She used an ordinary iron sword instead of her symbolic heavy sword, in order for Maggie to carry one more witch besides herself. The iron sword quickly cracked and broke during the fight. She seized the weapons dropped by the enemy, a halberd, a stick, sometimes an iron hammer or a cutlass. Anything in her hand became a lethal weapon.

Blood splashed and bodies were torn apart. In the middle of the platoon, Ashes cut them in two all by herself.

In the rear part of the platoon, the mercenary fighters could hardly offer the middle section any help because they had their own difficulties.

Andrea kept skipping through the forest like a fairy. She used the branches and trunks of the trees to cover herself and shoot arrows every time she changed position. Every one of her arrows would hit someone between his eyebrows and every one of her shots was to kill.

In less than ten minutes, the whole platoon was a mess. Screams, cries and fighting noises resounded in the forest.

Nightingale joined the fight immediately. She dashed through her mist, closely following her target, who was her only target in this fight, the Saint of the church and the witch hunter. The coaches were drawn by the frightened horses. They ran wildly for a long way before the horses finally calmed down, but then they did not return to the platoon. Instead, they left the main road and burrowed into the forest in two different directions.

It seemed that the Saint had already noticed that among her enemies there was a tough opponent, an Extraordinary. For most witches, an Extraordinary with God's Stone of Retaliation was unbeatable.

Unfortunately, she could not escape from Nightingale's control.

Nightingale had already spotted her position earlier on. The one in the other coach was likely a high-ranking priestess or priest.

Nightingale left it to Lightning and Maggie.

Despite the fact that the Saint's coach tossed heavily on the bumpy road in the forest, the coachman kept whipping the horses, looking like he was urged by someone to speed up.

Nightingale approached. In order to shoot fatally every time, she only fired when she was less than ten meters behind the target and in line with it. She aimed at the four Judgement Warriors following the coach and pressed the trigger to kill them one by one. The Judgement Army immediately split off at the sound of the gun, but the distance now was still only several steps for Nightingale in her mist. Further, their full armors were doing more harm than good in a fight against large caliber bullets. The bullets became more harmful to the human body after going through these deformed, cracked armors.

After getting rid of the four Judgement Warriors, she pointed her gun at the horses.

As the two horses fell down, the fragile wooden carriage promptly flew off from the force. It then hit a tree trunk and immediately fell apart.

Through the flying pieces, a person wrapped in silver light rolled out. Nightingale aimed and shot without hesitation, but the light formed by magic power seemed to have consciousness and blocked the bullets one by one.

She moved away to reload a new cartridge.

"Traitor!" the Saint shouted angrily, charging towards where Nightingale hid.

This time, the situation was different.

They did not fight in a small room anymore. Now every step Nightingale took would cost the Saint more than ten steps to catch up and the effective range of a revolver which was around 50 meters was much bigger than the area a witch could affect with her ability. The Saint's "silver whip" could hardly reach Nightingale while a bullet could put the Saint to death anytime.

At this distance, merely one or two out of five shots could hit the target, but luckily Nightingale had enough time to reload new cartridges and keep aiming and firing.

After five cartridges, the silver light dimmed out. One shot hit the Saint's left shoulder and another went through her stomach. She could no longer stand. She staggered a few steps, and then fell to the ground.

Nightingale was not in a hurry to approach her. She went back to the place where the carriage had fallen apart to pick up a God's Stone of Retaliation before she walked to the Saint. During the fight, she had kept moving around the carriage so it would be easier to search the site afterwards.

The moment Nightingale appeared beside the blood-covered witch, she suddenly stretched out her right hand, the only part she could move now, only to find that her silver light could not pierce her enemy as she wanted.

"You damned demon, the gods will put you on trial!" she said, gritting her teeth, blood was spewing out of her mouth.

Nightingale pointed the gun at her chest expressionlessly and replied, "Really? I'll wait for that day."

Then she pressed down the trigger.

Chapter 419: Faith

After the smoke caused by the battle dissipated, the forest returned to silence.

The witch's long braids had unraveled, and her hair spread like white petals over her body.

Blood streamed down her back and quickly formed a dark red puddle, slowly immersing into the ground and melting the cold, hard soil. After that, the air was filled with a smell of iron.

Nightingale squatted and untied the blindfold on the witch's face. She found the face looked unexpectedly young, probably similar to her own age. However, the scars by her eyes destroyed her overall beauty—her eyes looked like they had been repeatedly burned by red-hot iron, and her skin was red and wrinkled, so she had lost the contours of her eyes.

This was undoubtedly caused by men. Nightingale gently touched the wrinkled scars; as for whether she suffered these wounds before becoming a witch or after serving the church, no one would ever know. However, this was no longer important because from now on, she couldn't hurt any more witches and wouldn't suffer any more torments.

After searching the Saint's body, Nightingale found a letter, a seal and an emblem in the pocket of her robe lining. The emblem was a circle split by a cross with a clenched fist in the center.

She carried nothing else—no gold royals or jewelry.

"Perhaps she never enjoyed anything in her life," Nightingale couldn't help but think.

"Hey, look at what I caught." Lightning's voice sounded from the air. She looked up and saw the little girl carrying a struggling man, whom she threw onto the ground.

The man groaned in pain and rolled around, trying to get up, but he was hog-tied, so all he could do was to twist around helplessly.

The man's outfit revealed that he was probably the Priest who was sitting in the other carriage.

"Where's Maggie?"

"She's guiding Ashes to chase the runaway Judgement Army." Lightning walked over to the Saint. "This is the witch trained by the church?"

"Uh-huh," Nightingale said softly. "She won't ever hunt us again."

"From her appearance, it's difficult to believe that she saw us as enemies who must be killed..." The little girl sighed.

"If not for the church, none of this would have happened." Nightingale turned to glare at the captive man. When he saw the witch lying in a pool of blood, his eyes immediately widened, and he tried to say something but couldn't because of the cloth gag in his mouth.

She took out the cloth. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"Ahem... you, you've killed the Pure Witch of Bishop Tayfun, reckless devil! You'll sooner or later be hung by the church at the city gate and left to the crows!"

"Even if we didn't kill her, being caught by the church is no better," said Nightingale, "and compared with this, you'd better worry about yourself first."

"Even if I die, I'll have the salvation of God, and you guys will only sink into Hell and be tortured forever!" He yelled.

"That's why I have to block his mouth," Lightning said.

Nightingale stuffed the cloth back into his mouth. "Let His Highness deal with him. He said that the Iron Axe is very good at interrogating such kinds of people."

...

By the time Maggie brought over the two witches from Sleeping Island, it was already afternoon. Ashes jumped down from the back of the beast and landed steadily next to Nightingale. "You're not hurt, are you?"

"Everything went well," she said. "How about you?"

"Obviously, not a single man escaped." Ashes laughed proudly.

"Is she dead?" Andrea landed and looked at the Saint. "I thought you'd keep her alive."

"The enemy was a witch, so hesitating would have been extremely dangerous," Ashes twitched her mouth and said. "If I were you, I wouldn't keep her alive either."

"Gee, you have no mercy for your own kind."

"She isn't our kin, but a puppet controlled by the church," the Extraordinary said casually. "Besides, sometimes our own kind can be even crueler than others. I've never seen demonic beasts or demons imprison and torture people for several years."

After saying that, she took off her blood-stained gloves and offered her hand to Nightingale. "Your actions and performance were amazing, and you did the right thing in this situation."

"... " The latter stared at her for a moment before holding her hand. "Thank you."

"Who would have thought that someone like her would comfort me," Nightingale thought. "She probably didn't want me to feel guilty for killing a witch."

"I think this victory is worth celebrating," Lightning said.

Maggie agreed with a "Coo!"

Andrea rolled her eyes, reached out her hands, and placed them on top of the others'. "I have to clarify that if it were only your hand, I wouldn't touch it, so this's for Nightingale's sake."

"OK, I get it," Ashes said, raising her eyebrow.

Then, the five witches raised their hands to the sky, looking like an unwavering tower in the cold wind.

...

Next, they needed to collect the information carried by the emissary delegation and hide the traces of their battle. After properly dealing with these issues in the forest for two days, they arrived back in Border Town three days later.

After landing in the castle backyard, Nightingale was immediately surrounded by her sisters.

"I heard you were hurt. Where is the wound?" Nana asked.

"She has been waiting for you for a long time. Why did you come back so late?" Lily asked, annoyed.

"Does it... still hurt?" Lucia asked urgently.

"This batch of herbs was made especially by me. They can't only stop bleeding, but also calm swelling, so their effect should be pretty great," Leaf said with a smile.

"How could you be so careless to scurry into the church alone! You might not be this lucky next time!" This was Wendy's voice.

"It's alright as long as she can return safely." Scroll chimed in.

Seeing their concerned faces warmed Nightingale's heart, and she didn't understand how the Church's witches lived, but she knew what it was like to belong to the Witch Union. There was no doubt that this was worth devoting everything to.

Then, she saw His Highness Roland.

Lightning jumped into his arms and stuck to him like a gecko.

Maggie also flew onto Roland's shoulder, rubbing his cheek.

Although Nightingale wanted to do this too, she knew that she wasn't a child, so she held back the impulse to embrace Roland, walked up to him, and said with a smile, "I'm back."

"Uh-huh, I've waited for you for a long time." The prince smiled his familiar smile. "Take a hot bath and get some rest. I put a few bags of honey grilled dried fish in the office drawer."

"OK, then I'll go help myself."

Nightingale smiled.

She reassured herself that she had done the right thing.

Chapter 420: The Lord's Response

That night, Roland held a magnificent banquet at the Lord's castle.

Since they not only rescued Spear Passi but also captured a Priest from Hermes, it was technically the Witch Union's first unprovoked attack on the church.

As the five witches who had participated in the battle walked on to the stage, the hall erupted into applause, and even Roland, who rarely drank, drained two glasses of Evelyn's chilled white liquor.

Although it was only a small triumph, the Months of the Demons were long and stressful, and he wanted to take this opportunity to help everyone relax.

When Roland stumbled into his office the next morning with a raging headache, Nightingale was already waiting for him, sitting cross-legged on his table.

"Don't you need more rest?" he asked with a smile.

Ever since he agreed to let her attack the emissary delegation, he had been worrying about her—even if he knew she was in a spacious area and could use the Mist to remain invincible, he still fretted about accidents. After all, this wasn't daily practice, but a true battle of life and death. Now seeing her energetic and vital, he felt much better.

Nightingale swallowed her dried fish and said, "Of course I don't. I'm in a great shape right now."

As soon as Roland returned to his seat, she jumped off the table, walked to the back of the chair, and hugged him. "One more day of rest is one more day without seeing you."

The prince was slightly startled.

"I actually wanted to do this yesterday in the castle garden... but now isn't such a bad timing either," Nightingale whispered into his ear.

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She did not let him go and disappeared into the Mist until she heard the footsteps outside the door.

"Your Highness." A guard shouted. "The Lord of Fallen Dragon Ridge, Marquess Passi, is here to see you."

"Send her in." Roland cleared his throat and adjusted his posture.

Spear Passi walked into the office, bowed, and sat in front of his desk. "I've thoroughly considered your proposal."

"What do you think?" He poured a cup of tea for her.

While Nightingale, Ashes, and others were battling against the church, he had also been busy with showing the Marquess around the town and negotiating with her. Roland briefly told her the crisis that the kingdom faced, the origins of the church, and the threats of the demons, as well as his future plans.

When Spear heard about the church's origins and their reasons for hunting witches, she was so shocked that her eyes widened to the utmost. If not for the testimonies of Tilly and Agatha, she would have never believed that witches once had ruled the entire Barbarian Land, but her attitude changed greatly afterwards.

"Repealing feudal power, universalizing laws and administration institution, prohibiting the inheritance and sale of titles... I can accept these requests, but..." She paused. "I'm just curious. Do you really plan to spread this to all the territories?"

"Yes. If we don't do this, Kingdom of Graycastle will be nothing but loose sand," Roland said, nodding. "Before our final enemies arrive, we must gather as much power as possible."

"Your plan will offend all of the nobilities," said Spear slowly, "especially the part prohibiting the inheritance of titles—if I'm not mistaken, the Lord of a territory is also a title. Doing so will confirm your reputation of the 'rebel king'."

"That's why I don't expect them to back down voluntarily," he said, knocking on his desk. "Before the fateful Battle of Divine Will, the nobility's discontent is not my priority. I don't have to kill them all, either. As long as these people accept my new terms, they may even be able to keep their territories, just not their feudal power—I believe they'll make the right decision."

Centralization of authority was only effective when all the power was held by a few people, so if local authorities had too much power, they would threaten this centralization and even his position as a ruler. Unlike one year ago, the town now had the ability to undergo a revolution. After this step was completed, he would be the only ruler of Kingdom of Graycastle in a real sense.

"You seem to have made up your mind." Spear sighed. "If I don't accept them, your army will probably overturn my ruling anyways."

"I desperately need manpower for my plan," Roland said earnestly, "especially someone with experience in governing a city. Like I said, you won't lose your territory, and you can proudly reveal your identity as a witch to your people without fear of the church."

The Marquess was silent for a while. "I also have a request."

"Please, go ahead."

"After you take back Fallen Dragon Ridge for me, I don't want anything to change," she said bluntly. "I can only fully support you when Timothy is no longer the king."

"What a clever answer..." Roland thought. "She avoided giving a strict refusal and gave herself some room for changing her mind. Basically what she meant is that in order to earn her support, he needs to prove that his plan of unifying Kingdom of Graycastle isn't just empty talk and that he's truly capable of doing it."

"It's a deal then." He didn't think much of the Marquess' secret calculations. If his attack in the spring went well, it might be easier to overturn Timothy than retrieving Fallen Dragon Ridge.

"Oh, by the way, Your Highness." Spear hesitated. "The witches are attending class tonight, and I'm wondering if I could join them..."

Roland was a bit surprised. "Those are all very basic beginner courses. You probably won't learn anything new."

"I'm intrigued by their calculating methods," she said, shaking her head. "I've never seen anything like them before."

"Is she talking about the Multiplication Table or algebraic equations?" He mused. "Of course, as long as you're willing to join the Witch Union."

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After lunch, Iron Axe brought him some good news.

"He's willing to talk?" Roland was slightly surprised. "That soon?"

According to Nightingale, the captive Priest was quite stubborn.

"Not everyone has a will of steel, Your Highness," answered Iron Axe seriously. "The Sand Nation has some unique interrogation methods that barely damage the body but destroy the mind, even making some people view death as a relief. He has already lingered longer than most people."

"That's right," he thought. "Professional spies not only have extraordinary willpower, but are also trained not to crack under any interrogation, but no one in this era has received this kind of training."

"Take me to see him," said Roland. "I have quite a few questions for him."

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