

Chapter 177: Sudden Turn of Events

Audrey stopped writing after she finished sharing some interesting news and scandals about aristocrats. She then adopted a serious pose as she recalled something.

With her exceptional memory as a spectator, she arranged the information that she had received from her father's teachings, as well as the news she heard during banquets and salons into paragraphs.

After creating a draft in her head, Audrey penned, "As for the political situation in Backlund you asked about, it's not within my area of interest. I can describe it to you only based on my own impressions and the details that I happen to know."

"Some time ago, Father told me that after the abolishment of the Grain Act, the prices of crops were declining rapidly. The rent of farmland and pastures were also plunging, but I don't know the exact magnitude. I can only explain it to you with this example.

"As you know, Duke Negan is an aristocrat who owns the most land outside of the royal family. It's said that he owns more than 12,000,000 pounds worth of farmland, pastures, and forests. Last year, his land earned him a historic 1,300,000 pounds in rent. But this year, it's forecast that his rent will only be 850,000 pounds, a whole 450,000 pounds less. That's more than the entirety of the assets that I'm entitled to."

"Without any further explanation from me, I'm sure that my dear brother will understand the behavior of most old-fashioned nobles. They're proud of being landowners, and their income is derived mostly from rent. They place a heavy emphasis on their appearance and would maintain their current lifestyle even if

they have to go into debt. They spend tens of thousands of pounds on the upkeep of their castles each year, many more thousands on clothes and jewelry, as well as their persistent hunting activities, social banquets, and the occasional lavish weddings and funerals, etc, etc.

"With the decrease in rent, according to my knowledge, a good portion of the nobles have met with financial difficulties. Because of this, Earl Wolf has sold 84,000 ares of land in the countryside and gotten 29,000 pounds in return. Viscount Conrad has also sold his art collection worth 55,000 pounds to a national art gallery.

"Other than a few visionary nobles who had long shifted their focus to steel, coal, railroads, banks, and rubber industries, the rest of the nobles have been severely affected by the Grain Act. Let us praise our dear Earl Hall!

"Father told me that the financial distress will loosen the control the nobles have over politics. As you can imagine, the number of ministers with blue blood will decline from the next year onward.

"In a bid to secure funding, the Conservative Party and the New Party have promised to confer upon anyone the noble titles as long as they donate a sufficient amount of money and lack any criminal records. Of course, the caveat is that the person who donated the money must own an amount of land befitting of a noble.

"One example is the rich Mr. Syndras. He purchased the lowest area of land expected of a baron, 60,000 ares, then donated 100,000 pounds to the Carleton Club and 400,000 pounds to the Conservative Party, and donations to charity amounting to 300,000 pounds. Finally, he succeeded in receiving conferment from His Majesty and became a highly-regarded baron. I've heard that there's a price list to this, 300,000 pounds for a

baronet and 700,000 to 1,000,000 pounds for a hereditary baron. There is no clear price for the title of viscount or count, but I'm sure those are sufficiently ridiculous.”

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“This year, many nobles who are facing financial difficulties are starting to seriously consider the possibility of marriages with wealthy merchants. There have already been three marriages like this over the last two months. The betrothal gifts the noble women received are something to be envied.

“Also, the workers who protested the Grain Act did experience a decrease in the cost of living, but the quality of their lives has not improved. Instead, it seems to have deteriorated as the bankrupt farmers have entered the city and stolen their jobs by requesting lower wages. Thus, the wages of the laborers are dropping rapidly.

“I remember the day when Father asked me who I felt was the winner of the Grain Act.

“My dear Alfred, you must know the answer. You would definitely be able to obtain a hereditary baron title through your own efforts.”

...

Xio Derecha and Fors Wall were returning to the Backlund Bridge borough after they received Audrey's reply.

Xio, with her messy blonde hair, was looking out the window of the carriage, her eyes were bright like two burning balls of

flame.

She muttered the term “450 pounds” to herself repeatedly, as if reciting an incantation. Her strength and courage grew every time she repeated the term.

“Darkholme hasn’t reported the status of the investigation today. Let’s make a trip to his house!” Xio suddenly turned to look at Fors.

Darkholme was the leader of a gang in the Backlund East Borough and had control over many beggars and thieves.

Even though he looked very friendly with his chubby face that was perpetually adorned with a warm and amiable smile—Xio knew that he was a merciless scoundrel. He once broke the arm of a thirteen-year-old thief because the boy had hidden his profit.

Unless it was necessary, Xio was unwilling to meet Darkholme, but Darkholme was one of the few people who were most familiar with the vagrants in the city.

Fors pushed her slightly curly hair back behind her ear.

“As long as it doesn’t delay my lunch.”

“No problem! Perhaps I could treat you to an Intis feast after this week!” Xio promised in complacency.

“Must I thank God?” Fors asked as she laughed.

Unlike Xio, Fors was a moderate believer of the God of Steam and Machinery.

As they conversed, the two ladies switched to another public carriage and arrived at the Backlund East Borough, and arrived at Darkholme's house.

It was a terrace house located in a narrow alley. There were green plants hanging from the walls, the exterior looked relatively unkempt.

Xio walked to the door, raised her right hand and knocked in a unique rhythm.

The unlocked door opened with a creak following her knocks.

Xio's apparently confused expression immediately turned stern, like a wary lion's.

She took out a triangular blade she carried with her and cautiously pushed open the door. She then slowly stepped inside.

Fors also stopped looking nonchalant, having produced a dagger of unknown origins.

They didn't smell any peculiar scents, but their rich experience told them that something was off.

One step, two steps, three steps. Xio and Fors entered Darkholme's house.

Then they saw a pale limb on a gas lamp, internal organs on a coffee table, as well as strips upon strips of flesh strewn on the floor and hung on the clothes rack!

Pieces of bone had been stripped clean and piled up near the door.

And amongst the bones was a head, its vacant eyes open. It was none other than Darkholme.

His chubby face still maintained the amiable smile, as if everything was normal. Furthermore, there was no stench of blood in the house.

As a former clinical doctor before becoming a best-selling author and Sequence 9 Beyonder, Fors has seen many death scenes more disgusting than this. She patted the tense Xio, who was on the brink of vomiting, as she surveyed the surroundings.

“Qilangos? Vice Admiral Hurricane Qilangos?”

“He realized that Darkholme was investigating the missing vagrants and tracked him back to his house?”

“Or could it be said that Darkholme had tracked him down, but ended up being caught?”

Xio fought back the urge to retch and said with a serious expression, “He sure lives up to his name as a merciless and crafty pirate admiral. The strangeness here also fits the description of his treasure.”

“Crafty...” Fors was suddenly alarmed as she blurted out, “Could he be waiting nearby in an ambush against the mastermind behind the investigations?”

Xio froze for a moment before answering in a fluster, “That’s highly likely!”

He was a Sequence 6 Wind-blessed, a powerful pirate with a mystical artifact, while they were just two Sequence 9’s!

This was an extremely simple and easy contrast!

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In the house opposite Darkholme’s house, a man with a unique broad chin and dark green eyes in his thirties was standing by the window, coldly observing Xio’s and Fors’s opening of the door and slow entry.

He was none other than Vice Admiral Hurricane Qilangos!

The black glove on his left hand twitched as if it were alive. A layer of dull gold scales appeared on its surface.

Qilangos revealed a cruel and joyous expression as his dark green eyes turned pale gold and indifferent.

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The moment Fors realized this, she dragged Xio to the other side and avoided the area just across the main door.

She then gritted her pearly-white teeth and took out a bracelet that was hidden by her sleeves.

This silver bracelet had three dark green, coarse stones which showed signs of burn marks and were rough and uneven.

Fors pulled out one of the stones and let out a low growl in ancient Hermes, “Door!”

She grabbed onto Xio Derecha tightly as the stone released a faint blue glow.

The figures of the two ladies turned indistinct, nearly invisible.

They saw many forms they found difficult to describe. There were even transparent objects that didn't seem to exist. They saw different colors, lustrous splendors which seemed to possess immense knowledge. They had entered the mysterious spirit world.

In this strange world that stood distinct from reality, Fors proceeded in a particular direction while pulling Xio along.

Seconds later, they exited their indistinct states and returned to reality—to Backlund.

But they were no longer at Darkholme's house, but instead arrived at an empty cemetery.

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Qilangos, who was wearing his scaled glove, silently appeared at the door of Darkholme's house. He swept the interior with his cold gaze.

He froze for a moment, then creased his brows as he muttered to himself, "Traveler?"

...

In the cemetery.

"What are we going to do next?" Fors panted, sensing their predicament and feeling a lingering sense of fear.

The bracelet was a mystical item she had received along with the formula for Apprentice and its corresponding materials back during a fortuitous encounter of hers. Other than causing her to hear strange, faint murmurings during the full moon every month, it posed no threat.

There were originally five stones on the bracelet, each stone allowing her to traverse through the spirit world, technically allowing her to teleport. But now, there were only two stones left.

Xio calmed herself down and nodded solemnly.

"First notify Miss Audrey, then-then we call the police!"