

I! Cleaner 161

Chapter 161 As soon as I came in, I saw Anna hitting Melanie_1

"Sister?"

Just as the two siblings were embracing warmly at their doorstep, silently promising in their hearts to always be each other's safe harbor, a curious little head poked out and inquired,

"So it's big brother who's back! Are you still gonna hit Melanie today?"

???

Along with this loaded question, Leon felt the person in his arms suddenly freeze, and unusually clear teeth-grinding sounds echoed in his ears.

"Hit! Definitely hit!"

Releasing her grip around Leon's waist, the frail girl stomped her foot hard and gritted her teeth angrily,

"It doesn't matter if you come back, even if Mom and Dad came back today, she won't escape this beating!"

?!?!?

What?! Is it that serious?

Seeing Anna, who rarely mentioned their parents, so mad she was speaking nonsense, Leon quickly hugged his angrily frowning sister tighter, trying to persuade her earnestly,

"Stop, stop, don't rush to hit her, education comes first, education comes first!"

"My hitting her is educating her! Bro! Let me go! Let go!"

At William's reminder, Anna, who had just been gentle as water, now recalled her anger. She struggled and complained in rage,

"It's all your fault for always stopping me from hitting them. Do you know what they did?"

"Uh... what did they do?"

"In just their first week at school, they rallied those noble kids to chase away the teacher and started some kind of class parliament!"

"It's a class parliament."

Correcting his sister's mistake, William seriously explained while buttoning his pants,

"We're learning the Kingdom's two-chamber system, those from big noble families go to the Upper House. Those who are super-rich, particularly good at studying, or exceptionally good at fighting join the Lower House. The Upper House regularly drafts class regulations, but those need to be voted on by the Lower House. Finally, the class president, elected by the Lower House, announces the regulations and is responsible for negotiations with the principal and teachers. The model is very rigorous."

"..."

Wow, it's a perfect replication of it. Are kids these days a bit too ferocious? When I was their age, I was still arguing with my desk partner about whether there were urinals in the girls' restroom!

"How dare you still talk!"

After hearing William's pseudo-adult correction, Anna in Leon's arms struggled even harder, shouting angrily as she did,

"Melanie asked me for two packs of cookies, saying she wanted to share them with classmates, but she used the cookies I baked to get votes for herself, bribing the election to gain support and become the class president! Bro! Do you know? After that little brat became the class president, the first decree she passed was to unite with all the classmates to chase away the Religion and Home Economics teachers!"

Those two teachers together are almost a hundred years old. When I went there, one was pointing at my nose and cursing, and the other was holding the holy book and sobbing. I didn't even know how to apologize!"

"..."

Well, that is a bit too much, indeed they need some proper education.

Frowning with a headache, Leon brought his constantly struggling sister into the house. He looked at the closed door of the inner room, then turned his head to look at William on the side, and said with a slightly serious expression,

"Everything else is fine, but why chase away the teachers? If the reason isn't suitable, don't blame big brother for not helping you stop it."

"As for the reason, those two teachers really did suck."

Little William tilted his head, thought for a while, and then answered,

"The Home Economics teacher is the class advisor's aunt. Her cooking is really horrible, and she's always very kind to those noble kids, yet very harsh to us normal-dressing kids. The work Melanie and I were assigned in the Home Economics class involved washing potatoes, cleaning organs, and scraping fish scales. Then, we had to eat those unsuccessful dishes made by the noble kids. It's just terribly annoying."

"The Religion teacher is about the same. Every day he only tells us to loudly read the holy book and quizzes us on it. If we can't recite it, he hits our palms, calling us unfaithful little brats who should go to Hell and be taken away by demons when we die. Melanie and I just transferred there a week ago, and we weren't familiar with the holy book like others. As a result, we always got our palms hit.

Melanie couldn't stand it and found some tricky questions in the holy book to stump him. Then she asked him if he couldn't answer them, did it mean he wasn't faithful and should get his palms hit, too? In the end, he even kicked her once."

"..."

So that's what happened...

After hearing William's explanation, Leon and Anna's expressions froze slightly, with a trace of regret flashing in Anna's eyes. Then she lowered her voice and said,

"Then why didn't you tell me when I asked you just now?"

William didn't respond to that but instead hesitated a bit and glanced at Leon. Seeing the little guy's gaze, Leon vaguely guessed the reason they hadn't told her earlier.

Knowing that the kids at home had suffered, Anna would definitely go over directly, but her health hadn't recovered yet; she needed a few more months of medication. If they explained, it might make things more troublesome, especially since Leon had been away recently. It was simpler just to take a beating and then explain it later.

Additionally, if they were ordinary kids, they might think "the adults" would certainly help them seek justice, but these two little guys had known since they were young that their older brothers and sisters were not omnipotent. If enduring a beating and writing a review could solve the problem, they would probably just take the beating and get it over with.

These two little tykes are... both heartbreakingly sensible and headache-inducingly clueless...

...

"Maybe they've grown up and don't want to tell the family everything."

Fearing that telling the truth might upset Anna, Leon offered a vague excuse, then said to William,

"Bear with it for a few more days. Your big brother is too busy with work now to look after the family temporarily, but once things settle down, I'll go to your school right away."

Letting go of his no longer struggling sister, Leon squatted and patted William's head, solemnly promising,

"Big brother promises you, if it's indeed as you said, those two teachers will definitely be replaced, and they must apologize to you and the other kids. But next time if something similar happens, you are not to act rashly, rally classmates, and chase people away. Tell the family first. As long as you are in the right, big brother will definitely back you up!"

"..."

As long as we are in the right?

Looking at Leon's serious expression, William tilted his head and pondered for a moment, then nodded vigorously.

"Okay! Next time we'll definitely make sure we're right first!"

"..."

While there seems to be nothing wrong with that, why do I feel like what you understand isn't quite what I meant?

Leon smiled helplessly, then ruffled his little brother's always-unique-mindset head, before standing back up and patting him on the back.

"Alright, go call Melanie out, tell her she won't have to take the beating."

"Mm!"

Using his excellent diplomatic skills to defuse the family war, William trotted to the inner room and started pounding on the locked door.

"Come out, it's fine now!"

"Not coming out!"

From inside the room came Melanie's wary voice after hearing the knocking.

"You're surely trying to trick me into opening the door for another beating! Forget it, I won't come out before dawn! If I come out now, I might get beaten for an hour, but if I can hide until school tomorrow, Sister Anna might only beat me for ten minutes to avoid me being late!"

"Get out!"

After banging on the door for ages to no avail, William became visibly impatient and shouted,

"Big brother's back, sister has no time to beat you now!"

"Not coming out, you liar, no way I'm gonna get beat with you!"

"Then don't blame me!"

Seeing how unloyal she was, William squinted his eyes, then turned towards Leon and Anna,

"I'm telling you, Melanie took my pocket money to buy roses and planned to send them to the Home Economics teacher's house, making her husband think she's having an affair! And yesterday she wrote a complaint letter to the Sanctuary Church, reporting that the Religion teacher was too unfamiliar with the holy book, suggesting the Sanctuary Church check his priest's qualification to see if he bought it!"

Chapter 162 Color and Lost Item_1

With the "enthusiastic help" of her twin brother, Melanie didn't manage to escape that beating, and it even got a whole lot worse.

"Slap!"

"Ouch!"

"Don't you scream!"

After Anna's slender fingers forcefully closed together and gave Melanie's butt a hard smack, her two delicate eyebrows twisted up as she clenched her teeth and said,

"How old are you, and you've already learned to frame others!"

"I... I... I really wasn't framing anyone!"

Squirming forward like a baby maggot, but getting hauled back immediately, Melanie saw her sister's face turning as red as an apple. Predicting that Anna's next normal attack would probably be a critical hit, she hurriedly defended herself,

"That religious studies teacher always talks about how devout he is, yet he can't even name the right color of the underwear the Twelve Knights wore when they were martyred for God. He must be faking his devotion! Writing a letter to the church was a reasonable question!"

"You still dare to say that!"

After three consecutive critical hits, the attack speed stacked up. Anna panted and yelled angrily,

"How can the sacred texts contain such nonsense! You're just making things up!"

"Sister, Melanie wasn't lying this time. The holy canon actually mentions it."

Hearing this, William took out the holy canon from his backpack, flipped through it, and then handed it over, his little face earnest as he explained,

"Look, here in this passage, there's an account from the Twelve Knights after being knighted... 'Our God is white, so we must follow white, wearing inner clean clothes and outer crimson robes...'

Therefore, the clothes the Twelve Knights wore day-to-day should all be white from the inside out. They only donned robes of other colors out of respect for the deity, but their underwear should still be white.

Although this isn't directly stated in the sacred texts, if you're familiar enough with its provisions, you can actually guess it."

"..."

So... did I punish wrongly again?

Looking at William, who was defending his case confidently, Anna hesitated and lowered her voice slightly, biting her lip,

"But... but this isn't really an orthodox issue. Even if he couldn't answer that it's white, you can't just report him..."

"That's not the case. The religious studies teacher did come up with an answer."

William shook his head and said,

"Although he was very angry, after flipping through the holy canon for a while, he said the Twelve Knights' underwear should be white."

"Then why did you still..."

"Because white was not the correct answer."

After taking back the holy canon and flipping a few more pages, William earnestly pointed at the text to show Anna,

"Melanie's question wasn't about what color the Twelve Knights usually wore, but rather the underwear color when they were martyred for God.

According to the sacred texts, they first went through a three-month trial in the large desert. They went to their martyrdom just after exiting the desert with no time to change or wash clothes, so their underwear, after three months without a change, should be yellow."

"..."

"..."

Seeing Anna with veins jumping on her forehead, her face turning white, then red, and then purple, with a hint of black, Melanie quickly pulled up her pants and rolled over, launching herself into Leon's embrace.

"Big Brother, save me!"

No way! This is really impossible to save!

Siding himself to dodge Melanie's tackle, and twisting further to avoid the arms reaching for his thigh, Leon glanced at her with some pity, then sensibly stepped aside.

Don't blame your brother for being disloyal. With how furious your sister looks, if I tried to save you, I fear she'd even want to spank my butt. Just sit it out honestly!

...

After a chaotic pursuit, with chickens flying and dogs jumping, Leon glanced at the tearful Melanie who was beaten until she cried for her father and mother. Judging that Anna's anger was probably half-satisfied, he stopped her.

"Alright, alright, take a break, look at you huffing and puffing."

"I'll still hit her even if I'm puffing!"

"Yes, yes, yes, hit her! I won't stop you this time! If we don't educate her, she'll go astray!"

Following Anna's intent, Leon put on a stern face and "angrily scolded" Melanie a few times before reaching out to gently stroke Anna's back, helping her regulate her breath, and then softly requested,

"But I'm a bit tight on Time; I have to work overtime at the bureau soon, and it's so cold now... Dear Anna, could you maybe deal with her later and find me a couple of blankets first?"

"You're just protecting her!"

Easily seeing through Leon's diversionary tactic, the frail girl gave him a glare before struggling out of his embrace and storming towards the bedroom. With a creaking sound, she opened the paint-peeling wardrobe and began searching for blankets.

Giving Melanie an "hurry up and hide" look, Leon watched her tiptoe into the inner room before slowly sauntering into the bedroom, comforting his sister squatting in front of the cupboard,

"Actually, you don't have to worry too much. Melanie might be a little quirky but never bullies anyone. She's just got a very stubborn nature and can't stand losing.

William is the same way, a bit sneaky but never harms anyone. Although they cause some headaches, they are good kids, really... Anna?"

"Ah?"

It seemed like Anna was startled by Leon's words as she trembled slightly and continued with her task, her back to Leon, hurriedly rummaging through the blankets while nodding repeatedly,

"Yes, yes... they're indeed not bad, just a bit immature, they'll grow up... By the way, are blankets the only thing you need? How about taking a thicker set of clothes?"

"Just the blankets will do; it's quite warm in the office."

Watching his sister's slightly flustered movements, Leon instinctively furrowed his brows, then directly asked,

"Anna, what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

The frail girl shook her head, clutching two folded blankets as she turned around, her smile slightly forced as she said, "I just discovered something missing, worried about whether I didn't bring it when we moved."

"Is that so...?"

If it was a month ago, Leon might have been fooled by her words, but now he was already accustomed to discerning people's expressions. Even without using the Black Goat's soul vision, he could tell that Anna was obviously hiding something on her mind.

"Then you have a look first. If you can't find it, I can accompany you back to Veteran Lane in a few days, and we can search together."

"Mmm."

After bagging up two blankets and bringing them to the door, Leon picked up the shopping bag on the shoe cabinet, his fingertips quietly pressing the Yang Jiao.

"Anna, the thing you just discovered missing, is it the family photo that only included you and Mom and Dad?"

?!!!

Watching Anna's soul in the soul vision, filled with instant panic and confusion, Leon slowly put on his shoes, his voice gentle as he quietly spoke,

"Actually, my birthday isn't even on the day you told me; it's possible I'm not even blood-related to our parents, and you aren't my real sister, right?"

Chapter 163 Bad Guest?_1

"How... how could you think that way?"

After hearing Leon's words, Anna felt as if the world was spinning, almost collapsing, but she clung to her last hope, struggling to say,

"Brother, haven't you seen the photos? You look so much like Mom, and the color of your hair and eyes are identical to Dad's..."

"Yes, very much alike."

Leon nodded upon hearing this, replying quite frankly,

"It's because of the resemblance that I never doubted before, but last week, while on duty, I visited the Ryan Family's genealogy room and saw many things.

"Anna, unlike me, who has no memory, you should know our grandfather was from the Ryan Family, and our surname doesn't originate from Laine County, but rather from that Duke family on Redwood Avenue, right?"

"Yes..."

Seeing that Leon had even uncovered such a matter, the sickly girl couldn't help but turn pale before biting her lip and nodding.

"I... I didn't mean to hide it from you. It's just that Grandfather said back then, because of the competition for the title or something, he formed deadly grudges with many people. It was hard enough for him to escape from the Capital City, and he urged us not to get involved with them..."

"I believe you."

After putting on his shoes, Leon stood up and took a step forward to give his pale-faced sister another deep hug. He said in a calm voice,

"But I also hope you can believe me."

"I..."

"It's okay. Everyone has secrets they wish others not to know. I have such secrets hidden from you as well, but that doesn't stop me from considering you as my family."

Gently stroking Anna's hair, Leon paused the hug, then cupped her cheeks and, looking into her eyes, said with utmost sincerity,

"I don't know what you consider as family, but to me, being close by blood isn't the only criterion for family, not even a necessary one."

From a somewhat selfish viewpoint, the one I most want to share my happiness with and the one I most want to confide in during pain, that person is my family, and you are always the first I think of."

"Brother..."

"I'm here, but I'm about to leave soon."

Looking at his sister, whose eyes had turned red, and whose nose even blushed, Leon smiled, affectionately pinched her red nose, then stepped back, picked up his belongings, and opened the door to depart.

"Ah! Wait for me!"

When Anna, still a bit at a loss, wiped away her tears and prepared to see him off, Leon suddenly turned back and asked,

"By the way, just before I came in, what were you saying to me?"

"Ah?"

"Ah, what? You told me that no matter when, if I ever feel tired, I should come home, and you'd always be waiting for me..."

Repeating Anna's words, Leon frowned with an unhappy expression and said,

"You need to keep your word, regardless of whether we share blood or if I'm your natural brother. When I return, you can't drive me away!"

"Brother... you're really..."

Wiping her eyes, the sickly girl, now smiling through tears, shook her head, somewhat reproachfully saying,

"What strange words, how could I drive you away?"

"Better not, but even if you did, I wouldn't leave."

Nudging Anna's shoes inward and keeping her from seeing him off, Leon waved to her as if her heart knot had been untied, then carried a blanket and shopping bag downstairs.

When Leon descended, Anna gently closed the door and quickly walked to the window, staring unblinkingly at his silhouette until he boarded a carriage and vanished around the corner with the sound of a whistle, only then reluctantly withdrawing her gaze.

Maybe... the situation I fear most would never happen? Even if he knows what I did, my brother might not necessarily...

"Knock, kn-knock."

Just then, a somewhat heavy knocking startled Anna, who collected herself and walked over, asking through the door,

"Who's outside?"

"As for me... you could say I'm your friend."

Lightly tapping the lock's location, with a crisp sound as the lock cylinder automatically turned, a man in a black robe, wearing a wide-brimmed hat that obscured most of his face, entered the room. He nodded at the shocked Anna, greeting her with a voice that was both cold and hard,

"It's been almost six years, Miss Anna, how have you been lately?"

Six years?

Upon hearing the keyword and looking at the man with thin, long eyes and a face that seemed to be in a perpetual sad expression even while attempting to smile, Anna immediately realized.

"You... you're that person from the photography studio!"

"Yes, it's me."

Removing his hat and placing it before his chest, he gave a gentleman's bow. The naturally sad-faced man politely and coolly apologized,

"Sorry to intrude. I intended nothing more with this visit than to see how you've been... Please, was the person who just left the family member you chose for yourself?"

Upon hearing his words, Anna couldn't help but turn extremely pale, then tightly bit her lip and nodded stiffly.

"Yes..."

"Husband?"

"It's my brother..."

"My apologies."

With little sincerity, he briefly apologized, and the similarly stiff-faced man continued to inquire,

"I'm sorry for overhearing some of your conversation. It seems you all got along well over the years, so you should be content with what I gave you, correct?"

"..."

"Miss Anna, please don't be so nervous..."

Observing Anna's increasingly pale complexion, the man's icy voice carried a hint of helplessness.

"My visit this time really holds no malice, merely wishing to see what became of that item. My somewhat intrusive unlocking was only due to fear that you might not wish to open the door."

Having clarified his intentions, seemingly to reassure her, the man retreated a few steps back to the door, where he extended his palm to Anna, respectfully asking,

"If possible, could you kindly take out the item I gave you for me to check briefly?"

Seeing that he genuinely harbored no ill intentions, Anna couldn't help but quietly breathe a sigh of relief, then shook her head forcefully, her expression apologetic as she said,

"I could have, originally, but just now I found that I seem to have lost that photo..."

???

Lost? How could it be lost?

For such a promising high-numbered experimental subject, I placed more than one following command on it. Even if torn, crumpled, or burnt to ashes, it should reappear beside you!

...

When faced with the unexpected answer, the man in the black robe felt slightly bewildered.

Staring into Anna's eyes, seemingly using some method to confirm she wasn't lying, the man squinted, his tone rather helpless,

"There's no helping it then... How about this: seeing as it's already lost, could you trouble yourself to tell me about the past few years?"

Chapter 164 False Life_1

"Talk about what's happened over the years?"

Although she extremely didn't want to answer that question, after glancing back at her siblings' room, Anna couldn't help but bite her lip and then nod with some difficulty.

"Okay... Where should I start?"

"Start from when you got the object."

The man in the black robe said calmly,

"Six years ago, after your parents passed away, I came over to deliver the washed photos and discovered that you had a certain 'potential.' Then I gave you a little help. May I ask what happened after that?"

What happened after that...

Upon hearing this, Anna once again bit her lip, her face turning somewhat pale, and said,

"After that... I, indeed, just like you said, regained a family, but... but it wasn't the kind I wanted..."

"Oh?"

The man in the black robe raised his eyebrows with interest, then asked,

"Can you elaborate?"

"It's like... When I spoke to that photo, wanting my family back, it wasn't my parents who appeared in the house, but a boy around my age."

Recalling the situation back then, Anna said, her eyes full of complexity,

"When he saw me, he claimed he was my brother. I thought I had met a madman and was startled, frantically pushing him out the door, then continued talking to the photo you gave me.

What I said was that I wanted my parents back, to have a family again, but once again, they didn't appear. Instead, what came was a pair of swaddled babies..."

"I see... It seems that back then, you didn't fully believe my words."

The man in the black robe shook his head and said regretfully,

"You were a slightly mature and calm-minded kid, and back then, you had already deeply understood the meaning of death and knew that your parents couldn't come back.

Even though I told you that family photo was an unparalleled miracle, capable of allowing you to have a family again, and demonstrated a part of its power before you, you still didn't fully believe me. Deep down, you thought it couldn't bring your parents back.

Because of the doubt and distrust in your heart, the seed I left in that photo didn't hatch towards summoning your parents back but ventured into an unknown new direction, causing the abnormal... well... causing deviations in the effect, what a pity."

?!!!

Upon hearing the words of the man in the black robe, Anna felt a wave of dizziness, a cold rush of something gut-wrenching suddenly hit her heart.

"So... if I had believed it enough back then, could I really have brought them back?"

"Sorry, it's also impossible."

The man in the black robe shook his head again and said,

"The boundary between life and death isn't entirely irreversible, but the conditions needed are unimaginably harsh. Making someone 'undead' isn't hard, but bringing the dead back to life is astonishingly difficult.

Although your 'talent' is very outstanding, it was still not enough to break the barrier between life and death. However, if you had believed me enough, you might have summoned the remnants left by your parents or created two puppets like them."

"Then... wouldn't that still be fake?"

"It's fake, indeed, but back then you were not even ten years old. Even if they were just two empty puppets with the look of your parents, it would fulfill your wish, so I did not lie to you."

After answering Anna's question without changing his expression, the man in the black robe, noticing that the "test subject" seemed to have some trouble, his demeanor visibly became indifferent.

Looking towards the inner room, glancing through the wall at the two children inside, the man in the black robe slightly wrinkled his eyebrows and said with some dissatisfaction,

"It seems not only is your brother unrelated to you, but the remaining two also have no blood relation with you, and they aren't fake creations either; they're entirely real humans.

So you received a seed with a number within ten, and what finally germinated simply found a few children resembling your parents and forcibly wiped away their past, stealing their original lives, letting them play house with you?"

"I... I didn't want this! I never thought of doing such a thing!"

Hearing the "accusation" from the man in the black robe, the deepest guilt buried in Anna's heart was torn apart, her face turned pale as if all blood instantly drained from it.

"After discovering something wrong with that object, I immediately tore it apart and took my brother and Melanie to find the police, wanting to help them return to their original home, but... but everyone's memories seemed to have been altered!"

Holding the door frame to support her dizzy self from collapsing, Anna bit her pale lips, trying hard to explain,

"After the police talked to the neighbors, they said our family indeed consisted of four children. The municipal staff looked through the files and said they indeed are my siblings. Our home even had items for infants, and even in past photos, there were the other three children!

I... I didn't intend to steal someone else's family. I really tried explaining it! But no one believed me, they all thought I went mad due to excessive grief from my parents' death in battle, and I couldn't find their original family either, so... so..."

Municipal files, neighbor memories, traces of life... Were all of them completely altered?

Upon hearing this, the man in the black robe slightly relaxed his tightly furrowed eyebrows.

Although the result apparently deviated from what he initially envisioned for the Anomalous Object, the ability to directly intervene in the essence of existence itself, forcefully altering someone's life, meant its hierarchy was extremely high. It wasn't a waste to use the strength of seed number seven.

However, although the test subject's hierarchy was up to standard, the ability wasn't what he wanted, and "that moment" was not far off, leaving at most a year.

If he couldn't create the corresponding Anomalous Object within a year, even if he succeeded in handling the Scarlet Hair Lady of the Virgo Bureau, and destroyed what was sealed on the top floor of the Virgo Bureau, it would all end up in vain!

"Forget it..."

Thinking of this, the slightly disinterested man in the black robe shook his head, then politely yet coldly said to Anna after putting his hat back on,

"I have no more questions to ask. Sorry for disturbing you today..."

Oh, and since you lost the object I gave you, if I retrieve it later, you shouldn't have any objections, right?"

"I..."

Hearing the man in the black robe, even knowing he had an irresistible power, the frail girl summoned her courage, grasped the door frame, and asked,

"If you take the object, then... what about Leon and Melanie..."

"Naturally, they will return to their original home, and their memories from these years will be erased. No one but you will know what happened."

"!!!"

Watching Anna slump to the ground with a thud, her eyes instantly losing all luster, appearing to transform into a fragile shell of a human being, the man in the black robe, whose cold and rigid face finally broke into a sincere smile.

"Don't worry. Once I retrieve the object, I'll help amend the mistakes you've made. Isn't that what you want?"

Chapter 165 Director (Drunk Limited Edition)_1

Leon had no idea that just after he left, the Aquarius Director paid a visit to his home.

At this moment, Leon stood outside the Director's office, ready to report on the day's events and take the opportunity to greet the Red-haired Director, informing her that he planned to sleep at the bureau tonight. However...

"Knock, knock, knock."

"Who... is it?"

"Director, it's me."

"Who... are you?"

"I'm Leon!"

"Leon... who?"

"..."

Listening to the response from inside, which could not be described as logical and only indicated that the Director's mind had clearly checked out, Leon outside the door fell silent for a moment and then asked somewhat speechlessly:

"Director, have you been drinking?"

"Drinking... who?"

No doubt about it, she definitely had drunk, and quite a lot...

"Director, I'm coming in, don't make a move!"

As Leon spoke, he tentatively pushed the door open a crack, but before he could see the situation inside clearly, a gust of alcohol-laden air hit him head-on, making his vision go black.

My god, you really can drink!

Seeing the pile of empty bottles next to the desk, stacked higher than a person, and the red-haired beauty sprawled over the table giggling foolishly at him, Leon clicked his tongue in surprise while also feeling a headache.

Due to the discovery that he had drawn the rebels' attention and worrying they might target his family, Leon originally intended to ask the Red-haired Director for a favor to see if the "Protective Fur" that he had been wearing around his neck but had never activated could be transferred to Anna. Then he could try to get a few more for William and Melanie.

After all, he was targeted by the rebels because of official duties, and protecting the employees' families should also be the Purification Bureau's responsibility. If it was really inconvenient, he could trade with anomalous objects or something else. After all, the "Ghost Hand Under the Bed" given by Senior Jerry wasn't very useful to him, so why not use it to trade for a protective charm for his siblings?

But seeing the Director's state, comparable to "What's-his-name-Ma," it seemed unlikely that he could get a clear answer tonight. Maybe it would be better to leave it until tomorrow when she's sober.

After all, the Secret Investigation Bureau was about to start a major raid, and the rebels would be too busy to deal with anything on their end in the short term. Anna and the others were protected by Happiness Apartment, and as long as they greeted the manager lady every day before going out, they could get the risk-avoidance buff. So it probably wouldn't matter if it waited a day or two...

"Little Leon~ You're Little Leon, aren't you?"

Just as Leon hesitated about whether to leave, the drunken Red-haired Director slapped her forehead, sat up from the table, and giggling foolishly said:

"You came too late! Ha ha ha, I've already drunk all the alcohol! Don't even think about freeloading any of mine!"

"..."

This silly woman!

Looking at the woman in front of him, her brain reeking of alcohol, it was hard to associate her with the "brilliant and brave" Director in her sober state. Leon couldn't help but sigh helplessly.

"I'm not going to compete with you for your wine... Speaking of which, weren't you fine during the day? Why did you drink so much?"

"Because it was payday~"

After shaking her head vigorously, perhaps clearing up a bit, the Red-haired Director giggled with a bit more logic in her words:

"I owed a lot from the last time I treated you to drinks, which left me with no money to buy wine for a while. Now that I finally have some surplus, if I don't have a good drink, the alcohol worm in my belly will die of thirst!"

"..."

Honestly, if that thing really existed, it would be better to let it die of thirst, but... Did treating me to drinks last time really cost you a lot of money?

Seeing the glowing [Martyr of the Wine Country] on his panel, Leon scratched his head awkwardly and then said embarrassedly:

"Uh, can I ask how much you owed that time?"

"Sob... I really owed a lot..."

Hearing Leon's question, the previously cheerful expression of the Red-haired Director immediately collapsed. She blinked her charming fox eyes, full of tears, and counted on her fingers:

"Counting the part paid at the store, the bill they sent over is more than three hundred Gold Wheels. And after spending so much money, you drank more than I did... I didn't get much out of it..."

"..."

Over three hundred Gold Wheels... My goodness, we really drank away my salary for more than half a year that day?

"This... was really that much, huh? That's really embarrassing..."

Even though he had mentally prepared himself, hearing a bill that was more than three times the amount he had estimated left Leon quite shocked. Then under the pitiable gaze of the Red-haired Director, he scratched the back of his head awkwardly:

"Director, should I..."

"Help me pay the bill?"

"Uh... not the bill, what I meant was, should I take you home? Sleeping here might be uncomfortable..."

"..."

Turning his head slightly to avoid the Red-haired Director's bewildered gaze, Leon stiffened his resolve, walked over, and picked up the drunken Director from the table.

Paying that bill was not something Leon was going to do — not in this lifetime. The Director was so generous in treating him to drinks; if he insisted on paying, wouldn't that be ungrateful?

Besides, there was Anna's medication, home rent, and his siblings' tuition fees to consider... And the Director, who was already drinking excessively, would be healthier if she drank less. If he paid the bill and let her have money to buy more alcohol, that would only be hurting her!

Having thick-skinnedly rationalized it to himself, Leon cleared his throat and said to the Red-haired Director, who was glaring up at him:

"Director, where is your home?"

"I don't have a home."

"Uh... so where do you usually sleep?"

"In the suites of the liquor houses outside, or... or the reception room upstairs..."

"..."

"Do you pity me?"

"..."

Before Leon could come up with a reply, a slender white arm reached up, pinching his chin and turning his face toward her.

Staring into Leon's eyes, where a hint of softness flickered, the Red-haired Director wrinkled her nose, slightly parted her rosy lips, and exhaled a mixture of gardenia-scented alcohol in his face, declaring with some bravado:

"I'm fine on my own! No pity for me! I'm not to be pitied!"

"Uh-huh."

"Do you not believe me?"

Seemingly thinking her "Director's dignity" was being challenged, the Red-haired Director stiffened her neck and glared at Leon fiercely, while playfully hooking her foot to deliver a light kick at him.

"I'm very strong! Whether it's betrayal, hostility, or being cast aside, I never cried! Even when everyone in the bureau left, I was never afraid of being alone! I'm not afraid!"

"..."

How unfamiliar... Was she really the same Director from the daytime?

Seeing the little woman shrinking into his embrace, clutching his sleeve, despite proclaiming she's not afraid, Leon hesitated briefly before proposing:

"Director, you should rest. How about I take you upstairs first?"

"I don't want to go..."

Upon hearing Leon's suggestion, the Red-haired Director suddenly gripped his lapels tightly, tearfully replying:

"There're so many people upstairs yelling at me, I don't dare go up while I'm awake..."

So many people yelling at you upstairs?

Leon was slightly stunned by this, then curiously replied:

"Isn't upstairs empty, with never anyone there?"

"They're there, always there!"

Seeing that Little Leon didn't seem to believe her, the Red-haired Director pouted and argued:

"I've counted carefully. From the fifth floor to the top, there are twelve million, nine hundred and sixty thousand people yelling at me. They've never stopped for so many years. If you don't believe it, listen!"

Chapter 166 Vital_1

"One hundred and twenty-nine million people are cursing you... how is that possible?"

When Leon saw the stubborn expression on the Red-haired Director's face, he actually somewhat believed it at first. Although the director was prone to lying when sober, surely she couldn't be subconsciously messing with him when she was this drunk, right?

However, Leon's trust lasted barely a second before he extinguished it himself.

The Purification Bureau's building was quite large, but compared to nearly 130 million humans, it still seemed overly small. It was preposterous to think it could hold that many people, not just on the fifth or sixth floor of this building, and even if they included the entire police department's area.

Wasn't it just drunken talk?

"Don't worry, don't worry."

Grabbing the Red-haired Director's arm and draping it over his neck, Leon simultaneously bent his knee to nudge her on the butt, adjusting her into a position that was easier for carrying. As he carried her upstairs, he coaxed along, saying,

"I'm very good at cursing. If those people curse you, I'll curse them back for you."

"You're lying! You're so honest; how could you possibly curse anyone?"

"I'm not lying to you."

"If you're not lying, then why won't you look into my eyes? Are you afraid I'll see through your lies?"

"..."

"Look at me! I don't trust what comes out of your mouth. You enjoy lying; I only trust what your eyes say."

"..."

So in your eyes, am I honest or not?

Seeing that the Red-haired Director in his arms began to struggle again due to his lack of response, Leon had to open his badge panel, switch to the Silver Level "Elite Performer" badge, then looked at her seriously and said,

"I'm not lying to you. I'm really good at cursing. If that hundred million people upstairs curse you, I'll curse them back."

"Then... then you must promise me... if they curse me, you have to curse them back!"

Staring into Leon's eyes for quite a while, the drunken and bleary-eyed Red-haired Director finally settled down, clutching his clothes as she quietly urged,

"But don't curse too harshly. I was the one who started it. If they curse me... it's justified... I'm just... I'm just... afraid after being cursed for so long to go up there alone..."

"..."

Looking at the curled-up and tearful form of the Red-haired Director, Leon couldn't help but be slightly taken aback, vaguely sensing that there might be some truth in her words and not just a drunken rant, as if there really was something upstairs...

Could there be any danger?

After standing for a moment on the second floor of the stairway with the Red-haired Director in his arms, Leon hesitantly asked,

"Director, will those people who curse you ever come down?"

"No, they won't."

The Red-haired Director shook her head, leaning in Leon's arms, her gaze somewhat dazed, as she said,

"They... stay on the fifth or sixth floor, responsible for guarding the top ten... twelve Ant Nests. They won't come down unless someone enters the fifth floor."

Twelve Ant Nests?

After noting down this obscure name and hearing that those 130 million "people" wouldn't be coming down, Leon finally felt slightly relieved. Holding the Red-haired Director cautiously, he exited the stairway, moving almost step by step to enter the conference room where the Taurus Director had visited last time.

After placing the Red-haired Director on the sofa in the conference room, Leon rummaged through the chaotic room, finding a thick cashmere blanket beneath a pile of empty bottles in the corner, covering her with it. Then, picking a sofa cushion from the floor, he brushed off the dust, lifted the Red-haired Director's head, and placed it under.

Phew... finally took good care of her.

Looking at the Red-haired Director lying obediently on the sofa cushion without moving, her eyes continually following him, Leon couldn't help but let out a sigh.

One ordinary drunk is troublesome enough, but an incredibly strong and full-of-secrets drunk is twice the hassle. Thankfully, everything ended smoothly; he finally managed to settle her down, which at least repaid a bit of a favor.

"It's late; you should get some rest soon. I'm going downstairs to sleep."

After greeting the increasingly drowsy-eyed Red-haired Director, Leon crouched down to tuck in her blanket before turning to leave.

However, just as he reached the door, he felt a sudden shift in sight. His whole body rose into the air, pulled back to his original spot by a mysterious force.

"Knew you were lying to me~"

Undoing the button on Leon's collar, using her pinky to tug the hair tied around his neck, the woman with a blush of drunkenness on her cheeks smiled smugly. She slightly pulled the hair tied around Leon's neck, bringing his face closer, and slyly blinked her tipsy fox eyes at him.

"You promised to help curse them, but as soon as I'm in bed, you want to run? Dream on!"

"..."

What a pain... should have given her two more bottles, knocking her out before bringing her up...

Glancing at the red hair hooked around his neck, knowing he probably couldn't break free, Leon could only helplessly continue coaxing,

"It's not that I want to deceive you; it's just too late now, and you're this drunk. I can't just sleep beside you, can I?"

"Why not?"

After shifting into the large sofa to create space adequate for someone to lie sideways, the Red-haired Director pulled Leon onto the sofa, smiling as she said,

"It's just lying beside me; nothing's really going to happen. What are you afraid of?"

"..."

"Come on, lie down!"

Ignoring Leon's resistance, she pulled him down, forcibly pinning him on the sofa, and wrapped her arms around his waist. Burrowing her head into Leon's chest, her voice was somewhat muffled as she said,

"Sleep, sleep. I'm really sleepy..."

"Uh... sleeping here is fine. There's another sofa over there; I can move it over..."

"No need, this sofa is wide enough."

"Wide it is, but I turn over a lot in my sleep. What if I fall..."

"I'll hold on to you."

"..."

This is going to kill me...

Feeling a leg suddenly draped over him and their positions so entwined that he couldn't tell who was in whose arms, Leon's scalp tingled.

It's not that he rejected this sort of thing, but... the combat prowess of the one in his arms was just too overwhelming.

As a normal man, when he was initially dragged down, Leon inevitably had a hint of romantic thoughts. However, when the Red-haired Director started hugging his waist, he clearly heard a crackling sound from his spinal misalignment.

So, the 'killing' here wasn't metaphorical; it was a real threat to his life.

The fleeting, romantic notions that just appeared had now flown straight out of his mind under this solid 'bear hug' of sorts. At this moment, Leon had no other thoughts except to escape from the Red-haired Director's embrace quickly, fearing she might really choke him to death in her drunken state.

"Director, Director! Damn it, loosen up a bit!"

After pushing hard twice without success, and hearing the cracking sound of his bones instead, Leon gritted his teeth. Just about ready to apply more force, he suddenly felt a damp sensation from his chest, and the Red-haired Director in his arms started trembling uncontrollably.

Chapter 167 Number_1

Was she... afraid? Leon paused his struggling, noticing the red-haired Director's state, and couldn't help but be slightly startled. Then, enduring a pressure akin to a hydraulic press, he leaned to her ear and softly asked,

"Are those people starting to curse you?"

"Mm..."

Following a faint sob, the red-haired Director nodded slightly, and as if desperately trying to avoid something, she trembled uncontrollably, burrowing into Leon's arms.

Stop burrowing, any deeper and I might be gone!

Although the red-haired Director's particularly weak and pitiful appearance tugged at the heartstrings, Leon kept feeling his ribs creaking and the loss of a third of his lung's air, making him feel more pitiful.

Crossing his hands to brace against the red-haired Director's forehead and using all his strength to push her out, Leon finally rescued his lungs. Flushed red, he took two deep breaths and reached out to cover the red-haired Director's ears.

"How about now? Can you still hear them?"

"I can still hear..."

She nodded pitifully, sobbing softly, "They aren't cursing me through my ears. Even if I cover my ears, I can't escape..."

If it's not the ears, what is it? Mind? Soul? But when I usually use the Black Goat and look upstairs, I don't see anything!

Straining his ears for a long time but still hearing no so-called "curses," Leon could only pat the red-haired Director's back forcefully and urged,

"Listen... Let go a little, you're holding too tight..."

"I won't..."

Rubbing her head in Leon's arms and sobbing as if she were a little girl of five or six, she said, "If I let go, you'll run away like the others. I don't want that!"

You don't want it, but I can't afford not to! If you keep squeezing like this, I won't be able to run away, but my soul might leave first!

Feeling the iron grip tightening on his back, Leon couldn't help but slap her back harder, trying to coax her,

"I won't run! I definitely won't run! And not only won't I run, I'll help you curse them!"

"Rea... really?"

"Really, you can trust my eyes!"

"Then... let me see..."

After rubbing against Leon's chest twice, she looked up with teary eyes, half-believing, and finally relaxed her arms, gripping Leon's chest again, saying miserably,

"Actually... you don't have to curse them, just don't run away and leave me to be cursed alone..."

"Yeah, yeah, I won't run."

I surely won't run! If I get caught and held again, I might really be gone!

Merely thinking of trying to leave almost resulted in getting choked to death. Leon barely coaxed her to release her grip, and naturally, he dared not make any reckless moves.

To prevent her from getting agitated by the "cursing" and reaching out with a deadly hug, Leon pondered a moment, then chose to grasp the red-haired Director's shoulders, turning her sideways bit by bit.

Once they switched from face-to-face hugging to a position where she was nearly back-to-back, Leon clenched his teeth and exerted all his strength, reversing the hug to pin her deadly arms down tightly.

I mustn't release my grip before she sobers up! If I get hugged up front again, my bones will surely snap!

"Leon... you're so good..."

Unable to see Leon's gritting expression while being embraced "warmly" and "securely," the tear-streaked red-haired Director snuggled into his embrace and regretfully whispered,

"When Emma was still living at the office, she would sometimes hug me to sleep. But after drinking too much one night and being hugged back all night, she refused to let me hug her again and moved back to Redwood Street the next day..."

"..."

So the last victim was actually Senior Emma?

Hearing the red-haired Director's words, Leon, in stark pain and tears welling, couldn't help but shiver and hugged tighter.

I mustn't release! Absolutely mustn't release!

Even Senior Emma, with her Undying Body, couldn't withstand a night of hugging from the Director. I don't have the Undying Body as a backup; if she turns and gets me in a hug, I could really be done for!

And that damned Black Goat had the nerve to say my luck was fine. Just seeing the Director drunk and trying to help her to rest turned into a life-or-death crisis, nearly being strangled to death. This luck is supposed to be fine?!

...

"By the way, Leon."

Just as Leon was desperately praying for her to fall asleep quickly and surely not roll over in her sleep, gaining the hug seemed to calm the red-haired Director. She no longer trembled uncontrollably but leaned against him, speaking softly again,

"Do you want to know what's really upstairs?"

Hmm?

Hearing her question, Leon was momentarily startled and then reminded her,

"Director, although I don't know what's upstairs, according to confidentiality regulations, whatever the Director of the Zodiac Branch Office is guarding should be confidential to Level Three incident handlers."

"It's okay."

The red-haired Director shook her head, replying, "Unlike other Anomalous Objects of the same level, that thing's existence isn't a secret. Not only do branch directors know about it, but many Level One and Level Two veteran employees know about it, and they even know it's in my hands."

Though the threat level is very high, like with the Watcher's Palace, it has been categorized as public secret knowledge. Even if I tell you, it doesn't constitute a violation. You can listen without worry."

It seems... the Director's speech suddenly became much more coherent. Did she become sober after some fussing?

Sensing something was off, Leon pondered for a moment, realizing the red-haired Director wasn't genuinely trying to enlighten him but needed someone to talk to. He gently relaxed his grip and nodded,

"Then go ahead, I'm quite curious."

"Alright, hold me tighter again, and I'll tell you."

Seemingly craving the warmth behind her, she snuggled back into Leon's embrace. With the alcohol redness largely faded from her cheeks, the red-haired Director closed her eyes, curled up slightly, and softly said,

"What's placed on the top floor is an Anomalous Object with the ID 004. As for the 1,296,000,000 'people' always cursing me, combined they form another Anomalous Object with the ID 013, both currently mine."

ID? 004? 013?

"The ID I'm talking about was assigned by the central office's scholars before you proposed the Leon Value, artificially ranking Anomalous Objects by factors such as user, past performance, effect intensity, range, cost to use, and other impacts."

Seemingly aware Leon would question the numbers, the red-haired Director continued softly, explaining with her eyes closed,

"Typically, the closer an Anomalous Object's assigned number is to the front, the more terrifying its effect when pushed to the limit. Like your Holy Spirit pendant, if pushed to limits, should rank within the top 150."

And if you assemble all seven parts of that goat, with your super high affinity, it should have a chance to squeeze into the top 100 when you use it."

The Black Goat... that guy brags about being invincible under True God, and it only ranks in the top 100? And only with the enhancement from the Gold-Level Badge do I 'have a chance' to squeeze in?

Chapter 168 Directors Past_1

Certainly, here's the translated text following your guidelines:

"Don't misunderstand, that sheep is not weak."

The red-haired director, with the initial effects of the alcohol subsiding, regained some of her usual "wise and mighty" demeanor. Even while snuggled in Leon's arms with her eyes closed, she still guessed his thoughts and explained softly,

"At its peak, it was indeed the strongest great demon below the true god, but it was too greedy. Unlike other demons who focused on one or two concepts, it chose seven top-level original sins at once, hoping to leap to become a top-tier demon god.

"Although its talent was exceptional and it actually touched upon seven original sin-level concepts simultaneously, its hierarchy was ultimately lacking, unable to harness all seven original sins at once, which made its individual abilities spread too thin.

"For Anomalous Objects of the same level, their abilities mostly specialize in one or one main and one supplementary. Its seven concepts had almost the same intensity, so it's normal that its upper limit couldn't compare with others. Or, one could say, having such dispersed abilities but still squeezing into the top hundred in the numbering system is already quite a testament to its exceptional talent."

So that's how it was...

After recalling the situation with the Black Goat, a realization flashed through Leon's eyes, but he quickly shook his head.

"But it's still in the top hundred, a higher ranking surely implies a higher difficulty. Director, you have the number 004 and 013, even if I gather all the sheep's... uh... gather all the Black Goat's parts, it's far from comparable."

Hearing Leon's words, the red-haired director couldn't help but open her eyes and give him a brief glance back.

Exactly, an Anomalous Object barely in the top hundred can't compare to number 004, the [Twelve Ant Nests], or number 013, the [Slaughter Blood Hair]. But if it were anyone else, would they think of comparing with me first?

"Not necessarily incomparable."

Without exposing Leon's inadvertently revealed "ambition," she snuggled into the warm embrace behind her, then closed her eyes again, narrating in a serene tone,

"The numbers of Anomalous Objects can change. That number 013 Anomalous Object was originally numbered 116. After it fell into my hands and went through some events, it transformed into the 013 Anomalous Object."

116 became 013? Such significant progress!

Hearing the red-haired director's words, Leon couldn't help but raise an eyebrow, full of curiosity as he asked,

"You actually skipped over a hundred ranks... Director, what did you do?"

What did I do...

The red-haired director shook her head at Leon's question, didn't answer, and instead slightly turned over. She reached into Leon's collar, untied the hair fastened around his neck, and pinched the end of that red hair, lightly touching Leon's fingertip.

[Name: Slaughter Blood Hair-941026 (Slaughter, Crimson)]

[Appearance: A strand of bright red hair, if finely kneaded with the soul, it emanates a faint scent of blood, along with the vengeful curse and insults of an old man.]

[Ability: Slaughter proliferation, Crimson Domain]

[Cost: While you remain sane, you will be ceaselessly cursed by those you have killed.]

[File: After the failed descent of the Crimson Lord, the previous Taurus Director collected its remnants and crafted this growth-type Anomalous Object. For each human killed by the bearer, a new controllable strand of blood hair is added.

"Due to the harsh growth conditions, even after two generations of bearers, totaling 130 years of nurturing, the number of Slaughter Blood Hair barely exceeded ten thousand. The effect it exhibited was not proportional to the precious materials consumed, and it was once considered a complete failure.

"But in the Ophiuchus Eroded Nation incident, the third bearer of the Slaughter Blood Hair, Olivia, was forced to use the Anomalous Object 'Thirteen Ant Nests,' completely destroying the Purification Bureau's Ophiuchus Sub-bureau and the East Carleighwen Kingdom, bringing the blood hair count to one billion two hundred ninety-six million overnight, a figure almost identical to the population of the East Carleighwen Kingdom before its fall.]

[Evaluation: This is the most dangerous and terrifying Anomalous Object you have seen so far. If the bearer wishes, they can slaughter every living creature in the entire capital within five seconds.]

[Contamination Value: Indeterminate, increases with the number of activated blood hair.]

!!! A billion two hundred ninety-six million... people!!!

...

"It seems you already know the answer."

Feeling Leon's body suddenly stiffen and his arms unconsciously loosen, the red-haired director sighed softly, then gently pushed away Leon's arms, leaving behind the long-lost warm embrace. She sat up from the sofa, speaking calmly,

"Do you want to leave the Virgo Bureau?"

Gazing into Leon's eyes, which were filled with unparalleled shock, the red-haired director, her cheeks still slightly flushed with alcohol, gently suggested,

"If you want to work somewhere else, Beverly, the director of the Lion Sub-bureau, is quite familiar with me and very interested in your abilities. I can recommend you there, ensuring similar treatment as here.

"She, except for liking snacks too much, doesn't have anything too outrageous in her past, and is an undeniably good person. You should be able to do well over there..."

"Director."

Interrupting the red-haired director, Leon hesitantly inquired,

"Is the Thirteen Ant Nests... that number 004 Anomalous Object? What is the relationship between the East Carleighwen Kingdom and the Northern Carleighwen Kingdom? What exactly was the Ophiuchus Eroded Nation incident?"

"Regarding these..."

After staring at Leon for a moment, the red-haired director's lips moved slightly, then she turned her head slightly and explained in sequence:

Chapter 169 Director's Past_2

"Thirteen Ant Nests... After the disappearance of the East Carleighwen Kingdom, it should now be called the [Twelve Ant Nests], corresponding to the twelve kingdoms that remain. I shouldn't need to tell you its ability for you to guess.

"As for the East Carleighwen Kingdom... The current Carleighwen Kingdom, which was previously called the Western Carlay Wen Kingdom, is separated by a river from the ruins of the original East Carleighwen Kingdom.

"And the Ophiuchus Eroded Nation refers to a rebellion initiated by the Ophiuchus Sub-bureau of the East Carleighwen Kingdom. The director of the Ophiuchus Sub-bureau attempted to sacrifice the entire East Carleighwen Kingdom to ascend to godhood and transform half of the world into his divine country.

"As this outcome was unacceptable, the Twelve Directors conducted nine rounds of voting. Finally, with four abstentions and eight approvals, they decided to use the [Thirteen Ant Nests] to preemptively destroy the East Carleighben Kingdom and forcibly thwart his plan. I was the executor in charge of taking action.

"From then on, the Thirteen Ant Nests became the Twelve Ant Nests, which I have been overseeing to this day. The number of sub-bureaus of the Purification Bureau also decreased from 88 to 87, and the investigation and control within have become increasingly stringent. Any slight transgression will be severely punished..."

I see...

Having listened to the Red-haired Director's words, Leon finally sorted out the general context, and with a rather complicated look, he said,

"So those people upstairs who curse you... they were the ones back then..."

"Just as you thought..."

Responding vaguely, the Red-haired Director avoided his gaze and then, looking somewhat dim, said,

"The people originally from the Virgin Branch also left after that incident. It's not their fault, after all, they had over a hundred million reasons... Hmm... Leon, if you can't accept this and want to leave, it's the same. I understand your feelings."

" ... "

After getting up and sitting on the wide sofa, silently facing the Red-haired Director for a while, Leon didn't say whether he would leave but instead asked softly,

"Director, can I ask you a question?"

Upon hearing Leon's words, a hint of surprise flashed in the Red-haired Director's eyes, but he nodded and said,

"You may."

"Suppose there is a train about to switch tracks..."

After briefly recalling, Leon spoke,

"Twelve people are tied to the track in front of the train, while one person is tied to another track. And you are holding the lever that changes the track. Would you pull the lever to let the train go to the other track and save the twelve people?"

"I..."

Subconsciously clenching his fists, the Red-haired Director did not immediately answer this question but instead bit his lip and asked in return,

"Are you talking about my situation? But these two situations aren't the same..."

"So would you pull the lever to let it crash into the person who otherwise wouldn't die or leave it alone to let the train crash into those twelve people?"

Leon persisted in asking.

"I... I don't know."

"Of course you don't know."

Leon nodded and kindly said,

"Because you're not really the one pulling the lever. The directors who voted are. You're just the lever they gripped."

" ... "

"Thank you for your comfort..."

Noticing Leon's apparent attempt to console him, the Red-haired Director barely managed a smile before dimly saying,

"But these two matters are genuinely not the same. I'm not just a puppet following orders; I have the ability to refuse to pull the 'lever,' but I ultimately did not refuse and instead personally..."

"If you refused, you would merely be a passerby wielding a plunger, and someone else would simply grab a new lever and stand in your original position to send the train onto the track with just one person."

" ... "

"Director, sometimes, one shouldn't think of oneself as too important."

" ... "

After waiting for a while and noting that the Red-haired Director still kept his lips tightly sealed in silence, Leon shook his head and said,

"I'm not going to tell you that your choice was right or that those sacrificed would have died sooner or later and it's better they died by your hand to save others.

"Because if I were one of the East Carleighben Kingdom's people, I would curse you just as harshly as those upstairs are, and probably harder, and even curse the entire Purification Bureau while hoping you get run over by a carriage tomorrow and rolled over seven or eight times on the spot.

"But now, since I was one of the twelve tied to the original track, who was genuinely saved by your choice, I don't have the right to curse you. Including those who left the bureau, they could choose to leave you, but they had no right to blame you."

"You really are... Others have comforted me before, but no one quite said it like you..."

With an odd expression, the Red-haired Director shook his head and looked at Leon, who appeared physically weak but seemed stronger inside somehow, and couldn't help but ask him,

"If it were you, what would you do? Would you let the train keep running toward the twelve people tied on the tracks?"

"I would first try to find the one who tied them and push his head into the train's boiler."

"You really... How can you cheat like that?"

"I'm not cheating; that's truly what I think."

Leon shook his head, meeting the Red-haired Director's slightly playful gaze with a serious look, he replied,

"Director, I am a person who lacks a sense of security. I confess that ever since I learned the truth about this world, I have longed for power, very, very much!

"And the main reason I pursue power is so that when faced with such dilemmas, I have the ability to eliminate that scoundrel tying the people and avoid facing such eternally unsolvable decisions."

"Then... What if you've done everything in your power but still encounter such problems?"

"In that case..."

Upon hearing this, Leon hesitated a bit, then took something out from his coat and showed it to the Red-haired Director.

"Depending on which side my family is tied to, I would steer the train to the other side and then humbly endure the curse of a hundred million people and drink the way you do every day to fend off the painful clarity of being cursed."

" ... "

Looking at the small flask in Leon's hand, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but shake his head speechlessly and said, half-amusedly,

"Isn't that just the same as me? You really..."

"It is indeed the same."

After unscrewing the cap and taking a sip, Leon helplessly smiled and said,

"Since I've tried my best but still can't solve the problem, what else can I do? Escape might be shameful, but it's very useful, right?"

"Yes! It's indeed very useful!"

Looking at the glittering small flask in Leon's hand, the Red-haired Director's eyes couldn't help but curve, laughing with him, his smile still carrying a trace of the wine's crimson hue, like a rhododendron blooming in a garden.

The curses in his ear remained madly shrill, the heavy press on his chest still like a dark cloud bearing down, and the profound guilt tormenting him still as cold and sharp as ever, piercing deeply into his flesh.

Yet somehow, his heart felt less afraid. If he had to name a reason, it was probably because there was someone who not only respected his choice, but also accepted his weakness and avoidance.

Yes... At a time like this, a drink certainly seemed appropriate!

Seizing the flask from Leon's grasp, the Red-haired Director tilted his slender neck back and downed it all. After licking the slightly spicy liquor off his lips, he flung the empty bottle away, and fueled by the alcohol's emboldening effect, boisterously announced,

"Just borrowed money from Emma today! Let's go! Drinks are on me! We'll have the most expensive ones!"

...

The people of the Virgin Branch are truly... outrageous!

After knocking on the door for ages without a response, and spotting through the window of the director's office the piles of empty bottles and the snoozing man and woman on the table wrapped in a blanket, the two investigators couldn't help but shake their heads. They then simultaneously pulled out their investigation sheets, jotted a few lines, and marked two big red crosses.

The director led in drinking! Indulging through the night! Suspected indiscretion within the bureau!
Leaving aside this nightmare business on Ryan Blood Night, we must harshly downgrade their conduct and business ratings!

Chapter 170 Investigation Suspicions (Part 1)_1

After a lively night drinking with the Red-haired Director, and then spending a whole day rolled up in a blanket sleeping on her office desk, Leon finally opened his eyes again with a splitting headache, only to find the sun had already dipped below the horizon.

"Mr. Lyon, we are investigators from the main Zodiac Bureau, responsible for investigating the 'Heart of Ambition incident' you handled. Can you answer some questions now?"

"Huh?"

"..."

Seeing the man whose eyes were filled with bewilderment and whose gaze couldn't find focus—one who probably couldn't even tell if he was human or dog—the young female investigator furrowed her brow and raised her voice to repeat herself,

"We are investigators from the main bureau, tasked with investigating your case. The initial investigation has been completed, so now please cooperate with our inquiry!"

"Oh... cooperate... will definitely cooperate..."

After blinking for a while and finally grasping the situation, Leon's spirit lifted, and he twisted off the blanket in an attempt to get up, but...

He couldn't move at all.

Grasping the Red-haired Director's arm, he pulled hard a couple of times, but to no avail. He was still held tightly on the desk by her. Leon couldn't help but push her a couple of times, awkwardly leaning in to remind her,

"Director! Let go! The investigators are here!"

"Director! Wake up!"

"..."

It was over...

Under the investigators' speechless stares, Leon took a deep breath and awkwardly requested,

"I'll definitely cooperate with the investigation, but could you help me out first? Also... please be gentle, I think my ribs might be broken..."

"..."

In all my years as an investigator, this is the first time I've encountered such a request...

Exchanging a glance with the speechless female investigator, the older, wrinkled male investigator shook his head, marked a few notes on the investigation form, and then walked over slowly. Cautiously, he reached his hand toward the Red-haired Director's arm.

"Tss!"

Just as the older investigator's hand was about to touch the Red-haired Director, the sharp sound of ripping air echoed, and the whole director's office dimmed slightly.

The few present were utterly shocked to find countless strands of crimson hair extending infinitely from the director's desk. In just a heartbeat, they formed a massive scarlet "silken cocoon," binding all living things around it firmly.

The older investigator's vital areas were instantly "bitten" by thousands of these living-like hair strands. When Leon looked closer, he found that the hair strands had already infiltrated the man's flesh. He estimated that if the Red-haired Director willed it, they could pierce through like a spear and churn everything inside into a mess,

The Red-haired Director, who just moments ago looked thoroughly drunk, had her eyes open, full of cold severity as she stared at the two petrified investigators.

"Oh, it's you... gave me quite a scare..."

Recognizing the investigator's identity after a glance, the Red-haired Director appeared relieved. The sea of crimson hair instantly retracted, and the director's office returned to its usual state.

"Apologies, drank a bit too much yesterday."

Seeing her withdraw the [Slaughter Blood Hair], the two investigators sighed in unison. The older investigator chuckled lightly, withdrawing again with a serene expression, while the younger female investigator, now pale-faced, bit her lip and spoke,

"Lady Olivia, I will report exactly what just happened!"

"Mm-hmm, go ahead and report~"

Casting a glance at the female investigator who threatened her, the Red-haired Director first nodded, then yawned nonchalantly and turned over to lie back down.

If this had been two weeks ago, she might have been slightly concerned, but after the terrible Ryan Blood Night incident at the end of the year, the bureau's business evaluation was almost certainly going to be at the bottom, so whether it was reported or not made no difference.

I'm already last; do I really fear you reporting me for disturbing the exam room order? Whether the results count or not right now doesn't matter; I'll just do whatever!

Damn it!

Apparently provoked by her nonchalant attitude, the female investigator bit her lip once more, then with a stern face, looked at the now-free Leon and said expressionlessly,

"Mr. Lyon, since you're out now, can you cooperate with our investigation?"

"Sure..."

"No, you can't."

Just then, the Red-haired Director, lying back down on the desk with her back to the group, spoke discontentedly,

"If you want to investigate, do it elsewhere. Why in my office? Can't you see I still need to rest? Hurry up, leave! I've just done a night shift, and I'm exhausted!"

???

After the Red-haired Director's words, Leon watched the female investigator's face turn from pale to flushed, then to an ashen gray, and he couldn't help but lament inwardly.

Director! Are you worried my shoes don't fit, planning to have these two investigators gift me a pair of smaller ones? Now that you've ignited a wave of trouble, even if Ryan Blood Night wasn't my doing, even if I'm completely innocent, these two might find a way to throw some dirt my way, right?

"Heh, let's go, let's go."

Unlike the female investigator beside him who appeared furious, the older male investigator seemed to have a gentle disposition. Not only was he not angered by the Red-haired Director's rude dismissal, but he also began to gently push her back, humorously saying,

"The Virgo Department has the fewest people in the Zodiac Bureau, and Director Olivia is usually busy with her duties. After a night shift, it's normal for her to want to rest; we really shouldn't disturb..."

"What's she resting from?"

Apparently displeased with the Red-haired Director's behavior, the female investigator shook off her colleague's hand and angrily criticized,

"Look at all the bottles everywhere, and you dare say she's been busy with work? I will definitely report today's incident! Someone as mentally unstable as her, getting drunk all night in the branch office, how can she be the director of the Zodiac Branch Office? Let alone..."

"Enough!"

At this point, the older investigator's expression changed, and he sternly scolded,

"You don't understand anything; this is not something you should interfere with!"

"But I..."

"What's investigation guideline number three? Recite it!"

"Everything... everything must be based on facts, and personal emotions must not be involved in the investigation..."

"Then what should you be doing now?"

"..."

The relationship between the two investigators seemed similar to a mentor and student dynamic. After the reprimand, the young female investigator took a deep breath, bit her lip once more, and gave a deep bow toward the Red-haired Director on the desk, then turned and quickly left the room.

Likewise, after bowing to the Red-haired Director, the older investigator kindly said to Leon,

"Mr. Lyon, since Lady Olivia needs to rest, let's go to your office. Also, please don't worry too much, this is just a routine inquiry."

"Alright."

Seeing at least one of the two investigators hadn't been aggravated by the director, Leon let out a sigh of relief, and he got up to follow the older investigator out of the director's office.

After leaving the office, just as Leon was about to start some small talk to ease the slightly tense atmosphere, he suddenly felt a slight itch on his chest.

When Leon looked down, he saw a single red hair emerging from his collar, floating past the older investigator. It twisted twice behind the investigator's blind spot before forming into a shape resembling an exclamation mark, quietly attaching itself to the old investigator's back.