

I! Cleaner 171

Chapter 171 Investigation Suspicions (Part 2)_1

Was this... a warning to be cautious of him?

After receiving the reminder from the Red-haired Director, Leon couldn't help but stiffen.

Unlike last night's "drunken limited edition," the Director was now sober and had returned to her normal state. In this state, she was quite reliable.

So if she advised him to be wary of this old investigator, there must be a reason! Even that deliberate "provocation" just now likely had some consideration behind it—her warning should absolutely not be ignored!

"By the way, Mr. Lyon."

Unaware that he had been "marked," and after waiting a few seconds without seeing Leon engage in conversation, the old investigator turned around, asked gently,

"I saw in your file that you've been working for over a month now, right? Have you adapted to your time at the Virgin Branch?"

"Well, quite accustomed."

After stealthily switching out the [Elite Performer] badge, Leon suppressed the vigilance in his eyes, smiled, and replied,

"Although there aren't many people in the Bureau, and the work content is quite dangerous, both the Director and the seniors have taken good care of me; everyone in the Bureau is a good person."

"..."

Everyone in the Bureau... is a good person?

Hearing Leon's words, the corners of the old investigator's mouth couldn't help but twitch slightly.

If it were another investigator, they might not be all that clear about the state of the Virgin Sanitation Bureau, but him visiting so often for investigations made him quite aware. While the people in the Purification Bureau's Virgin Branch were not outrightly evil, they weren't exactly close to being good either.

There was no need to mention the Scarlet Hair Lady, who wiped out a nation with ruthless intent and left behind slaughter of over a hundred million. Even Tom the Ill-fated Gambler and Emma the Corpse Pivot Executioner, two First Level disaster handlers, were regulars of the investigation department too.

The former violated countless rules but was extremely careful, leaving no evidence for the Bureau to catch, while the latter's methods were too brutal and ruthless—the aftermath of her cleanup missions

was more terrifying than the havoc caused by anomalous objects. Despite being repeatedly warned, she never changed her ways.

The rest, such as Tape Man Harry, Sewer Emperor Jerry, Silver Demon Pioni, and Plague Alchemist Amien... None of these Level Two individuals were any easy to deal with. In those large inter-branch joint enforcement missions, they were universally hated, and basically, no one wanted to engage with them.

To be honest, the biggest reason these guys have been able to stay at the Virgin Sanitation Bureau for several years is probably not due to the personal charm of the Scarlet Hair Lady, but because other branches simply didn't want to take them on; leaving the Virgin Bureau, they had nowhere else to go.

And to get along well with such a group of people, even sincerely believing they are all good people...

Looking at Leon, whose appearance was handsome and smile was gentle and who otherwise just seemed like an ordinary Kingdom civil servant, the old investigator couldn't help but take a deep breath, then subtly sensed the aura surrounding Leon.

The demonic flame was immense... Someone who could get along with this bunch couldn't possibly be a normal person.

Feeling the aura behind him that was no different from that of a typical demon and even more ferocious and dark, the old investigator couldn't help but sigh inwardly, already starting to ponder a nickname for this new employee at the Virgin Branch.

This person had a high affinity with demon-type anomalous objects, appeared thin and scholarly like those cultured people in universities, and had proposed a metric called the Leon Value for anomalous objects, seemingly quite adept in research...

How about calling him the Demon Scholar!

...

Unaware that the old investigator was secretly giving him a nickname, Leon followed him into his office, first invited the two investigators to sit on the sofa, then got a chair to sit opposite them, and cooperatively spoke up,

"You two, you can ask your questions now."

"Then I'll begin."

The female investigator had already regained control of her emotions. Although her expression remained icy, it was no longer the hostile stance from before. She took out a stack of documents and flipped through them, then said with an air of businesslike formality,

"The first question: Do you have a personal grudge against members of the Ryan family, especially Bobby Laien, who controls the Heart of Ambition?"

"This... I'm not sure if it counts..."

Hearing this, Leon hesitated for a moment but ultimately spoke truthfully,

"Before joining the Purification Bureau, my sister contracted a lung disease due to a leak of waste gas from an alchemical factory, and because we couldn't get the compensation we deserved, she almost died in the hospital.

The alchemical factory was a subsidiary of Ryan Military Industries, and the compensation case was handled by someone related by marriage to the Ryan family, effectively making him a member of the Ryan family.

Although they were just a side branch of the Ryan family, if you look at it that way, I do have some animosity with the Ryan family."

"..."

Hearing Leon's candid answer, the female investigator couldn't help but freeze for a moment. She then looked down at the file in her hand and bit her lip somewhat reluctantly.

What Leon said was precisely what she had painstakingly discovered today.

According to the public facts, the other party didn't have substantial contact with the Ryan family before the Ryan Blood Night, so to avoid suspicion, they would likely outright deny any grudges against the Ryan family.

At that point, she could lay out these facts to puncture his "lies" and "covers," then during the subsequent questioning, subject his answers to more "reasonable" doubts.

But he unexpectedly admitted it directly, frankly saying there might be a grudge with the Ryan family, and given how extensive the Ryan family's reach was, it's inevitable for anyone living in the Capital City to have some interactions with them, with only minor animosities on the sidelines, not nearly enough motive to initiate the Ryan Blood Night.

The information she'd painstakingly gathered ended up being a pile of useless paper due to his honesty, at best it could only serve as slight supporting evidence...

Damn, how could someone under investigation not shake off suspicion but actively draw it upon themselves?

Frustrated, she bit her lip and quickly shoved the file to the bottom, then coldly said,

"Next question: After the Ryan Blood Night, have you been able to benefit from it?"

"Yes."

Leon sighed,

"I was not capable enough to stop Bobby Laien's atrocities. On the day of the Ryan Blood Night, I nearly got killed by him several times and was significantly injured.

However, it seems I am a member of the Ryan family. The people ahead of me in the line of succession were all incapacitated by Bobby Laien, so while I was convalescing, I was dragged over and forcibly designated as the new Duke. The succession ritual is on Tuesday."

Hearing Leon's words, the female investigator couldn't help but perk up, her lips curling into a cold smile,

"So you're basically admitting that you're the biggest beneficiary of the events following the Ryan Blood Night, correct?"

"Incorrect."

Leon shook his head,

"I have no interest in this title at all, neither in the wealth it represents nor the power behind it; they hold no significance for me.

When the succession ritual comes, I plan to suggest transferring all the industries to the royal family through a marriage alliance, thereby forcing them to replace me as the inheritor of the title.

Fortunately, the succession ritual is tomorrow; if you don't believe me, you can wait a day and see if I do it then."

"..."

Damn it... Could he really be willing to part with the entire ducal estate?

Seeing Leon's expression, appearing genuine and seemingly prepared to do just that, the female investigator nearly bit through her lips. After sensing the demonic aura all over Leon, she clenched her fists tightly and finally couldn't help but taunt,

"Ha, it sounds saintly... But if you don't want anything, how do you explain this aura more evil than a demon's on you?"

Chapter 172 Investigation Suspicions (Part 2 Continued)_1

The scent even more sinister than a demon's...

Leon frowned upon hearing this and glanced at the badge section where it read, "I Am the Demon," before he began to speak,

"I carried the scent of a demon because I had an extremely high affinity with demon-class Anomalous Objects, and I had always used the demon Anomalous Object known as 'War Cornerstone.'

Additionally, please try to ask questions within the scope. I don't believe this matter had any connection to the 'Ryan Blood Night.'"

"That's not necessarily the case."

The female Investigator, exuding an air of wickedness, gave a sneer and said,

"A demon was the embodiment of desire. For someone with an extremely high affinity to demon Anomalous Objects, they almost invariably had strong desires. But you, on the contrary, don't want anything, so I have reason to suspect you're lying, hurriedly donating your assets to deliberately evade the investigation!"

As he faced the clearly antagonizing female Investigator, Leon narrowed his eyes and coldly retorted,

"Donating was a deliberate attempt to evade investigation? What if I didn't donate, chose to take the Duke's title, and the Ryan Family's wealth? Would you then say I orchestrated the 'Ryan Blood Night' to gain benefits? Is this how you investigate?"

"I didn't say that."

Although it seemed like she held great animosity towards the entire Virgin Sanitation Bureau, the female Investigator, despite her continual troublemaking in her questions, wasn't entirely senseless. Naturally, she wouldn't leave such a remark and retorted,

"You had a high affinity with demon Anomalous Objects yet appeared to want nothing. I merely suspected that you were deliberately concealing something. Hence, I raised a reasonable doubt."

"Why would you question your horse?"

Just as Leon slightly squinted to consider whether to set her up, the Black Goat, who had been listening silently, couldn't help but struggle out from a shopping bag, spitting a thick yellow wad of old tobacco phlegm at her.

Watching the startled female Investigator dodge in panic, the Black Goat chuckled gleefully, then opened its goat eyes and asked,

"Hey lady, why didn't you bring your mom along when you left the house? Afraid she'd interfere in finding you a new sugar daddy?"

"You...?!"

"What, you? Using your words, this is called reasonable doubt!"

Of course, if you did bring your mom, then you're picking the next sugar daddy yourself... Haha, isn't it reasonable doubt? As if no one can do it!"

After a few sharp words left the female Investigator's complexion purplish, the Black Goat raised its eyebrows at Leon, giving him a reassuring look of leave-it-to-me-before taking a deep breath and continued,

"You couldn't even **pee in a puddle and look at yourself, with your **ugly** face, thinking you're being ...hmmm?"

Watching its suddenly sealed shut mouth, as if it never existed, the Black Goat was left stunned, its eyes wide in surprise, and hummed a chaotic tune of disbelief.

The senior Investigator, who had been silently recording, placed down two fingers crossed in a diagonal manner, nodded apologetically, and said to Leon, who showed a surprised expression,

"Sorry, Eisha has some bias against people from your bureau, indeed her questioning method was inappropriate. Let me handle the questioning from here. However, please keep that Anomalous Object somewhat under control.

The bureau's regulations on such matters are very strict. Even though it's just routine inquiry post-incident, besides Her Excellency Olivia as the director, others aren't allowed to listen in or interfere as a rule."

"Alright, since you were being reasonable, I will also be reasonable."

Using the Holy Spirit pendant to pick up the Black Goat, Leon placed it across from the female Investigator who was shaking with anger. After an exchange of stares between goat eyes and human eyes, Leon raised his own query,

"But you should know, Miss Eisha, seems to have a deep prejudice against our bureau, which even affected her judgment and behavior.

I don't think she should have been part of this investigation at all. The General Bureau sending down Investigators with conflicts against us was not only unfair but also couldn't guarantee accurate inquiry results."

"..."

The senior Investigator was slightly surprised at these words, a gleam of contemplation appeared in his eyes, seemingly hesitating on how to respond, whereas the female Investigator couldn't help but scoff,

"Do you think I wanted to come?

To ensure the fairness of the results, Investigators must investigate in pairs. The entire General Bureau has only nineteen Investigators in the Northern Triad, sixteen of which have vendettas with you, and two hold grudges to death!

Ha, who do you propose to come next time? Just don't choose me—I can help you request anyone!"

"..."

Holy crap... did that mean eighteen out of nineteen Investigators were offended?

Using the Black Goat's soul vision, Leon saw that what the female Investigator said was true. Shocked by the degree of bad karma, Leon smacked his lips in disbelief and tried to reconcile,

"Well... even though I've not been in the Virgin Branch long, I've interacted with some of the seniors, and they all seemed pretty good, doesn't that indicate there's some misunderstanding here?"

"..."

Hearing Leon's words and finding no trace of a lie, it seemed he genuinely thought so, even the previously sarcastic female Investigator's expression stiffened, full of disbelief as she said,

"You...you actually think they're okay?"

"Uh... is there a problem?"

Leon pondered briefly and frowned,

"The director, albeit prone to excessive drinking, was shrewd and capable when sober, often looking after me and occasionally inviting me for a drink; Senior Emma was gentle and meticulous, I managed to survive several crises thanks to her invaluable experience;

As for Senior Jerry... he did seem to have a not-so-good habit of stealing, yet he was generous and enthusiastic. I helped him with a small matter, then he gifted me both Anomalous Objects and weapons, teaching me carefully how to use them. He was also a great senior."

"..."

The alcohol-obsessed Scarlet Hair Lady invited you for a drink, the ferocious Corpse Pivot Executioner treated you gently and patiently, and that Sewer Emperor didn't steal from you but gave you things?

Dang... this was either you're living a dream, or I simply haven't woken up?

Listening to Leon's description of the Virgin Sanitation Bureau, where everyone was kind and friendly, seemed like a newcomer's heaven, the fierce look on the female Investigator's face unknowingly faded, and she mumbled defeatedly,

"You're something else... Damn it, just pretend I said nothing."

"???"

Watching the female Investigator cover her face with a file and lay back on the sofa motionlessly, Leon stood silently for a moment before turning to the elder Investigator,

"Did I say anything wrong?"

"No, you're all right."

Seeing Leon thriving in a place like the Virgin Sanitation Bureau, even viewing everyone as kind, the senior Investigator was rendered speechless and had to vaguely acknowledge, then quietly unfolded the inquiry form, writing seven consecutive question marks under the mental state section.

???????

This guy's brain must have some sort of problem!

Chapter 173 Investigative Doubts (Part 2)_1

Why was my psychological evaluation filled with a series of question marks?

Recognizing the text reflected in his pupils from the Young Ha he was observing, Leon couldn't help but slightly furrow his brow upon seeing the seven question marks following the psychological status section.

After receiving a reminder from the Red-haired Director, Leon exercised the utmost caution, seating himself with two investigators on the right side of the sofa, near a storage cabinet. He discreetly sent Young Ha, who was holding a small mirror, into the glass of the cabinet's open glass door.

Under normal circumstances, the position where Leon sat wouldn't allow him to see the contents of the investigation form. But with the help of the "Mirror Dog," every word the two investigators wrote on the paper was reflected into his pupils without missing a single detail. He saw the series of question marks as soon as they were written down.

Nevertheless, despite the peculiar evaluation of my psychological state, it seems that my overall evaluation was quite favorable.

Cooperating with the elderly investigator, Leon answered some not-so-pointed questions. Despite the prior warning from the director to "be careful of this person," his impression of the elderly investigator continued to rise as he saw a dozen or so evaluations categorized as "outstanding" and "excellent."

Even after being chased out of the director's office and having a minor conflict, the elderly investigator managed the questioning without bias, even mildly protecting him on trivial matters, which was quite impressive.

In comparison to the female investigator next to him, who marked many crosses on his evaluation and liked to create issues out of thin air, always steering topics towards the entire Virgo Branch, even hinting that he could report his colleagues—she was significantly better.

...

"Mr. Lyon, we have finished our questions. Thank you for your cooperation,"

The elderly investigator stood up and shook hands cordially with Leon, without sharing the results, and then left Leon's office with the silent female investigator.

Shortly after, having completely exited the Virgin Branch's vicinity, the elderly investigator glanced at the female investigator, whose expression was quite peculiar. He tugged the corner of his mouth and smiled, inquiring,

"Eisha, what do you think of this person today?"

"..."

The female investigator remained silent for a moment after hearing this, then sighed and said,

"Honestly... he seems to be a rare good person. Not only is he kind-hearted, but he is also diligent and meticulous, hardworking and honest yet not obstinate, and he seems quite intelligent.

Senior Camus, from my perspective, he is practically the ideal template for a Cleaner. It's really a shame for him to stay in a place like the Virgin Branch."

"Oh? No wonder your evaluations of him were so low, so you used the low evaluations to help transfer him to a branch with a better environment?"

"Yes."

The female investigator nodded, speaking with a hint of admiration in her eyes,

"Senior Camus, according to our previous division of labor, I was responsible for investigating him as a person, while you were responsible for investigating Ryan Blood Night. Although we exchanged information beforehand, some things just don't manifest in the data.

Before joining the Virgin Branch, he was almost driven to the brink by money several times; presumably, his desire in this aspect should be quite intense. Yet, he never became a slave to money—not even Scales Gold Sect's Holy Spirit could control him.

Aside from money, his desire for power is also very weak; he is quite resistant to becoming a Duke and tried to escape as soon as he recovered from his injuries. These things can't be faked. He indeed isn't a greedy person—the only thing he truly values seems to be the emotional bonds between people.

He not only treats his family well, taking care of his younger siblings after his parents' death, but also remembers all the good deeds done to him. Even with those people at the Virgin Branch, he gets along quite harmoniously, which is really remarkable."

Hearing the female investigator's words, the elderly investigator seemed to have discovered something amusing, and he couldn't help but chuckle slightly.

The corners of his mouth naturally turned upwards, paired with crescent eyes filled with kindness and deep smile lines by his eyes and mouth, making him seem approachable when he smiled. However...

"Eisha, you have completely read him wrong this time."

Shaking his head slightly, the elderly investigator took out his investigation form and handed it over.

The female investigator took it and was shocked to find it filled with eye-catching red crosses and numerous comments like "Dangerous!" "Must be monitored!" "Recommend thorough investigation!" — completely different from the form Leon had seen.

"He seemed too normal. And within our Purification Bureau, the more normal a person appears, the more terrifying they often are!"

Facing the female investigator's slightly confused gaze, the elderly investigator shook his head and explained,

"The Cleaners are constantly exposed to the corrosion from Anomalous Objects, witnessing the most extreme human evils repeatedly during their missions, and engaging in brutal life-and-death battles with countless entities coveting this world.

Eisha, always remember: the biggest influences on a person's character and behavior are always their encounters and experiences. Someone engaged in such work is bound to deviate from the realm of a

normal human continuously, so how could he behave so normally and maintain such an unusual stability?"

"This..."

Hearing the elderly investigator's words, the female investigator was stunned. She couldn't help but express her doubt,

"Could it be that he's just recently joined the Purification Bureau, so he hasn't changed too..."

"It's not a matter of time or the strength of the change, but a certain more 'solid' feeling. Even with abilities far exceeding an ordinary person's, there's no deviation in his self-awareness at all.

Right now, he still believes himself to be part of the 'ordinary people,' even genuinely treating the Purification Bureau's tasks as a similar job to that of a civil servant. This eerie sense of stability is truly terrifying. Just thinking about it makes one's skin crawl."

Saying this, the elderly investigator pondered briefly before shaking his head again,

"Moreover, he didn't behave quite as normally as he appeared... you know? He was watching us write that investigation form the entire time."

"Huh?"

"Just like that Sewer Emperor, he also keeps a pet from the Mirror World, which stayed in the glass beside us the entire time, projecting every word you wrote into his eyes."

"..."

As the female investigator looked utterly baffled, the elderly investigator sighed and began elaborating on his findings,

"Not only that, the Ryan Blood Night is closely connected to him. I strongly suspect that those people didn't actually die at Bobby Laien's hands—they were killed by him. When I traced back the scenes, Bobby Laien seemed equally shocked by the events, his eyes full of desperation.

But this person was meticulous, never revealing any flaws. All interactions with Bobby Laien and that Goat Demon happened within the mental realm. I had no way to eavesdrop by tracing back the scenes.

Even the Heart of Ambition submitted to the bureau didn't seem to have any influence from him and consistently claimed that the person who acted was Bobby Laien.

Besides that, I went to the Secret Investigation Bureau and traced back the events before and after the Ryan Blood Night, observing his two interrogations of that female Rebel. This person... how should I put it? He has a strange, innate talent for playing with the human mind..."

After contemplating briefly, the elderly investigator solemnly summarized,

"In conclusion... he is most likely a madman!"

Chapter 174 Intuition and Intuition_1

So... was I deceived by him?

After listening to the old investigator's summary, the young female investigator stood there, stunned. It took a while for her to come to her senses, and then, with a look of indignation, she took out the investigation report and tore it into pieces!

"Don't be hasty."

A hand, with skin yellowed and loose, covered with age spots, gently waved, and miraculously, the torn paper flew back together, reassembling into a complete investigation report, as neat and intact as before, with no sign of having been torn.

The old investigator took the report from the female investigator's hand and curved his crescent-shaped eyes into a welcoming smile as he teased,

"Eisha, didn't you think highly of him before? What happened? Planning to rewrite the investigation report now?"

"I... thank you for your guidance!"

The female investigator, whose face looked a bit troubled, took a deep breath and then respectfully bowed to the old investigator.

"This time, I didn't think it through. Without your reminder, I might have been fooled by him. I am still too naive and have much to learn from you."

"Hehe, these are not things that can be learned."

The old investigator shook his head, his eyes curving with a gentle smile.

"Strictly speaking, all the judgments I just made are without any evidence; they are just empty conjectures. The way I judged that something was wrong with him wasn't based on concrete logic but rather on a feeling that was closer to the subconscious.

To do a good job in our investigation department, we have to be like bank tellers, constantly in contact with more 'real money.' If a person has handled real money all their life, when they come across counterfeit money occasionally, they may not need to discover anything specifically; they will instinctively feel that the money in their hand is different from the real thing.

Our investigation work is similar. This subconscious sense of disharmony cannot be learned; it can only be gradually mastered through enough contact with people."

"I understand, Senior Camus!"

"Hehe, as long as you understand. I'll keep this investigation report here. After I finish writing the investigation results later, I'll attach it to the back of my report and submit them together."

???

Hearing that he was actually planning to submit her investigation report too, the female investigator couldn't help but ask anxiously,

"But my investigation had mistakes. How can it be submitted?"

"Indeed, there were mistakes, but the fact that such an experienced investigator like you made mistakes is excellent evidence in itself."

The old investigator smiled at this, waving to a steam carriage on the roadside as he explained,

"As you just said, not everything can be reflected in the data.

My investigation was based on a 'something's wrong' intuition after contacting this person, with no evidence to speak of. But your investigation was purely logical, with evidence supporting every judgment; its credibility was higher than my investigation.

Only by submitting your flawed investigation and comparing it with my results can those responsible for review take notice and understand what's wrong with this newcomer from the Virgin Branch... Eisha, you won't blame me for making you lose face, will you?"

"Not at all... After all, I did make a mistake, and it's only right for you to report it."

"Hehe, as long as you don't blame me... Hmm... Since the investigation is over and we generally agree, let's end it here together; your car is here."

Uh? My car?

The female investigator was slightly stunned when she heard this, then hesitantly asked,

"Aren't you planning to return to headquarters with me?"

"I won't be returning now."

After sending her off in a luxurious two-seater steam carriage, the old investigator smiled and said goodbye,

"I have an old friend around here, someone I seldom meet. Before this mission, I had agreed to meet him here to catch up, so I won't be returning with you this time."

"Alright, then take care."

"You too."

After waving goodbye to the female investigator, as her carriage drove away, the old investigator did not wait for the so-called old friend, but instead, he waved again and summoned another empty steam carriage.

After looking up and down at the old investigator's attire, which seemed finely tailored, the coachman, thinking he might be a big customer, couldn't help but smile and, as the old investigator boarded, politely asked,

"Sir, where to?"

"Not sure, just wander ahead for a bit."

"Alright... okay..."

As he heard the words that sounded as cold as shards of ice, the coachman shivered suddenly, then couldn't help but sneak a glance at his passenger in the rearview mirror.

His eyes were narrow and long, with eyebrows and mouth corners slightly drooping, giving him a look as if he were about to cry even without any expression.

This old man looks so gloomy... Oh well, as long as he can pay the fare ~

...

"Director, that old investigator was quite nice."

After recounting the inquiry process and the two investigation reports seen through Young Ha, Leon curiously asked,

"He hardly asked any difficult questions, and even in his soul, there was no malice towards me and you. Why did you warn me to be careful of him?"

"If I have to give a reason... it's probably a kind of intuition."

The Red-haired Director rubbed his temples upon hearing that, blinking with his fox-like eyes and looking perplexed,

"I can't really explain this feeling, but it's like when a case of twelve bottles of Margaux's dry red wine has a second-label wine mixed in secretly.

Even if the taste may not differ much, even if the grape vines are just separated by a river, after drinking a lot, you'd instinctively feel the acidity is slightly off, and the alcohol would feel stronger.

And he is like that mixed-in bottle of wine, where no matter how you savor, something doesn't feel right, especially when he heard your call for help and came preparing to wake me up. At that moment, I almost instinctively felt that I mustn't let this person get too close to me."

After sharing his feelings, the Red-haired Director unwillingly asked,

"Leon, after observing his soul, did you really not find anything abnormal?"

"Really, nothing. His soul was entirely normal."

"I see..."

The Red-haired Director furrowed his brow,

*"The soul is the core of a person, and there should be no way to fake it. Maybe there's something about him that poses a threat to me, which is why I instinctively resisted getting close to him..."

Hmm... But you still need to be careful; there is a subtle sense of disharmony about him, and it's best not to have any contact with him."*

"Alright, I'll remember that."

Nodding slightly, and taking the Red-haired Director's advice to heart, Leon spoke up,

"Director, the ceremony for the title conferral is tomorrow, but I still have some official business to finish. If it's alright with you, I'm heading back to the office first."

"Go ahead, go ahead, and stop using the formal 'you' for me; it sounds exhausting... Oh, by the way."

When saying this, the Red-haired Director seemed to remember something, and looked down to rummage through a drawer, pulling out a photograph tied with a strand of hair.

"Here you go, your stuff."

Chapter 175 Vices and Inferior Flowers_1

Was this... the photograph that Anna lost?

Through the gap in his hair, after identifying what it was, Leon couldn't help but open his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Director, how did this end up with you?"

"Well, that's a question for your good senior."

The Red-haired Director smiled warmly and said,

"Did you really think that guy Jerry could resist his kleptomania and not swipe something when he saw you?"

"But... this thing should have been at my house, not on me."

"That's the effect of an anomalous object called the [Cunning Hand of Fate]. When Jerry wants to steal something from you, it doesn't matter if it's just at home or even in another world, the result is the same.

As long as he's close to you and reaches out, the thing that has the greatest impact on your life will be directly taken by him. Even a True God cannot fully exempt themselves from this ability."

After briefly explaining Jerry's ability, the Red-haired Director asked with a smile,

"Though he did something quite unpleasant to you, I made him compensate you doubly. Are you satisfied with his apology?"

"..."

So that's how it is... No wonder Senior Jerry was so generous, insisting on a buy-one-get-one-free and giving me not just two anomalous objects, but also teaching me many tricks to use them, and even gifting an absurdly expensive bomb...

"Very satisfied. Senior Jerry helped me a lot."

Having understood the reason, Leon shook his head in a bit of speechlessness and, recalling the evaluation of the Virgo Branch members by the two investigators earlier, couldn't help but inquire,

"By the way, Director, is our bureau's reputation... not too good?"

"Indeed, it's not that great, or you could say it's quite lousy."

Hearing Leon's question, the Red-haired Director nodded, openly admitting the bad reputation of the Virgo Branch and then sighed,

"But there's nothing we can do about it. All the people in our bureau are born carriers of anomalous objects, and behind these self-carrying anomalous objects are curses that none of us can shake off.

Jerry with his thieving hand can't help but steal, Emma with her Undead body is particularly afraid of death, Tom with his dice is addicted to gambling, Harry who sticks to everything can never hold onto anything... These all fall into this category. While gaining power, everyone also has to pay a corresponding price.

Other branches may also have people like this, but either their abilities aren't as great, resulting in less extreme situations, or they only have one or two people, not as many as us, so they haven't caused big troubles.

As for us... Well, although none are bad people, each has their vices hard to change, and there have been quite a few issues in the past. Coupled with my notorious executioner reputation as Director, naturally, our reputation can't be good."

I see...

After hearing the Red-haired Director's words, Leon couldn't help but nod knowingly, while the Red-haired Director, after glancing at him, couldn't help but ponder his situation.

As for Little Leon... Forced intelligence acquisition, an ability related to the cognitive world, according to this logic, could his "vice" be... an excessive thirst for knowledge?

No, that's not it!

Recalling Leon's usual behavior, thinking that although he treasured knowledge, he hadn't reached the level of a "vice," the Red-haired Director couldn't help but shake his head slightly, dismissing his guess.

It seemed Leon's "vice" wasn't Jerry's kind of "positive reinforcement" of anomalous objects, but more likely Emma's and Harry's kind of "reverse conflict" type...

"Director?"

Under the somewhat thoughtful gaze of the Red-haired Director, Leon slightly tightened his scalp, quickly picked up the photograph on the table, and said goodbye,

"I have no other questions to ask, so I'm leaving!"

"Mm, off you go, off you go!"

After Leon left through the door, the Red-haired Director interlaced his fingers and leaned somewhat lazily against the chair back, continuing to ponder the earlier issue.

The "vices" developed by a Cleaner after Corrosion generally fell into two common scenarios.

Either there was a positive reinforcement concerning the anomalous object, such as the ability to steal with the [Cunning Hand of Fate] and Jerry's kleptomania, or a reverse conflict with the ability, such as the ability to maintain a living body's Undead state and Emma's extreme aversion to death.

As for Leon's anomalous object ability, relating to the cognitive world, since he hadn't shown an excessive thirst for knowledge, it wouldn't be the first scenario, but rather the second one. A character trait directly opposing the expression of the abnormal ability.

Then the reversed cognitive world... Would that mean Leon had a complete understanding of the laws of the world, which was extremely resilient and not easily changed?

...

Unaware that his "cards" had been turned over seventy percent by the Director, nearly about to be fully exposed to the knees, Leon didn't start working immediately upon returning to his office. Instead, he checked the family photo of his sister Anna and his parents.

[Name: Warm Home (Under Repair, Unusable) (Prayer, Doll, Alteration)]

[Appearance: A brand-new family photograph, seemingly normal from the front but showing numerous unhealed cracks and deep brown scorch marks when viewed from the back, as if repeatedly torn and burned with flames]

[Ability: Obtaining family, controlling family, altering the world]

[Cost: Under updating, visible upon repair completion]

[File: One of the many functional anomalous objects the Purification Bureau's Aquarius Director created to fulfill a wish, tentatively numbered 0006.]

This anomalous object with a particularly special ability was born out of a child's deepest longing for family members. However, it doesn't bring family members who truly love the user but rather puppets that obey every command.

After discovering this, its creator directly denied the significance of this anomalous object and tore it apart, lifting the control over "family members" but also causing irreparable damage.

However, after years of mutual companionship, its creator and the family brought by this anomalous object slowly became true family in the true sense, and the significance of this anomalous object was once again acknowledged, beginning a slow self-repair process.

Please note that once this repair is fully completed, there will be entirely unknown new changes in its ability, based on the creator's situation.]

[Evaluation: Even if it is an Evil blossom born of deceit and malice, as long as it is carefully nurtured with kindness and love, it may yet bear warm and beautiful fruit.]

[Contamination Value: ?]

So... Was the original me indeed not Anna's real brother but a fake family member "kidnapped" by this anomalous object?

Though he had already had similar suspicions, after reading this family photograph's file, Leon couldn't help but close his eyes, leaning back on his chair with a complicated heart. However, such complex emotions didn't last long before being violently shattered by a strong sense of crisis.

Aquarius Director again!

Looking at the family photograph's file, once again containing information about the Aquarius Director, Leon's eyebrows furrowed deeply.

I didn't expect Anna's family photograph to be one of the anomalous objects he created to fulfill a wish... So, what exactly is the Aquarius Director's wish? In the process of achieving his wish, will Anna be harmed?

Chapter 176 Rebel group meeting with..._1

"Leon Laine..."

Just as Leon was holding a family photo with his sister, pondering how to dig into the secrets of the Aquarius Director to speed up the bureau's investigation of this character, a group of people was holding his file, contemplating how to remove this obstacle from their path.

"Do we really have to take action? Can't we deal with him using ordinary methods?"

After quickly flipping through a few documents in his hand, a short man sitting at the end of the long table couldn't help but speak first,

"His schedule was pretty fixed, leaving from Bridge Street every day to head to work in the municipal area where the police department is located. If we ambush with the right people in advance, we might just need a few bombs..."

"Useless."

A young man sitting across from him shook his head and, biting his teeth, said with a face full of resentment,

"He's with that Purification Bureau, carrying more than one Anomalous Object for protection; ordinary alchemical bombs likely wouldn't kill him."

"Then blow up his house!"

The short man suggested again,

"Even with Anomalous Objects for protection, he might not be able to defend every hour of the day. We could sneak over at night and blow up the entire apartment on Bridge Street!"

"Can't sneak over."

A young woman wearing a hat shook her head and quickly said,

"The apartment's view is excellent. The northwest corner's tower could directly oversee the whole street. When I was assassinating the Princess earlier, I had considered making it the first sniper point,

but once I jumped over the fence, I found an intimidatingly strong old man staring at me with giant scissors. I shot at him, and he was fine. He almost killed me with a backward snip.

I later took twenty people over and, in the blink of an eye, they were tied up tightly by an old white-haired lady and thrown into the street corner's garbage station.

While the old man didn't kill me, he held onto the meter-long scissors, snipping at my head for over half an hour. He shaved not just my hair and eyebrows but even cleaned up my nostrils; they haven't grown back since."

Raising her head slightly to show everyone her empty nasal cavity, the young woman sighed and said,

"I later learned that the apartment itself was an Anomalous Object. Both the strong old man and the white-haired old lady had been dead for over ninety years. With these two old ghosts guarding the apartment, we'd need heavily armed troops to forcibly enter and plant bombs.

Oh, by the way, have you ever seen heavy weapons? I snuck into Ryan Armaments Company last month. The heavy weapons ordered by the military were only half-finished, but the report falsely claimed completion; aside from the most critical units, many were not yet deployed. We could exploit this..."

"Alright, Charlotte, your intelligence is very useful, but it's unrelated to this meeting. We're discussing how to solve the problem of Leon Laine."

After interrupting the young woman, the middle-aged man sitting at the main seat spoke,

"Everyone, according to the intelligence returned by Barton, this Purification Bureau employee is not weak. Dealing with someone carrying Anomalous Objects by conventional means has a low probability of success, so we need you to take direct action."

"We have no problem taking action, but what happens after we do?"

Sucking his teeth, a somewhat shabby old man reminded,

"He's with the Purification Bureau. The person who gave us Talents warned us that the Director of the Virgo Branch was incredibly strong. Even if we're all together, it would be a suicide mission."

If Barton were still around, we could have killed him in the Duplicated Space Barton created. But now Barton's gone, and killing him might provoke that woman to step in personally..."

"No, it won't. That woman from the Virgo Branch has her own responsibilities and generally won't intervene personally. Plus, we don't necessarily have to kill him, just erase his Ability and memory."

The middle-aged man at the main seat said this while turning to look at the drowsy child on his right, knocking gently on the table,

"Phoebe, join this mission. You're responsible for making the target forget all our intelligence in his mind and the Ability that allows him to glimpse others' souls. Can you do it?"

"Huh?"

Hearing the middle-aged man's question, the drowsy little girl suddenly shivered, then said, with a face full of confusion,

"What mission?"

"..."

"Ambush Leon Laine."

The little girl sniffed and continued to ask, bewildered,

"Who is Leon Laine?"

"An employee of the Purification Bureau who exposed Barton's identity and took Samantha's Ability."

"Who is Barton? And who is Samantha?"

Faced with the little girl's repeated inquiries, the middle-aged man wasn't impatient. Instead, he explained patiently,

"They're our comrades. Barton was a spy in the Secret Investigation Bureau, a burly uncle with a scar on his face. Samantha was the aunt with bandages on her hand who could heal others or cause them to rot..."

"Oh..."

After reluctantly nodding as if she understood, the little girl rubbed her eyes, then asked again,

"Who are you?"

"I... forget it."

Rubbing his temples in frustration, the middle-aged man waved to the seat on the little girl's other side, saying with some helplessness,

"Lucy, your sister's amnesia has flared up again. She's not in a state to discuss. Just infuse the necessary information directly into Phoebe's head!"

Chapter 177 Rebel group meeting with..._2

"Alright."

A hoarse and elderly voice echoed. An old woman, her face crisscrossed with wrinkles, straightened up and reached out with her trembling hand to caress the young girl's forehead.

Seeing that this odd pair of "sisters" was ready, the middle-aged man nodded in satisfaction, then instructed the wrinkled old woman,

"Lucy, the target this time has the ability to probe others' soul states, so once the meeting is over and we've chosen who will execute the ambush, I'll trouble you to step in again.

To prevent the selected individuals from harboring hostility towards the target and inadvertently alarming him, please implant a layer of false memories in the chosen ones to temporarily mask their original memories. Is that alright?"

"No problem."

"Thank you."

Nodding towards the old woman in appreciation, the middle-aged man leaned slightly forward, his hands pressing on the tabletop as he spoke directly,

"So next, it would be best to first determine the ambush location. Do you all have any suggestions?"

"I suggest we act while he's at work!"

A man on the right side, covered in burn scars, raised his hand and coldly proposed,

"We should all move in together, storm that Purification Bureau or whatever, kill that red-haired woman first, then burn everyone else to death, and then..."

"Alright, alright, shut up!"

Hearing the burned man's suggestion, which couldn't be considered a death wish but seemed rather suicidal, the middle-aged man sighed and waved in the burned man's direction.

With a peculiar explosion sound, the burned man instantly disappeared from the room, leaving only a dust-covered empty chair in his place.

Having used some unknown method to expel the burned man, the middle-aged man said with a headache,

"There's no need for such foolishness; does anyone have a slightly more feasible suggestion?"

"I do."

A rather scruffy old man raised his hand and seriously proposed,

"What about during the Duke of Lionheart's investiture ritual? How about an ambush there?"

The Duke of Lionheart's investiture ritual?

Hearing the unkempt old man's suggestion, the group of rebels in the room fell silent for a moment, then they started nodding one after another.

"Very good!"

"Quite fitting!"

"I think so too!"

The middle-aged man at the head seat thought for a while, then nodded along with a smile,

"It's indeed a good choice. The Duke of Lionheart's investiture ritual will surely draw many important figures, even the royal family might send representatives.

If luck is on our side, we could not only solve the Leon Laine problem but also eliminate a large number of nobles and officials in one stroke. Let's set the ambush location at tomorrow's investiture ritual!

As for who will carry out the ambush, does anyone wish to volunteer?"

"Me! Me!"

Hearing the middle-aged man's words, a young woman with a shaven head, courtesy of a burly man, excitedly raised her hand,

"I can strike from five kilometers away..."

"Not you."

Interrupting her again, the middle-aged man at the head seat shook his head and said,

"Your ability is covert enough, and the range is sufficient, making you excellent for assassination, but your destructive power is too weak. You might not break through the abnormal object the target uses for protection.

Moreover, we don't need to kill him this time; just subdue him so Phoebe can erase some of his memories and abilities. So, you're not suitable for this mission."

"Count me in then!"

Just as the bald-talking woman pouted in dissatisfaction, ready to argue, a slender young man stood up eagerly, announcing,

"It was Barton who stayed behind to cover, so Samantha and I could escape. This time I..."

"Sorry, you're not suitable either."

The middle-aged man shook his head and said,

"Now is not the time to provoke that red-haired woman at the Purification Bureau. You were closest to Barton, and I'm afraid you'd kill the target in vengeance for Barton, making it impossible to wrap things up. So you should stay back."

"..."

Seeing the young man sit down dejectedly, the middle-aged man stopped asking for volunteers and named his choices directly,

"So, aside from Phoebe and Lucy, David and Luke, you two come along! Your abilities are clearly most suited for this mission."

"No problem!"

The man who initially suggested setting a bomb responded.

"Okay."

The scruffy old man nodded.

"Then it's settled!"

After confirming the participants, the middle-aged man looked at those heading towards Lucy to willingly accept the memory implant, nodding in satisfaction.

Once they accepted the memory implant, he waved at everyone inside the room, and the peculiar explosion sound rose again, making everyone vanish, leaving only the dust-covered chairs.

And the middle-aged man at the head seat seemed to age a decade instantly, his once jet-black hair streaked with strands of gray.

...

Was there still no one who could survive into the future?

Looking at the empty meeting room and the dust-covered chairs, the clearly aged middle-aged man sighed deeply. He then struggled to stand, controlled the future body he inhabited, and walked towards the door.

After his last attempt to change things, he still couldn't alter the Kingdom's fate of downfall. The Faction of War Advocates, led by the Princess, failed abruptly, plunging the entire Kingdom into eleven years of brutal conflict. The once prosperous Capital City turned to ruins under bombardment, leaving countless people homeless and living worse than death.

Chapter 178 Rebel group meeting with..._3

In those future visions where he had successfully assassinated the Princess, the royal family and nobility surrendered willingly. First, they ceded territories and paid reparations, then handed over all ports and mines. They even forcibly abolished the legal currency. The once prosperous nation was almost entirely drained, yet the people could barely maintain their lives.

As for himself and the "Rebels" he gathered... in every future vision, they didn't exist. Only he endured the *pain of a ruined nation and family*, struggling to survive. *Because only by staying alive could he send messages back in time, trying to save his doomed country!*

Staggering to the door, the aged middle-aged man took a deep breath, his bony hands grasping the rusted doorknob with force.

Come on! The Ryan Family, which caused massive military deficits and led to the lack of the army's strength, had been completely wiped out, replaced by a new Duke of Lionheart. I want to see what this future will look like!

"Creak!"

Accompanied by the creaking sound of the old door hinge, it was as if he had opened a door that separated two worlds. Vibrant, almost blinding sunlight poured in, together with an overwhelming, lively noise, bathing the middle-aged man.

"This... what is this?!"

Seeing the exquisite, orderly buildings, the bustling streets, the huge airships adorned with ribbons flying overhead, and people gathered at the street corner around a giant, strange screen, engaged in heated discussions, the middle-aged man froze in place.

I did it! I finally did it! The Kingdom is saved!!!

An overwhelming sense of immense joy seized his heart. Tears streaming down his face, the middle-aged man fell to his knees with a loud thud, emitting a hysterical roar uncontrollably.

"Oh dear! Gave me a fright!"

"What's his problem? Suddenly yelling like that!"

"Prince Lyon was caught cheating, how could he be so happy?"

"Guards! Guards! There's a madman here!"

"..."

Amidst the curious glances of passersby and their chaotic pointing and gossiping, the middle-aged man, finally witnessing a beautiful future, abruptly raised his arms, shouting exultantly to the heavens.

"Long live the Kingdom! Long live the Kingdom!!!"

His shout startled the crowd considerably, causing them to take a collective step back. Then they began whispering among themselves, puzzled expressions on their faces.

"This man is crazy, isn't he?"

"What's wrong with him? Yelling 'Long live the Kingdom' out of nowhere?"

"Yeah, wasn't the Kingdom gone a long time ago?"

What did you say? The Kingdom was gone?!!!

Hearing the conversation between two women holding vegetable baskets, the middle-aged man sprang from the ground, rushing to knock the woman over, shouting wildly:

"How could the Kingdom be gone?! Who did it?! Who did it!!!"

"No, no, no... it wasn't me! It wasn't me!"

Terrified by the "madman's" actions, fearing he might bite her in a fit of anger, the vegetable-selling woman raised her hand, trembling, and quickly pointed to the large screen on the street corner.

"Find Prince Lyon; he did it. It has nothing to do with me!"

Prince Lyon?

Following the woman's guidance, he looked toward the strange screen at the street corner, seeing the handsome man waving his hands repeatedly, emphasizing that the rumors of his infidelity were false, and that he did nothing that night. The middle-aged man froze in place.

Lyon... Ryan?

I'll kill him! I'll go back and kill him right now!

Chapter 179 Vegetable Basket and Trade_1

"Bang!"

After figuring out who destroyed the Kingdom, the strange explosion that once "sent off" other rebels resounded again. The middle-aged man lying on the vegetable vendor woman shuddered violently, regaining his consciousness.

Was I... temporarily replaced by my past self?

Having understood what had just happened, the middle-aged man's expression changed. He quickly reached into his coat and pulled out a leather booklet.

After carefully checking the booklet and finding no signs of it being flipped through, his past self hadn't seen the contents. The middle-aged man's face changed again and again. He then grabbed the shoulders of the woman below him, shaking her frantically as he shouted with urgency in his eyes,

"Tell me quickly! What did I do? What did I just do?"

This madman... he seems even crazier than before?

Looking at his eyes like he wanted to devour someone, the vegetable vendor woman clenched her vegetable basket tightly, wanting to bash it against the back of his head. But she worried her strength wasn't enough and might provoke him further instead of knocking him out. Shakily, she answered,

"You just... just asked me who destroyed the Kingdom..."

"What did you say? What exactly did you say?"

"I... I... I just told the truth..."

Frightened out of her mind by the man's increasingly frenzied expression, the vegetable vendor woman answered tearfully,

"Wasn't it Prince Lyon who ended the Kingdom? He announced it himself five years ago."

"And then? What did I say after hearing that?"

"You... after hearing that, you gritted your teeth and repeated Prince Lyon's name, then looked up and howled strangely, and then... then you just collapsed on me without moving..."

"..."

Damn it!

Imagining the scene the vendor woman described, the middle-aged man broke out in a cold sweat, realizing his past self probably misunderstood something. The sweat drenched through the back of his shirt.

His past self repeatedly borrowed the anomalous object to observe the future, but the results only got worse each time. Despite continuing to struggle, he was almost in despair deep down inside.

Given his past mental state, upon emerging from the door this time and hearing the Kingdom had completely disappeared, his first instinct naturally wouldn't lean positive. Instead, he would focus on worse outcomes like the country's early downfall and complete occupation.

With his obsessive and mad nature back then, once he returned to his original timeline's body, the first thing he'd likely do was find a way to take out Prince Lyon!

I'm such an idiot! I'm such an idiot! At least read what I wrote in the booklet before you leave!

After swatting himself hard across the face twice, to prevent this world—one of the only decent outcomes—from being altered, the middle-aged man shot up from the ground, aiming to find others with time-based abilities to try and stop his past self from doing something foolish.

Unfortunately, as soon as he got up, the middle-aged man was hit in the back of the head by a vegetable basket thrown from behind, full to the brim.

It was a hard hit, knocking the middle-aged man flat on the spot. Even the two radishes in the basket, each bigger than a human head, shattered upon the violent impact.

"Ouch! My radishes!"

Just as the vegetable vendor woman began to pick up the basket to see if the radishes were still edible, the middle-aged man, knocked down by the basket, began crawling forward, yelling hoarsely at the crowd, even as he crawled.

"Quick... send me... send me to the Purification Bureau! This world... needs me to save it..."

"Save my ass!"

After swinging the basket and hitting him again, the vegetable vendor woman watched the middle-aged man collapse onto the ground, out cold. She pursed her lips disdainfully,

"This madman... save the world? Does he really think he's Prince Lyon or something? Oh? By the way, who is Prince Lyon again?"

...

Eliminate him! Leon Laine! The one who ended the Kingdom must be removed!

Returning to his own body, the middle-aged man, who had been "napping" on a long table, suddenly opened his eyes. He took a deep breath, filled with murderous intent, ready to summon all the rebels with abnormal abilities back and draft a new assassination plan.

As he lifted his hand, intending to activate the anomalous object again, he heard a strange, almost imperceptible knocking on the door.

Who is it?!

Hearing the intermittent knocking outside, the middle-aged man shuddered, a deep wariness flashing in his eyes.

His anomalous object, the "Gate of the Other World," besides granting brief access to the future, could keep shifting behind every door in the Capital City. Only certain doors recognized by him could lead stably into the world beyond.

For someone to successfully knock on the "Gate of the Other World" without him noticing meant they knew which doors were "real," possessing the ability to directly track him down.

As the middle-aged man hesitated between immediately fleeing or rallying everyone to fight, a voice as cold as ice shards came from outside.

"Nathan, it's me."

Opening the door that was no longer twisting weirdly and had become completely stable, a black-robed elder walked in, raising his hand to remove the hood and revealing a naturally sorrowful face.

"It's getting harder and harder to find where you place your door. I rode around in a carriage for ages in the Capital City before barely finding a 'real door' that was about to disappear."

"There's no choice. That Rat guy from the Purification Bureau is too troublesome; he has spies all over the Capital City. If I'm not cautious, I would've been caught long ago."

Seeing it wasn't someone from the Virgin Sanitation Bureau but the black-robed elder he had collaborated with, the middle-aged man relaxed slightly, then frowned and asked,

"Didn't you say last time that we were all scraps, myself included, and none of us met your requirements, and that you wouldn't contact us anymore? Why have you suddenly come looking for me?"

"I need your help, of course."

Seemingly indifferent to the middle-aged man's disgruntled tone, the black-robed elder's long and drooping eyebrows lifted slightly, speaking coldly,

"Just a few hours ago, I found something that might meet my requirements. It should be a photo, kept in the drawer of the Virgin Branch Commander's office in the Purification Bureau."

Nathan, you should've seen firsthand how strong that Virgin woman is in some future. I'm not confident I can retrieve what I want without alerting her, so I need to borrow your power."

Upon hearing this, the middle-aged man raised an eyebrow slightly, immediately understanding the black-robed elder's implication.

"You want me to move the 'Gate of the Other World' to the office door so you can sneak in directly through it?"

"Yes."

"Okay, but in exchange, you need to do something for me too."

After pondering briefly, the middle-aged man narrowed his eyes and proposed,

"Temporarily strengthen Phoebe's ability for me, so that anyone she touches vanishes from everyone's memory. Can you do that?"

Chapter 180 Fleet and Road_1

On a Tuesday morning, the moon had just completely vanished at the horizon, and the sun wouldn't rise for another hour. It was the darkest time.

However, under the illumination of thousands of whale oil street lamps, the entire Redwood Avenue glowed as bright as day. The usually quiet Redwood Avenue came alive early in the extravagant lights.

Coal, flour, spices, lamps... crates of all sizes and baskets, piles of expensive utensils, mountains of silken ribbons...

Carriages carrying various supplies and gifts nearly filled the wide transport road entirely. These carriages, linked one after another, were like intertwined dragons winding their way toward the Ryan Manor at the end of Redwood Avenue...

Wow, the Duke of Lionheart's inheritance ceremony is sure spending a lot of money!

A young woman in a light blue ceremonial dress stuck her head out from a two-wheeled carriage. After seeing the seemingly endless line ahead, she quickly shrank back due to the biting autumn wind, rubbing her red, round nose as she muttered,

"I messed up. If I'd known it would be this cold, I would have worn more layers."

"..."

Watching the young woman warming her hands with her breath and stomping her feet, the middle-aged noblewoman sitting opposite her couldn't hold back any longer. After trying and failing to keep silent, she finally reminded her,

"Princess Veronica, even if you sneaked out, please mind your manners!"

"Oh, let me off today. I'm too cold to care about manners right now. Honestly, if you can make it warm in here, I'd even give you a dance."

After joking with the middle-aged noblewoman, the young woman tugged at her woolen shawl, covering the nearly exposed smooth curves above her underskirt. She then leaned sideways against the carriage window, continuing to observe the procession outside.

"There sure are a lot of people here today..."

As she squinted at the noble-exclusive drive lane for a while and counted the number of passing carriages, the pretty young woman said with a half-smile,

"Silver Chalice, Birds of Paradise, Light Shield... Ha, in just a short time, three noble families have already passed by. It seems the Ryan Family's inheritance is indeed tempting.

Regardless of whether they belong here, everyone with any ability wants to come and take a bite. Today's inheritance ceremony will surely be lively!"

"..."

Whether the ceremony will be lively or not, I don't know, but that dress you're wearing is certainly 'lively' to an excessive degree!

Watching the young woman leaning against the window frame in a way that nearly exposed her ample bosom, the middle-aged noblewoman couldn't help but twitch her eyelids. She quickly yanked her back, eyes full of irritation as she exclaimed,

"Your Highness, mind your manners! Really...

If your identity gets exposed at the ceremony and people see you dressed so immodestly, the entire royal family will be humiliated! At least find a better-fitting dress before heading out!"

"Well... there's nothing I can do..."

Looking down at her formal dress, the young woman pulled the pleats at her waist, showing the middle-aged noblewoman how much excess fabric there was. She then said somewhat helplessly,

"My dress size is special, so they're usually custom-made. This is already the best-fitting dress I could find in a hurry. Look, there's a lot of room at the waist here, any bigger and it wouldn't fit."

"..."

Observing the dress that would be considered plain in style but looked strikingly impactful on her, the middle-aged noblewoman couldn't help but twitch her lips twice.

She rudely snatched the young woman's shawl, yanked tassels from the carriage cushion, and tied dozens of knots along the side of the shawl, fashioning a mesh edge to cover the front.

After placing the modified shawl back on the young woman, the middle-aged noblewoman sighed in relief upon seeing her chest obscured by the knotted mesh. She then threatened through gritted teeth,

"When we get to the manor, even if you sweat to death, you cannot take off this shawl; you must wear it properly! Got it?"

Really?!

Surprised by her words, the young woman's face wore an awkward expression as she glanced at the remarkably heavy shawl.

"This is pure wool, and it's the densest kind! Plus, there are coal stoves burning in the Ryan Manor. If I don't take the shawl off..."

"Princess Veronica!"

"Alright, alright, I won't take it off."

Seeing the "wear it or die" look on the middle-aged noblewoman's face, and recognizing this as her bottom line, the young woman sighed and obediently wrapped the shawl tightly. She then once again poked her head out to watch the flowing carriages.

"By the way, suggesting I take the transport road instead of the drive lane was a great idea. If I were on the drive lane, I wouldn't see so many interesting things."

After a few carriages bearing the crest of three copper feathers sped by on the drive lane, the young woman counted the participating nobles and joked with the worried middle-aged noblewoman,

"Look, that snobby little Earl has also come. I wonder if he brought that cabbage with him?"

Snobby little Earl?

Hearing the young woman's words, the middle-aged noblewoman couldn't help but frown and asked,

"Your Highness, what does 'snobby little Earl' mean?"

"It's an insult."

The young woman explained with a laugh,

"The new Duke of Lionheart had some conflict with that snobby little Earl a while back. Upon discovering that, despite his title, the Earl's crest only had three basic feathers, the Duke disdainfully poked the crest on his chest and called him a snobby little Earl, nearly enraging him to death on the spot.

Later, after the snobby little Earl recovered, he sought revenge for the Duke's mockery by displaying a cabbage at home. He then proclaimed that the Duke of Lionheart's title would likely rot faster than that cabbage."

After providing the middle-aged noblewoman with the backstory of the "snobby little Earl" and the "cabbage Duke," the young woman smiled brightly,

"Even though he's about to inherit the Duke title, the Duke of Lionheart feels very un-noble. The reason I insisted on witnessing the inheritance ceremony today is to see what interesting antics he'll come up with."

Ah, Her Highness... still such a young person who loves excitement...

Seeing the young woman smiling happily, no longer wearing her usual thoughtful frown, the middle-aged noblewoman's heart softened slightly. She was about to say something when they suddenly heard a commotion behind them.

"Clear the way!"

"Make way! Make way!"

"The royal family is on the move, everyone step aside!"

Shocked, the two in the carriage looked back and saw the temporary barrier dividing the transport road and the drive lane getting forcefully pushed down and stacked to the roadside.

Next, two teams of brightly dressed guards wielding long poles with hooked ends, used to clear people, began shoving numerous carriages that couldn't dodge out of the way, forcibly widening the center of Redwood Avenue to allow an opulent carriage drawn by eight fine horses to drive through.