

## The Witch 71

### Chapter 71: Helia's Castle

"Black Crow is right. Entering Redpine City is too dangerous, even if we skip the gate check and sneak over the walls," Silver Horn stated.

"We've had dealings with a number of nobles in the kingdom, but that doesn't mean they welcome us. The moment we risk exposing our relationships with our clients, they wouldn't hesitate to cut us down like mortal enemies."

"Everything related to our work has to be kept in the dark," Silver Horn added.

Silenced filled the area.

Several breaths later, the fourth assassin opened his mouth to speak again.

"Our target's destination is the capital city of the Kingdom of Black Rose, Blackthorn City. There is still a great distance between Redpine City and Blackthorn City. We can take a detour around Redpine City and set up a new ambush ahead of them again."

"Do you understand what you are saying right now, Poison Claw?" Silver Horn said in a low tone.

"Even though our organization's operations are widespread, we do not operate that deep inside of a witch kingdom. There are too many variables and uncertainties. A single mistake could cost the lives of the whole party."

"We've already lost a few members back in the Blackmoon Region."

As soon as Silver Horn mentioned the Blackmoon Region's events, the mood within the assassin party became gloomy at once.

"It's all that crazy bitch's fault for provoking all the Dark Hellhounds in the region. God Knows what her fucking problem was. It's like someone murdered her whole family or something," Poison Claw spat venomously.

As Poison Claw recalled the event, the angrier he became.

"This is why we should kill more witches outside of our missions. These witch kingdoms and their matriarchal society are sickening. I feel disgusted the longer I stay here," the fifth assassin spoke after being silent the entire time.

"If we wantonly kill witches in the witch kingdoms, we won't just lose all our potential dealings in this witch kingdom. The entire witch kingdom won't stop hunting us down until the organization is uprooted, Blood Knife," Silver Horn glanced at the fifth assassin and said.

"If you can't control your urge to kill witches, then you should have applied for a different branch. There is more freedom to hunt witches outside of the seven witch kingdoms."

"You think I don't want to, Silver Horn? We don't get to choose our branch when we join the organization!" Blood Knife spat gloomily.

"Not when you join, obviously," Silver Horn retorted with a snicker.

"You get one chance to apply for a branch relocation once you raise your organization status to the B rank. Given your current abilities, it shouldn't be difficult for you to take the rank assessment and become a B-rank Witch Hunter."

"After all, you only need to kill five Senior Witches or prove you have the strength of one in order to raise your status to the B rank," Silver Horn stated.

"Huh? Why didn't you say so earlier?" Blood Knife's yellowish-orange eyes glimmered with interest before he said, "Let us finish the mission quickly. I can't wait to return and take the rank assessment."

"Then let us quickly make a decision? Who is in favor of continuing the mission?" Silver Horn queried.

In a short moment, Black Crow and Silver Horn had chosen not to continue the mission.

However, the odds were against them. The assassins voted three-to-two in favor of continuing the mission.

"It seems like we will have to continue the mission," Black Crow said with a sigh.

Shortly after, Black Crow's yellow eyes flickered with a determined look before dishing out his instructions, "We will take a detour through Sunset Forest, west of Redpine City, and use its cover to reach Shadowacre Swamp in the north."

"If our targets want to reach the next city to rest, they will definitely pass through Shadowacre Swamp. That would be the ideal location to ambush them."

"However, we will have to be quick and get there before they do. Otherwise, it will all be for nothing," Black Crow stated.

"Shadowacre Swamp is even more dangerous than Blackmoon Region for those who do not know their way through it. It's the best burial ground for Marquis Delarosa's daughters," Silver Horn mentioned.

"However, there won't be any more chances if we cannot stop them there."

"I must remind everyone that only B-rank Witch Hunters are allowed to operate beyond Redpine Region. I am only willing to take this risk with everyone because we are all Peak C-rank Witch Hunters who are ready to become B-rank Witch Hunters."

"Otherwise, I wouldn't want to go anywhere near Shadowacre City. The Shadow Puppeteer Witch isn't someone we want to be caught by. We'll suffer a fate worse than death if she catches any of us," Silver Horn stated.

Eventually, the assassin finalized their plan and moved out from their hidden locations, heading northward with swift and lightless steps like shadows.

"Be light on your steps and control your breathing," Black Crow advised.

"We don't want to alert the hobgoblins in the mountain caves. Although hobgoblins are only Rank 2 monsters, something we can deal with, they are still troublesome in larger numbers."

"Furthermore, we don't want any more delays."

"Yes."

...

...

...

Back in Redpine City, Vaan followed behind Linetta and Lillias as Yasmin escorted them to Lord Helia's castle.

Along the way, Vaan casually studied the city's well-developed buildings and infrastructures made of clean-cut stones, concrete, and some rarer earth minerals that didn't exist back on Earth.

Whether it was the nine-story magic towers or the single-floor homes, the buildings had a wide range of architectural designs.

Even so, they all seemed to fall under the western styles during the medieval period. The only difference was the prevalence of magic.

Some lower-quality homes offered little protection, while the important buildings like the magic towers had their walls reinforced with multiple defensive spells.

The mana consumption was no joke, but mana wasn't something the world lacked since the opening of the Gehenna Realm.

"We've arrived," Yasmin suddenly stopped before the stone bridge leading to the enormous stone castle surrounded by water ahead.

"From here, someone else will escort all of you to Lord Helia."

Chapter 72: Large-Scale Mana Gathering Spell

Vaan activated his Magic Vision on Helia's Castle and saw a tremendous amount of mana overflowing from it.

Furthermore, the mana was so concentrated that it looked like a sea.

'This must be one of those mana gathering spells that draw in the surrounding mana to enrich a single area. Considering the sheer amount of mana coming from Helia's Castle, the scale of the spell isn't small either,' Vaan mused.

Mana gathering spells were common among witches, whether used to restore their mana reserve, form new magic circles, or simply practice their magic spells and other miscellaneous professions involving vast amounts of mana.

Furthermore, they were also crucial for powering the defensive spells of any essential buildings.

'But to set up a mana gathering spell of this scale... At least a High Witch would be required to pull it off,' Vaan concluded.

With that thought in mind, Vaan began to wonder whether Lord Helia had a connection to a High Witch.

If not, then they must be extremely wealthy in order to commission a High Witch to set up such a large-scale mana gathering spell for them.

Vaan leaned towards the latter possibility.

A few moments later, a new witch wearing a blue battle dress soon arrived from the other side of the stone bridge to receive them.

"Apologies for the slight delay, Lady Linette and Lady Lillias. My Lady has prepared a feast in the Great Hall to receive you and the additional guest," the blue-dressed witch informed them.

"Please follow me. I will lead you all there."

"Alright."

Shortly after Linette agreed, Vaan and Lillias followed the blue-dressed witch with Linette. They quickly crossed the bridge and entered the stone castle.

Despite the castle being made of stone and having endured the rain and wind since the time of its establishment, the castle remained spotless, without a single speck of grime and mold.

Its maintenance was impeccable.

The blue-dressed witch led them to the entrance of the Great Hall before she stopped to face them.

"This is as far I can go. My Lady awaits you on the other side of this door. Please enter at your will, guests of my Lady," the blue-dressed witch politely informed them.

Shortly after the blue-dressed witch dismissed herself, Linette pushed open the doors of the Great Hall and entered with Vaan and Lillias.

A long sandalwood table covered with a clean white cloth and an assortment of lavish food laid out on top of it immediately appeared before them.

A single beautiful woman was seated on the other end of the table with a calm look, carrying an air of authority.

The woman appeared to be in her early 30s, but her age was likely much higher.

She had blue eyes that did not match her black hair, which produced an unnatural feel, and she wore a high-quality black dress of simple design.

Even someone without the slightest bit of knowledge about Lord Helia would know that the said person was precisely sitting before them.

"Welcome to my castle, Lady Linette and Lady Lillias. You both had a rough journey to reach here and must not have eaten yet," Helia Ashenborn spoke amicably.

"Please, take a seat and join me for dinner along with the man beside you," Helia Ashenborn gestured for them to take their preferred seating before turning to Vaan. "I'm sorry. May I know your name, young man?"

"My name is Vahn Cadieux, Lord Ashenborn," Vaan calmly introduced himself with a gentlemanly bow as he had yet to take his seat. "It's an honor to make your acquaintance."

"Cadieux?" Helia Ashenborn furrowed her brows slightly but couldn't recall a noble household by such a name within the Kingdom of Black Rose. "Pardon if I am ill-informed, Vahn of Cadieux. Which witch kingdom does your noble household hail from?"

Linetta and Lillias were also surprised to learn of Vaan's last name. But like Helia Ashenborn, they did not recall any notable household by the name of Cadieux.

At the same time, they noticed a slight difference in the pronunciation of his first name, but they didn't overthink it.

"Ah, I apologize if I caused a misunderstanding, Lord Ashenborn. Cadieux is just an ordinary surname. I do not hail from any noble household," Vaan clarified.

"Oh?" Helia Ashenborn raised an eyebrow, but her gaze became slightly cold and less welcoming.

Marquis Delarosa's eldest daughter had requested his presence. As such, Helia Ashenborn didn't immediately kick him out or disrespect him in any way.

Nevertheless, Helia Ashenborn turned to Linetta and asked, "Who is Vahn Cadieux to you, Lady Linette?"

"He is my magic teacher and... my future betrothed," Linetta added with hesitation after realizing she may have brought Vaan unnecessary trouble by bringing him along to meet Lord Helia.

Even so, her choice to bring Vaan to Helia's Castle wasn't done without reason. She wanted to borrow Lady Helia's authority to make things easier for Vaan in Redpine City after they part.

She understood the difficulties of a man without backing in a witch kingdom.

Nevertheless, Helia Ashenborn was greatly startled to hear someone so young be Linetta's teacher, a man no less.

"Vahn Cadieux, a man who appears no older than twenty, is your magic teacher? Is he qualified? What can a man teach you, child of Marquis Delarosa?"

"It's no surprise that you doubt his abilities and qualifications, but I assure you that he is more than just qualified. My little sister and I wouldn't be here if not for his wisdom and strength. So I will not stand by if you mean any disrespect to my teacher, Lord Helia."

Linetta's words carried a trace of threat as if she was willing to fight Helia Ashenborn over it despite their difference in power.

Nevertheless, Helia Ashenborn knew when to advance and retreat. It wasn't worth offending the eldest child of Marquis Delarosa, even if the young lady was a little impudent towards her.

"Lady Linette has spoken too seriously. Since I, Helia Ashenborn, had invited all of you to dine with me, I will naturally not treat any of my guests with disrespect."

"Is that so? I apologize if I had been rude, Lord Helia. I hope you understand my position. If you knew even a little bit about how great my teacher's wisdom is, you would understand why I behave as such."

"Never mind it. Let us not dwell on this matter," Helia Ashenborn suggested.

"Right, let us do that," Linetta nodded before asking, "So what is Lord Helia's reason for inviting us?"

### Chapter 73: Helia's Condition

"I've been informed of the events in Blackmoon Region and received a request from Marquis Delarosa to protect her daughters and assist them if they are found in my territory," Helia Ashenborn casually said while pouring herself a glass of red wine.

"Mother did?" Linetta and Lillias revealed their surprises as their eyes widened.



Their mother was very sick and bedridden. Unless someone informed her, their mother shouldn't have even known they had left home.

'It must be one of Mother's people,' they thought.

"Well, not from Marquis Delarosa herself, but one of her close retainers. Although I don't know why you both left your home without any protectors, I will ensure your safety as long as you are within my territory," Helia Ashenborn promised.

"I appreciate your goodwill, Lord Helia," Linetta shook her head and said, "However, we won't be staying for long. In fact, we plan to leave right after resupplying necessities for the journey."

"Oh?" Helia Ashenborn briefly glanced at Lillias before nodding with understanding. "You must be heading to the capital."

"However, it is too dangerous," Helia Ashenborn suddenly added with a stern look. "You should be aware that assassins from the Assembly of Silent Night are targeting you. The measly escort group will not be enough to protect you."

"I will arrange for my best guards and combat witches to accompany you to the next city. They will provide much better protection than your current escort," Helia Ashenborn generously offered.

"You must have met Yasmin before coming here. She's an experienced Senior Witch whose power isn't much inferior to mine. The Assembly of Silent Night's people shouldn't pose a threat to you with her around."

'You are too kind, Lord Helia,' Linetta said with surprise.

Shortly after, Linetta turned her head to seek Vaan's opinion—to which he responded with a nod, advising her not to reject Helia Ashenborn's offer.

Vaan had observed Helia Ashenborn's body language and speech and confirmed her genuine concern for Linetta and Lillias's safety.

It wasn't hard to guess why.

After all, Helia Ashenborn would be greatly troubled if Marquis Delarosa's daughters were assassinated within her territory.

"Well then, I will take you up on your offer and remember the favor, Lord Helia," Linetta agreed and said, "We plan to leave right after. It would be great if they are ready by then."

"You don't have to worry about that. I will inform my people right away," Helia Ashenborn promised before clapping her hands to summon a servant into the Great Hall.

After Helia Ashenborn spoke some words to the male servant, the male servant bowed respectfully and took his leave to carry out his task.

"If you have any more requests, feel free to state them. I will do my best to satisfy them if they are reasonable," Helia Ashenborn offered shortly after.

Linetta was pleasantly surprised by the offer before she said, "In that case, I hope Lord Helia would take care of my teacher during his stay in your city and ensure people don't make things difficult for him."

"It would be even better if you could satisfy his requests," Linetta added.

"Oh?" Helia Ashenborn raised an eyebrow in surprise and briefly glanced at Vaan before returning her attention to Linetta. "Are you not traveling together?"

"No, my teacher has some businesses in Redpine City," Linetta shook her head and said, "We've only agreed to meet again in the future when he arrives in the capital."

"I see." Helia Ashenborn contemplated before nodding, "I can arrange that."

"However, I must say," Helia Ashenborn suddenly turned to Vaan shortly after and asked, "Do you have any personal requests of your own, Vahn Cadieux?"

"If you permit it, I would like to freely peruse the knowledge in your city's libraries, Lord Ashenborn," Vaan spoke politely after a brief pause while maintaining his proper etiquette.

He wasn't in a position to refer to the Lord of Redpine City by her first name like Linetta did.

"Interesting," Helia Ashenborn looked at Vaan with scrutiny before saying, "You do understand what you are asking me, right?"

"I do, Lord Ashenborn," Vaan calmly nodded.

"Although men generally have no access to libraries, there are also no rules that actually forbid them from reading the books. It is completely at your discretion whether I am permitted to enter your city's libraries, Lord Ashenborn."

"How very interesting. What you say is true," Helia Ashenborn was intrigued by Vaan's boldness.

Even if what Vaan said was the truth, there weren't many men who dared to request access to the public libraries.

In fact, it was Helia Ashenborn's first time coming across a man that did.

"I can indeed grant you access to the public libraries, but there is a limit to my generosity. Considering I have already promised to ensure your comfortable stay in my city, don't you think you should also do something for me if you want more than that, Vahn Cadieux?"

"What do you propose, Lord Ashenborn?" Vaan calmly asked.

"How about this; my seventh daughter is currently attending Redpine Academy of Magic. However, she lacks talent and is struggling with her studies. If her grades can improve after a week of private teaching from you, I won't just grant you access to the public libraries. You may also use the academy's library."

"What do you think, Vahn Cadieux?" Helias Ashenborn sought his opinion shortly after. She was curious enough to want to confirm his teaching qualifications.

Nevertheless, Linetta wasn't too happy to hear it.

"Aren't you making things difficult for my teacher, Lord Helia? You're expecting my magic teacher to help your daughter improve her grades in all her subjects? Within a week, no less. And what if her grades don't improve after a week?"

"You don't have to worry about that, Lady Linette. Nothing will happen if Vahn Cadieux fails to improve her grades. I simply won't permit him access to the libraries. That's all," Helia Ashenborn explained before turning back to Vaan. "So what do you say, Vahn Cadieux? Will you accept?"

"Gladly, Lord Ashenborn," Vaan accepted with a pleasant smile. He couldn't have asked for a better situation.

#### Chapter 74: Inevitable Parting

If there had been harsh penalties for failing, Vaan wouldn't have readily agreed.

After all, even if he was confident in his abilities, the same can't be said for Lord Helia's seventh daughter, who he knew nothing about.

Without understanding Lord Helia's seventh daughter's comprehension level, Vaan wouldn't have accepted the job if Lord Helia had set unreasonable penalties.

'Seems like Helia Ashenborn is quite a reasonable person...' Vaan thought according to his first impression.

That being said, no matter how perceptive Vaan was, he couldn't learn everything about a person's nature from their first meeting.

"When do I start, Lord Ashenborn?" Vaan shortly inquired after his agreement.

"When you want to start, you just need to inform me. I will send someone to fetch Cyrena from the academy to be privately tutored by you in the castle. All study materials can be supplied at your request," Helia Ashenborn said after some thought.

Vahn Cadieux's teaching qualifications were still unconfirmed.

Helia Ashenborn didn't want him to teach her daughter in a public place like the academy. She also believed the castle would be more convenient for Vahn Cadieux to teach.

Vaan saw through Helia Ashenborn's intentions, but he found it in his favor.

Staying in Helia's Castle would give him plenty of chances to learn more about Helia Ashenborn and her household.

"Since Lady Cyrena is behind in study, I believe the sooner we start, the sooner she catches up to her peers. How about we start tomorrow, Lord Ashenborn?" Vaan suggested, appearing thoughtful of Helia Ashenborn's daughter's education.

"Tomorrow, huh? You're very confident, Vahn Cadieux," Helia Ashenborn mulled before she nodded. "Alright. I will send some to fetch Cyrena after dinner, and you can begin tomorrow."

"Do I have freedom outside of tutoring hours, Lord Ashenborn?" Vaan inquired.

"Naturally," Helia Ashenborn nodded.

"Since you are an important person to Lady Linette and a guest of mine, I would not restrict your freedom. If necessary, I can even arrange someone to accompany you for protection if you want to head outside, Vahn Cadieux."

"Thank you, Lord Ashenborn. I will definitely ask if I do happen to require protection when I head outside," Vaan said gratefully before inquiring further, "Will my daily teaching hours for the week be the same as academy standards?"

"That is entirely up to you, Vahn Cadieux. I do not care whether you teach my daughter for two hours a day or twenty hours a day; I only look at the results at the end of the week," Helia Ashenborn coolly said.

"Understood, Lord Ashenborn," Vaan nodded.

After some idle talk over the lavish dinner, Linetta and Lillias bid farewell to Lord Helia.

They left the castle, meeting up with Captain Rhys's people and the group of guards and combat witches led by Yasmin, a Senior Witch.

"We meet up again, Lady Linetta and Lady Lillias. My Lady has arranged for me to accompany you and ensure you are safely escorted to the next city."

"We will be in your care, Yasmin," Linetta said politely before sweeping her gaze to Captain Rhys's group to check if everyone was present.

"If you are all set, we leave at any time," Yasmin said.

"Just one moment. I still wish to say my farewells to someone," Linetta said before turning to face Vaan, who had followed them out. "I guess this is where we will part, Vaan."

"For now, yes, my Lady," Vaan casually nodded before there was a period of silence between them.

"The capital is full of talents. Although I am taking my little sister there to get treated, I will also be meeting many people. I also have a lot of suitors there."

"I see."

"I also have a lot of suitors there. They are also handsome men of notable talents and backgrounds. Who knows, there might also be someone else who is also skillful as you in the art of pleasuring, Vaan."

"Cool."

Seeing how Linetta's words failed to trigger the desired reaction she had hoped from Vaan, she became slightly unhappy and depressed.

At the same time, Vaan understood Linetta's thoughts. But he found it more amusing to tease her by feigning ignorance.

"Don't you get what I'm saying? If you take too long to reach the capital, I won't wait for you. I might pick up a few handsome and talented men if they meet my standards," Linetta said with a bit of frustration.

However, Vaan's lips curled into a sly smile. Linetta's tricks to incite his jealousy were completely ineffective against him.

Furthermore, Vaan was confident that he had set her standards pretty high.

"I'm not in a position to dictate what you do in the capital, my Lady. However, if you do happen to play with other men, you will lose whatever chance you have to be with me," Vaan calmly said.

Although Vaan knew Linetta wasn't a loose woman, he felt he still needed to be clear about some points.

"Hm? Are you saying you're the type who dislikes sharing a woman with other men? It's quite normal for a woman to have multiple partners... Men are also quite accepting of this point..." Linetta mentioned.

That being said, Linetta never really entertained the thought of having multiple lovers.

"I am not like other men, am I?" With a calm smile, Vaan said, "Just as a capable woman can have multiple men, a capable man should also have multiple women. However, I don't like my women to have any other men. I'm quite possessive, you see."

"That's a surprise," Linetta said.

"You're definitely different from other men. It's a pity I failed in getting the response I wanted out of you, but you don't have to worry, Vaan. I will be waiting for you in Blackthorn City."

"Hehe, even if my sister doesn't wait for you, I will. Once I'm cured, let's do it a lot, okay? I'll certainly be more fun than my—Ow!" Lillias suddenly cried after being smacked on the back of the head by Linetta.

"Don't talk nonsense in front of so many people," Linetta admonished her.

"Ahem!" Captain Rhys and many other men in the area coughed and pretended they didn't hear anything.

Even so, they were quite envious of Vaan.

Nevertheless, exchanging a few more words, Linetta and Lillias departed with everyone, heading north for the Shadowacrea Swamps, which was the quickest route to the capital.

Sometime later, when Vaan couldn't see Linetta and Lillias's slender figures anymore, he issued a soft sigh and gathered his thoughts.

'Since I have time, I should head to a tavern and collect some information,' Vaan decided.

#### Chapter 75: Cyrena's Inability

Redpine Academy of Magic and Witchcraft, or Redpine Academy for short, was a western-style castle with several tower walls with cone-shaped roofings interconnected with the main building.

Although it didn't look as grand as Helia's Castle, it was founded on the summit of the tallest hill on the western side of the city. It appeared towering and overlooked the entirety of Redpine City.

Of the several cone-roof towers, the third tower was used to accommodate the witches-in-training living on campus.

Inside one of the rooms on the seventh floor, a beautiful young lady sat by the window and stared out at the night sky with her dull and apathetic blue eyes, not focusing on anything in particular.

An air of solitude seemingly filled the dark room as the young lady enjoyed the cold winds and silence.

The young lady was precisely Cyrena, Helia Ashenborn's untalented seventh daughter.

Although Cyrena shared her mother's blue eyes, her snow-white hair greatly differed from her mother and elder siblings, who all had jet-black hair.

Not only was she known to be untalented, but she was also regarded as an outcast in the family.

Suddenly, the tranquility of the dark room was disturbed by the several thuds on the door. Someone had knocked on it from outside.



"My Lady, your mother, Lord Ashenborn, summons you back to Helia's Castle," Cyrena's male servant informed her.

"A notice has already been sent to the headmaster's office, informing the headmaster that you will be taking a week off academic studies, my Lady. Lord Ashenborn expects you to return by tomorrow morning—"

Creak..!

The marble-coated wooden door slowly opened before the expressionless Cyrena exited her room in a light-blue dress.

"We can leave now."

"Understood, my Lady."

The male servant slightly bowed and reached out his hand to carry Cyrena's luggage. However, the male servant's hand quickly froze upon realizing Cyrena wasn't bringing anything with her.

"Do you have friends you would like to inform about your departure before we leave, my Lady?"

"No need. I don't have any friends."

"I... I see..." the male servant stuttered awkwardly.

Nevertheless, the male servant quickly recovered his composure and led Cyrena to the front courtyard outside the main building, where a ride was prepared for Cyrena.

...

Sometime later, Cyrena returned to Helia's Castle with the male servant. She headed straight to Helia Ashenborn in the Great Hall.

Plenty of lavish food remained on the long sandalwood table. But even though they had been there for some time, they remained in their freshly-cooked state under the preservation of magic.

"You've returned quite fast. Have you eaten? If not, join me. I have some things to say to you, Cyrena," Helia Ashenborn coolly said, but she had been expecting her daughter to show up.

Cyrena impassively took her seat on the side and started filling the empty plate in front of her with food from the table.

Although Helia Ashenborn didn't receive a verbal reply, she didn't mind. Such was the norm for the estranged relationship between them.

"I've arranged for a private teacher to teach you for the whole week you'll be staying in the castle. It doesn't matter which subject you want to prioritize; I expect you to study seriously when you are with your teacher. There's something I want to confirm."

Helia Ashenborn's strict words quickly produced a reaction as Cyrena suddenly paused and gave her a cold glare.

"When have I not taken my studies seriously? I've put in more effort than anyone else! My theoretical knowledge wouldn't lose to anyone in my class!"

"It doesn't matter how much effort you put in if it doesn't produce results, and theoretical knowledge is useless if you cannot apply them," Helia Ashenborn replied coldly.

If Cyrena Ashenborn had not come out of her own womb, Helia Ashenborn would have questioned whether Cyrena Ashenborn was her daughter.

Nevertheless, Cyrena's gaze became colder after hearing her mother's cold words.

Even if Cyrena was at the top of her class in potioneering and other miscellaneous subjects, Helia Ashenborn wouldn't acknowledge her.

Only strength mattered.

Without it, Cyrena can only be a useless person in her mother's eyes.

"Your teacher for the week starting tomorrow is called Vahn Cadieux, a young man around twenty years old. Before you start disrespecting your teacher, you should know that he is also the teacher of Linette Delarosa, whom I met earlier," Helia Ashenborn stated.

"Linette Delarosa is a genius who is already close to stepping into the realm of Senior Witches. On the other hand, you are trash. You can't advance from first grade, even after studying at the academy for three years."

"Nevertheless, I didn't call you back to scold you for being unable to use magic. I just want you to put away any prejudice you may have against Vahn Cadieux for being a man and learn from him seriously for a week and confirm his teaching qualifications."

"And if I can't learn anything from him even after a week?" Cyrena Ashenborn asked.

"Then you don't have to study under him anymore, and I will kick him out of the castle and let him stay in one of the inns in the city instead," Helia Ashenborn coolly said.

"However, on the off chance you can learn a lot from Vahn Cadieux, I will request him to extend his teaching. After all, even if you are trash, you are still my blood; I want the best for you."

"Even if you can't become a powerful witch like your older sisters, you can still become best in other non-magic professions like the potionneering that you enjoy."

"I understand, Mother," Cyrena replied expressionlessly.

Although Cyrena doubted how someone younger than her by a year could teach her, a man no less, she didn't want to argue with her mother.

There must be some truth to Vahn Cadieux's wisdom for Helia Ashenborn to arrange for Cyrena to study under the person.

"Where are you going?" Helia Ashenborn asked after Cyrena suddenly placed down her fork and knife and stood up.

"I am full, so I am retiring to my room for the night," Cyrena left after throwing out those impassive words.

Helia Ashenborn glanced at the barely eaten piece of black venison on Cyrena's plate before she snickered and paid no further attention to Cyrena.

#### Chapter 76: Wretched Seal

"What a waste. That venison came from the Wild Treehorns in the Kingdom of Scarlet Flame. They're quite costly to import," Helia Ashenborn casually muttered with a shake of her head.

The Wild Treehorns were a species of deers with tree-like horns and wood-like hooves. They were endowed with the wood element.

People that eat their meat gain a variety of health benefits. Increased recovery, lesser fatigue, youth extension, and more.

After Helia Ashenborn continued to eat by herself, she suddenly lost strength in one of her hands, causing the knife to fall out of it.

Helia Ashenborn immediately furrowed her brows before removing the glove to check the condition of her hand.

Before long, the fair skin of Helia Ashenborn's hand was revealed—only to be overshadowed by the glaring purplish skin near the tips of her fingers.

Seeing the purplish skin slowly but surely expand towards her palm, Helia Ashenborn sighed in resignation.

"This damn illness..."

Helia Ashenborn felt helpless against the strange disease. Healing magic and purification magic couldn't cure it, nor could food with healing properties.

"Magic and medicine don't work. On the contrary, they're accelerating the spread of this weird disease," Helia Ashenborn frowned with worries.

Nevertheless, Helia Ashenborn didn't dwell on the problem. She quickly put her black gloves back on to hide the purple skin.

Shortly after, Helia Ashenborn called in the servants to pack up the food. She was also done with them. Afterward, she called one of her top combat witches.

"What is Vahn Cadieux doing right now? He should have been back by now."

"The person in question headed into the city shortly after bidding farewell to Marquis Delarosa's daughters, Lord Helia."

"Oh? Without requesting any guards?" Helia Ashenborn furrowed her brows in thought for a moment before saying, "Go and accompany Vahn Cadieux. Someone will need to guide him to his designated room when he returns."

"Understood, Lord Helia," the combat witch complied and left.

...

...

...

Meanwhile, Vaan secretly changed his outfit and hid his face before dropping by a pawnshop and pawning off some sellable goods from his Heaven-Swallowing Space.

After Vaan secured the bag of coins with no questions asked by the pawnbroker, he immediately left and found a place to switch back into his original black outfit.

Following his course of action, he asked around on the main street and found a popular tavern named Wretched Seal Tavern to drop by.

It was rarely frequented by witches and only had rowdy men with big mouths for drinks and gossip.

Wretched Seal Tavern was the perfect place for Vaan to effectively gather information without being hit on by witches for his slender and handsome figure.

Of course, the possibility of being hit on by men was not zero. However, such instances were quite rare.

The world was filled with beautiful witches. Male witch descendants with their witch bloodlines also possessed superior appearances to ordinary people.

Even so, men that could be more beautiful than witches were very rare.

Thus, men who lust for other men either had something wrong with their eyes or something wrong with their heads.

...

Dingling~!

The bell rang as soon as Vaan pulled open the door and headed inside Wretched Seal Tavern, filled with rowdy men of varying strengths and wet floors due to spilled drinks.

Vaan quickly headed over to the bar to order himself a drink.

"What can I get for you?" the cute female bartender with blonde hair and mesmerizing golden eyes asked with a charming smile.

"Surprisingly, there is also a lovely lady here to serve the drinks in a place of men," Vaan complimented with a smile of his own.

"I like the vibe here," the cute female bartender casually replied while maintaining her smile, "I'm Raina. And you are?"

"Vahn Cadieux. You can just call me Vahn. And as you can probably tell, I'm new around here, my Lady. If you may, can you recommend a drink to me?"

"Oh my, aren't you one with manners? Since you asked so nicely, It'll be hard for me to refuse. For beginners, I'll recommend Serpent's Kiss. As for experienced drinkers, I recommend the Dragon's Kick, our tavern's specialty."

"A mild drink with an interesting spice or a heavy drink so strong it can knock out a person, huh? I'll have a mug of the Serpent's Kiss, please. Thank you."

"One mug of Serpent's Kiss coming right up. Thank you for your patronage."

Although the cute female bartender maintained her professionalism, Vaan could clearly tell the disinterest in her eyes, which was also the result he sought.

A young lady who enjoyed the rowdiness of men like the cute female bartender naturally wouldn't be attracted to a gentlemanly and weak-looking man buying light drinks.

Nevertheless, the cute female bartender was surprised by Vaan's ability to guess the nature of drinks by their names and became a little curious; not enough to be attracted to him, but enough not to ignore him.

After Vaan paid for his drink with some of the coins he earned, he found himself at a table in the corner of the tavern and sat down, seemingly minding his own business.

However, his ears were perked and took in all the words of the rowdy speakers.

No one minded Vaan's quiet presence, which conflicted with the vibe of the tavern. In fact, the men inside the tavern treated Vaan like he was invisible.

Everyone had their own circles and only chatted boisterously within them.

Vaan didn't have to worry about someone coming over to strike up a conversation with him. But even if it happened, he would welcome it.

...

"Hey, do you what—?"

"No, I do not know what."

Before a rowdy man with the aura of a Rank 1 Aura Warrior could finish speaking at the table behind Vaan's table, one of the man's buddies interrupted.

"Hahaha, you fucker. Are you trying to be funny? Shut up and let me finish," the Rank 1 Aura Warrior smacked his buddy on the back.

"Anyway, I heard something interesting about..."

Chapter 77: Zellera's Curse

"About... Malise Breedlove."

"Malise Breedlove?"

After hearing the Rank 1 Aura Warrior bring up the name of a Senior Witch, the people at the table were quickly startled, and the mood at the table changed.

A few moments later, one of them surprisingly whispered in a very soft tone, "Malise Breedlove, the sex maniac? What happened to her?"

"There were rumors that Malise Breedlove contracted Zellera's Curse. Apparently, Malise Breedlove also spread it to twenty other men, who then spread it to fifty other witches," the Rank 1 Aura Warrior whispered back.

"That many?!" everyone at the table immediately took a sharp breath due to shock from hearing the startling news.

"How did so many people get infected?" another man at the table asked.

"You know Zellera's Curse works. It's sexually transmitted, but the curse doesn't manifest immediately. Infected people will only notice something wrong after three days," the Rank 1 Aura Warrior quietly mentioned.



"However, those three days are very critical. We don't know if anyone else had come in contact with the infected later in those three days. Thus, there's a chance that the number of infected could be higher than the initial count."

"Err... Brothers, I think I am in trouble..." another man at the table said with a paled look, causing the others to look at him with alarm.

"You... did you hook up with one of the infected witches in the past three days?" the Rank 1 Aura Warrior glanced at the nervous man with surprise.

The person in question smiled bitterly and said, "Not just any witch, but Lady Malise herself. I bumped into her last night, and we went at it for a few rounds in her love nest."

"You... how can you be so stupid?" the men started to admonish the person at the table while trying to control their voices.

"Malise Breedlove, that sex maniac, doesn't always visit the red-light district for pleasure stimulation services. Otherwise, why do you think she is called the sex maniac? She would gladly sleep with anyone as long as it's free."

"Furthermore, Malise Breedlove doesn't specialize in Water Magic or Light Magic, so her Purification Magic cannot compare to the witches maintaining the hygiene and sanitation of the red-light district."

"Going to such a person for some cheap sex, even if Malise Breedlove didn't catch Zellera's Curse, there were bound to be other health complications," the Rank 1 Aura Warrior said.

"Haiz, don't keep talking about it. It's making me more depressed," the person sighed despondently before saying, "I got baited by people praising Lady Malise."

"People praise Lady Malise?"

Another person suddenly raised his eyebrows before pulling one of the spare chairs from Vaan's table over to join the table's conversation behind him, startling the people around it.

"No need to be alarmed. I'm also interested in your table's conversation," the man said while exuding a strong presence that only Rank 2 Aura Masters possessed. "I've only heard bad things about Lady Malise."

"For example, Lady Malise lacked talent in every field. Thus, Lady Malise could only rely on cheap sensual practices with men to increase her mana gathering instead of buying Sense Enhancers like witches from noble households or paying for quality services from the red-light district."

"Anyhow, what are these praises you mentioned?" the Rank 2 Aura Master shifted his gaze to the potentially-infected person with interest.

The person quickly felt embarrassed to be the focus of attention at the table as he scratched the back of his head.

"Actually, it's a bit embarrassing to say... I heard Lady Malise is very skillful in bed and infertile... So men don't have to worry about anything when they are with her. Because she will be the one to please them."

"Just because of that, you risked your manhood?"

"How was I supposed to know Lady Malise caught Zeller's Curse at the time?"

The potentially-infected person became more depressed and regretful the longer he thought about the matter.

"The red-light district had already caught winds of Malise Breedlove's matter and temporarily suspended all businesses. We'll know how many more people have been infected within the next three days," the Rank 2 Aura Master mentioned.

"You should observe your body's condition carefully in these three days. Once you confirm catching Zeller's Curse from Malise Breedlove, you should get yourself treated quickly before it spreads. Otherwise, there will be days of hell ahead of you."

Everyone at the table immediately felt coldness in their loins at the Rank 2 Aura Master's advice.

...

At the same time, Vaan casually eavesdropped on the table behind him and overheard everything. He, too, felt coldness in his loins.

'Zellera's Curse is commonly known to be incurable. Those who contract it will experience insufferable pains until they die. Healing, cure, and purification methods only accelerate the growth of the infected areas...'

'The only plausible treatment is to remove the infected areas before it becomes life-threatening...'  
Vaan mused.

In other words, there's a chance that the potentially-infected man would have to cut off his manhood to preserve his life.

'Only High Witches can restore dismembered limbs and regrow missing organs... But even they are helpless in restoring areas affected by Zellera's Curse,' Vaan recalled.

That was why it was called Zellera's Curse.

It wasn't just any ordinary disease, but a terribly vicious and complex disease—that people publicly believed it was a powerful curse cast down by Zellera, the most powerfully-known Lust Demon.

But for someone who had a past life on Earth like Vaan, he had a different outlook on Zellera's Curse.

Due to the existence of mana, Zellera's Curse was more like an upgraded version of STD. It seemed to be capable of rewriting its victim's genetic code.

Thus, even if the removed parts were restored, they would still have the same damaged appearances before they were removed.

As Vaan casually sipped on his drink and listened to the other rowdy conversations, the corner of his eyes caught the cute female bartender's odd behavior.

The cute female bartender had seemingly caught some secret message before subtly sending a reply.

Nevertheless, Vaan's attention didn't stay on the cute female bartender for long before another topic in the tavern caught his interest.

"Hey, have you heard about Wyvern-Type Abomination?"

...

## Chapter 78: Eniwse's Trail

"The Wyvern-type Abomination? You mean the one found deep in the Red Goblin Mountain the other day?"

"Yeah, that one. I mean, what other Wyvern-type Abomination could I be talking about around here? Wyvern-type Abominations aren't that common."

"True, you do have a point. And so? What about the Wyvern-type Abomination? Did some party kill it already?"

"Kill it? A Wyvern-type Abomination? Do you think a Wyvern-type Abomination is easy to kill by the likes of us? Furthermore, I received some information that the Wyvern-type Abomination used to be a Senior Witch. That means the Wyvern-type Abomination is at least a B-rank threat."

"B-rank threat? That dangerous? But that would mean..."

"That's right. A B-rank threat isn't something normal Senior Witch can deal with. Unless we have a well-organized large party of Senior Witches or Rank 3 Aura Grandmasters, a High Witch or Rank 4 Aura Lord would be needed to slay the Wyvern-type Abomination."

"However, Rank 4 Aura Lords are practically legends. So few had reached such a level of strength that people would question whether they even exist."

"On the other hand, High Witches aren't common either. At the very least, High Witches aren't people that commoners like us can easily meet. It would take time to dispatch a High Witch over to hunt down the Wyvern-type Abomination."

"In that case, just what are you trying to talk about by bringing up the topic exactly?"

"A group of Senior Witches thought they could slay the Wyvern-type Abomination, so they also brought twenty Aura Masters to challenge it deep in the Red Goblin Mountains."

"They failed, didn't they? Just what the hell were they thinking?"

"You're right. Not only did they fail, but they also suffered disastrous losses. The world never lacks idiots, so there's no helping it. It is what it is."

"They ventured too deep inside the Red Goblin Mountains and attracted many Green Goblins and Green Hobgoblins. All the Aura Masters were wiped out. And among the seven Senior Witches, only one made it back."

As the people chatted at the adjacent table left of Vaan, he recalled the journey to Redpine City was relatively smooth due to the small number of encounters with the Green Goblins on Goblin's Road.

'So that's why the goblins were fewer than I heard about Goblin's Road,' Vaan thought.

"So they didn't even reach the Wyvern-type Abomination? They were only overwhelmed by goblins and nearly suffered complete annihilation? It's a bit too pathetic, no? Just what were they thinking?" one of the people continued to ask about the topic brought up.

However, the person who brought up the topic shook his head, "No, the group of Senior Witches did indeed reach the Wyvern-type Abomination and even fought it. The survivor confessed to it."

"Supposedly, the Senior Witches and Aura Masters even had the upper hand against the Wyvern-type Abomination before they were ambushed and overwhelmed by the goblins, leading to their terrible defeat."

"However, the problem is the Wyvern-type Abomination did not stay in Red Goblin Mountains after that. It took flight and flew west. This will no doubt cause delays in eliminating it once a High Witch arrives in the city."

As the men at the table continued to talk, Vaan picked up his mug of Serpent's Kiss and suddenly joined them.

"What do you want?" one of the Rank 1 Aura Warriors at the table quickly looked at Vaan with a frown.

"I overheard you guys talking about the Wyvern-type Abomination and became interested in your conversation. I hope you all don't mind me joining," Vaan replied with a smile before adding, "You won't refuse a smiling person, right?"

"At least we won't punch a smiling face. Just suit yourself, pretty face," another Rank 1 Aura Warrior snorted after noticing Vaan's slender figure and bitch-ass drink.

"Thanks," Vaan smiled and took the only empty seat at the table of six.

"Now, what were we talking about again? Thanks to this new brother joining us, I forgot what we talked about," said a Rank 2 Aura Master with a bulky and tanned build.

Most men that diligently train their aura would usually have large muscular bodies.

"You were just talking about the elimination of the Wyvern-type Abomination being delayed. Since the surviving Senior Witch's party caused the problem, the person will shoulder all the blame and be heavily punished," Vaan said before asking, "Do you know the Senior Witch's name?"

"Let me think. I'm pretty sure I've heard the person's name," the Rank 2 Aura Master contemplated before recalling, "Ah, yes. I believe the Senior Witch was called Niobe Autumn."

Although the people at the table initially disliked Vaan, he was good at reading expressions and easily blended with the group.

After improving the people's impressions of him, Vaan began to ask more questions regarding the Wyvern-type Abomination.

Gradually, Vaan learned that the Wyvern-type Abomination didn't just fly in any western direction; it flew closer to the north-western direction.

'North-west of Ashenborn's territory... is the Thousand Fog Mountains, one of the Dark Zones!' Vaan slightly furrowed his brows with concern.

The Dark Zones were regions of land deemed too dangerous for people below Rank 3 in strength to explore and had a high mortality rate for those that ignored the warning.

It was full of the unknown.

Although Eniwse would be freed from the kingdom's pursuit for the time being, Vaan didn't know if she would face other dangers within the Thousand Fog Mountains.

'As I am now, it'll still be difficult to venture into the Thousand Fogs Mountains to find Eniwse. I won't be able to change her back either. I should improve my abilities and test my method on Lady Aeliana first,' Vaan contemplated seriously.

Pak!

Vaan suddenly received a smack on the back before the Rank 2 Aura Master laughed, "Hahaha. Since you joined our table, you should drink something better with us. Someone get this brother a mug of Dragon's Kick!"

Shortly after, the Rank 2 Aura Master placed his coin bag on the table before Vaan smiled wryly.

It didn't seem like Vaan could refuse, considering the Rank 2 Aura Master was willing to pay for the drink out of his own pocket.

Dingling~!

As Vaan was in a pickle, the entrance bell rang with a new guest.

Chapter 79: Hester's Answer

Out of everyone in Wretched Seal Tavern, only the cute bartender was a female. Thus, when a new beautiful lady walked inside, Vaan quickly determined the person wasn't a customer.

As if reinforcing Vaan's conclusion, the beautiful lady scanned the tavern before meeting his gaze. But before their gaze met, there was a brief instance where the beautiful lady's gaze met with the cute bartender.

Although it was only a very brief pause, it was more than enough for Vaan to draw further conclusions. His eyes flickered when the beautiful lady with brown hair started walking over.

"I appreciate your kind gesture, but it seems like someone has come to pick me up. Perhaps, we can drink another time if the opportunity arises," Vaan politely declined.

"Oh? Someone came for you?" the Rank 2 Aura Master replied with a raised brow before shifting his gaze to the beautiful lady approaching.

Along with the other people at the table and even neighboring tables turning their heads to look, the Aura Master and everyone's eyes quickly widened with surprise and alarm.

"L-Lady Hester!"

Everyone who recognized the beautiful lady's identity quickly shot up to their feet to greet her with respect.

Hester Thornton, the beauty of fair skin with brown hair, hazel eyes, and wearing a brown and white renaissance dress, was one of the stronger Senior Witches in Redpine City; third in authority and vice-captain of the Combat Witches serving under Lord Helia.

Outside of the Redpine Academy, Hester Thornton was also the leading authority in Earth Magic. She was Vice-captain Hester Thornton, the Witch of Black Iron.

"Don't let my presence spoil the mood of the tavern. I am only here under the instruction of my Lady to protect a person, so just treat me as someone invisible," was what Hester Thornton said impassively after acknowledging everyone's greeting with a nod.

However, no one in the tavern could relax and enjoy themselves in the presence of such an authoritative person. The festive mood was replaced by nervous tension.

After all, most of their topics frequently involved witches, which men are forbidden to discuss in any way that may tarnish the witches' dignity and reputation.

Vaan quickly downed his mug of Serpent's Kiss in one go before standing up from his seat and saying, "Let us leave, Lady Hester."



"Don't mind me, Sir Cadieux. I was only sent to protect you, not bring you back to Helia's Castle," Hester Thornton explained, thinking she may have caused some misunderstanding.

However, Vaan shook his head with a wry yet bitter smile.

"Just Vahn Cadieux or Vahn will do. I am undeserving of such respect from a noble Senior Witch such as yourself, Lady Hester. Others would be under the impression that I hail from some noble household," Vaan ruefully requested.

"Besides, can anyone enjoy themselves with the present mood in the tavern?" Vaan added.

Hester Thornton glanced around with a slight frown before acknowledging Vaan's reason and conceding.

"It matters not whether you are of nobility or not. I am someone who serves Lady Helia, and you are her guest. Treating Sir Cadieux with this much respect is totally acceptable. That being said, it seems Sir Cadieux is uncomfortable with it. In that case, I will just call you Vahn Cadieux."

"It would be much appreciated, Lady Hester."

Vaan understood the difference between Hester Thornton's position and his own.

If Hester Thornton had to serve someone of lower status like Vaan with such respect, he would draw unnecessary hostilities from those that idolize her.

Those circumstances lead to all sorts of unwanted troubles.

"Then, let us leave together, Vahn Cadieux."

"Yes, Lady Hester."

Shortly after the two left the Wretched Seal Tavern and started heading back toward Helia's Castle, Hester Thornton glanced at Vaan from the corner of her eyes as they walked side by side.

"Judging by your build, you don't look like someone who has undergone any rigorous aura training and achieving an adequate level. It would be dangerous for you to wander the city alone without any protection, Vahn Cadieux."

"Despite how I look, I am actually quite sturdy," Vaan replied with a slight smile.

Back in the tavern, he had reserved a smack on the back by a Rank 2 Aura Master, which might have seemed like a friendly smack at the time—but was, in fact, the person gauging his strength.

If his defense points weren't so high, he might have been slightly injured, and the person was unlikely to continue maintaining his friendliness with him.

More often than not, various motives and schemes are hidden under the simplest of gestures and acts. Whether it could be noticed or not depends on the person's ability.

Nevertheless, human interaction could sometimes be... exhausting.

"Hmm..."

Hester Thornton subtly studied Vaan's expression for any dishonesty but didn't feel like he was lying. But whether it was confidence or foolhardiness, she could not determine.

"You didn't seem surprised at my arrival, though. Rather, it seemed like you were expecting me, Vahn Cadieux."

"Not you, in particular, Lady Hester, but yes, I did assume someone would be coming for me."

"May I ask how you knew, Vahn Cadieux?"

"Lady Hester, the better question would be – how can I not know? Wretched Seal Tavern is one of the most popular places in the city and a gathering for all sorts of interesting rumors and information," Vaan mentioned.

"If Lord Ashenborn wanted to build an effective information gathering network, she would have long planted her intelligence agents in such places. As such, contacting all the intelligence agents working in such places was the most efficient method you have to find me in such a big and prosperous city."

"I see. How impressive—No, should I say terrifying?" Hester Thornton praised, but her gaze glinted with killing intent for a split instant before returning to normal.

Sometime later, Hester Thornton guided Vaan back to Helia's Castle and showed him to his designated room.

...

Afterward, Hester Thornton went straight to see Helia Ashenborn, who was enjoying a glass of wine and the evening cold winds on her bedchamber balcony on the highest floor of the castle.

"You're back, Hester. I assumed you just escorted our guest to his room."

"Yes, my Lady."

"What did you think of our guest during your brief interaction with him? Give me your thoughts on Vahn Cadieux," Helia Ashenborn said while casually swirling the glass of wine in her hand.

"I believe Vahn Cadieux is too dangerous to be left alive, my Lady," Hester Thornton answered without hesitation.

"Oh?" Helia Ashenborn smiled with interest. "Elaborate."

Chapter 80: Bold Assumption

"Yes, my Lady," Hester Thornton complied with a nod.

"First of all, the spy we planted in Wretched Seal Tavern to secretly collect information was easily found out by Vahn Cadieux. He is aware that we have an intelligence-gathering network."

"Although it was just a feeling, I believe he also knew the agent was a witch instead of a normal lady without magic. This is in spite of the fact that our spies had altered their appearances and

hidden their mana presence to appear like ordinary women or untalented witches that couldn't land better jobs than bartending."

"So because Vahn Cadieux found one of our spies and became aware of the intelligence network in the city, he should die?" Helia Ashenborn casually asked, but her intentions were unclear.

"This... Well... it is because Vahn Cadieux poses a great threat to our security, my Lady. Vahn Cadieux easily found one of our spies upon his first visit to Wretched Seal Tavern. If we let him stay in our city, he might look for the other spies we planted in the city," Hester Thornton argued.

"Imagine the damage Vahn Cadieux could inflict if he had ill intentions or something against us. Vahn Cadieux could sell his information to our rivals, compromising our security and endangering our lives. However..."

"However?" Helia Ashenborn casually sipped her wine and said, "After saying so much to kill Vahn Cadieux, now you're hesitating, Hester?"

"There are some things I am uncertain about, my Lady. Although Vahn Cadieux claimed to be a commoner, he has shown exemplary manners and wisdom," Hester Thornton mentioned.

"This isn't something a regular household can produce—No, it would make more sense if Vahn Cadieux had been nurtured by a noble household of elitists. Only a man who has received extensive education from a noble household of elitists from a young age would develop such intelligence and exemplary etiquette."

"If I hadn't interacted with Vahn Cadieux, I wouldn't have believed there was such an exceptional man. He is almost too perfect of a man—it's almost like he had been raised for the sole purpose of serving and assisting witches, whether as a servant or husband."

"For someone who wants him dead, you've started praising him a lot, Hester," Helia Ashenborn teased.

Hester Thornton felt slightly embarrassed, but she hid it under her stern expression. After a slight cough, she said, "I'm just stating the facts as I see them, my Lady."

"Heh," Helia Ashenborn snickered before her eyes flickered with deep thoughts.

"Marquis Delarosa's eldest daughter mentioned that Vahn Cadieux is her teacher and future betrothed, while Vahn Cadieux claimed he didn't come from a noble household..." Helia Ashenborn began to think.

"If they are both speaking the truth, Vahn Cadieux might be an exceptionally-talented orphan that the Delarosa Household decided to secretly raise to be Linette Delarosa's husband, who will assist her through life."

"However, Marquis Delarosa only requested protection for her two daughters. There was no mention of Vahn Cadieux," Hester Thornton mentioned.

"That in and of itself could be a form of protection for Vahn Cadieux," Helia Ashenborn boldly assumed after brief contemplation.

"If those noble households hoping to establish a relationship with the Delarosa Household through marital bonding learned of Vahn Cadieux's identity, they would see him as an absolute obstacle to be removed."

"No wonder someone exceptional like Vahn Cadieux is unknown to us..." Hester Thornton uttered before she suddenly frowned with doubt. "But then why did Young Lady Linette expose his identity to us?"

"Perhaps, the Delarosa Household is testing us to see whether they could trust us. Is it because I don't have any son despite having seven children?" Helia Ashenborn wondered before her blue eyes flickered in the next moment.

"Nevertheless, this could be our golden opportunity to build a closer connection with the Delarosa Household. We can't kill Vahn Cadieux. On the contrary, we have to protect him at all costs. If he dies on our territory, we'll fall out of favor with the Delarosa Household."

"Hester, I'm assigning you as Vahn Cadieux's personal bodyguard during his stay in my territory. You have to monitor and protect him from harm's way. Can you do that for me?"

"Your wish is my command, my Lady. I won't let Vahn Cadieux lose even a single hair," Hester Thornton vowed.

"Good!"

...

...

...

Meanwhile, Vaan remained inside the guest room on the floor that was arranged for him, unaware of the wild assumptions made by Helia Ashenborn and Hester Thornton.

Helia's Castle has five floors, but only guest rooms are on the ground floor. The rooms on higher floors are better, but the guest rooms on the ground floor weren't bad either.

At the very least, everything was of higher quality than the brothel rooms made for comfort and didn't look like some pig's den.

'I've already noticed this, but Lord Ashenborn is seriously rich. How does she amass her wealth?' Vaan mused.

If Hester Thornton didn't come for him so soon, Vaan could have gathered more information from the tavern.

Nevertheless, there were no what-ifs. He could only leave it for another day.

On another note, Vaan only had one week to teach Cyrena Ashenborn, the untalented child of Helia Ashenborn's seven children.

'Helia Ashenborn said her youngest daughter was untalented, but she did not specify the scope or area her youngest daughter was inept. If it's very severe, one week is not a lot of time. I have to learn where Cyrena Ashenborn's weakness lies so I can quickly come up with a suitable teaching plan for her,' Vaan mused.

Knock, knock!

Following the two sudden knocks on the door, Vaan shortly heard Hester Thornton's voice behind the door.

"Are you still up, Vahn Cadieux? I've brought some materials that may prove useful to you before your lesson with Young Lady Cyrena tomorrow begins," said Hester Thornton.

Vaan opened the door a few moments later and quickly glanced down at the stack of papers in Hester Thornton's arms. "These are..."

"Cyrena's health records, diagnosis, and insights made by Senior Witches and High Witches who have studied the art of healing," Hester Thornton explained.

"Oh? This is just what I needed. Thank you, Lady Hester." Vaan was pleasantly surprised by the timing.