

Witch Monastery

Chapter 26: Chapter 26: Fight!

The underling studied Charles' clothes and nodded. "Local goods, boss. Sharp eyes as always."

After a pause, he whispered: "How do we handle him?"

The bald Small Boss weighed options, then closed his eyes. "No matter who he is—the mission comes first. Knock him out, tie him up."

"If he's connected, we apologize later. If not? Madame Casalante pays well for pretty toys."

Weapons smuggling, drug running, murder—Xanathar's Guild profited from them all.

And trafficking attractive commoners to wealthy perverts? A practiced side hustle.

The lackey grinned, relaying orders. Soon, a dozen hands tightened on hidden weapons.

Three minutes passed. Then—

A red-mohawked human burst in, shouting: "Boss! Paul's dead!"

Code given.

The bald Small Boss roared: "Kill my brother? DIE!"

Chaos erupted.

Gangsters surged up. One lunged at the half-orc woman—a flying kick to her ribs.

Clubs and pipes rained down.

The half-orc—battle-hardened—took the kick, then rolled with the blows. One arm shielded her head; the other yanked her mace free.

Her orcish toughness saved her. Malnourished thugs lacked the strength to drop her instantly.

"YOU—DIE!"

Pain ignited the orcish fury in her blood. She tore the mace from her hip and swung with reckless abandon, cracking skulls in a brutal exchange of injury for injury!

As that brawl erupted, another gangster lunged at Charles—short club raised high—

BANG!

The blow landed square on Charles' skull.

But his preparations paid off.

Crack.

First, his Blade Ward cantrip shattered—absorbing most of the impact. The pain? No worse than a teacher's chalk flick.

Then—

Armor of Agathys activated.

An invisible shield absorbed the remaining force—and struck back.

Frost exploded from the club. The air temperature plummeted ten degrees in an instant. Deadly cold raced up the thug's arm, turning it corpse-pale and lifeless.

Clatter.

The frozen club hit the floor.

"AAAGH!"

The gangster stumbled back, clutching his necrotic limb. "W-what ARE you?!"

The scream snapped Charles out of his daze.

Raised in peacetime, he'd only ever heard of such violence. That sudden blow had stunned him mindless.

Now, realizing he'd nearly been killed—or so he thought—cold sweat drenched him.

And when he saw their weapons couldn't touch him?

All those weeks trapped in the monastery, powerless against the witches...

All that pent-up rage...

It ignited.

The witches bully me because they're strong. But YOU?

You're the trash I slaughtered by the dozens in-game!

UNFORGIVABLE!

DIE!

He surged to his feet, hand slamming onto his spellbook. No incantation needed—raw magic detonated from him.

"THUNDERWAVE!"

BOOOOOOOM!

Thunderwave—a 1st-level spell that unleashed explosive force in all directions, blasting away nearby threats while dealing damage.

Perfect for crowd control: non-lethal but devastatingly effective.

Its only flaw? The deafening BOOM that echoed for blocks.

And in this cramped tavern? The sound was brutal. Every patron clutched their ears in pain.

Worst hit were Charles' would-be kidnappers. The concussive blast hurled them backward like ragdolls—crashing into tables, limbs splayed, unconscious or worse.

Even the longtable and benches flipped over. Plates and tankards shattered. Drunks toppled like dominoes.

No surprise. This Thunderwave packed maximum punch—fueled by Charles' 20 Charisma, the peak of mortal potential.

The relentless commotion instantly drew the attention of everyone in the tavern.

Behind the counter, Alan, the tavern owner—who had been mildly irritated that Xanathar's Guild dared to cause trouble in his establishment—suddenly straightened, his eyes wide with shock.

A spellcaster!

Not one of those Strixhaven University students who learned a cantrip or two and called themselves "mage," but a genuine, real spellcaster—one who had mastered 1st-level spells!

How did someone like this end up in my tavern today?

As the most renowned middleman in South Harbor District, Alan's discernment far surpassed the average person's. Just from Charles' movements and the damage dealt, he could tell this man had mastered at least three 1st-level spells: Mage Armor, Thunderwave, and Armor of Agathys!

This was real talent. And given how young he looked, it wouldn't be surprising if he eventually mastered 2nd—or even 3rd—level spells!

Even if others couldn't identify the exact spells, they could still tell this young man wasn't to be trifled with.

The bald small boss spun around, eyes bulging as he stared at Charles.

This... was a mage?!

Though spellcasters made up barely more than one percent of Liberl Port's population, they weren't evenly distributed.

In core districts like Mithral District, Central District, Blackstaff District, and University District, spellcasters could even cluster together. But in the four harbor districts, the Outskirts, or Rubble District? You'd be lucky to find one among a thousand.

So even if these gangster killed without blinking, they might've never seen a living spellcaster—or real magic—until now.

Fear gripped the gangster. Some even lost their grip on their weapons. Ruthless as they were, drenched in blood, they were still lowborn gangster with no education.

They'd hardly ever encountered a true spellcaster, let alone understood the difference between a mage, a warlock, or other classes. Naturally, they had no real grasp of their capabilities.

And now, faced with a living, hostile "mage," old rumors resurfaced—tales like "A mage can turn you into a sow with a single incantation!"—making their knees tremble.

Damn it all, why did we piss off someone like this?!

Unaware of their terror, Charles—suddenly ambushed—was flooded with rage and panic.

He panted heavily, his glare like an enraged bull, locked onto the bald small boss.

Right now, only one thought remained:

Take them all down.

Chapter 27: Chapter 27: The Might of Magic

Then, he uttered the incantation once more, casting the cantrip Blade Ward on himself before striding over the overturned longtable, heading straight for the bald small boss.

At his approach, the Xanathar gangs on the other side of the table instinctively took half a step back, their faces twisting in panic. Only the bald small boss kept his nerve—though his guts churned with regret, he knew it was too late to back down now. Gritting his teeth, he drew his short knife and pointed it at Charles.

"Stop!"

He bellowed, eyes blazing, trying to intimidate this fresh-faced youth with sheer aggression.

But Charles, knowing full well his spells would shield him from these thugs' mundane weapons, wasn't fazed in the slightest.

He ignored the bald Small Boss's warning entirely, gripping his spellbook as he advanced—charging straight into the heart of the gang!

Seeing this, the bald small boss didn't hold back. His short knife thrust straight toward Charles' abdomen.

He wasn't putting his full strength into it—this was a feint. In his experience, anyone seeing a blade coming would dodge, and dodging meant losing balance. That's when he'd seize their wrist, twist them into a lock, and render their spellcasting useless.

But to his shock, Charles didn't even flinch.

He walked right into the blade.

Whoosh—

Instantly, the sigils of Blade Ward deflected the strike, and Armor of Agathys triggered. A surge of biting cold crawled up the bald Small Boss's right arm, numbing it instantly. Agony seared through his nerves, and sweat beaded on his forehead.

Meanwhile, Charles—completely unharmed—stepped past him, moving into the center of the crowd. He channeled his magic into the spellbook, and once again, the 1st-level spell Thunderwave erupted.

BOOM—!

A violent shockwave exploded outward from him. No matter how frantically the gangsters tried to brace themselves, the force sent them flying like twigs in a storm—crashing into tables, chairs, even the bar itself.

The tavern filled with screams and the shattering of glasses and plates, reducing the interior to chaos.

Only the seasoned half-orc woman reacted in time. Before the spell went off, she spun around and lunged, tackling the female half-ogre bouncer behind her.

The two burly women collided, but the move spared her the worst of Thunderwave's blast. Though she ended up in a heap, she was at least unharmed.

Behind the counter, Alan could only pinch the bridge of his nose, his heart aching.

Damn it all. Xanathar's footing the bill for this.

While Alan mourned his property, Charles listened to the groans of pain from the Xanathar thugs, taking in their battered forms and terrified expressions. The knot of frustration and rage in his chest unraveled, leaving nothing but pure, exhilarating satisfaction.

These bastards got exactly what they deserved!

He turned, sweeping his gaze over the few remaining gangsters still standing—though their legs shook, their faces pale, their weapons nearly slipping from trembling hands.

Despite never having killed before, the look in Charles' eyes struck them as more terrifying than even their commander's wrath.

In an instant, their resolve shattered. "Y-you... stay back! I surrender! I surrender!"

Clatter!

One Xanathar thug dropped his weapon entirely, falling to his knees as tears streamed down his face. "M-mercy, Lord Mage! Spare us!"

The others followed suit, collapsing into a chorus of pleas.

Seeing them utterly broken, Charles exhaled, his anger finally spent. He waved a dismissive hand. "Get out."

The gangsters scrambled up like beaten dogs, hauling their bald small boss to his feet and dragging their unconscious comrades toward the exit.

At last, the tavern settled back into quiet.

The female half-ogre bouncer hadn't moved the entire time, merely watching with a wide, amused grin.

For one, while mages were rare, her half-ogre constitution meant Charles' spells likely couldn't harm her much.

For another, she was just a bouncer. The tavern's damages weren't coming out of her pocket—Alan's influence ensured the losing side would cover the costs.

With the Xanathar gone, Charles didn't leave immediately. The longtable was overturned, his peanuts scattered. Instead, he moved to the window, taking a seat at an empty table to collect himself—though his mind kept replaying the fight.

Exhilarating.

The superiority of a spellcaster was undeniable. Even these bloodstained brutes hadn't lasted a single round against him.

This feeling of power... it was good.

At the counter, Alan caught a waiter's eye and nodded. The man hurried over with a fresh bowl of boiled peanuts, setting it before Charles before retreating without a word.

The half-orc woman, Yagra, watched him with a mix of wariness and uncertainty, wrestling with how to address a mage.

After a long pause, she finally approached. Bowing deeply, she clasped her fists in an awkward but earnest gesture of respect.

"Yagra of the Zhentarim. Thank you for your aid, my lord."

Charles' fingers stilled mid-peanut crack at the name.

Zhentarim?

She was part of that shadowy intelligence network?

The Zhentarim—a vast and ancient underground organization—operated on one core principle: "Public information is curated to serve its publishers' interests, and therefore unreliable. We obtain real truth through our own means, from the shadows."

Their agents spanned the world, extracting secrets through blackmail, threats, seduction, bribery, and other coercive means. They targeted the secretaries, servants, chefs, and grooms of the powerful, compiling their findings into dossiers for profit.

Naturally, such an organization dabbled in illicit trades like smuggling to sustain itself. Yet they also hoarded evidence of corruption—bribes, embezzlement, insider dealings—inadvertently exposing such crimes.

Thus, in a sense, they weren't purely malevolent but operated in a moral gray area—an intelligence network neither fully light nor dark.

However, Zhentarim agents typically worked in secrecy. That this half-orc woman, Yagra, had revealed her affiliation suggested she wasn't a core member—just a higher-ranking thug at best.

With this in mind, Charles shook his head at her gratitude. "They attacked me too. I was just defending myself. No need for thanks."

Yagra's face remained uneasy as she straightened. "Even so, my lord deserves thanks. Without you, I'd have been captured."

"This debt," she pressed a fist to her chest and bowed again, "I won't forget."

With that, she turned and strode out of the tavern.

Charles resumed eating his peanuts. An uneasy silence settled over the room, broken only by waiters righting toppled furniture.

But the quiet didn't last. Soon, Alan, approached with two tankards of ale, his prosthetic leg thumping against the floorboards. He set one drink beside Charles.

"Care for a drink?"

Chapter 28: Chapter 28 Alan's Probe

Charles shook his head, declining the offer. "Family rules. I'm not permitted to drink yet."

"Rules are made to be broken. That's just limiting your freedom," the Alan chuckled, well aware what rebellious youngsters liked to hear.

But he didn't press. Moving the drink aside, he leaned in companionably. "Name's Alan Alice, owner of this fine establishment. And you?"

"...Nigel Charles." Charles gave his former identity's name.

Charles?

Alan wracked his memory but came up blank—likely no major noble house.

Good. The truly powerful would be beyond my reach anyway.

"Fine name," he grinned, thumb jerking toward the wreckage. "And those spells? Magnificent!"

Charles waved it off. "A trifle. Not worth mentioning."

"Now, now, none of that!" Alan's eyebrows shot up, lavish with praise. "In seventy years at South Harbor, I've never seen a mage your age wield magic so fluidly—so masterfully!"

His expression turned wistful. "Though...you're not from South Harbor, are you?"

"...East Harbor." Half-truth. His family was there—before he fled.

He'd no intention of being fully honest. Though game lore painted this middleman as generous and reliable, Charles knew better: Alan was a bold, cunning fox who'd chew you up without spitting out the bones.

Caution is essential here.

"East Harbor! Fine place," Alan sighed theatrically. "Main port, ships from across the seas, enterprises and conglomerates galore. Opportunities abound for the capable!"

"Not like South Harbor—fishing for scraps, bullied by those Amazonian wenches, heh..."

Charles nearly reflexively countered with "The wealthy hoard it all; the poor still suffer," but caught himself.

Eyes glinting, he recognized the gambit: Alan was buttering him up.

Targeting my spellcaster status. Then let's make the fox tread carefully.

"East Harbor isn't as idyllic as you suggest," Charles smiled earnestly. "For all its 'fair competition,' loafers still clamor for unearned rewards."

He leaned in. "At least here, a fisherman's haul reflects his skill. Can't blame the sea for empty nets—unlike those dockworkers crying 'oppression' for their own laziness."

Alan barely suppressed the urge to slam the table and curse this privileged brat. Decades of practice kept his smile intact. "Ah. Quite so."

But the exchange confirmed it: this plainly-dressed boy spouting aristocratic rhetoric was nobility.

No rags-to-riches prodigy here.

"How old are you, then?" Alan lobbed another probe.

"Fifteen." Truth this time.

"See, you're still so young." Alan spread his hands. "Those men earlier were some of the toughest warriors in South Harbor District, and you handled them effortlessly."

"At your age, you should be proud. Doesn't anyone ever praise you?"

"No." Charles shook his head slightly, his expression calm. "Just a few 1st-level spells. Nothing to be proud of."

Alan studied his face closely and was surprised to find not a trace of vanity or arrogance.

Hiss—that could only mean the peers he usually interacted with were even more exceptional.

What he didn't know was that Charles' in-game character could casually cast 9th-level spells in the late stages. A handful of 1st-level spells were hardly worth boasting about.

"Then your teacher must be ruthlessly strict!" Alan sighed, shaking his head. "Where do you study? Strixhaven?"

Charles shook his head again. "No. Self-taught at home."

That was also the truth, but to Alan, it implied something else entirely.

A private tutor?

Hiring a mage to teach at home—what kind of family could afford that?

Nouveau riche? High nobility?

Unlikely. His surname didn't match any of the great houses... Had there been any upstart families named Charles in East Harbor District recently?

He wasn't sure and was about to probe further when the tavern door swung open again.

A tall, curvaceous, and stunningly beautiful young nun stepped inside, her expression slightly tense.

It was none other than Hattie.

When her gaze landed on Charles, she visibly relaxed and flashed him a warm smile.

Seeing her, Charles quickly stood and addressed Alan: "Apologies, sir. We'll talk another time. I must leave now."

Gathering his package, he turned toward the doorway.

"Of course, next time." Alan offered the usual pleasantries, watching him go.

But when his eyes landed on Hattie, the most renowned middleman of South Harbor District froze, his pupils contracting sharply.

That nun from the monastery under the Goddess of Life's name?!

She... was here for this Charles?!

This... How could it be them?!

To the common masses of South Harbor District, the nuns of this monastery were truly beautiful in appearance and kind at heart. Whenever disaster struck South Harbor District, they would freely offer porridge, caring for those poor souls who couldn't even afford a meal.

The abbess of the Monastery of Life, that imposing nun Theresa who always wore milk-white vestments, would go further by casting divine spells without compensation, driving away diseases from those poverty-stricken patients too poor to pay, restoring them to health.

Such power and compassion, in the eyes of South Harbor District residents, was nothing short of angels descending from heaven!

Thus, though this monastery wasn't particularly renowned in South Harbor District, its reputation remained impeccable. Ordinary residents might not think of them often, but whenever mentioned, nothing but praises would follow.

But Alan was different. As one of South Harbor District's most reliable middlemen, he knew much darker truths about this place: for instance, he was well aware that certain lust-driven gangs had long set their sights on the pretty nuns of that monastery, plotting unspeakable deeds against them!

Yet in the end, these reckless fools without exception all vanished into thin air, disappearing without a trace!

Yes, vanished into thin air - no living witnesses, no dead bodies to be found!

Alan was a middleman, and in their profession, information was paramount. Yet even with his intelligence network, he couldn't trace where these men had gone!

This realization chilled him to the bone, but he knew full well that curiosity killed the cat, so naturally he lacked the courage to investigate further. He could only maintain his fearful respect while repeatedly warning newcomers with ill intentions toward the nuns to stay far away from that monastery.

Outsiders all assumed this old fox who would devour a man without spitting out the bones still retained one last shred of kindness, unable to bear seeing the last remaining goodness in this filth-ridden South Harbor District suffer blasphemy.

And every time this happened, Alan could only force a bitter smile, thinking to himself: I'm clearly trying to protect your life safety here - that monastery is an existence none of us can afford to provoke!

Chapter 29: Chapter 29: Level 2 Warlock

Unfortunately, these were words the tavern Alan owner dared not speak aloud, keeping them locked deep in his heart.

Today, seeing Charles standing shoulder-to-shoulder with a nun—after he himself had just been probing the man's background—Alan was overcome with a cold, creeping dread.

I... I'm no better than those Xanathar thugs. I'm digging my own grave!

Only when Charles and Hattie vanished through the doorway did Alan finally snap out of it, meticulously reviewing every word he'd said, searching for any slip-ups.

Thank the gods. I only flattered him and asked harmless questions—nothing too pointed. No more prying. This is way above my pay grade!

After a long bout of self-reassurance and stern warnings, he finally steadied himself, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and returned to the counter to bury himself in the ledger.

...

On the other side of the slums, inside a derelict warehouse.

The battered gangsters of the Xanathar Guild were recuperating here.

After being blasted by Charles's twin Thunderwaves, some were unconscious, some had broken legs, others cracked ribs or shattered faces. A few were lucky—only minor scrapes and bruises.

But no matter the injury, they finally had a moment to rest. All except their bald, bald Small Boss. Even with one arm wrapped thickly from frostbite, he still had to hobble on crutches to report to his superior.

Seated before him now was a terrifying brute—easily two meters tall, twice as broad, with one eye missing and a massive tattoo of an eye in its place.

His remaining eye stared coldly at the bald underling, making his scalp prickle with sweat. Still, he forced himself to deliver an embellished account:

"Fortunately, in the end, the Zhentarim Mage did not kill us and let us return."

"I've failed you, boss. Punish me as you see fit!"

His tone was thick with shame and fury—seemingly a plea for punishment, but really, a blatant attempt to shift blame. The fault was his own misjudgment, his order to attack Charles that led to their defeat. Yet now, he pinned it all on another.

Sure enough, his one-eyed superior lowered his gaze and said, "Not your fault. The intel was flawed. Damn Daevyl... never thought he'd hire a mage for this."

After the curse, he looked up and growled, "Rest up. You and your men better heal before Twin Moons Night. Don't screw up the delivery."

Days prior, One-Eye's crew had been tasked with smuggling a highly valuable—yet unknown—item into Liberl Port, to be delivered secretly on Twin Moons Night.

Their usual method was simple: exploit their contacts inside Amazon Fisheries Company, hide the cargo in a shipment of fish, and slip it through South Harbor District.

But someone talked.

Zhentarim agent Daevyl Starsong got wind of it and sent a letter—demanding a king's ransom to keep quiet.

One-Eye refused to pay. Silence, he decided, would come by force.

Yet no one knew what disguise that sly sun elf wore, or where he lurked.

So One-Eye played along, plotting to ambush him. First, they'd snatch his bodyguard—the half-orc woman Yagra—then extract the next meeting's time and location. Finally, they'd take Daevyl down.

But the bastard was prepared. Sent a mage. Turned the tables. Left them broken.

Now, the feud with Daevyl was sealed. He'd sell the intel—and come for blood.

One-Eye's eye darkened. Teeth gritted, he spat, "Heal up. I'll alert the commander. This is beyond us now."

Within the hierarchy of Xanathar's Guild, ranks ascended as follows: Eye Agent, Eye Ray, Guild Commander, and finally, Eye Hand.

The bald small boss was an Eye Agent, while his superior, One-Eye, held the rank of Eye Ray.

And the "commander" One-Eye spoke of?

Naturally, that would be a figure of Guild Commander status.

As he spoke, One-Eye casually reached out and clapped the bald man on the shoulder, barking loudly:

"Worst I'll get is a tongue-lashing—maybe a whipping. You lot just heal up. Don't dwell on it!"

The bald small boss was instantly moved to tears—though how much of it was genuine remained unclear.

"My incompetence shames me!" he choked out. "This failure rests on my shoulders!"

Their hollow performance continued—unaware that outside the warehouse, two lean figures stood silently.

Clad in black leather trench coats and round-topped hats, they observed with cold detachment.

"Is this really the best the Cassalanter Family could hire?" one murmured, shaking his head in quiet disdain.

"Just as we predicted," the other replied. "Our... partners are not entirely reliable."

"Fortunately, come Twin Moons Night, our own strength will be bolstered."

"If need be, we'll simply take the Illusionist's Bracers by force."

...

That same night, within the monastery's scriptorium...

Charles closed the spellbook in his hands, his state of focused study dissolving.

As the scriptorium's magic waned, suppressed thoughts rushed back—unsettling, restless.

He pulled up his system interface, eyes scanning the attributes panel with a furrowed brow.

A decision weighed on him:

Should I advance my Warlock class to Level 2 now?

Chapter 30: Chapter 30: Sophia's Intrusion

Earlier, Charles had worried that leveling up too quickly might leave him overwhelmed—clumsy with unfamiliar abilities, unsure which to use in battle, and ultimately weakening his combat effectiveness.

After all, he hadn't fully mastered the spellbooks in his possession yet.

Moreover, his Purification Points had other uses—like constructing additional New Constructions—so he'd been inclined to save them for emergencies.

But today's encounter had been a wake-up call.

The memory of that blow to the back of his head still haunted him, now that he'd calmed down and reflected. A man who'd never seen real bloodshed, he couldn't shake the lingering fear.

Sure, he'd grown up in a rural Eurasian laborer family, but Charles had never even killed a chicken—at most, he'd thrown a basketball at one...

Ahem.

Point was, as a child of peacetime, the shock still rattled him.

Today's fight had ended quickly only because both Thunderwaves landed perfectly. Had it dragged on, who knew what chaos might've followed?

Even so, with his current spell slots, he could only cast two 1st-level spells. At Level 1, he had just four slots total—far too slim a margin for error.

Luckily, only two gangsters had landed hits, and even then, Blade Ward had shielded him.

True, these thugs were weak—untrained, most not even Level 1 warriors—but he was just a Level 1 warlock. No overwhelming advantage.

If the others hadn't frozen in fear, if their clubs and pipes had kept swinging, if they'd been smarter—like in-game enemies—pelting him with light crossbow from a distance...

Blade Ward blocked just one strike. Armor of Agathys wasn't impenetrable. Had they broken through, the outcome—his fate—would've been grim.

His first three attributes, especially Constitution, were outrageously low. Without spell protections, a single solid hit might've dropped him.

The more he analyzed the fight, the more his stomach twisted.

And when Twin Moons Night came, with its monster uprising? Who knew what fresh horrors awaited.

Boosting his combat strength wasn't just wise—it was urgent.

Besides, after purifying Ruth that night, he'd gain another windfall of Purification Points. He wouldn't be lacking in the future.

So—time to level up!

Resolved, he reached out and tapped the system panel.

Instantly, a dense purification white light enveloped his body. Boundless magic power, and something even greater, surged into his veins, weaving into new strength...

Moments later, the light faded. Charles, brimming with anticipation, checked his attributes panel—

And immediately deflated.

That's it?

With his warlock level now at 2, his Spell Slots increased to 6—on par with a standard mage.

He'd also gained a new class feature: Eldritch Invocations.

But...

Eyes of the Rune Keeper: You can read all writing.

That was the entire description. Nothing more.

Charles nearly wept.

A non-combat utility ability?

Three hundred Purification Points spent, and his combat strength...

Well, it wasn't zero improvement. But barely noticeable.

Sure, the two extra Spell Slots meant he could now cast three 1st-level spells per encounter instead of two—a modest boost.

But the real prize of leveling up was supposed to be Eldritch Invocations!

And this was what he got?

What he desperately needed were invocations like Agonizing Blast—drastically enhancing his Eldritch Blast cantrip's damage—or Fiendish Vigor, allowing him to infinitely cast False Life for constant self-protection.

Anything but this purely narrative, zero-combat-value ribbon ability!

Damn you, system!

Give me back my 300 Purification Points! I should've invested in attributes instead!

With a drawn-out sigh, Charles glared at his remaining 550 Purification Points, his expression twisting in frustration.

Leveling from 2 to 3 required exactly 600 points. He was fifty short...

Whatever. He'd have needed to reach level 2 eventually. Two extra Spell Slots were better than nothing.

Steeling himself, he massaged his temples, stood up to stretch, and prepared to resume studying.

But then—

The scriptorium door swung open violently.

Assuming it was Hattie, he turned toward the doorway—only to freeze.

There stood Sophia, the raven-haired, dark-eyed memory witch, pausing mid-step as her striking eyes locked onto him.

Charles' heart leapt to his throat, panic surging through him.

Why is she here?!

Damn it! Didn't they say witches barely visit the scriptorium? When I first came here, the place was covered in dust!

And now this witch barges in out of nowhere!

Fury and dread warred within him. The situation felt utterly unacceptable—like playing Resident Evil, safely organizing items in a safe room, only for Tyrant to kick down the door and charge at you.

How is this fair?!

A thousand curses burned in his mind, yet he remained oblivious to one critical fact:

Sophia had come specifically for him.

Something felt wrong to Sophia. Terribly wrong.

Though Charles and Hattie had tried maintaining distance that morning, their countless intimate encounters had forged an unbreakable bond.

Certain habits had become instinctual—the effortless closeness between them, Hattie's subtle deference to Charles...

Their act might fool most witches—like Ruth and the others—who cared only for souls, not human behavior.

But to a Memory Witch like Sophia, attuned to every nuance, their performance rang hollow.

She couldn't pinpoint the exact truth, but the dissonance screamed at her.

These two are hiding something.

And so, suspicion festering, Sophia had watched. And waited.

