

DOROTHY'S FORBIDDEN GRIMOIRE

Chapter 14: Departure

The night recedes, and daylight arrives.

By noon, the town of Vulcan, a bustling transportation hub, comes alive. On the wide, compacted dirt streets, carriages of all kinds race by—some carrying goods, others passengers—filling the town with an unrelenting energy. The spinning wheels kick up clouds of dust that hang thick in the air, while long-distance carriages stop to rest and resupply in the town.

In a private room by the window on the top floor of a three-story restaurant at the crossroads, Gregor is enjoying a meal. He is dressed in a white shirt, gray-black jacket, and matching trousers, a modest outfit that gives him the appearance of an ordinary young man from a well-off family. No one would suspect that he is the leader of a hunter squad from the Serenity Bureau.

Using a knife and fork to cut into his steak, Gregor glances through the window at the busy crossroads below. Several robust laborers are loading wooden crates of various sizes onto a carriage, directed by a short, hooded man who appears to be their boss.

“Hey, Gregor, news from the Bureau. That guy we took down last night was Albert Mill, a butcher from Oil Channel Alley. According to the report, the second squad raided his house this morning and found three human skeletons in a hidden room—one of which hadn’t even been fully consumed. People closely associated with him have already been detained,” said a woman sitting across from him.

She is dressed in a gray dress with lace trim on the sleeves, her light blonde hair falling in soft curls to her shoulders. As she spoke, she was chewing on a piece of bread while holding a long strip of telegraph code, translating it as she went along. Her words brought Gregor’s attention back into the room.

“They only found a few skeletons?” Gregor asked.

“Yep, at least that’s what the telegram says. They also discovered an altar linked to the ‘Chalice’ concept, but it had already been destroyed. The house was ransacked, and any useful clues might have been wiped out beforehand,” she replied, setting the telegraph strip aside and focusing on her bread.

Gregor rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“The Crimson Eucharist people sure move fast...”

“Mm-hmm,” she mumbled through a mouthful of bread.

“They’re always quick to act. Just when we manage to catch someone more significant than a pawn—a so-called ‘apprentice’—the trail goes cold again. It’s really something.”

Gregor fell silent at her words, lost in thought. After a moment, he spoke again.

“So, all we’ve achieved in this operation is taking out a ‘Chalice’ apprentice? Nothing else?”

“Not just nothing else. This whole thing has become even murkier, Captain,” the woman, Elena, replied bluntly.

“Indeed, murkier... especially because of that letter,” Gregor muttered, frowning.

Elena set her bread aside and donned a pair of white gloves from her bag. She then pulled out an envelope, carefully opened it, and began reading portions of the letter.

“A word of caution: it seems we are being watched. It is not the Serenity Bureau nor the Church. The origins and intentions of the party are unclear for now, but their methods are highly peculiar and extremely dangerous. This is the reason for our sudden change in plans...”

After reading, Elena looked up, her gaze sharp as she turned toward Gregor.

“So... who’s been watching Albert and the others?”

“No idea,” Gregor admitted.

“But based on the letter, whoever is targeting them is incredibly dangerous. I suspect the corpse that delivered the letter to the police station was killed by this mysterious party.”

Gregor sipped his wine as he spoke, analyzing the situation. Elena nodded in agreement.

“That makes sense. We examined the body earlier, and there were indeed traces of spiritual energy left behind. It’s clear the individual was affected by mystical forces. However, because of that, determining the time and cause of death has become nearly impossible.”

“In any case, it’s likely that he died due to some supernatural power. He might’ve been targeted by this mysterious entity while delivering the letter, tried to seek refuge at the police station, but was killed in a bizarre manner,” Gregor concluded.

“Or,” Elena interjected with a raised brow, “it’s also possible that the mysterious party manipulated the letter carrier and deliberately made him die at the station.”

“Deliberately made him die there... Why?” Gregor asked, perplexed.

“To ensure the police would notify us and have us deal with Albert and his associates,” Elena explained.

“Us...” Gregor frowned, pondering her words. After a moment of silence, he spoke again.

“This mysterious party wants us to clash with the Crimson Eucharist. But for what purpose?”

“It’s not entirely clear yet. The most plausible assumption is that the mysterious party may be at odds with the Crimson Eucharist. By providing us with clues, they likely intended for us to use Albert as a starting point to target the Eucharist. Of course, there could also be other reasons. For now, we have far too little information on this mysterious party to draw any reliable conclusions,” Elena analyzed.

After taking a sip of tea, she continued.

“And then there’s the letter’s recipient, Edrick... We’ve already investigated him. That guy’s a local thug here in Vulcan. When we went to his house this morning, we found a pile of specially treated corpses. It’s confirmed that he had contact with the realm of beyond and with the Crimson Eucharist.”

“Indeed. Edrick himself is currently missing. Based on past experience, he’s probably already dead, and it’s highly likely that the mysterious party was behind it,” Gregor added, exhaling deeply before speaking again.

“Hidden actions, bizarre methods, brutal tendencies, and motives shrouded in mystery... It seems we’re dealing with another individual—or perhaps a group—that we must take seriously.”

Elena paused upon hearing Gregor’s words, then added, “Perhaps it’s not an individual, but a group. In Igwynt County, without any backing, no single person would dare provoke the Crimson Eucharist.”

Gregor was momentarily startled by her analysis. With a hint of disbelief, he asked, “A group... Are you saying...”

“Yes,” Elena replied.

“Perhaps a new clandestine society has emerged in Igwynt—whether they’re outsiders or a homegrown group doesn’t matter.”

“A new clandestine society... If that’s true, then this is a serious matter. We’ll need to report the details to the director immediately,” Gregor said, his expression turning solemn.

Elena nodded in agreement.

“I’ve already prepared the report. We can hand it directly to the director when we return.”

“A report? Ha... I have to hand it to you, Elena. You’re far more meticulous and sharp-minded than I am. Without you, it seems I’d be a terrible captain,” Gregor remarked with self-deprecating humor.

Elena smiled and replied, “It’s just a matter of division of duties. In our team, your role, Captain Gregor, is to ensure we have sufficient firepower.”

“Firepower? I can provide them as much as you need,” Gregor said with a grin.

After taking another sip of wine, he glanced back out the window. The wooden crates by the roadside had all been loaded onto the carriage, and the short, hooded figure seemed to be giving the carriage driver final instructions.

“Such a short person... perhaps they’re disabled? And still out here working—it’s not an easy life,” Gregor mused silently. He then drew the curtains and focused on finishing his lunch, choosing to ignore the scene outside.

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“All right, the goods are fully loaded, and the payment has been settled. I’ll leave it in your hands,” said Dorothy, a hooded and cloaked figure, as she gave instructions to the carriage driver at the bustling crossroads.

The dark-skinned carriage driver smiled and responded, “Understood, ma’am. I’ll make sure all your goods are safely delivered to the city!”

With that, the driver began to steer the carriage forward. Watching her “cargo” being transported away, Dorothy’s lips curled into a faint smile.

“Well then, time to find myself a nice, comfortable passenger carriage to hit the road~”