

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 31 : Director of the Inquisition - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 31 : Director of the Inquisition

Chapter 31: Director of the Inquisition

Ten days later, at the Inquisition.

Leon arrived at the duty room assigned to his team as usual and exchanged greetings with his colleagues.

The Mana business he had been secretly running was steadily improving.

In less than half a year, he had already accumulated a fortune of over a hundred thousand, far more than the total salary he had earned in two years of working at the Inquisition.

Even so, he still could not resign from this grueling job that ran year-round and occasionally required overtime.

Now that he was engaged in illegal business, the identity of an Inquisitor had become even more important to him.

It was a protective umbrella over his head, and also the basis on which he had claimed he could provide protection for Rena.

As an Inquisitor, he could promptly learn about the Inquisition's movements and internal intelligence.

For example, he and Rena were currently raising Magical Beasts in the Labyrinth.

If the Inquisition were to notice something amiss, they could enter the Labyrinth to conduct a search at any time.

Only by knowing in advance could he let Rena escape before the search and eliminate the evidence inside the Labyrinth.

Besides that, if things later became entangled with underworld conflicts, even though he was merely a low-ranking Inquisitor, he could still use the clues he reported to steer the Inquisition's power toward dealing with hostile underworld forces.

After exchanging pleasantries, they immediately started chatting idly.

The topics were basically unrelated to work—just casual banter.

The captain had not yet arrived to assign tasks, and this was precisely the best time to slack off.

The meager wages and benefits issued by the Church were nowhere near enough to make them risk their lives, or even to give them much motivation to work conscientiously.

However, good times of slacking off were always short-lived.

Just as they were laughing and talking, the captain walked in with a stern expression.

Everyone immediately stopped joking and greeted the captain one after another:

“Yo, Captain.”

“Morning, Captain.”

“Where’s the salute? Since when did you all have no discipline at all!?” the captain suddenly glared at them.

“I could hear your laughter from far away. Do you think this is an amusement park?”

Everyone looked at one another.

The captain was usually quite easygoing and not this rigid.

At this moment, Leon and another team member noticed that the captain was standing at attention where he spoke, while frantically signaling at them with his eyes.

They quickly nudged the colleagues beside them with their elbows as a reminder.

One by one, the team members reacted, swiftly forming up in front of the captain in the usual formation for训话, and saluted him together.

“If I hear you chatting about things unrelated to work inside the Inquisition again, I’ll have him go clean the toilets here. Understood?” the captain warned sternly.

“Understood, Captain!” everyone replied in unison.

Just then, a burly middle-aged man with his hands clasped behind his back appeared at the entrance of the duty room.

His square face was expressionless, with a meticulously trimmed mustache.

He wore a dark blue Inquisitor uniform, and a silver Church emblem was pinned directly to his chest.

The moment they saw this man, everyone present—including Leon—felt a chill in their hearts and immediately understood the captain’s earlier reactions upon entering the duty room.

Director of the Inquisition, Caron Eso!

“All personnel, attention, salute!” the captain turned toward the doorway and shouted, leading the entire team in saluting the director.

Then they shouted in unison, “We salute you, sir!”

“Mm.” In response to his subordinates’ salute, Caron merely gave a brief sound through his nose.

His gaze did not linger on the ordinary team members, but instead pointed at the captain as he left behind a single remark: “Hurry up!”

After saying that, he walked past the entrance of the duty room, his footsteps gradually fading into the distance.

Someone immediately let out a sigh of relief, only to be glared at by the captain.

“Everyone, put on your uniforms properly and assemble in the conference room. The director is holding a major case meeting,” the captain said seriously.

Leon finally understood why the director, who usually stayed in his office, had passed by the duty room on the first floor—it was because there was going to be a meeting.

However, according to Leon’s experience, when holding case discussions in the past, it was usually the deputy director who assigned a case to a specific team, and then that team’s captain would lead and host the meeting to formulate an investigation plan.

The deputy director might sit in, but most of the time he did not.

As for Director Caron, Leon had never seen him personally participate in case investigations, let alone preside over a meeting.

Most of the time, the director only appeared before the assembled personnel to give drowsy speeches during collective admonitions or annual summaries.

Sensing this abnormality, Leon quietly asked the captain, “Captain, is the director presiding over the meeting today?”

“Don’t worry about that. Move quickly,” the captain urged.

Soon, everyone had changed into their uniforms and followed the captain to the conference room.

By then, the room was already somewhat filled with smoke.

Director Caron, who had arrived earlier, had lit his pipe and was steadily puffing away.

“Damn it, smoking indoors without even opening the windows?” Leon glanced at the tightly shut windows behind Director Caron and cursed inwardly.

But no one present raised this issue with the director.

Of course, most people did not actually have any objections.

In this era, not many people knew how harmful smoking was to one’s health, and some even regarded tobacco as medicine.

Some in the team had a smoking addiction but could only afford low-quality tobacco due to their meager wages.

Seeing Director Caron smoke good tobacco, they instead began taking deep breaths—secondhand smoke was still smoke to them.

“Is this how you usually slack off downstairs?” Director Caron’s first sentence made everyone present break out in a cold sweat.

It seemed the director had no intention of letting go of what had just happened.

“Once you come in here and work for the Church, you should do it properly. As Inquisitors who urge the populace to revere the Church, lacking reverence for the Church yourselves won’t do,” Director Caron said unhurriedly while smoking his pipe.

“Team Three will each have one Thaler deducted this month.”

As soon as those words came out, everyone began cursing the bastard in their hearts.

“Sir, I guarantee this won’t happen again. Please...” the captain tried to plead with the director.

One Thaler was also quite painful for the team members.

“You want to interrupt a decision I’ve made? What, thinking of sitting in my position?” Director Caron swept a glance at the captain.

“N-no...” The captain was at a loss.

“Heh, just joking. You’re just too serious,” the director said with a chuckle, pointing at the captain.

He then quickly withdrew his smile.

“But the fine isn’t a joke. You need to be taught a lesson. Rules are rules!”

He spoke in a high-sounding manner, but everyone present knew clearly that there was no such fine stipulated in the Inquisition’s regulations.

This was merely Director Caron’s unilateral decision within the Inquisition.

As for whose pocket the deducted one Thaler per person would end up in—well, that was really hard to guess.

“All right, long story short. Yesterday I was called to the prefecture for a meeting. Colleagues from the Mister District told me that their informants discovered a new batch of Magical Potions appearing on the market.”

As Director Caron spoke, he took out a small bottle of potion that glimmered with an orange-red glow and placed it on the table for everyone to see.

“This is the sample. The performance of these Magical Potions far exceeds what was previously on the market. After their people analyzed and reverse-engineered them, they found that the activator used in these Magical Potions has a purity close to eighty percent.”

Hearing this, Leon’s heart instinctively tightened.

“And there are reports that...” The director tapped the table with his finger and continued, “the Mana used as the activator was circulated from here to over there.”

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 32 : A Big Fish Arrived - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 32 : A Big Fish Arrived

Chapter 32: A Big Fish Arrived

“So fast?”

That was Leon’s first reaction.

He had long expected that the Inquisition would eventually discover the Mana he was selling on the market, but being exposed this quickly was still far beyond his expectations.

Ten days—just ten days—and the Church forces of South Harbor County had already noticed that higher-purity Mana products had appeared on the market.

They immediately began focusing their investigation and had even roughly grasped the flow of the Mana.

He had originally thought that it would take at least until his next batch of goods entered the market before it drew the Church's attention.

Judging from Leon's experience of working within the local Inquisition, this efficiency was extremely abnormal.

Although it was possible that the Inquisition in Caster Town was simply more diligent than usual, and Caron's sudden change in attitude might have been because he cared about a new large-scale Mana transaction in his jurisdiction that he had not yet grasped and wanted to identify it quickly for profit, the fact that both sides were coordinating and tightening their efforts at the same time felt distinctly suspicious.

Caron had mentioned earlier that he was heading to the county for a meeting—could it be specifically for this matter?

It was only ten grams of Mana with seventy-eight percent purity, yet it had alarmed the Church's law enforcement forces across the entire county? That was far too exaggerated.

The transaction value of this batch of Mana was only two to three hundred thousand at most, merely a small ripple among the black money circulating in the underground market of South Harbor County.

Mana with seventy-eight percent purity could at most be considered high-end goods and was indeed rare in Hamel Town.

But looking across the entire eastern part of the Empire, it was hardly that unusual.

In the major eastern cities, Mana trades of around eighty percent purity were often found—mostly goods belonging to the Earl...

At this thought, Leon's heart jolted.

The Earl? Could this be related to the Earl's forces expanding into South Harbor County?

“If the intelligence provided by the informants over there is accurate, then it’s very possible that a big fish has come into our territory.

“So, all of you, stay sharp. You’ve got work to do next. Go out and round up the petty thieves you know on your streets, and those ‘distributors’ we’ve arrested before.

Question them properly.

“Recently, we may also hold joint investigation meetings with people from other Inquisitions. Don’t let it come to that and have us be the only ones who can’t produce a single useful piece of intelligence.”

Caron continued issuing instructions to those below.

At that moment, the captain suddenly raised his hand to speak.

“Director, could it be that a local brought in goods from outside South Harbor County? For example, Helenburg to the north—that place has always circulated the Earl’s goods.”

Leon immediately focused all his attention.

He had just been considering this possibility, and the captain brought it up at exactly the right time.

Perhaps those above had also noticed that the Earl’s forces were expanding into South Harbor County, and were worried that this newly appeared batch of goods was the Earl quietly using his own supply to enter the market, which was why they were taking it so seriously.

This situation was relatively favorable for Leon.

If the South Harbor County Inquisition investigated toward the direction of external Earl forces, he would be much safer.

However, after hearing this, Caron immediately shook his finger.

“No.

It’s not coming in from outside—at least, it won’t be the Earl’s goods.”

Leon felt puzzled.

The fact that he had produced high-purity Mana was purely an accident.

For such Mana to be produced within Hamel Town was a low-probability event.

Normally, people would first suspect external inflow, yet Caron bit down firmly on the conclusion that this matter had nothing to do with the Earl.

“May I ask what basis there is for that?” the captain asked.

Caron did not answer immediately.

Instead, he clenched his pipe between his teeth and puffed out smoke, raising his eyebrows as he stared meaningfully at the captain, as if asking in return, Are you questioning what I said?

The captain’s expression immediately turned uneasy.

Just as he was about to defend himself, Caron removed the pipe and continued in a casual tone:

“It’s intelligence provided by the people in Caster Town.

Their information is quite reliable.

You lot should strive to be as capable as they are, so I can save some face the next time I go to a county meeting!”

“Yes, sir!” everyone responded in unison.

Leon echoed along while constantly thinking to himself.

Against the backdrop of the Earl’s forces initiating a territorial struggle with local powers, he had just begun supplying goods to the local factions, and the Church’s forces reacted with astonishing speed to trace the new source of goods and lock onto the local powers with unbelievable precision.

It was as if... they were deliberately helping the Earl’s forces expand.

At this thought, Leon suddenly felt a chill crawl up his spine.

Could it be that the Earl’s influence could directly affect the Inquisition, driving local Church forces to put pressure on local factions?

He had heard that “the Earl” was all-powerful, someone even the central Inquisition could not deal with.

But he had never imagined that the other party’s influence could go so far as to command the Inquisition itself—like a criminal syndicate ordering the police to eliminate its competitors!

After that, no one raised any further questions.

Caron gave a few brief additional instructions and then announced the meeting's dismissal.

Everyone felt a sense of relief and prepared to leave the conference room.

Leon, burdened with worries, also prepared to follow them out.

At that moment, the captain lightly coughed and leaned close to Leon, whispering, "Stay for a moment.

The director has something to say to you."

Leon's heart jolted.

He instinctively turned his head to look at Director Caron Eso, who was still seated at the far end of the table.

Caron continued to hold his pipe, casually sizing him up.

Cold sweat instantly broke out on Leon's back.

The director had just announced in the meeting that they would investigate the batch of goods that had flowed into the black market, and now he was keeping Leon behind—could it be that suspicion had already fallen on him?

The old shop owner's face immediately flashed through Leon's mind.

Could that man have sold him out?

After the other team members left the conference room, the captain closed the door.

Leon stood in place, facing Director Caron Eso across the room, and spoke in as calm a tone as possible:

"Do you have any instructions, sir?"

"Leon Set, a low-ranking First-Rank Inquisitor who joined two years ago..." the director said as he removed his pipe and pointed at the captain beside him.

"I heard Martin say you ran an errand for him?"

Leon reacted quickly.

This was referring to the matter from over four months ago, when he had gone to the junk shop in place of the captain.

Leon glanced sideways at the captain standing at attention nearby.

The captain gave him a barely perceptible nod.

“Yes, sir,” Leon replied.

His emotions settled slightly.

Director Caron was mentioning that the captain had brought it up, not that shop owner.

At the very least, this meant the shop owner had not reported anything to Caron.

“There may be people from other Inquisitions coming soon, and perhaps even people from above for an inspection.

You should understand what can be said and what cannot be said, right?” Director Caron stared at Leon as he warned him.

Hearing this, the weight on Leon’s heart finally lifted.

He had handled goods that Caron had embezzled, and it was only because inspectors from above might be coming that Caron was specially warning him—four months later—to keep his mouth shut.

Otherwise, Caron would not even care about a small fry like him.

“I completely understand what you mean.

That day, I was on normal duty the entire time, with nothing out of the ordinary,” Leon answered seriously.

“Very good.

You may go.” Director Caron waved his hand.

“Yes, sir.” Leon felt as if he had been pardoned.

He saluted and left the conference room.

The captain then also prepared to take his leave.

“Then, Director, I’ll return to work as well.”

“Mm.

Martin, make sure you investigate that case I mentioned properly, understand? Treat it as the focus of your recent work.” Director Caron instructed the repeatedly nodding captain.

He then picked up the Mana potion bottle and examined it, snorting softly through his nose.

“My territory, and there’s a transaction I haven’t grasped?”

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 33 : A Fairy Tale’s Happy Ending - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 33 : A Fairy Tale’s Happy Ending

Chapter 33: A Fairy Tale’s Happy Ending

That night, Leon once again appeared in front of the Old Junk Shop in Snake Mouth Alley.

After making sure he was not being followed, he pushed open the shop door, which was still lit inside.

Prompted by the ringing bell, the shop owner looked up at him, a hint of surprise crossing his face.

“You came earlier than expected. Are you in that much of a hurry to use the item?”

The owner got up and went to the door, checked the small window, locked it, then turned back behind the counter.

“But fortunately, what you wanted arrived quite early.”

As he spoke, he took out a quartz test tube filled with a purple liquid and placed it on the balance scale.

On the other side of the scale, he put an empty test tube of the same specifications, then began adding weights to measure it.

“A bit over seven grams. Let’s count it as thirty-five thousand.”

The owner looked at Leon.

“Oh right, do you want to take a bit first to verify the goods? But I should remind you—this thing was extracted and stored for a long time. Its toxicity isn’t that strong anymore. You’ll need to activate it with a little Mana for it to become a potent poison.”

“I’ll just take it back and check it myself.”

Leon took the reagent, carefully examined the seal, and only then put it away with caution.

He then counted out the money and handed it to the owner.

“Thank you for your patronage!” The owner smiled as he put the money away, then noticed that Leon was still standing there and hadn’t left.

He asked, “Is there something else?”

“Actually, I didn’t come this time just to pick up the goods. There’s something I need to tell you.” Leon looked the owner straight in the eyes.

“The Inquisition has already started investigating our supply source...”

He briefly explained to the old shop owner the situation he had learned about from the Inquisition.

“So fast?”

The old shop owner’s brows furrowed tightly before Leon had even finished listening, his reaction much the same as Leon’s had been when he first heard it.

“Caron—or rather, the entire South Harbor County Inquisition—has bitten down hard on the idea that this isn’t the Earl’s goods. They don’t have even the slightest doubt and have directly concluded that the source came from this side.

“How much do you know about the Earl’s side? Do they really have that much power, enough to put pressure on the entire South Harbor County Inquisition?” Leon asked the old shop owner.

He hadn’t come just to issue a warning—he also wanted to exchange information.

As far as underworld news went, the other party was definitely better informed than he was.

“I don’t know that much about the Earl either. There are rumors that he’s actually a titled lord from the eastern regions. There are also rumors that he runs a multinational

merchant consortium, and some even say he once held a position in the Church. If even one of those rumors is true, then he should be able to pull that off," the old shop owner said, folding his arms.

"Sounds like you don't have much chance on your side," Leon said.

"What, young man, are you thinking of defecting to the Earl?" the old shop owner teased.

"If there's a chance." Leon shrugged.

"From the sound of it, supplying him means you don't have to worry about getting caught by the Church at all. Supplying you, on the other hand—only ten days have passed and the Church has already sniffed us out."

"Heh, don't even think about it. My superiors wouldn't rashly trust a stranger, and the Earl's side would be even more cautious when seeking partners. Not to mention that their operations are already complete, and they can continuously produce goods with purity even higher than yours. They don't need an extra supplier like you at all.

"My guess is they're already looking for you, the local source. Exposing yourself proactively would be no different from suicide. Besides, in our line of work, being a fence-sitter is a big taboo. Rats who sell out others usually die the ugliest deaths," the old shop owner said earnestly.

"I'm just saying it out loud. Things are already this bad—can't I complain a little?" Leon shrugged.

"Anyway, the Inquisition has already started investigating in Hamel Town. Do you have any countermeasures?"

"Do we really need any countermeasures? The dealings here are just between you and me. Caron needs me to launder the goods, and you yourself are an Inquisitor. Just like you said before, young man—you mind your mouth, I mind mine, and we'll both be safe."

The shop owner spoke indifferently, then added, "Oh right, if you've got other people under you, remember to keep your people in line too."

"You'd better keep your people—and your mouth—in line as well," Leon replied, staring at him.

"But judging by this trend, it's probably only a matter of time before South Harbor County falls under the Earl's control."

The old shop owner spoke meaningfully.

“Young man, if you want to make money, you have to do it early. While goods can still be moved out from here, we’d best sell as much as we can!”

He tried to persuade Leon to supply faster and in larger quantities, so he himself could make as much money as possible.

“Are my goods selling well?” Leon asked.

“Extremely well. Products made from that batch of Mana you provided have left customers more satisfied than ever before. My upstream contact is already impatiently waiting for the next batch of Fenrir’s goods. You should get as much as you can. Soon enough, you’ll make a name for yourself in this line of work.” The shop owner grinned broadly.

“I will—but I don’t want to make any kind of name for myself,” Leon replied.

“Oh right, if you need anything or run into any trouble... I mean the kind that doesn’t directly involve the Church—you can come to me anytime. I have a bit of a network in the local underworld,” the shop owner said.

“Then I’ll thank you in advance.”

With that, Leon left the shop carrying the goods.

The situation could hardly be called optimistic now.

The Inquisition was investigating the source of their batch of goods, and the Earl’s forces were ready at any time to replace the local powers.

Only after entering this line of work did Leon realize just how intricate and tangled the internal forces were.

As an Inquisitor, he was completely unable to grasp the full picture, and the risks of throwing himself into it were far greater than he had imagined.

But the money he had earned so far was still far from enough.

The business couldn’t stop.

On the contrary, just as the shop owner had said, while the local forces hadn’t yet collapsed, they should make as much money as possible.

Otherwise, once the Earl’s forces took control of South Harbor County, Leon would lose his channel for moving goods.

Thinking about all this, he returned to Melissa’s home.

He quietly unlocked the door with his key, careful not to wake Sally and Melissa in the attic.

However, as soon as he opened the door, he saw a faint candlelight glowing from the room at the very back of the house.

That room had originally been a small living room, and in the past it had been Melissa's bedroom.

Now the bed had been moved up to the attic, and a spinning wheel had been placed inside.

Whenever she had free time at home, Melissa would sit there spinning yarn.

It didn't earn much, but it at least helped cover household expenses.

Leon sighed and walked over, intending to remind Melissa to rest earlier.

Spinning so late for the little money it brought in wouldn't even necessarily cover the cost of the lamp oil.

It would not only damage her eyes, but she could also end up pricked by the spindle.

However, when he stepped into the small candlelit room, what he saw was Sally asleep, slumped over a small table used for tools.

After months of persisting with her medication, Sally could now barely walk.

Though her legs were still not very nimble, she could manage quite a bit of housework and no longer needed to stay bedridden with Melissa constantly caring for her.

"Mrs. Hesh." Leon tried to wake her.

He couldn't let her sleep here all night.

"Ah!"

Sally startled awake at the sound.

When she lifted her face and saw the still-lit lamp, she let out a frustrated sigh—she had actually fallen asleep with the oil lamp still burning.

Not only had she failed to work properly, she had wasted lamp oil for the household.

"I really... how did I fall asleep?" Sally covered her face and sighed deeply, but still turned to thank Leon.

“Thank you for waking me, Mr. Leon.”

“You worked all night?” Leon looked at the thread and yarn wound around the spinning wheel.

“Your body is still weak. You really shouldn’t overexert yourself... Strange, where’s Melissa?”

If Melissa had been home, she definitely wouldn’t have let Sally work in this room so late, let alone let her fall asleep like this.

“Melissa...”

Sally blinked, her still-drowsy mind snapping awake.

“Melissa! Mr. Leon, what time is it now?”

Leon recalled when the bell had rung.

“It’s been past nine for a while.”

“After nine? Melissa still isn’t back?”

Unease immediately appeared on Sally’s face.

She braced herself on the table and struggled to stand, calling into the house, “Melissa? Melissa!”

There was no response from anywhere in the house.

Leon’s brow furrowed as well.

“Melissa hasn’t come back?”

He realized that Sally falling asleep here wasn’t just from working—she had been waiting for Melissa to return and had waited so long that she accidentally fell asleep.

After Sally became able to take care of herself, Melissa hadn’t allowed herself to rest.

She had increased the amount of work she did outside.

Leon knew that in the evenings she now worked as a tavern waitress two streets away, but she would always be back by eight and wouldn’t make her mother worry.

Not being back by this time was a bit abnormal.

“I’ll go look for her...” Sally said, staggering toward the door.

Leon grabbed her at once.

“With your condition, how can you go out? Mrs. Hesh, you stay at home and wait. I’ll go check the tavern!”

“Mr. Leon...”

Sally turned back to look at him, her eyes trembling.

“Please.”

“Wait at home with peace of mind. Melissa might come back at any moment, and someone needs to be here waiting for her. Promise me—don’t go out on your own no matter what!” Leon urged.

Seeing Sally nod and sit back down, Leon finally left the room.

He first checked the hall and the attic to confirm that Melissa wasn’t at home, then quickly left the house and headed straight for the tavern.

Sally sat inside the room, worry written all over her face.

The faint flame of the oil lamp flickered unsteadily.

This room had once been Melissa’s bedroom.

It had once held her bed and wardrobe, as well as a small shelf for books and the cloth dolls she liked—now, anything that could be sold had been sold, and nothing remained.

In a daze, Sally seemed to see the past.

Young Melissa sat on the bed, while Sally herself held a book and sat at the bedside.

Every single day, before sleep, there would always be a story.

Every story had a happy ending, like “The prince defeated the evil witch, rescued the princess from the high tower, and from then on they lived happily ever after.”

Yet outside of fairy tales, happiness vanished in an instant—so fleeting it couldn’t even be grasped—while suffering seemed endless.

“Melissa, please come back soon...”

Sally pressed her still somewhat bony hands together on the table and clasped them tightly, praying with all her strength.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 34 : Conflict in the Tavern - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 34 : Conflict in the Tavern

Chapter 34: Conflict in the Tavern

Hamel Town, Black Rye Tavern.

A little past nine in the evening was the noisiest time in the tavern.

The tables were covered with overturned cups and scattered plates, and the drunken customers shouted loudly, raising their glasses and drinking to their hearts' content.

The large round table in the corner was especially lively.

Five young men each held a mug of alcohol, laughing boisterously.

The man at their head had a scar at the corner of his eye.

He slapped the table as he cheered, while beside him, Melissa held a cup and, with a pained expression, downed an entire glass of grape wine in one go.

That day, just like any other, she had been working the evening shift at the Black Rye Tavern as a waitress carrying trays.

Three hours of night work earned her fifty Fenni, making it one of the better-paying jobs among her various part-time employments.

However, near the end of her shift that night, someone among a group of customers suddenly recognized her.

"Well, well, isn't this little Melissa?"

"Mr. Garcia?" Seeing someone she knew, Melissa was also surprised.

Garcia was a debt collector employed by the wealthy merchant Potter in town.

Potter owned a casino and a pawnshop in Hamel Town.

The pawnshop ran a moneylending business.

Aside from collecting debts for Mr. Potter, Garcia was sometimes responsible for watching over the casino.

And the largest sum of Melissa's debts was precisely the loan issued by Potter's pawnshop—money her father had borrowed back then to operate the theater.

Garcia came to collect debts once every three months and had dealt with Melissa before.

Sally Hesh often reminded Melissa that Potter's debts had to be repaid first, because the methods used by these debt collectors were notorious.

Melissa herself disliked Garcia as well.

Every time he came to her house, the greedy look in his eyes when he stared at her... always sent a chill down her spine.

And now, as Garcia looked at Melissa wearing a waitress's apron, his gaze became even more undisguised.

"Didn't expect such a coincidence. Come, come! Sit down and take a break with us. Have something to eat together." Garcia reached out and grabbed her slender arm, pulling her over to the seat beside him.

"N-no, Mr. Garcia, I still have to work..." Melissa naturally wanted to refuse, but he did not loosen his grip at all.

Instead, he tightened it, making her arm ache with pain.

"I take such good care of you, and you won't give me face? That makes it hard for me in front of my brothers! What's wrong with resting for a bit?"

As Garcia spoke, he shouted toward the middle-aged owner behind the counter.

"Hey, Old Frank, it's fine to let your little girl sit with us for a while, right? Huh?"

Seeing the situation, the middle-aged owner quickly forced a smile and replied, "Haha, of course it's fine, of course it's fine. Melissa, just sit with Mr. Garcia for a while!"

Garcia was a genuine underworld figure.

The owner did not dare provoke people like him—otherwise, his tavern might mysteriously be burned down one day.

Melissa could only sit down at the table helplessly.

After that, Garcia and his lackeys ate, drank, and joked, frequently egging Melissa on to drink with them.

With her limited experience, Melissa could not withstand these men's mix of coaxing and pressure.

After a few drinks, her head began to feel dizzy.

It was long past the time she was supposed to get off work.

Several times she tried to leave, but each time Garcia forcefully pressed her down.

The owner ignored what was happening altogether.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garcia, I really can't drink anymore. I really have to go home..." Melissa tried to stand as she spoke, but the moment she rose, a wave of dizziness hit her and she nearly fell.

"Hey, hey, hey, what's this? You're going to be a buzzkill already?" Garcia grabbed her again.

"Sit for a little longer."

"Please, I really have to go... My mother, she... will worry..." Melissa pleaded haltingly.

Hearing her slurred words, the men at the table burst into laughter.

"Oh, mother... right, right, Mrs. Hesh who's been lying in the attic all this time!" Garcia laughed as if he had just remembered.

"I really miss her days on stage. Melissa, you really look just like her."

After thinking for a moment, he picked up a bottle of strong liquor, poured nearly half a small glass with a glug-glug sound, pushed it in front of Melissa, and said to her,

"How about this— we're about to wrap things up anyway. Drink this last glass and sit with us for ten more minutes. How does that sound?"

With bleary, drunken eyes, Melissa looked at the small half-glass of liquor that did not seem like much, and at the men around her who were jeering.

Under the influence of alcohol, she could barely think anymore, but a primal sense of danger kept warning her that no matter what, she should not drink this glass.

"I'm sorry, I really can't drink anymore..." Melissa refused with all the strength she had left.

“Oh no, Melissa, that really makes me sad.”

Garcia shook his head.

“In a few days it’ll be debt-collection day. Do you know how much you owe? Every time your family scrapes together just the interest, I have to give you several extra days. Have you gathered the money this time?”

“I... I...” Melissa suddenly found herself unable to speak.

“How about this—drink this glass and sit a little longer, and I’ll delay going to your house to collect the debt by one month this time. What do you say?” Garcia coaxed her with a smile.

Melissa stared dizzily at the glass of liquor.

Everything before her eyes seemed to blur into a single mess, and the smiling faces of Garcia and his lackeys became grotesquely twisted.

After a long while, she silently reached her hand toward the glass.

The owner looked away at this scene.

None of the other customers spoke up either.

Everyone knew what kind of end awaited the girl after she was drunk senseless by this group tonight, but here, no one dared provoke Garcia and his men.

At that moment, a figure dashed in from the entrance, weaving between the tables, and rushed to the table.

A hand reached out and grabbed Melissa’s hand just as it was about to touch the glass.

“Melissa, your mother is worried.”

Leon spoke as he pulled the unsteady Melissa up, sweeping his gaze over the others at the table.

“Sorry, gentlemen, she needs to go home!”

With that, he supported Melissa and prepared to lead her out of the tavern.

“Brother Leon?” Melissa raised her head in surprise.

She could not see his face clearly, but she recognized the voice.

“Hey, hey, hey!!” Garcia immediately shouted, raising his hand.

His men reacted quickly and stood up, two of them blocking Leon with unfriendly expressions.

“I say, friend, who are you?” Garcia spread his hands toward Leon with a false smile.

All his men had stood up, yet he himself remained seated.

“You grab our table’s little girl and try to leave—what are you trying to do, hmm?”

Leon looked back and forth at the people present.

From their bearing alone, he realized they were not good sorts.

In the end, his gaze settled on Garcia at the head.

“I live in her house. Her mother asked me to find her and bring her home. Is there a problem?”

Garcia looked at Melissa in surprise.

By instinct, she had already pressed close to Leon’s side, tightly clutching the corner of his clothes.

“Ah... I see. You’re the tenant renting the ground floor of the Hesh house, right? I’ve never met you before.”

Garcia suddenly understood.

In the past, he usually went to Melissa’s house during the day to collect debts, and Leon would be at work at those times.

“If there’s no problem, then please step aside.” Leon glanced at the two men blocking the way.

The two lackeys did not move and instead looked toward Garcia.

Garcia continued to smile at Leon, then tapped the tabletop with his finger.

“Alright, little brother, there’s no need to worry. We all know Ms. Sally and little Melissa. Melissa will just have one more drink with us, and then we’ll send her home. You can go back and tell her mother that. Is that okay?”

As he spoke, he gave a look to the person beside him.

That lackey quietly lifted the hem of his coat toward Leon, revealing part of a Gun grip at his waist, making sure Leon fully understood that they were not ordinary street thugs.

Five against one—if this man dared ruin his fun today, he was going to suffer a bit.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 35 : A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 35 : A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Chapter 35: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Seeing this scene, Leon also realized how thorny the situation was—these people were genuine underworld gangsters.

In fact, among the five present, there was one man who looked somewhat familiar to him, likely someone who had been investigated and registered by the Inquisition before.

The surrounding patrons either watched nervously or with eager interest.

The tense, swords-drawn atmosphere quickly cooled what had been a lively tavern.

Facing pressure from five people, Leon showed no sign of retreat.

He shielded Melissa behind him and replied, “She can't drink anymore.”

Garcia was not particularly surprised by Leon's attitude.

There were always some inexperienced fellows who underestimated how ruthless people like them were, thinking that in broad daylight, they wouldn't dare act rashly.

But in truth, as long as Leon dared to take Melissa outside, even without drawing guns today, they could beat him with fists and feet until he could only crawl out—perhaps limping for the rest of his life.

Afterward, when the sheriff investigated, it would amount to nothing more than an ordinary tavern brawl.

One of his men would step forward to take full responsibility and spend some time in the holding cells.

To them, it was routine.

However, today Garcia didn't need to go that far.

“Heh heh, Melissa didn’t say that, did she, Melissa?”

Garcia sneered, his gaze seeming to pierce through Leon and directly reach Melissa hiding behind him.

“I don’t want to make things ugly. When I come to your house to collect the debt later, I don’t want to smash anything either. Nobody wants that, right?”

Melissa shuddered and, trembling, stepped out from behind Leon.

“Good. Come sit here,” Garcia ordered, pointing to the seat beside him.

Then he looked at Leon, his eyes gradually turning cold.

“As for you, sir, you can see it yourself—this has nothing to do with you anymore. Leave. Don’t test my patience again.”

Melissa fearfully drew her hands to her chest.

She suddenly realized that her choice concerned not only what her family would face afterward, but also Leon’s safety.

Driven by fear, she took a step forward.

At that moment, Leon raised his hand to stop her.

“Oh no, buddy…” Seeing Leon be so tactless, Garcia shook his head and sighed.

He raised his hand, about to signal an attack, and several subordinates cracked their knuckles and stepped forward.

“Don’t! Don’t!” Melissa cried anxiously.

At that moment, Leon suddenly said, “Did you bring a receipt?”

“What?” Garcia froze for a moment.

“You’re here to collect a debt. You should have a receipt, right? How much do they owe this time?” Leon stared at Garcia and asked.

Garcia and his men looked at each other.

Then Garcia suddenly burst into laughter, as if he had heard the funniest joke imaginable.

“Hahahaha—are you planning to pay it for them?”

Melissa also looked at Leon in surprise.

“How much?” Leon simply asked, his tone firm.

The smile on Garcia’s face did not fade.

“I collect once every three months. By the normal schedule, they should be paying twenty-four thousand Fenni every quarter. Do you have it?”

This was the repayment standard—including principal and interest—that Melissa’s father had set when he borrowed money to run the small theater.

But in reality, Sally and Melissa had long since been unable to repay according to that standard.

Each time, they could barely manage to cover the interest and late fees, and sometimes they couldn’t even finish paying that portion.

Garcia quoted this number only to see the other party’s embarrassment.

Ordinary people couldn’t pull out such a sum all at once.

Helping the Hesh mother and daughter repay the debt was not something that could be done without substantial assets.

In his eyes, their fate had already been sealed.

Before long, Mrs. Hesh would die, and their debt would exceed the deadline.

At that point, they could seize the Hesh family’s house.

In fact, they had already taken several row houses in that alley.

The Hesh family’s neighbors had lost their house years ago because they couldn’t repay their debts.

The wealthy merchant Potter wanted that whole plot of land.

As for Melissa, burdened with massive debt and without a home, Garcia would then be able to naturally take her and introduce her to some “good work” to repay the debt.

Many women in the town had fallen into that line of work this way.

Today was an opportunity.

Melissa would end up like that sooner or later anyway.

He might as well enjoy it in advance—maybe it would even help her “wake up” earlier and understand what kind of work was most suitable for repaying debts, saving her a few years of detours...

Bang!

A loud sound interrupted Garcia’s thoughts.

Leon expressionlessly pulled out a rolled piece of parchment and slapped it onto the table, unfolding it in front of everyone.

A Church-issued gold voucher, with a face value of twenty thousand Fenni.

Not long after getting the money from the junk shop, Leon had found ways through other channels to exchange those large-denomination gold vouchers for gold coins and smaller vouchers.

Large vouchers passing through underworld hands were unsafe and not suitable to keep for long.

“Well then, that’s perfect. I won a big sum gambling today—it seems God wanted me to use it here!” Leon said.

Garcia frowned slightly and carefully examined the gold voucher.

As a debt collector, he had handled gold vouchers many times.

This one looked genuine.

Melissa’s eyes widened.

Leon continued, pulling out two Gold Shields and tossing them onto the table, where they clinked loudly.

Together with the gold voucher, it made exactly twenty-four thousand Fenni.

After thinking for a moment, he took out another Silver Wolf and placed it on the table, saying in a slightly gentler tone, “One quarter’s payment, and this as a little compensation for everyone. Is that acceptable?”

Garcia reexamined Leon.

Leon’s attitude had clearly changed.

The look in his eyes toward him seemed more earnest.

Garcia had often seen this expression—those who wanted to smooth things over all wore that face.

He suddenly laughed.

It seemed the Hesh mother and daughter had really run into a great benefactor.

But in the eyes of people like them, a good person was practically synonymous with a soft target.

Twenty thousand plus wasn't a huge sum for someone with stable work and the ability to save, but few were willing to give it away to settle someone else's trouble.

A benefactor who could take out money like this was a fat sheep in his eyes.

Perhaps in the future, he could visit this good sir a bit more often and make good use of that mother-daughter pair to squeeze out some more money.

“Sure thing, buddy,” Garcia raised his eyebrows, smiling meaningfully.

“Since you're so generous, let's just let tonight's matter end here.”

He finally stood up from his seat, reaching across the table toward the gold voucher and coins.

At that moment, Leon spoke: “There's one thing I forgot to mention. I'm not your 'buddy.' I'm an Inquisitor.”

As soon as these words were spoken, Garcia and his companions—who had just relaxed—instinctively stiffened all over.

Garcia's hand reaching for the money froze for a split second.

At the same time, the “fat sheep” in front of him suddenly bared its ferocious fangs!

Just as Garcia was about to raise his head to look at Leon, Leon lightning-fast drew the hand that had silently moved toward his waist.

Suddenly, a Church-issued silver dagger appeared in his grip, and he viciously stabbed it down at Garcia's frozen hand.

Leon used all his strength.

The dagger pierced straight through Garcia's palm and nailed it into the soft oak tabletop.

Caught completely off guard, Garcia let out a miserable scream.

Before he could finish screaming, the flintlock pistol drawn by Leon's other hand was already pressed against his face.

Seeing this, Garcia's subordinates all drew their guns at Leon.

With a gunfight imminent, the tavern instantly erupted into panic.

People screamed—some rushed for the door, others crawled under tables in terror.

“Ah!” Melissa screamed as well, clutching her head and squatting down.

But another, more commanding voice immediately drowned out everyone else's cries:

“Inquisitor! Come on—if you've got the guts, shoot!”

Leon shouted, glaring at the armed men with bloodshot eyes.

Garcia's men looked at each other.

They didn't dare lower their guns, but they could only stand there in a standoff with Leon.

Someone recognized the dagger decorated with the Four-Pointed Star Emblem and sucked in a sharp breath.

They didn't dare act rashly.

For one, their boss was under the other's gun.

For another, killing someone in public was no small trouble—and killing an Inquisitor would be catastrophic!

Garcia also instinctively reached for his own weapon.

Leon gripped the dagger and twisted it slightly, pressing the gun muzzle firmly against Garcia's face as he threatened in a low voice, “Don't move! Raise that hand!”

“Guh!!” The searing pain as the blade cut deeper into the wound made Garcia's whole body shudder.

He immediately gave up on drawing his weapon and raised his hand.

Then Leon released the dagger and pulled out the Four-Pointed Star Emblem from his person, holding it up for everyone to see.

“Come on—let your people shoot!” Leon glared at Garcia viciously.

“I shoot you, they shoot me. In front of all these people, shooting an Inquisitor—openly rebelling against the Church. Come on! Come on!!”

Garcia gasped from the pain.

Only with great difficulty did he squeeze out a sentence through clenched teeth: “When you deal with people... leave some room... there’s no need... to take it this far...”

Whether Inquisitors or guards from the Security Office, they had dealt with both before.

They weren’t truly afraid of law enforcers.

If their criminal dealings were discovered, they would even kill enforcers without hesitation to silence them.

But now, with so many witnesses, killing an Inquisitor in public while exposing their identities was tantamount to openly challenging the Church’s authority.

They would undoubtedly be put on a priority wanted list.

Stirring up such enormous trouble, even the organization backing them would fear being implicated and treat them as expendable—perhaps even worry that if they were captured and talked, they would be internally executed outright!

This Inquisitor had seized precisely this point, daring to draw blade and gun alone against five people.

But would an ordinary person really go this far?

If even one of them lost control, there would be no turning back.

He himself would be riddled with bullets and die on the spot.

Gambling his life like this—people like them, who lived on the edge of a blade, might not even be able to make such a decisive choice!

A madman! This person was completely insane!!

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 36 : The Prince Who Saved the Princess - Read What Witch? A

Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 36 : The Prince Who Saved the Princess

Chapter 36: The Prince Who Saved the Princess

Hearing Garcia's words, Leon let out a soft laugh.

"So now you know to leave yourself a way out?"

Then he swept his gaze over Garcia's men and suddenly added, "You're really not going to shoot?"

Garcia's subordinates were all stunned, not yet fully understanding what that sentence meant.

"Then I won't hold back." Leon nodded slightly, suddenly tightening his grip on the hand holding the badge, swung his fist, and smashed it straight into Garcia's face.

"She's only thirteen! You son of a bitch, you sick pervert!!" Leon roared each word out, launching a series of vicious hook punches at Garcia, each punch landing louder than the last.

One of Garcia's hands was pinned to the table by a dagger, and his head was still being held at gunpoint—he had no way to fight back at all.

Seeing this, his subordinates shouted at Leon in threatening tones, telling him to stop, but Leon seemed to hear nothing.

He threw five consecutive punches, beating Garcia's face into a bloody mess.

"Kh—!" The fists finally stopped, and Garcia at last got a chance to catch his breath.

He lay sprawled over the table, spat a mouthful of blood into his wine glass, then looked up and glared at Leon.

"You don't think about the consequences at all, do you?"

"I'll tell you what consequences are!"

Leon grabbed Garcia by the hair with a cold expression.

"I'll soon know exactly who you are, and the entire Inquisition will soon know about your involvement with me. After that, if anything happens to Melissa, her mother, or their house, I'll make sure you're in serious trouble!"

“And if anything happens to me, the Inquisition will come looking for you. Before you try to scare me, check whether your own ass is clean!!”

He knew very well that in the whole of Hamel Town, no underworld organization dared openly challenge the Security Office or the Inquisition—let alone a few people like these, who clearly weren’t very high-ranking.

The moment they chose to endure things here, Leon had already figured out their bottom line.

Garcia reassessed the crazed Inquisitor in front of him, gently shook his head, and said in a voice only the two of them could hear, “Is there really any need to put on such an act? Being able to pull out that much money means you’re no upright man either. You were eyeing that mother and daughter too, weren’t you?”

This money didn’t necessarily have to be gambling funds.

For an Inquisitor, this amount wasn’t actually that large—as long as he was willing to be corrupt.

Garcia was convinced Leon had to be the sort who abused his authority for personal gain, squeezing oil out of countless people, violent and ruthless to boot.

Though their identities differed, at heart they were the same kind of people.

He didn’t believe someone like that would suddenly act out of kindness.

Leon fell silent for a moment, then replied in the same low voice, “If you know, then stay the hell away from my prey.”

No matter how he explained, the other side wouldn’t believe him anyway, and it would be pointless.

Letting them believe he wasn’t someone to mess with was actually more intimidating.

With that, Leon grabbed the dagger and yanked it out.

Garcia let out a pained groan as he clutched his hand, while the men beside him hurriedly tore pieces of cloth from their clothes to bandage the wound.

“Now take the money—all of it, including the Silver Wolf coin for medical expenses—write up the receipt properly, and get the hell out of here. Until next quarter, I don’t want to see your stupid faces again!”

As Leon spoke, he picked up a large jug of alcohol and rinsed the blood off his hands and the dagger with beer.

“Did you understand?”

Garcia stared at him for a while, then finally nodded in silence.

This time, he didn't dare reach out to take the money himself.

He signaled his subordinates to check the Gold Vouchers and then collect the money.

Another subordinate took out the receipt they carried from the Potter Pawnshop.

Garcia's hand was still bleeding, but he took the pen his subordinate handed him anyway, gritted through the pain, signed the receipt, and finally pressed his bloodstained fingerprint onto it.

He was a registered debt collector under Potter.

Only a receipt signed and fingerprinted by him carried legal effect.

Leon took the receipt and examined it carefully.

After confirming there were no problems, he swept his gaze over Garcia and the others.

Garcia avoided his eyes, said nothing, stood up, and led his men out.

Leon called after him, “Don't forget to pay for your own drinks!”

That Silver Wolf coin Leon had given him was meant as medical expenses from the start, not to buy them alcohol.

Garcia could only comply helplessly.

He took out a Silver Wolf coin, slapped it onto the table, and left the tavern without looking back, his subordinates following close behind.

After the conflict ended, the tavern remained eerily silent.

Everyone left behind looked at Leon with lingering fear, their gazes filled mostly with awe.

Melissa, who had been squatting on the floor clutching her head, finally dared to raise it.

She stared blankly at Leon's back.

She had never seen such a ferocious, wild side of Leon before.

This was on a completely different level from when he had disciplined those two boys earlier—like an enraged male lion, ready at any moment to bite through someone's throat.

At that moment, Leon put away his gun, turned around, and reached out a hand to her.

"It's okay now, Melissa. Shall we go home?"

The lion seemed to shed its beastly hide in an instant, turning back into the gentle Brother Leon she knew so well.

"Mm..." Melissa responded softly and took Leon's hand as she stood up.

"Where's the owner?" Leon suddenly turned his head and called out.

For a brief moment, no one answered.

Leon raised his voice and repeated, "Where's the owner?!"

Only then did the tavern owner, Frank, come over trembling.

He bowed carefully to Leon and asked, "Sir, what are your instructions?"

"Settle all of Melissa's wages. She won't be working here anymore," Leon said calmly.

"Yes, yes, yes!" The owner replied hurriedly, taking out a Thaler Silver Coin from his person and presenting it to Leon with both hands.

"Is this the right amount?" Leon asked Melissa.

"It should really only be fifty Fenni..." Melissa said quietly.

"Well, you stayed so late and even had to drink with customers. This is only right!" the owner said, forcing a smile.

"Fine." Leon took the silver coin directly and glanced at the owner.

"Even though I know you probably couldn't do much anyway, but..."

He suddenly raised his hand and clenched his fist, looking as though he was about to smash it into the owner's face.

"Eek!" The owner shrieked, covering his face and retreating, waving his hands frantically.

"Don't, don't! Let's talk this out! Let's talk this out!!"

In the end, Leon didn't throw the punch.

He lowered his hand and left behind only a cold sentence: "Count yourself lucky nothing happened to Melissa."

With that, he stuffed the silver coin into Melissa's hand and led her toward the door.

Before going out, he cautiously looked around first.

Only after confirming there was no ambush on the street did he take Melissa onto a hired carriage.

The carriage set off, the cabin swaying gently.

Only then did Leon fully calm down and realize that his earlier actions had indeed been somewhat impulsive.

Although the final result was safe and sound, there had been a moment when he hadn't been sure he could control the situation.

If even one hot-headed youth on the other side had snapped and fired a shot, he really would have died there.

If a gunfight had broken out, Melissa would have had little chance of surviving either.

But at that moment, there had been a voice in his heart, screaming incessantly at him not to bow his head to those people—and not to fear them!

The present him had long since touched upon even more forbidden matters and tasted the thrill of high risk and high reward.

Even though he could now reflect on his impulsiveness, that intoxicating sense of victory still lingered in his heart, refusing to fade.

At that point, Melissa, who had been hesitating to speak the whole time, finally opened her mouth.

"Brother Leon, that money of yours was..."

Leon snapped back to reality, realizing that pulling out such a large sum of money really did require an explanation.

Fortunately, his mind worked fast.

“Ah, that. It was actually entrusted to me by Bishop Leona. There’s a total of fifty thousand Fenni. She saw all the hardship you’ve endured and told me to use this money to help you out more.”

He could just have Rena coordinate the story with him later.

“The bishop’s money?” Melissa twisted the hem of her skirt awkwardly.

“We’ve already received such great kindness from her. How can we still use her money? This money...”

Even if they wanted to repay it, their family truly had no way to come up with such a sum.

“She knew you wouldn’t agree, which is why she left it with me. She asked me to tell you that for her, doing good is also a form of cultivation. This is her heartfelt intention—rejecting it would only make her sad,” Leon said.

The carriage soon reached the entrance to their alley.

Leon helped Melissa down and paid the fare.

Holding Melissa’s hand, he hurried toward home while carefully keeping watch of their surroundings.

The chance of those people coming back for revenge was low—but not nonexistent.

“Sorry for quitting your part-time job for you without asking. But that place was really too dangerous. You have no idea how worried your mother was. I was too...” Leon said softly as he walked ahead.

“Mm...” Melissa responded through a sob, sniffing.

“Melissa?” Hearing the tremor in her voice, Leon instinctively stopped and turned around.

Melissa’s shoulders shook as she began to sob uncontrollably.

In the tavern, she had forced all that fear and grievance down into her heart.

Now, feeling truly safe and relaxed, it finally burst forth like a delayed flood.

“Waaahhh!!”

Melissa cried out loud.

Leon was just about to comfort her when she suddenly threw herself hard into his arms, clinging to him tightly, burying her face in his chest as she continued to cry.

Leon was completely caught off guard.

Melissa wasn't just emotionally breaking down—she had also been drinking.

She hugged him so tightly that it almost made it hard for him to breathe.

How could this little girl have so much strength?

"It's okay, it's okay, everything's fine now!" He could only pat her back gently and soothe her, waiting for her emotions to settle.

As Melissa cried, countless memories churned through her mind:

Brother Leon visiting their home to look at the house for the first time, Brother Leon carrying her mother on his back to see the doctor, Brother Leon helping her deal with those two boys who bullied her, and in the tavern, when she had fallen into utter despair, Leon grabbing her hand in time...

Somehow, amid all those memories of Leon, she suddenly recalled a scene from her childhood—lying in bed, listening to her mother tell her stories.

"Mom, the princess has been taken away. Will someone come save her?"

"Yes. Her prince will definitely come to save her."

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 37 : He Was No Stepping Stone - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 37 : He Was No Stepping Stone

Chapter 37: He Was No Stepping Stone

The next day, Leon once again appeared at the Owl Old Junk Shop.

"You asked around about the debt collectors from Potter's Pawnshop?"

The old shopkeeper frowned slightly.

"So the Inquisitor who broke Garcia's arm at the tavern yesterday, beat the five of them until they were vomiting blood and kneeling to beg for mercy, and then made them crawl out of the tavern in a line... that was you?"

“I didn’t go that far!” Leon frowned as well.

It had only been one day—how had the story already spread like this?

“I really don’t understand you. Just yesterday you warned me to act carefully, and that very night you went and provoked people yourself. What are you trying to do?”

The old shopkeeper shook his head at Leon.

“They were the ones who provoked me. From the sound of it, you know that group? So they’re in this line of work too?” Leon asked smoothly.

Garcia’s restrained reaction toward him as an Inquisitor, as well as the familiarity of the men under Garcia, made Leon keenly realize that the crimes these underworld figures were involved in were likely connected to Church regulations.

If they merely engaged in usury, broke a few arms and legs, or forced women into prostitution and pimping, those matters were not under the Church’s jurisdiction.

They would be handled by the Security Office and town guards.

In that case, there would be no reason for them to fear the Inquisition so much.

For the underworld to be involved in something the Church forbade, the only profitable option was smuggling Magical Beast materials.

That also explained why the old shopkeeper could name Garcia—there was a good chance they were colleagues in the underworld.

Following that line of thought further, if Garcia, the underworld thug hired by the wealthy merchant Potter, was involved in Magical Beast smuggling, then Potter’s own businesses were very likely connected to it as well.

“Did you come here specifically to fish for information, or what?” the old shopkeeper asked Leon irritably.

“Didn’t you yourself say yesterday that if I ran into trouble in the underworld, I should come find you? I was just being cautious,” Leon said, spreading his hands.

Although it seemed that he had completely crushed those underworld thugs yesterday and achieved a total victory, there was still no guarantee they wouldn’t seize an opportunity to bite back and take revenge later.

An open spear was easy to dodge; a hidden arrow was hard to guard against.

To be safe, he had chosen to come see the old shopkeeper today.

If the old shopkeeper truly had some connections in the underworld, that would greatly reduce the risk of Leon and Melissa and her daughter suffering retaliation in the future.

“Alright, I understand. I should still thank you for thinking highly of me and being willing to come explain the situation clearly.”

After hearing the entire outline of events, the old shopkeeper nodded calmly.

“Don’t worry. Garcia’s superior is also a steady person and won’t let them act recklessly. The Inquisition is investigating very tightly right now. I’ll also have my people quietly pass along a word. You can go back and live your life in peace.”

“Many thanks.”

Leon nodded in gratitude, but instead of leaving immediately, he stayed where he was and continued looking at the old shopkeeper.

“Is there something else?”

The old shopkeeper sensed that Leon had another purpose.

“I’ve actually been thinking—since the Inquisition is urgently trying to find my goods, can we find someone suitable in the underworld to take the blame and cut off the investigation?” Leon asked.

“The quantity of your goods makes for a serious charge. How many people in the underworld do you think would be willing to shoulder that kind of crime?” the old shopkeeper countered.

“Who says they have to be willing? I could frame them using my goods, then directly arrest them,” Leon suggested.

The people he had in mind were Garcia’s group from yesterday.

If they were involved in Magical Beast trading, he would have the conditions to frame them.

To ensure that those people would never be able to retaliate against him and Melissa, the safest course of action was indeed to send them inside.

At the same time, it would let him lie low himself—killing two birds with one stone.

But after hearing this, the shopkeeper shook his head seriously.

“Don’t mess around. It might work for an ordinary case, but if, as you said, Caron personally stepped in, he would definitely dig to the bottom and trace the source of the

goods. Framing a few petty thieves who can't explain anything is useless. You won't fool him, and doing this might instead make you yourself fall under suspicion!"

"I've never seen Caron Eso dig deeply into any case. Many investigations into Mana trading chains were halted because of his orders. His style is to close cases as quickly as possible. Only if Hamel Town hides filth does he have opportunities to skim profits from it," Leon said.

"He doesn't dig deep because he has a grasp of the transactions behind it. He almost secretly knows the entire trading chain of Hamel Town—except for you! That's why he's definitely trying every possible way to find you now!"

As he said this, the shopkeeper suddenly seemed to realize something and looked at Leon with a grave expression.

"Tell me—do you have some misunderstanding about Caron Eso? How many years have you been in service?"

"Two and a half years." Leon shrugged.

"I've never seen that bastard personally investigate a case."

"Listen carefully, kid. Caron Eso may be a bastard, but he is absolutely not a useless fool! He took part in the Maritime Conquest War and earned his rank from the Church through military merit before taking this post!" the shopkeeper said sternly.

"He actually served in the military?" Leon was somewhat surprised.

This was the first time he had heard of it.

"He was a lieutenant officer. It's said he was already quite formidable back then, and after becoming a Transcendent, it became even more exaggerated. Although not many people in the underworld still remember it, he truly once charged alone into a small house defended by six people, under a volley of gunfire. He killed two, crippled the remaining four, and only suffered minor flesh wounds himself," the shopkeeper said.

"Are you sure that's not just hearsay?" Leon found it hard to believe for a moment.

After all, even his own deeds had spread overnight into a story of him fighting five men alone.

"What if I told you I saw it with my own eyes? I personally saw him get shot and only have his skin broken a little," the shopkeeper said seriously.

"Impervious to blades and bullets... a recipient of blessings from the Church of the God of War?" Leon finally took the shopkeeper's words seriously.

Among the Four Gods, the Church of the God of War was said to grant blessings to Fully Appointed Knights and bishops that could turn an ordinary person as strong and powerful as a brown bear or lion and tiger.

Some could even become impervious to blades and bullets without wearing armor.

“Perhaps. And it’s not just strength—his sense for tracking people like us is also extremely sharp. You think he can’t investigate cases? You can’t even imagine how many people he caught when he was young! Use your brain properly. How could someone who can single-handedly dominate both the underworld and the legitimate side here be a piece of trash? Underestimate him, and you will definitely fall flat on your face!” the shopkeeper warned.

Leon was left speechless.

He had to admit that what the shopkeeper said was not without reason.

He really had underestimated Director Caron somewhat.

In his two years at the Inquisition, he had only seen the Director bully others by relying on his authority and had never seen him do any real work.

But thinking carefully, it became clear that the premise for this shopkeeper to fence goods for Caron was that Caron had the ability to control him and, to a certain extent, understand the trading chain behind him.

Caron loafed about in the Inquisition because he firmly controlled both the black and white sides of this small town.

A male lion that ruled a pride was always lazy as well—that was because it had the ability to control its territory and its pride.

It rarely hunted, instead snatching prey painstakingly brought down by other lions and eating its fill.

But when an external threat appeared in its territory, the lion king would put away its usual laziness and reveal its most ferocious and violent side.

“Sounds like you’ve suffered at his hands before,” Leon stared at the shopkeeper.

“You wouldn’t stumble twice, would you?”

“Worry about yourself, kid. Don’t let him catch any flaws,” the shopkeeper snorted.

“The feeling’s mutual.” After saying this, Leon took his leave.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 38 : Changing Direction - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 38 : Changing Direction

Chapter 38: Changing Direction

Two months later, in the Labyrinth Workshop.

Rena wore a mask and gloves at the workbench, pinning down a mouse for observation.

She used a long needle to touch the left side of the mouse's body.

The mouse struggled nonstop, clearly in great pain, yet the left side of its body remained completely immobile, shriveled and stiff like a dried corpse.

"This medicine's effect still isn't ideal."

Rena sighed and put down the experimental tools in her hands.

"I didn't think it would be that simple either." Leon, who had been standing to the side with his arms crossed and watching, shrugged.

Rena was currently researching the toxic mechanism of Cockatrice venom, hoping to concoct a special medicine that could cure the aftereffects of Leon's injury.

The Cockatrice Beast was a low-level Magical Beast in the labyrinth and not particularly rare.

It resembled a rooster in shape but had no feathers, instead possessing lizard-like scales and bat-like membranous wings.

At the end of its tail grew the head of a venomous snake.

The Cockatrice was small in size and not very strong, but it was extremely agile.

Both of its heads—front and back—were poisonous.

Anyone pecked by it or bitten by its tail would experience a coagulation phenomenon in their bodily tissues, which would gradually harden like stone until complete necrosis.

If Church holy water was used in time, the petrification symptoms could be alleviated, but the aftereffects were unavoidable.

“The toxic mechanism of the Cockatrice is rather complex. Compared to poison, it’s actually more like a curse,” Rena analyzed.

“A curse?” Leon asked.

“Many Magical Beast poisons work like this. Once Mana is added to activate them, their toxicity increases—the higher the Mana purity, the stronger the poison. Ordinary poisons lose their activity once heated to a certain degree or treated with strong acids or alkalis, but these poisons are unaffected. It seems that using ordinary antidotal herbs won’t have any obvious effect. Maybe we need to look for another research direction,” Rena explained.

“What direction?” Leon asked.

“The Cockatrice has natural enemies in the labyrinth. Some creatures aren’t afraid of its poison. Of course, I’m not talking about cases like Slimes, where their physiological structures are completely different, but true immunity to Cockatrice venom—like Demonic Wolves. If we could get Demonic Wolf blood...”

Rena spoke while thinking.

Leon had also heard of Demonic Wolves in the labyrinth.

These creatures were larger than ordinary wolves, had tough bodies, could heal quickly after being injured, and were immune to toxins.

Demonic Wolves hunted in packs and could prey on large animals and Magical Beasts.

They were extremely hostile toward humans, but it was said that Witches could tame them as mounts.

“Just the Cockatrice venom already cost thirty-five thousand. This sounds like it’s going to take another huge sum of money,” Leon sighed.

As a Magical Beast, Demonic Wolves were more dangerous than Cockatrices, so their materials would definitely not be cheap.

“Let’s give it a try. If it can solve your injury once and for all, it’ll definitely be better than you constantly spending money on holy water,” Rena thought for a moment, then suddenly proposed, “At worst, I’ll pay for it myself!”

“So generous?” Leon was a little surprised.

“After all, my own research has progressed largely thanks to you. I don’t want to owe you,” Rena replied.

“Thank you, Rena.” Leon looked at her and smiled.

“I said it’s just because I don’t want to owe you,” Rena replied.

“What I’m thanking you for is that you’re willing to put so much effort into my injury. I’m very grateful, no matter whether you succeed in the end,” Leon said seriously.

Rena widened her eyes at Leon, then quickly turned her head away.

“Don’t get any weird misunderstandings. I just want to get rid of you as soon as possible!”

“Alright.” Leon still smiled.

“But even if my injury gets cured, I still want to earn a bit more money. Money always comes in handy.”

“You…” Rena glanced at Leon.

“Do you want to help Melissa and the others repay their debts?”

She recalled the time Leon had helped Melissa’s family repay one season’s worth of debt and then came to her to align their stories.

“Provided I can earn a lot, a lot of money, taking out a little to help them wouldn’t be a problem,” Leon said.

Rena made no comment.

After a long while, she spoke again:

“Then if one day you earn enough money and your illness is cured, and I’m no longer of any value to you, you’ll let me go, right?”

“What could I possibly do to you? We’re accomplices! If you keep up your research, even if I quit someday, I might still have to find a way to keep protecting you. You’re so naïve—if you get caught one day and sell me out, that’d be real trouble,” Leon replied.

“I’m not afraid of you arresting me. I’m afraid you’ll silence me,” Rena muttered.

“If you were really afraid, you wouldn’t even ask. I’m more afraid you’ll poison me,” Leon shot back.

They joked like this often now.

“If you’re really afraid, then hurry up and get to work and do your job as an assistant. Otherwise, I’ll give you a medicine that makes your whole body itch.”

As she spoke, Rena pointed at the breeding pool.

“It’s all for researching your antidote. I haven’t even fed the Magical Beasts yet today.”

“You’ve been researching for over a month with no results. I think you’d be better off researching some medicine to make yourself smarter first—that’s the real critical illness!” Leon said, but still turned around and picked up the wooden bucket for feeding the Magical Beasts.

“You’re dead today!” Rena bared her teeth and lunged at Leon.

“Stop messing around! There are poisonous things in this laboratory!”

.....

At the same time, in the Inquisition, Director’s Office.

“Sir, we’ve visited everyone under Mr. Griffin in town, and for now we haven’t found any obvious abnormalities. Do you think there might be new distributors we haven’t yet grasped?” Captain Martin of Team Three reported the recent investigation results to the Director.

Director Caron Eso leaned back against the chair, a pipe clenched in his mouth.

After thinking for a moment, he raised his hand and waved a finger.

“That batch of finished goods has already been confirmed as Mr. Griffin’s merchandise. The Mana must have been purchased by his distributors. He only trusts his own people—at a time like this, if a stranger approached him to supply goods, he’d definitely treat them as a spy from the Earl’s side.”

“But all of Mr. Griffin’s distributors in town are your informants. They... would dare take such a huge risk to deceive you?” the captain asked cautiously.

“The fact that these mongrels can serve as my informants proves they play both sides. Not a single one of them is trustworthy!” Caron said disdainfully.

“I dare say it—one of them is definitely secretly sourcing goods from somewhere behind my back!”

“Then should I find a way to apply some pressure and interrogate them one by one?” the captain suggested tentatively.

“That would take too much time.” Caron rubbed the family crest ring on his finger and thought briefly.

“Maybe we should change direction.”

“Change direction?”

“Mr. Griffin is in desperate need of High-Purity Mana. If someone suddenly produces goods like that, their standing in the organization will definitely rise.”

Caron pointed at the captain as he instructed him.

“Have other informants ask around in that direction. And while you’re at it, check whose territory has expanded recently among those people!”

“Yes.” The captain bowed in acknowledgment and withdrew.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 39 : Exposed - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 39 : Exposed

Chapter 39: Exposed

Bourbon Street, Snake Mouth Alley, Owl Old Junk Shop.

A burst of urgent knocking sounded.

The shop owner, who had been dozing on a reclining chair, frowned.

He neither opened his eyes nor responded, pretending that no one was home.

The old junk shop was merely a cover to him.

Though it did include some personal interests, it could not be considered real work.

He rested whenever he wanted.

At that moment, the person outside spoke in a lowered voice through the crack in the door: “Old sir, are you in? Roddy sent me.”

Only after hearing the code phrase did the shop owner open his eyes and struggle to get up.

This, to him, was real business.

He walked to the door and opened the small window.

A familiar face appeared in the opening—it was Martin, the Inquisitor who usually ran errands for Caron Eso.

“So it’s you.” The shop owner relaxed, unlocked the door, and opened it.

“Please come in—”

At the instant the door opened, he suddenly froze in place, as if struck by an arrow on the spot.

Martin stepped aside the moment the door opened.

Only then did the shop owner notice that there was another person standing behind him.

“Old friend, long time no see.” Caron Eso stood there, grinning broadly at the shop owner.

“Director Eso!?” Caught completely off guard, the shop owner only reacted after a moment, his face instantly filled with forced smiles.

“What wind blew you here?”

Seeing the Director of the Inquisition standing there, alarm bells were already ringing wildly in his mind.

“Can’t I come check on you once in a while?” Caron raised an eyebrow.

“No, no, that’s not what I meant. I was just surprised. If you had any orders, you could have just sent word. How could I trouble you to come personally?” the shop owner said with a flattering smile.

“Are we going to keep talking at the door?” Caron suddenly spread his hands.

“Ah—please come in, please come in.” The shop owner could only step aside to invite Caron inside.

“Sorry, it’s a bit messy in here...”

“It’s fine. It’s not my first time here.” With his hands behind his back, Caron entered the shop, surveying the interior with interest.

Martin followed him inside and stood guard at the door, locking it.

Though uneasy inside, the shop owner maintained a calm exterior.

He quickly cleared an empty table, brought over a chair, and invited Caron to sit.

“Please have a seat, Director. I’ll make you some tea right away.”

“No need for tea. Let’s get straight to business.” Caron stopped him as he turned to fetch the tea set, then gave Martin a look.

“Oh, then Director, you came this time to—” The shop owner spoke as he turned back around.

What met his eyes was Martin suddenly stepping forward and swinging his fist.

Captain Martin’s heavy punch landed.

A flash of gold exploded before the shop owner’s eyes, and the world flipped upside down.

He let out a miserable scream and collapsed to the ground.

Before he could react at all, Captain Martin had already used a grappling hold to wrench both his arms behind his back and hoist him up, slamming him onto the small table.

“No!” The shop owner finally recovered from the pain and looked tearfully at Caron, who stood unmoving.

“Director, what are you doing!?”

“Oh, old friend, you know better than I do.” Caron replied with a smile.

“Director, what are you talking about? Is there some misunderstanding?” the shop owner continued to argue.

“Martin.” Caron gave his subordinate another look.

Captain Martin pressed down firmly on the shop owner’s wrist with one hand, and with the other grabbed his left little finger and bent it hard.

A crisp crack sounded as the finger snapped.

The shop owner instinctively let out a scream, but Caron had already placed his hand on the back of his head, forcefully pressing his face down onto the tabletop.

With his chin jammed against the table, the shop owner was forced to clench his teeth under the pressure, his cries suppressed.

“There are only ten fingers. You’d better use them sparingly,” Caron said cheerfully.

Only after the shop owner steadied himself did he release his hand.

“Ah... Director...” The shop owner began to cry with tears and snot streaming down his face.

“What did I do wrong? Why are you treating me like this?”

“That batch of Mana with eighty percent purity that Mr. Griffin obtained—was that turned in by you? Where did it come from?” Caron asked with a smile.

“That has nothing to do with me! I’ve been trying to find out who turned it in myself!” the shop owner shouted, eyes wide as he defended himself.

“Two more,” Caron said to Martin, once again pressing down on the shop owner’s head.

“Mm—mm—mm!” The shop owner desperately squeezed out sounds through clenched teeth, unable even to clearly utter the word “no.”

Following the order, Captain Martin snapped the shop owner’s left ring finger and middle finger as well, followed by another muffled scream.

“Don’t pass out on me, old friend. Talk. You still have a chance,” Caron said.

“It really has nothing to do with me! You’ve got it wrong, you’ve absolutely got it wrong! Who’s slandering me to you? Let me confront him! I’m begging you!” the shop owner pleaded through sobs.

“I heard you’ve been doing pretty well lately. You were always fighting with others over that storefront on South Street—Mr. Griffin was going to give it to you? Planning to open a branch shop?”

Caron patted the shop owner’s face and questioned him in a low voice.

“Congratulations. You must have rendered quite a few services to earn that, right?”

“No... you’ve misunderstood! That was because ‘Crocodile Dar’ said the wrong thing in front of Mr. Griffin and got punished, so Mr. Griffin gave the storefront to me. You can go ask around again to confirm it!” the shop owner argued.

He had spread some rumors before to cover himself, but whether they could fool Caron, even he was unsure.

“Perhaps I should let you come sit in my office for a while, where you can explain it more clearly?” Caron continued smiling.

“You’re in no shape to work like this anyway. How about taking some time to recuperate?”

The shop owner’s expression changed slightly.

Caron meant to discard him once he was no longer useful—arrest him and deal with him directly.

After all, Caron still had other informants who could replace him in moving stolen goods.

Yet he still did not confess.

Instead, he broke down into pitiful sobs.

“Director, if you no longer needed me, you could have just told me. Why go this far? I’ve worked for you all these years—what exactly did I do wrong... for you to treat me like this? Why won’t you believe me?”

“No, no, old friend. I’ve always needed you. Among your group, you’ve always been the most reliable.”

Caron said with a genial smile.

“Even if you really hid something from me, there’s still goodwill between us. In the future, if I have extra goods to deal with, I’ll still come to you. I’ve always trusted you. The question is—did you trust me?”

The old shop owner lifted his face in surprise.

The smile on Caron’s face did not fade.

“Did you misunderstand something? Once you tell me, it’s not like I won’t let you keep making money. The only thing that changes is who you’re cooperating with. Does that make any difference to you? Why suffer like this for no reason?”

Hearing this, the old shop owner gradually withdrew his pitiful act and began to think seriously.

Caron’s meaning seemed to be that he did not intend to blame him at all, but was instead more interested in the source of the goods.

Even after learning the source, Caron planned to replace that supplier and continue selling through him.

For the shop owner himself, there was actually no loss.

This combination of the whip and the carrot loosened the defenses in his heart.

Watching the change in the shop owner's expression, Caron felt assured.

"Martin, go out. Let me do some private persuasion with an old friend."

Captain Martin complied, released the shop owner, and went outside to stand guard.

A short while later, Caron walked out alone.

"Director, what's next..." Martin asked for further instructions.

"That's enough. Your work ends here. No need to investigate further. Forget everything that happened today," the Director replied.

"Yes." Martin was somewhat surprised, but this was not the first time Caron had abruptly halted an investigation.

Caron slowly left Snake Mouth Alley, a smile hanging at the corner of his lips.

In the end, the shop owner never spoke that person's name, because he himself did not know it.

But from just that small amount of description, Caron already knew who it was.

That person was an Inquisitor.

Aside from Captain Martin, only one person under his command had ever contacted the shop owner.

"Fenrir... Leon Set... heh." He silently repeated the name in his mind, the image of that inconspicuous low-ranking Inquisitor under his command surfacing before his eyes.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 40 : The Boss Spawned Right in Our Own Base - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 40 : The Boss Spawned Right in Our Own Base

Chapter 40: The Boss Spawned Right in Our Own Base

Inside the labyrinth workshop, Leon poured a bucket of slime into a basin filled with concentrated brine, then covered it with a lid.

The slime immediately began to writhe violently inside the basin, trying to escape, but Leon firmly held the lid down.

The high concentration of salt quickly forced the water out of the slime's body.

The slime began to shrink, and its wriggling grew slower and slower.

The slime had not died—it had merely lost its ability to move.

As long as water was added, it could revive at any time.

Leon opened the lid and began slicing into the shrunken, hardened slime with a sharp scalpel.

He reached his fingers inside, extracted the core, and carefully placed it into a glass jar.

The slime's Mana was essentially concentrated within its core.

As for the remaining viscous liquid, after being cured in saltwater and treated with a few reagents, it could be turned into gel.

Whether slaughtering Head-Hunting Rabbits or slimes, Leon had already become extremely proficient at it.

"The Magical Beasts are reproducing even faster than expected, especially the slimes—they just keep splitting. If you're planning to keep expanding the scale, we'll need to enlarge the breeding pool," Rena said while washing her hands.

She had just finished extracting some Mana preparations from a Head-Hunting Rabbit's brain and heart.

"We can dig another one over there in the corner and connect it through," Leon replied.

After finishing the slime processing, Leon also came over to the sink.

He rubbed his hands, which were covered in slime residue, then used his fingers to form a thin film and tried blowing a bubble.

The bubble burst before it could take shape, and Rena, standing nearby, vaguely felt a few droplets splash onto her.

"What are you doing? Stop fooling around and hurry up and wash properly!" Rena complained as she scooped up some water with a ladle.

Leon grinned and stretched out his hand.

Frowning, Rena helped rinse the slime off his hands.

“How many rabbits have we killed so far?” Leon asked while drying his hands.

“Five,” Rena answered.

“The Mana and gel can be stored, but Head-Hunting Rabbit corpses are hard to keep if we don’t process them,” Leon mused.

“How about we ship out a small batch early?”

“Up to you.”

As she spoke, Rena returned to the workbench, preparing to make another batch of Mana preparations using slime cores.

Leon wordlessly stepped forward to help organize the experimental equipment.

“You forgot to put on gloves again,” Rena reminded him with a sideways glance.

“Oh.” Leon picked up the protective gloves and put them on.

Raising Magical Beasts inside the labyrinth had significantly shortened their breeding cycles, causing their operation to expand far faster than anticipated.

Coupled with the increased output within the labyrinth, if things continued at this pace, they might still be able to ship another fairly large batch before winter arrived.

Five years... no, aim for four years to earn enough money.

Of course, if Rena could produce an antidote next year, maybe they could stop as early as then.

With the money, they could help Melissa and the others, and still leave themselves a decent sum.

Leon silently calculated in his heart.

At that very moment, unfamiliar footsteps appeared without any warning at the entrance of what had once been a Knight Order encampment.

A violent shudder exploded inside both of them at the same time.

They turned simultaneously, eyes wide, staring toward the entrance.

The newcomer had been deliberately lightening his steps after entering the labyrinth, and only now did the sound of footsteps finally emerge.

The faint glow of a lantern appeared first at the entrance, followed by a burly silhouette.

Rena sucked in a sharp breath in fear and instinctively hid behind Leon, while Leon immediately drew his gun and aimed it at the doorway.

When he clearly saw who it was, Leon's heart plunged straight down, cold sweat instantly breaking out across his back.

The Director of the Inquisition, Caron Eso, strode into the space wearing a military cloak, a pipe clenched between his teeth, a lantern in hand.

The moment he saw Leon, a smile appeared on his face.

"Heh, so it really is you."

Despite being aimed at by a gun, he showed not the slightest fear.

Instead, Leon's gun hand trembled slightly.

Caron Eso had discovered their business—and had appeared without any warning inside this labyrinth workshop, catching both him and Rena red-handed!

Such a disastrous situation was completely beyond Leon's expectations!

"Oh, don't make that face. You never considered this possibility? I actually tracked you down two days ago. It was only today that I confirmed you were raising Magical Beasts here," Caron said as he casually looked around.

"Heh, raising Magical Beasts inside a labyrinth? You've got some nerve."

He walked over toward a corner, suddenly pointed in that direction, and asked Leon with interest, "The Magical Beasts are kept in there?"

"....." Leon neither answered nor lowered his gun.

He was hesitating over whether to fire immediately.

For some reason, only Director Caron himself had appeared—there were no other Inquisitors with him.

If it were an ordinary person at this distance, Leon was confident he could hit them with a single shot, and once hit, they would lose the ability to act.

But the information the shop owner had given him, combined with Caron's unnaturally calm demeanor, was warning him that even if he fired now, he probably wouldn't be able to kill Caron.

Caron Eso was a Transcendent granted rank by the Church, and very likely had received the God of War's blessing that enhanced combat ability.

If Leon fired and failed to kill him on the spot, the one who would die next would be Leon himself.

This was basically a BOSS that far exceeded their level spawning out of nowhere right in their own base!

Seeing no response, Caron didn't seem to care and simply strolled over to inspect the breeding pool.

After some thought, Leon shifted his position slightly and quietly reached toward the test tube rack on the experimental bench.

Caron finished looking over the breeding pool and turned his face back toward them.

"You're still holding onto that thing?"

He suddenly laughed, his gaze like that of an adult looking at a child pointing a wooden sword at him.

But in the next moment, his smile faded slightly.

He lifted his cloak and placed his hand on the gun at his waist.

"Put the gun down, Inquisitor Set."

Besides the gun, there was also a knight's sword at his waist, decorated with a four-pointed star, issued by the Church to Fully Appointed Knights.

Leon hesitated.

Caron repeated, "Put. The gun. Down."

This time, his tone was noticeably heavier.

In the end, Leon slowly lowered the gun.

This was not the best moment for him.

"Very good." Caron smiled in satisfaction.

His gaze passed over Leon and landed on Rena, who was desperately trying to hide behind him.

“So that’s the Witch making medicine for you? Producing eighty-purity Mana at such a young age? How did you find her?”

Rena hugged her arms tightly, trembling.

The moment Leon lowered the gun, she felt as if she had fallen into an icy abyss.

When Caron lifted his cloak and placed his hand on his gun, Rena clearly saw his uniform and the emblem on his chest.

Even without a deep understanding of the Church’s internal hierarchy, she could tell he was an Inquisitor—and... not a low-ranking one.

And Leon looked as if he had already given up resisting.

Leon didn’t immediately answer Caron’s question.

Instead, he asked in return, “Director Caron, you came alone to find us. What exactly do you want?”

After the initial panic, he gradually calmed down.

Caron Eso claimed he had tracked Leon down two days ago, yet he hadn’t arrested him at the Inquisition immediately.

Instead, only after confirming that Leon was raising Magical Beasts in the labyrinth did he secretly come here to catch them in the act.

Yet Caron hadn’t brought even a single subordinate with him—he had swaggered in alone.

Even if he had absolute confidence in his own strength, there was no need not to bring anyone.

This wasn’t a man who cared about his subordinates’ safety.

All signs suggested that Caron was not here to arrest them.

“Quick thinker. I didn’t expect someone like you among my subordinates. Seems I misjudged you,” Caron said with a smile and a nod.

“Then I won’t beat around the bush. From now on, you’ll work for me, kid.”

Leon didn't look particularly surprised.

This answer was within his expectations.

"You should understand that I'm not talking about work within the Inquisition. You're bold, and you've got ideas. Being able to carve out a business like this—I admire that! But using my channels to ship goods without informing me first is a bit improper," Caron said with a chuckle, shaking his head.

"So you want to take a cut from our business?" Leon asked, confirming.

"Hm?" Caron suddenly frowned, as if he had heard something he cared about.

"Another cut? 'Your' business? From the sound of it, you're cooperating with that heretical Witch? She gets a share too?"

Leon didn't answer.

He had given Rena an even split, something that, in Caron's eyes, was probably incomprehensible.

"Really? You finally get your hands on a useful tool, and you end up being captivated by the tool?" Caron laughed and shook his head.

"That lowers my evaluation of you. Looks like there's still a lot I need to teach you."

"Director, just tell me directly—how much do you want?" Leon stared at Caron as he asked.

Setting aside whether he would even consider letting the other man interfere in his business, right now all he could do was go along and wait.

"The rules naturally have to be reset. I haven't decided yet. But before that, you'd better understand your position. I don't want to hear that kind of questioning again!" Caron's voice suddenly turned cold.

He was reminding Leon that this was not a negotiation.

From this point on, the rules here were his to set.

Whatever he said went.

Leon had no right to scrutinize his terms.

Leon silently looked at Caron.

“All right, don’t be so tense,” Caron suddenly softened his tone again.

He took a puff from his pipe, then smiled at Leon.

“Your benefits won’t be lacking—we can discuss that slowly later. But before that... you go out first.”

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.