

Chapter 16: Rat-Baiting With Dogs

Phew, I finally got through the round with the medium...

Klein let out a foul breath. He slowly turned around and enjoyed the cool breeze and tranquility of the night while walking closer and closer to the apartment building's door.

He took out his keys, inserted the correct one in and turned it gently, allowing the crimson-mixed darkness to expand with the creaking sound of the opened door.

Walking on the staircase without a single person in sight and taking in the cold air, Klein had an inexplicable and amazing feeling. It felt like he had a few more hours than others. This caused him to hasten his pace.

In a similar state of mind, he opened the door to his room and before he even stepped inside, he saw a silhouette sitting silently in front of his desk. It had reddish black hair, bright brown eyes, and a delicate, pretty face. Undoubtedly, she was Melissa Moretti!

“Klein, where did you go?” Melissa asked curiously as she relaxed her eyebrows.

Without waiting for Klein's reply, she added, “Just now, I got up to go to the bathroom and realized you weren't home.” It was as if she wanted to know everything clearly, from the causes and effects of the matter to the underlying logic.

With great experience at lying to his parents, Klein's brain took a

spin before he gave a bitter smile and calmly replied, “I couldn’t fall asleep again after I woke up. Instead of wasting time, I decided that I should train my body. So I went out to run a few rounds. Look at my sweat!”

He took off his jacket and half-turned his body, pointing to his back.

Melissa stood up, took a glance half-heartedly and deliberated for a few moments before saying, “Honestly speaking, Klein, you don’t have to stress yourself out. I’m sure you can pass the interview to Tingen University. Even if you can’t, er—I mean *if*—you can still find better ones.”

I haven’t even thought about the interview... Klein nodded his head and said, “I understand.”

He did not mention the “offer” that he had gotten because he had not decided whether he wanted to join them or not.

Staring at Klein intensely, Melissa suddenly turned around and trotted into the interior of the house. She took out an object that resembled a tortoise. It consisted of items like gears, rusted iron, torsion springs and ordinary springs.

After quickly tightening the torsion spring, Melissa placed the object on the desk.

Ka! Ka! Ka!

Dum! Dum! Dum!

The “tortoise” moved and jumped with a rhythm that could pull anyone’s attention.

“Whenever I feel irritated, I feel much better seeing it move. I’ve been doing this very often recently and it’s very effective! Klein, give it a try!” invited Melissa as her eyes brightened.

Klein did not turn down his sister’s goodwill. He approached the “tortoise” and waited for it to stop before laughing. He said, “Simplicity and regularity can indeed help relaxation.”

Without waiting for Melissa’s reply, Klein pointed to the “tortoise” and casually asked, “Did you make this yourself? When did you make this? Why wasn’t I aware of it?”

“I made use of unwanted materials from school and picked up things from the streets to make this. It was only finished two days ago,” Melissa said in her usual tone, the side of her lips upturned a few more degrees.

“That’s impressive,” Klein praised sincerely.

As a boy with poor skills in machine assembly, he encountered great difficulties even assembling a four-wheel toy car as a child.

With her chin slightly raised and her eyes slightly bent, Melissa calmly replied, “It was okay.”

“Being overly humble is a bad trait,” Klein smiled slightly and continued, “This is a tortoise, right?”

Instantly, the atmosphere in the room took a great plunge,

leaving behind an air of graveness for a while. Then, Melissa faintly replied with a voice that seemed enigmatic like the crimson veil, “It’s a puppet.”

Puppet...

Klein gave an awkward smile, and tried to forcefully explain, “The problem lies in the materials, they’re too rudimentary.”

Following that, he tried to change the topic and said, “Why would you go to the bathroom in the middle of the night? Isn’t there a toilet here? Don’t you always sleep till dawn?”

Melissa was taken aback momentarily.

It was only after a few seconds, before she opened her mouth, prepared to explain.

At that moment, an intense sound of digestion sounded from her thoracoabdominal [1] area.

“I-I’ll go get some more sleep!”

Bang! She grabbed her tortoise-like “puppet”, trotted to the interior of the house, and closed the door to her room.

Last night’s dinner was too good, she ate too much and now her stomach is having trouble digesting it... Klein shook his head as he smiled, slowly walking towards his desk. He sat down soundlessly, silently pondering Dunn Smith’s invitation as the crimson red moon emerged from behind the dark clouds.

Being a Nighthawk civilian staff member had its apparent disadvantages.

With me being a transmigrator, “The Fool”—initiator of the mysterious Gathering—and the multiple secrets I have, it will be risky to be under the noses of the Church of Evernight’s team that specializes in dealing with matters regarding the Beyonders.

As long as I join Dunn Smith and his team, I would certainly aim to become a Beyonder. I could then cover up the benefits gained from the Gathering.

Yet, becoming a formal member would entail many restrictions on my freedom, like how a civilian staff has to report his leaving of Tingen. No longer would I be able to go wherever I want or do whatever I want. I would miss many opportunities.

The Nighthawks are a strict organization. Once a mission is given, I can only wait for the arrangements and accept orders. There is no room for rejection.

Beyonders have the risk of losing control.

...

Having all the disadvantages listed out one by one, Klein turned to considering the necessities and advantages:

Judging from the situation of the luck enhancement ritual, I’m not one of the eighty percent of lucky people. In the future, there is bound to be some bizarre event happening to me, increasing the dangers I face.

Only by becoming one of the Beyonders or by joining the Nighthawks can I be equipped with the ability to resist.

The wish to become a Beyonder cannot be solely reliant on the Gathering. The potion formula is not a major problem, but where can I find the corresponding materials? How am I to obtain and concoct them?

Not forgetting the nous of daily practice, I'm faced with serious obstacles! It is just not possible for me to consult Justice and The Hanged Man on every matter and exchange every object with them. This would not only hurt the image of The Fool and arouse their suspicions, but there will also be inadequate time to communicate on such trivial issues.

Similarly, I am unable to produce anything that can pique their interest.

Besides, more materials would more often than not leave behind the trail of my real identity. Then, "online disputes" would effectively be transformed into "offline conflicts," bringing about immense troubles.

By joining the Nighthawks, there would definitely be contact with the common knowledge of the world of mystery and relevant channels. This can sufficiently accumulate into a corresponding social circle and can be used as leverage. Only then can I initiate the Gathering and in turn gain the greatest benefits from Justice and The Hanged Man. In fact, the gains can feedback into reality, allowing me to obtain more resources and form a virtuous cycle.

Of course, I could also go to an organization that is suppressed by the various Churches such as the Psychology Alchemists mentioned by Dunn and join them.

Yet I'll also lose my freedom, and be in a constant state of fear and anxiety. However, more importantly, I have no idea where to look for them. Even if I manage to gain the corresponding information from The Hanged Man, such rash contact with them could endanger my life.

Becoming a civilian staff leaves opportunity for a buffer and exit.

The inferior recluse hides away in the wild; the superior, the crowd. Perhaps the identity as a Nighthawk can be a better cover.

In the future, when I become one of the top authorities of the tribunal, who would imagine that I am a heretic, the head of the secret organization who is working behind the scenes?

...

As the first rays of the morning sun shone, the crimson disappeared. Gazing at the golden light on the horizons of the sky, Klein made up his mind.

He would find Dunn Smith today and become part of the Nighthawk's civilian staff!

At this moment, Melissa, who had gotten out of bed again, had pushed open the door to the room. She was surprised to see her brother stretching in an unglamorous manner. "You didn't sleep?"

"I was thinking through some things." Klein smiled, feeling relaxed.

Melissa thought for a moment and said, “Whenever I encounter problems, I’ll list out both the pros and cons one by one and compare them. After that, I would be able to get a hint of what I should do next.”

“That’s a good habit. I did that too,” Klein smiled and replied.

Melissa’s countenance was relaxed, and she did not add more. Holding a yellowish sheet of paper and her toiletries, she headed to the bathroom.

Not in a hurry to leave after he finished his breakfast and his sister’s departure, Klein took a good nap. Based on what he knew, nearly all the pubs were closed in the morning.

At two o’clock in the afternoon, he smoothed the pleats of his silk hat and handkerchief using a small brush. He also removed the dirt to reestablish the tidiness.

Thereafter, he wore a suit of formal clothing, just like he was going for an interview.

Besik Street was a little far, and Klein was afraid that he would miss the “working hours” of the Nighthawk. Therefore, he did not walk there, but instead waited for a public horse carriage at Iron Cross Street.

In the Loen Kingdom, public horse carriages were placed under two categories—without track and with track.

The former consisted of a carriage drawn by two horses and could sit approximately 20 people while taking into account the top of the carriage. Only a general route existed, without specific

stations. It had flexible operations and could be hailed anywhere unless it was full.

The latter was operated by the Orbital Carriage Company. First, a rail-like service device was laid on the main street. The horses would move on the inner lane while the wheels ran on the tracks, making it easier and more labor-saving. This could thus pull a bigger double-decker carriage that sat nearly fifty passengers.

However, the only problem was that the route and stations were fixed, making many places inaccessible.

After ten minutes, the sound of the wheels hitting the tracks approached from a distance. A double-decker horse carriage stopped in front of the station at Iron Cross Street.

“To Besik Street,” Klein said to the carriage driver.

“You have to transfer at Champagne Street but when you get there, it takes about ten minutes to walk to Besik Street,” explained the carriage driver to Klein, with regards to the route.

“Let’s go to Champagne Street then.” Klein nodded in approval.

“It’s more than four kilometers, four pence”, said a young man with a fair and clean face, as he extended his hand.

He was a worker responsible for money collection.

“Okay.” Klein fished out four copper coins from his pocket and handed it to the other party.

He walked up to the carriage and found that there were not many passengers. Even on the first floor, there were a few empty seats.

“I only have three pence on me now, so I can only walk when I go back...” Klein pressed his hat down and sat down firmly.

On this floor, the men and women were mostly well-dressed although there were a few clothed in their work clothes, leisurely reading newspapers. Almost no one spoke, and it was rather quiet.

Klein shut his eyes and recharged his strength, oblivious to the coming and going of passengers around him.

Station after station passed until he finally heard the few words “Champagne Street.”

After alighting the horse carriage, he inquired along the way and soon reached Besik Street, where he saw the pub with the brownish-yellow hound logo.

Klein reached out his right hand and gave a forceful push. The heavy door gradually opened, inundating him with a wave of uproarious noises and an impetuous heat wave.

Although it was still afternoon, there were already many customers in the pub. Some were temporary workers, looking for opportunities here, waiting to be hired. Others were simply idling around, numbing themselves with alcohol.

The pub was dimly lit. In the center, there were two large iron cages with a third of its bottom sinking deep into the ground

without any gaps.

People held wooden wine cups and surrounded it, sometimes discussing loudly while laughing, sometimes cursing loudly.

Giving a curious glance, Klein found two dogs caged inside. One was black and white, similar to the husky found on Earth. The other was wholly black, with shiny fur, making it look healthy and fierce.

“Do you want to bet? Doug has won eight games in a row!” said a little man wearing a brown beret, as he neared Klein and pointed to the black dog.

Bet? Taken aback at first, Klein regained his senses immediately.

“Dog-fighting?”

When he was at Khoy University, those aristocratic and wealthy students would always ask him contemptuously and curiously, if the boorish workers and unemployed hooligans enjoyed participating in boxing and gambling at the pubs.

Besides being able to gamble on boxing and card games, didn't it also include cruel and bloody activities like cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and others?

The short man smirked. “Mister, we're civilized people. We don't engage in such unglamorous activities.”

Having said that, he whispered, “Besides, laws were introduced to ban these things last year...”

“Then what are y’all betting on?” asked Klein curiously.

“The better hunter.” Just as the short man finished his sentence, a resounding cacophony sounded.

He turned his head, waved his hands excitedly, and said, “You can’t place a bet for this round as it has started, wait for the next one then.”

Upon hearing that, Klein tipped his toes, lifted his head, and looked as far as he could.

He saw two strong men each dragging a sack, coming to the side of the iron cage and opening the “prison door.” They then dumped the contents of the sack into the cage.

There were gray and disgusting animals!

Klein tried to identify them carefully before realizing that they were rats. Hundreds of rats!

As the iron cage was deep underground without any gaps, the rats moved in all directions but could not find a way out.

Right then, just as the door of the cage was closed, the chain of the two dogs were untied.

“Woof!” The black dog pounced ahead and killed a rat in one bite.

The black-and-white dog was dazed at first before it started playing excitedly with the rats.

The surrounding people either raised their wine cups and intensified their gaze or shouted loudly, “Bite it! Kill it!”

“Doug, Doug!”

*Motherf**king rat-baiting with dogs [2]...* Klein regained his senses and the corner of his mouth twitched unceasingly.

The objective of the gamble is to determine which dog can catch more rats...

Perhaps, one can even bet on the specific number of rats caught...

No wonder there were people purchasing live rats at Iron Cross Street...

That's really unique...

Klein shook his head, laughing as he backtracked, and circled along the edge of the alcoholic customers, and reached the front of the bar.

“New here?” said the bartender as he spared Klein a glance while wiping the cups. He continued, “One cup of rye beer is a penny. Enmat beer, costs two pence. Four pence for Southville beer, or do you want a cup of purely brewed malt Lanti?”

“I came here for Mr. Wright,” said Klein directly and bluntly.

The bartender whistled and shouted to the side, “Old Man, someone is looking for you.”

“Oh, who...” A vague voice sounded, and an intoxicated old man stood up from behind the bar.

He rubbed his eyes, shifted his gaze to Klein and asked, “Lad, were you looking for me?”

“Mr. Wright, I would like to hire a small mercenary squad for a mission,” replied Klein, according to what Dunn had instructed.

“A small mercenary squad? Are you living in an adventure story? This hasn’t been around for a long time!” the bartender interrupted and smiled.

Wright went silent for a few seconds before saying, “Who told you about this place?”

“Dunn. Dunn Smith,” replied Klein in all honesty.

Instantly, Wright broke out in a chuckle and replied, “I see. Actually, the small mercenary squad still exists. It’s just in another form, with a more contemporary name. You can find it on the second floor of No. 36 Zouteland Street.”

“Thank you,” thanked Klein sincerely before he turned and squeezed out of the pub.

Before he went out of the pub, the alcoholic customers who surrounded him suddenly quieted down, as they murmured, “Doug was actually defeated...”

“Defeated...”

Klein smiled and shook his head. Then he left quickly and found his way to the nearby Zoeterland Street after asking around.

“30, 32, 34... Here,” he counted the house numbers and walked into the stairwell.

Going around the corner and slowly climbing up the stairs, he saw the vertical sign with the current name of the so-called small mercenary squad.

“Blackthorn Security Company.”

1. Areas relating or affecting the thorax and abdomen.
2. Note, this is not an invention of the author, but an actual legal blood sport known as rat-baiting back in the Victorian era.