

Alpha's Rejected Mate Returns as Queen

Chapter 201 The Puppet Tour

Selma Payne's POV:

Frank didn't look like the high-spirited leader that we had first met. His hair was now messy, and his wrinkles were deep. He looked like an old man who made a living by scavenging, exuding a heavy air of lethargy.

We didn't know what kind of blow he had suffered, but when he mentioned his experience in the past ten days, he looked disturbed.

"It was a dangerous journey." He still looked frightened. "I felt like I was dreaming, a cold, lonely, and dangerous dream. I didn't know where the end of the dream was until I came back to the safe house."

He didn't go into detail, so we couldn't understand him.

He took another sip of the hot tea, carefully and cherishingly letting the warm tea stay in his mouth for a while.

"I know what I will say next might sound crazy, but please believe everything I'm saying is true."

He slowly recounted his experience.

"I remember searching for the source of the scream with Linda. We walked for a long time, but with my many years of experience, I could feel that we didn't go very far, as if we had been walking in circles. I realized something was wrong and wanted to stop with Linda, but I suddenly realized that Linda, tied to me with the rope, had disappeared. I couldn't control myself; no matter how much I wanted to stop, my legs wouldn't listen.

"I slowly realized that I was trapped in a certain space. An unknown force was controlling me to walk around in the snow. I'm not a werewolf grandmaster, so I couldn't tell what it was exactly, but I can confirm that it's some complicated magic circle or rune.

"I knew I'd fallen into a trap, but I had no choice. After a long time, I stopped. Many pine trees and shrubs suddenly grew around me. They emitted an ominous black mist and formed a huge forest in a few minutes. There was an extremely tall and strong tree among them. I'm guessing that's the core of this forest.

"After the forest was formed, perhaps I was no longer useful, so the power controlling me let me go. But I still couldn't escape from that place. The trees could move, and it was like a maze with no exit, trapping me.

“I couldn’t find any trace of Linda, and there was no response even when I called out loudly. The trees forced me back to the starting point – a large open space in front of the giant pine tree. I was exhausted. Even though I knew danger was lurking everywhere, I couldn’t help but stop and rest.

“Just as I let my guard down, the giant pine tree suddenly came to life! Its branches pierced my skin like long needles, and I was tired and sleepy then, so I couldn’t raise my guard and was quickly captured by it. I thought it would kill or eat me, but it didn’t. It just stretched out a few more branches to suck my blood.

“After the branch sucked my blood, it expanded and changed shape. In the end, it looked like me!

“I immediately understood what these damn things were up to, but I couldn’t stop them. Firstly, I had lost a lot of blood and couldn’t move even if I wanted to. Secondly, the giant pine tree had wrapped its roots around me and buried me underground in a few moments.

“I thought I was going to die that I fainted. However, when I opened my eyes again, I was lying in a cold and hard layer of soil. I was woken up by the cold, and the surrounding forest had mysteriously disappeared.”

I had to interrupt him.

“Wait, so you’re still alive after being buried alive for who knows how long?”

“I know it’s hard to believe, but this is true. I don’t know why I did not suffocate. I think it’s either that I was buried shallow or the exposed soil was blown away by the wind and snow. Or the giant pine tree did some transformation to me. When drinking my blood, it might have transferred some unknown substance to me so that I could survive. Many plants in nature habitually rear their prey for fresh food. Although this giant pine tree is an evil creation, perhaps it also imitates nature.

“In short, I immediately left the place after I woke up, but I was seriously injured and tortured by hunger and dehydration. I fell not long after.

“I thought I was going to die, so when I saw a woman in an ancient robe walking toward me, I thought she was the messenger sent by the Moon Goddess.

“But she was not. This woman introduced herself as Mullwica – that’s right, she’s the famous Supreme Witch Mullwica we’re looking for! Of course, I didn’t believe her immediately, but I had no other choice and could only be taken away by her. She led me to a stone house and gave me a blanket, food, and water. I didn’t dare to take any out of caution, so she consumed the food and water first. I was too hungry and thirsty, and I guess I’d been cursed with some mental spell in the pine forest, so much so that my mental guard was down.

“I had some food and water, and then Mullwica said I couldn’t stay there for too long because a powerful demon was sealed there. She would send me down the mountain.”

202 Lost In The Dream

Selma Payne’s POV:

It was the devil’s seal!

I was pleasantly surprised for a moment, but I quickly calmed down. There was no such thing as free lunch. No matter how I looked at her, this woman who called herself Mullwica was suspicious.

“Of course, I didn’t believe her,” said Frank. “So I used the excuse of recuperating to beg her to let me rest for a few more days. In the past few days, I slowly discovered that she had an extremely strange habit: covering her head and body before going to bed, only revealing her neck. I recalled that legend, ‘Wasn’t Mullwica beheaded by her son in her sleep?’

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“I tried to observe her in the middle of the night, but I couldn’t help but fall asleep at around 10 pm. No matter what I did, I couldn’t stay awake. It was like a game setup, and I had to do something at a particular time.

“That didn’t feel right. So, on the last night, I didn’t stay in the house. Instead, I hid behind the firewood outside the house when the bell rang at 10 pm. The moment the bell tolled, the entire house was suddenly reconstructed! It was like an image composed of countless pixels, trembling and adjusting the position of each mosaic until dawn-

“Yes, the sun rose very quickly. At least, I felt that the sun had risen in less than ten minutes. Just when I wanted to go back to the house to take a look, the woman called Mullwica suddenly walked in from the fence. From outside the fence! But I did not see her leave the house.

“Then, things got even weirder. She came to the empty guest room, which was my room, and said ‘good morning’ to the empty bed. Then, she put breakfast on the empty wooden table and showed concern for my injury.

“At that moment, I understood that everything was fake. Everything I saw and investigated was a pre-set program. Even the world I was in might be fake because I was slow to realize that even the birds chirping outside the window were the same as a few days ago.

“And the moment I discovered the truth, everything collapsed. Mullwica and the house; all gradually melted like wax. My world fell into darkness. When I woke up again, I found

myself still lying in the snow – I wasn't buried alive, nor was there Mullwica or a stone house. I was lying on the pattern I drew with my footprints and was in a sorry state.

"I immediately realized that I couldn't stay here any longer. The overlapping of dream and reality left me in a daze. I didn't know what happened to Linda or what that pine tree did with my clone. I don't even know whether that pine forest was real or just a dream. I could only transform into my wolf form and use my wild instinct to find the right direction.

"In the end, I came here, the safe house at the foot of the mountain."

After he recounted the incident, Frank's eyes blurred as if he was still immersed in a dream.

"I don't even know if I'm dreaming or not. Selma, Aldrich, do you really exist?"

We immediately gave an affirmative answer. "Of course. Take a whiff of your tea. This is a new recipe that the royal kitchen just created this week. I don't think even the most powerful dream will have something you've never seen before, right?"

Frank took a sip of tea in a daze and didn't say anything.

Aldrich sat beside him and worriedly suggested, "Your physical condition is terrible, Frank. You need a comprehensive examination. But it's too late now, the werewolf grandmasters can't come down the mountain in the dark, and the plane to transport the injured has already set off. We'll send you back to the pack for treatment tomorrow morning, okay?"

However, Frank refused. "Thank you for your kind intentions, but I can't leave. The Rocky Mountains is too strange. There must be some unknown conspiracy waiting for us. I can't leave my team behind."

"But your body is already an arrow at the end of its flight," Aldrich disagreed. "Of course, I understand your concern for your team members. If it were me, I wouldn't rashly leave my team and not care about them. However, the situation is special now. With your current physical condition, what help can you be even if you return to the team? Why don't you return to the pack for a check-up and treatment? The sooner you recover, the sooner you can return to the team."

However, no matter how we persuaded him, he was determined to stay.

Looking at the deep night outside the window, he muttered, "Something is calling me here. I heard it, and I won't back down..."

Left with no choice, I could only communicate with Dorothy and ask her to get a werewolf grandmaster down the mountain. Frank's current physical condition was too poor. He could not withstand the pressure of climbing the mountain at all.

Moreover, we had to secretly discuss with the werewolf grandmasters about that 'Frank' on the mountain.

The exhausted advance party leader quickly fell asleep. Aldrich and I stayed by his side to monitor his physical condition.

"He's taking action for sure," I mumbled. "That demon... If what Frank experienced is real, he was probably in an illusion constructed by the demon just like we had. As for the pine forest, I'm inclined to believe that it was real and the same pine forest I encountered.

203 The Real And Fake Frank

Selma Payne's POV:

Aldrich didn't say anything. He only glanced at Frank.

I understood and followed him out of the guest room.

"We can't confirm whether what Frank said is true or not. We don't even know if he's really Frank." Aldrich's many years of professionalism made it impossible for him to let down his guard. "His appearance is too coincidental as if he specifically picked a time when there were only the two of us to ask for help. You don't understand him, and I've been separated from him for so many years. Even if there's a flaw, it'll be hard for us to find it.

"And his experience. To be honest, I can't believe it. It's too bizarre, especially after he got involved with demons. I can't think of a reason for him to spare Frank's life. If they want to use the fake Frank to interfere with our judgment, why don't we just get rid of the real one? Why did he give him a chance to escape?"

"And that so-called dream. If Mullwica was just a dream, how did he survive for more than ten days in the Rocky Mountains at -30 degrees Celsius without food or water? No matter how strong a werewolf is, this is still impossible even if he was in a deep sleep.

"Especially when I tried to test him by asking him to return to the pack for medical treatment, he refused no matter what. A qualified soldier should know what to do at the right time. The advance party does not lack people who can take care of the team members on his behalf. He has no reason to refuse treatment.

"There are too many holes in his story. It's hard for me to trust him."

Aldrich was right. There were too many loopholes in the time of Frank's appearance and the story.

However, he had Frank's face, and his scent was no different from Frank's. It was hard for me not to exaggerate the possibility that he was the real Frank.

The problem was that the one on the mountain also fulfilled all the conditions for 'Frank'. It was as if there were two identical Franks in the world.

But how could that be possible? One of them must be fake.

"No matter what, we have to calm him down first. I could only try to calm the one in the guest room down. We'll talk about it when the werewolf grandmaster arrives tomorrow."

At noon the next day.

Master Mary arrived hurriedly with Kerner and a few other team members. Without saying anything, they first did a thorough examination of Frank. The results were good. Other than the exhaustion of his bodily functions, there were no fatal or internal injuries.

On the surface, I was celebrating his safety, but I was getting increasingly suspicious. Was this a state that a person who had struggled alone in the snowy mountains for more than ten days should be in?

Master Mary insisted that Frank go to a human hospital for a more detailed examination, no matter how much he protested. The werewolf grandmaster, who had accumulated a lot of power and influence, obviously had more say than the two young ones, Aldrich and I. In the end, Frank had no choice but to agree.

Kerner and a few other team members were in charge of taking care of him. Now, there are only three of us left in the safe house.

"Yes." Master Mary went straight to the point. "After I received Dorothy's message last night, I immediately went to test the waters with Frank on the mountain. He was acting normal. There was nothing suspicious about him. I secretly collected a strand of his hair and did a test. The results showed that he was Frank himself."

"So this is a fake?"

"No." She took out a small test tube from her sleeve. "I've tested this fellow, and the results are the same. He's also Frank."

"It can't be that Frank has a twin brother that no one knows about, right?" I was deeply troubled.

"We can't prove the authenticity of Frank with our current means," Aldrich said. "We can't let the two Franks meet. In a situation where one side is accusing the other's identity, if we let them meet, it will only lead to a chaotic war of slander. If both claim they are real, it will not help and will confuse us."

“That’s why I stabilized Frank on the mountain. I told him that there was something wrong with Selma’s body.”

“What about Kerner and the others?”
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“They’re trusted aides. On the surface, they’re members of the advance party, but they’re people from the Lycan King. I’m sorry to have kept this from you, Your Highness. This is His Majesty’s order. The unknown spies can help you solve many problems without you knowing.”

I recalled a familiar face among the team members: “Then, is Yuri also from the Lucan King? He has been acting like he can’t wait to push me off the cliff.”

“Yes, Yuri too.” Master Mary nodded helplessly. “He is loyal to His Majesty but also hostile to you. Please forgive him, he’s not targeting you, but he doesn’t have a good impression of all the nobles.”

I wanted to ask why, but now was not the time to chat.

“Anyway,” I continued. “No matter what, we must send this Frank back to the pack. There are too many suspicions about him, and we don’t have the energy to test his authenticity bit by bit. It’s better to leave this problem to my parents to solve. We need to keep an eye on the other Frank on the mountain. Even the one here is more suspicious, we still can’t prove his innocence.”

“After all, demons have a lot of time and energy. Who can be sure that he could only create a fake Frank?”

204 The Human Trend

Dorothy’s POV:

Master Mary asked me to monitor Frank’s movements secretly.

“The other members are more experienced than you, but you are the only one we can trust completely.” She said, “No one would suspect a young girl who’s just an amateur. You can follow Frank openly. After all, you’re not an official member and don’t have a specific mission. Understandably, you’re the person in charge of the team.”

Now that she was gone, I realized that in the entire witch tribe clan, I could only trust Master Hayley and Master Kevin.

The two weren’t smart, so I was suddenly isolated and helpless.

I could only follow Master Mary's instructions and try to get close to Captain Frank as much as possible without leaving a trace. He assigned tasks to the team members and constantly patrolled and inspected them as usual. He didn't have any objections to my arrival and even taught me some details of how to handle things.

"For example, we have to clean up the scene. We are not professional archeologists, but we have to do our best to be careful and minimize the damage." He squatted on a construction site where ancient stone monuments were being cleaned up, pointed to the team members working, and said, "The best way is to lower your head and imagine yourself as a kindergartener who doesn't understand anything. No matter what you dig up, just carefully put it in a sealed bag. Naturally, these things would be handled by the kindergarten ladies – I mean, the professionals. Are you listening, child?"

"Yes." I nodded immediately.

Moon Goddess, if this wasn't a fake, then he was a professional.

"A little bored, aren't you?" Frank smiled understandingly. "This kind of mundane work is actually what soldiers like the most. Although the advance party members were all honest, like interns in a laboratory, every one of them had been on the battlefield. After coming into contact with real merciless killing, this cumbersome cleaning work is peace in a long time."

"Have you also been on the battlefield?" I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test the truth. But the werewolves' last major battle was over twenty years ago.

With a lollipop in his mouth, Frank's eyes were unfocused as if he was reminiscing.

"Yeah, that was more than twenty years ago. Back then, I was still a young kid. I was always in danger on the battlefield. However, it was not only recorded in history books are considered wars. To put it bluntly, war was a bloody version of a group fight. Ten thousand people could fight it, and even a hundred could fight it. Even our neighbors can't guarantee that there won't be any conflicts, let alone between different races.

"All these years, we've had a lot of conflicts with wizards, witches, wandering forces, and cult followers. It's just that these small-scale battles don't have many casualties, and the Lycan King also wants to let the people rest and recuperate, so we didn't make it public.

"But the blood must be shed in war, and even the gentlest description can not deny this. So, I'm quite glad I can bring my subordinates to the Rocky Mountains to carry out a mission. At least the mountain won't snipe me in the dark, right?"

I was a little surprised, "Snipe? Aren't firearms only used by humans?"

“Humans invented it, and it’s really useful. It’s been twenty years since we fought hand-to-hand. When you and your opponent have found a suitable weapon, it’s not up to you to decide whether to use it. Sometimes, I’m wary of the human race. From culture to war, their shadows are everywhere in the world. We always felt that they were a group of inferior creatures with weak physiques, but how could inferior creatures with submachine guns be more vulnerable than werewolves with strong bodies? It’s hard to say who will win.

‘Especially after we found the work of the humans in a few unremarkable wars, we can no longer lie to ourselves that everything doesn’t matter. It’s not like 300 years ago. We’re like the ruins of the witch clan, beautiful on the surface but empty on the inside. The enemies who used to be disdainful are likely to dig into our foundation.’

These profound theories were unfamiliar to me. All this time, I had only been on guard against those ‘traditional’ enemies, such as witches and wizards or demons with evil intentions.

Humans were too far away from me. I’d never even seen a living human on TV or in books. All along, there were only a few races that could cause harm to the werewolves. As for humans? They were fish meat, and we were the knife.

“I know this isn’t easy to understand.” Frank smiled. “After all, before things happen, everything is groundless worries. Let’s just say I’m old and like to nag. Now, let’s finish the work at hand, okay?”

Only then did I realize that my initial intention was to test the authenticity of Frank’s words.

It was still the same sentence. If the person in front of me was a fake, he was too dedicated. Did a puppet used to confuse the eyes need to have such a profound vision?

No matter what, the balance in my heart began to tilt.

205 Finding A Way

Dorothy’s POV:

Selma told me they were going to force Captain Frank, who was at the foot of the mountain, back to the pack.

“Even if we return to the pack, we can’t confirm his identity.”

Even Master Mary’s bloodline tracing couldn’t find anything. Was he going to do a DNA test? If demons could even imitate the bloodline and the soul, there was no reason for them to ignore the physical body.

I didn't know what I said reminded Selma, but she suddenly said excitedly, "Thank you, Dorothy. I know how to differentiate the real from the fake!"

"What?"

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"I'm sorry, but I have to keep it a secret for the time being. If you know the correct answer and Captain Frank on the mountain is a fake, it'll be hard for you to treat him normally, right? I'll tell you everything, but not now. Please treat Captain Frank as the real deal for now."

Alright, I knew that I was an unqualified monitor. Selma's concealment made me heave a sigh of relief because I didn't know how to face a fake.

Master Hayley and Master Kevin came to discuss countermeasures with me during dinner. They didn't do anything. They used all kinds of secret methods to run a series of tests on Captain Frank, but they didn't find anything.

"I don't want to make such a hasty conclusion, but I can't help but believe that he's real." Master Hayley said, "It's impossible to create such similar information even by copy and paste. All the detection errors are within the normal fluctuations. I'm at my wit's end. If you want me to do anything else, I'll have to try to knock him unconscious and then dissect him."

He didn't have to do this.

Selma and the others would only be back tomorrow. After losing their leader, Master Mary, Master Hayley, and Master Kevin were at a loss. Although it was true that Frank was the team's leader, there was a considerable gap between a warrior and a werewolf grandmaster. Furthermore, he was labeled a suspect and could not be fully trusted.

"Anyway, let's be more alert at night. Don't sleep too deeply. We can take turns keeping watch." I said, "Keep an eye on Frank's movements at night. See if he's doing anything while it's dark."

The first half of the night was Master Hayley's shift, while the second half was Master Kevin and me.

At two o'clock in the morning, I covered myself with the blanket and leaned against the bed. The cold air dispelled my sleepiness, allowing me to try my best to keep a clear mind and watch every movement outside the window.

Occasionally, some team members would leave the house to relieve themselves in the temporary public toilet, but none was Frank. The window that belonged to him seemed to have been sealed by transparent resin for eternity, and there was no movement.

Wait a minute.

There was no movement?

This wasn't quite right. As the captain, Frank had to get up every night to check on the situation of his team members on night duty in case someone dozed off or got into an accident.

He was supposed to check on her in the first half of the night, but Master Hayley didn't see him. Master Kevin and I didn't see him either, which meant he didn't get up tonight. What reason could make an old soldier who always sought perfection break his habits of more than ten years?

I told Master Kevin about my doubts and woke Master Hayley up. We were prepared to go and take a look.

Due to the cold weather, the members on night duty changed shifts every two hours. When we left, we were just in time to change shifts. A few members asked us what we were doing out so late.

"Captain Frank wants us to go to his place." I waved the walkie-talkie in my hand. "He didn't say what he was going to do. I guess he needs help with some spells."

The team members did not suspect anything.

When I arrived at Captain Frank's residence, I pretended to knock on the door. As expected, I didn't get a response, so I pretended to get permission to enter and used magic to unlock the door.

It was a narrow two-story stone building. Other than the original furniture, some digging tools, notebooks, drawings, and other things were scattered around. We searched the entire house but didn't find any traces of Captain Frank.

This was strange. We saw Captain Frank enter the house, but we didn't see him leave. We didn't find a back door or a cellar in the house either. How could he have disappeared into thin air? However, his sudden disappearance undoubtedly increased the suspicion of his identity. In this world of ice and snow, I couldn't think of any reason for him to sneak away alone.

We didn't make a big fuss about it because this wasn't a good time to alert the enemy. Whether it was a misunderstanding or there was something wrong with Captain Frank, it wouldn't be good to clean up the mess if it was blown up.

We stayed in the room for the whole night. That night, Captain Frank didn't show up.

At five o'clock in the morning, the team members gradually woke up, and there was a commotion outside. There was still no trace of Captain Frank in the crowd, as if he had never existed.

Suddenly, Master Hayley tugged at the corner of my shirt.

I was busy looking out the window. Without raising my head, I asked, "What's wrong?"

She said, with a hint of shock, "You'd better take a look at..."

"What?"

I looked in the direction in which she was looking at the stairs ...

We didn't know when Captain Frank appeared, but he was yawning at the top of the stairs and greeting us.

How could this be possible?

206 Appearing Out Of Thin Air

Dorothy's POV:

"Good morning, guys. I'm sorry I got up late," Captain Frank said with drowsy eyes. "It's a little cold in this room at night. I think I caught a cold..."

"You slept here the whole night?" I confirmed in disbelief.

It was obvious that Frank didn't understand why I was so agitated. He frowned and nodded. "Yes, actually, I'd rather sleep on the first floor, but Master Mary said there are many precious historical relics here, so I had to go upstairs and say good night to the broken wooden furniture."

But that was impossible! Master Kevin was standing guard upstairs. How could he not see such a big man like Captain Frank?

"Honestly, I'm a little scared of your attitude." Captain Frank slowly raised his hand. "Is there a curse on me? Spell? God, I can't see anything! Do you need me to do anything? Or do you want me just to stand here and cooperate with you?"

Master Hayley gave me a look, then said as if nothing had happened, "It's nothing, Frank. Our eyes were playing tricks on us. We thought we saw some unknown mana fluctuations on you. But it's just a shadow of dust. It looks like magic waves when it floats."

No matter how you put it, it would seem strange, but fortunately, Captain Frank didn't suspect anything and even warmly invited us to breakfast.

"I wonder what the on-duty team cooked today." As he cleaned, he mumbled, "Please don't give me minced meat porridge. I bring this as the main dish whenever I go on a mission. It's as if I will fail the mission without minced meat porridge."

While he wasn't paying attention, we signaled Master Kevin, hiding at the corner of the stairs, to hurry down. I opened the door and pretended that Master Kevin had just entered.

"Good morning, Captain," Master Kevin said in all seriousness. "The team members are waiting for you to have a morning meeting."

"I'm sorry. I'll be there immediately!" Captain Frank immediately got dressed and led us out of the cabin.

While everyone was having breakfast, we'd hide in a corner.

"Are you sure you didn't doze off last night?" Master Hayley grabbed Master Kevin and asked, "You didn't even see a living person like that right under your nose?"

Master Kevin seemed aggrieved, "I swear the second floor was empty the whole night! I've been patrolling every room and even used a detection spell. No living person can escape my eyes! The truth is that Captain Frank disappeared for the night and suddenly appeared again. Although this is ridiculous, think about where we are. Anything is possible."

"But even if he left in some way, we should be able to feel the magic fluctuations. Unless he didn't use any spell, but how could that be? A mortal body can't do such a thing!"

Looking at Captain Frank, who was having a morning meeting with his team members, we descended into deep confusion.

Could he be a fake? A puppet created by a demon? However, even the ancient supreme demons could not change a person back into their original form. They would leave behind magical waves. Not to mention that this was once the witch clan, and the defense function from hundreds of years ago was still incomplete. The evil aura could not escape its eyes.

So, how did he do it?

I told Selma about this.

“We’ve been on guard all night, but Captain Frank just appeared out of thin air. The more I thought about it, the more I felt something was amiss. It’s like an NPC in a game that refreshes itself automatically. You see, he went into the room to sleep, but this data has disappeared. It will only refresh after a certain period.”

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Now, this Captain Frank on the mountain seemed more likely to be a fake. But Selma told us not to let our guard down.

“There’s no evidence to prove that there’s only one such situation.” She added, “Maybe what we saw was all a demon’s trick? This is a necessary precaution. Don’t trust anyone easily.”

This meant I would have to go through a tough morning – feigning civility wasn’t my specialty.

It was still an aimless search, and it was still a fruitless operation. The team members were well-trained, but I still heard someone whisper, “What’s the point of this? Why don’t we get an archeological team? We’re using weapons, not dust.”

Fortunately, that member knew to avoid Captain Frank, or he would have been scolded badly.

At noon, Selma, Aldrich, and the others returned.

They acted as if nothing had happened and exchanged information with Captain Frank.

“How’s your health? If you are tired, don’t force yourself. Miss, please allow me to say a few words to you. You’ve just come of age, but that doesn’t mean your body has stopped growing. If I were to suffer from any illness now, I’d be in a lot of pain at my age.”

Selma replied naturally, “Thank you for your concern. I’m really fine. Is there anything you need me to do in the afternoon?”

I was amazed by their exchanges.

Selma was acting like a real princess – I mean, in terms of how she conducted herself in the world. She knew that the person in front of her could be a trap set by the demon, but she could still ‘confide’ in him with a poker face. When did she learn this skill? Could she maybe teach a shoddy actor like me?

207 Visitors From The Human World

Selma Payne’s POV:

I carefully observed Captain Frank on the mountain, and as expected, I couldn't find any flaws.

If I had to say, if this demon didn't want to work for Satan in the future, he could disguise himself and go to human society to be an 'AI Engineer' or something. It was said that the other side was very interested in creating lifelike mechanical lives. With this demon's 'human-making' skills, he could make a name for himself.

I had sent the other Frank back to the pack. Since I couldn't guarantee the authenticity of this person, it was difficult for me to contact my parents. As the overall person in charge of the team, all external communications had to go through Frank. This meant that he had control of the official communication channel.

I couldn't establish a mind link with my parents, so I could only communicate through Master Mary's private communication with the royal family.

But I couldn't be with Master Mary all the time. Since I came to the ruins of the witch clan, I'd mostly been with Dorothy and Aldrich. It was too conspicuous to get close to Master Mary suddenly. Moreover, as the head of the werewolf grandmaster team, it was inevitable that Master Mary would form the team's core with Frank, which meant that they often acted together.

It was not until dinner time that I had the chance to receive news from the palace.

Hiding in an obscure corner, Master Mary said, "His Majesty has left him in the palace in the name of recuperation. The royal guards are closely monitoring him. However, from the looks of it, there was no sign of suspicion or anxiety on Frank's face. He seemed to be enjoying his luxurious life. However, he occasionally showed concern for the Rocky Mountains situation. Out of caution, His Majesty did not completely hide it from him, hoping to use this as bait to see if he would give himself away."

"Did you check his identity?"

"We've used almost all the existing methods, and the results show he has no problem. The rest of the results had to wait, but the possibility of a negative conclusion was very small from the current conclusions. At least from the data, the one in the palace is real."

Could the suspicions Aldrich and I had been all groundless? The one on the mountain, Frank, was the fake?

"It would be great if we could check this one as well. That way, we can confirm their identity. If the one on the mountain is a fake, then we don't have to make wild guesses."

"What if both of them are real?" Dorothy asked.

"... that means that even the examination cannot be trusted."

But if even the inspection couldn't be trusted, what else could we believe?

"I can use the Eye of Insight to take a look." Dorothy suggested, "It's just one person. It's simple. There won't be any harm."

"No!" I immediately refused. Master Mary and the others also disagreed.

"From a medical point of view, you're completely blind," Master Mary persuaded her. "You can see now because of the subtle power of the Eye of Insight. Previously, when I engraved the mark on you, on the one hand, it was to restrain the curse. On the other hand, it was to suppress the power of the Eye of Insight so that it would lose its balance as soon as possible. Once you activate the Eye of Insight, no one knows if the balance will be broken. The consequences of peeking into a person's life are unpredictable."

With our firm rejection, Dorothy gave up on this idea.

"I'm just saying, don't be so serious...."

She was a little depressed, but this was related to her health and life. No matter what we said, we couldn't go along with her wishes.

Today, one of the teams responsible for exploring the periphery returned especially late. It was so late that they only returned when we were ready to send people to search.

The leader of the small team was called Eve. She had a serious expression and quickly reported to Frank without even taking a sip of water.

"We've found traces of humans near the middle of the peak ten kilometers away. From the flags they're flying, we've met the group of human religious members before."

Humans?

It was nothing new for humans to appear in the Rocky Mountains. After all, the ski resorts, resort hotels, and other tourist facilities here were all built by humans. However, the ruins of the witch clan were a 'remote place'. Usually, no one would come to this place where the natural environment was too harsh for them, let alone humans.

Were they going to build a church in the place where the legendary witches and demons lived? Even a real angel wouldn't have such a strong business ability.

I secretly told myself a cold joke, but I couldn't laugh at all.

In the new era, whether one wanted to admit it or not, one had to face a fact: Just as they said, humans had become the undeniable overlords of this planet. Perhaps their influence in the sea was still slightly weak, but no race could compete with humans on the vast continent.

Even if they didn't have solid bodies or sharp claws and didn't know all kinds of strange witchcraft or supernatural powers, they could occupy this world and make other races avoid them.

Going up against humans was the worst situation apart from the demons breaking the seal. They were uncontrollable factors, and no one knew what kind of influence they would bring.

208 The Public Order Squad

Selma Payne's POV:

Although he didn't know if it was true, Frank immediately took this matter seriously. "Can you tell what their goal is?"

Eve shook her head. "I can't tell. They're just setting up camp in a remote mountain. It seems that they plan to stay here for a long time. I didn't contact them without permission for safety reasons, but I observed them for a while. After ensuring they had set up camp, I returned with the team."

"You've done the right thing." Frank nodded and motioned Eve to rest first. "Go and rest. We need to discuss the countermeasures tonight. You have to rest well."

"Is this the human organization the advance party mentioned in their first report?" I asked immediately after Eve left.

"That's right." Frank's expression was serious. "We found out that they were exploring something in the Rocky Mountains, but since they were going in the opposite direction, we gave up on them after observing them in secret for a few days. But this time, they're too close to us. We must take them seriously because they've already exceeded the safe distance.

"The place where they set up camp is too close to the ruins of the witch clan. Is it possible that their goal is the same as ours, and they are all here?"

It was hard to determine, but the possibility was not slight. Considering reality, this was the only option we could use as a target.

However, Master Mary said, "There's another possibility. Could they be looking for the devil's seal? They've raised the flag of religion; based on this, exorcism is their most possible goal."

Even if the humans were here to exorcise demons, it was not good news for us. From a long history, the werewolves were also one of the heretical forces they tried to expel. Although there weren't many people who were so indiscriminate in modern times, who could guarantee that our neighbors ten kilometers away weren't a group of fanatics?

“No matter what, we must seize the opportunity to obtain information. We need to choose a team of quick-witted and experienced members to keep an eye on them,” said Frank.

After some discussion, Eve was appointed as the leader of the public order squad, leading Dorothy, the other members, and me to carry out the tracking mission.

I was a little surprised that Dorothy and I were chosen. We were newbies who knew nothing, not to mention being smart.

“Is this how you see yourselves?” In response to Dorothy’s and my questions, Frank laughed heartily. “Don’t belittle yourself, ladies. Your performance these days is more experienced than many of my old-timers – not everyone can face a demonic creation and escape unscathed, right?”

“That’s not the same. Demonic creatures are dead, but we’re facing humans this time, the legendary humans with a thousand eyes!” Dorothy and I were a little apprehensive. “We don’t know if we can do a good job. Any slip-ups could affect the work of the public order squad.”

“That’s a problem I should deal with.”

Eve smiled at us.

“Isn’t it the captain’s duty to take care of his team members? Don’t worry. I won’t be soft-hearted.”

I was more worried that this was a scheme by Frank – if he was an imposter -perhaps he’d noticed something amiss, and that was why he was sending Dorothy and me away.

But now that things had come to this, military orders were like mountains. Although Dorothy and I were not soldiers, we still had to follow the orders of the person in charge.

At night, Aldrich sneaked in. With our apologetic gazes, Dorothy speechlessly went to Master Mary’s place to ‘take refuge’.

“I’ll be back before lights out.” She left after saying that.

Aldrich hugged me, and we curled up in front of the crackling burning stove and whispered.

“I’m very worried about you.” He held my hand tightly. “I’ve carried out countless stalking missions and have dealt with many vicious human beings. Humans aren’t as weak and pushy as they look, and you can’t judge what camp they’re in from their race. There are many times when you can’t guard against their traps.”

At this moment, I wasn't worried at all. I even had the energy to comfort my anxious boyfriend. "Captain Eve is here, right? She was the most experienced member of the team, second only to Frank. The mission will go smoothly."

"Let's hope so." Aldrich gently kissed my hair. "I feel there's something wrong with that group of humans. Their whereabouts are too strange. From my many years of experience, unusual visitors are always the beginning of a disaster."

Frank had wanted to send an experienced werewolf grandmaster to accompany the team, but Master Hayley was seriously biased, and Master Kevin was a blockhead, so the candidate fell on Master Mary.

However, Master Mary refused. She had no choice but to refuse. As the only person who could avoid Frank and contact the palace, she had to ensure that Frank was always under her watch and not miss any suspicious traces of him. Master Hayley replaced her and followed the team.

Imagining all the possibilities I would encounter tomorrow; I slowly fell asleep in the warm light of the fire. *inread.com*

209 Surveillance

Selma Payne's POV:

Unfortunately, it suddenly started snowing today.

Fortunately, it snowed all year round in the ruins of the witch clan, and we were used to such weather.

However, getting used to the snow didn't mean I would like to lie in the snow for the entire morning.

It was only now that I finally understood the true meaning of 'stalking' – as the name implied, it meant to keep an eye on your target. You have to use your eyes to keep an eye on your target. This mission was incredibly boring but was already the least torturous part. The frozen earth and cold air had taught me a proper lesson.

"Can you still hold on?" Eve asked in a low voice.

In fact, I felt like I was at my limit, but it was not time for the shift change yet. I had to hold on even if I couldn't.

"What a stubborn girl." Eve chuckled. Compared to me, who looked like I was about to face a great enemy, she was much more relaxed. "Don't push yourself. Your performance is already very good among the newcomers who are doing this for the first time. The first time I followed Captain Frank was on a tall grass plain. There was no

snow there, but there were as many monster-like mosquitoes. I surrendered in under three hours.”

Although I had a boyfriend, who was a general, I rarely came into contact with military life, so I was naturally very interested in Eve’s experience. “Didn’t Captain Frank punish you?”

“Of course, I was lectured. Military orders are like mountains. If I don’t complete the task, I will be punished.” Eve raised his eyebrows. “But making mistakes is the right of newcomers, and it’s also an inevitable shortcoming of newcomers. We should find our actual level from these experiences and train ourselves to complete the next mission more perfectly.”

She was subtly trying to persuade me to rest, but the team members for the shift change had not arrived yet, so I couldn’t just leave like that.

“By the way, is it okay for us to whisper like this?” I remained tense because I was afraid that any movement would alert the other party.

“Of course not.” Eve shook her head slightly. “It’s not possible to be too loud. It’s necessary to control communication and movements within a reasonable range. After all, we’re scouts, not rock puppets. Be it observing or transmitting information; we inevitably have to move our limbs. That’s why we must keep our detection range at a range that’s neither too close nor too far. If we’re too close, we’ll expose ourselves, and if we’re too far, we won’t be able to get any information.”

Eve divided the reconnaissance team into several groups. Each group observed the human camp in the distance from different directions and heights. The members of the reconnaissance team were all related by blood, which allowed them to communicate silently through their mind link.

When they found out that Dorothy and I could create a mind link, the team members were all shocked, as if it was something unique.

“Don’t blame us for being surprised,” Eve said. “Mind link is a very mysterious thing. Generally speaking, only blood ties and oaths are its strongest bonds. This is why most mind links are produced between relatives and husband and wife. You are not related by blood and don’t look like a couple. It’s an awe-inspiring thing for you to be able to build a mind link. This shows that the friendship between you two is very, very, very strong.”

Now, because of our ‘very strong friendship’, Dorothy and I had to be placed on two ends of a diagonal line.

“What’s the situation on your side?” I asked her.

Dorothy replied boredly, “Nothing. There’s nothing. Moon Goddess, this group of humans did nothing but admire the scenery the entire morning. They even built a kitchen just for cooking. Are they not here for an outing?”

“It’d be great if they were here for an outing.” I held the telescope in my other hand and let my frozen left hand warm up properly. “Everything considered, a false alarm is the best result.”

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly said, “A group of humans has entered the camp. We didn’t observe any camp members going out earlier, so we’re considering that this group will likely be a foreign aid.”

The human camp was built in a narrow crack sheltered from the wind. From our angle, we couldn’t see the camp’s entrance on the other side of the mountain. About two minutes later, a team of about twenty people appeared at the corner of the mountain. They were all wrapped up tightly, each carrying a large backpack half a person’s height. There were no weapons on the outside, so he didn’t know if they were hidden in his backpack.

Eve and I lurked in front of the human camp on the shaded side of the mountain while Dorothy’s team lurked on the sunny side. Even without a large pile of luggage, it would take at least five minutes to walk from the shady side to the sunny side. How could these humans be so fast?

Eve also noticed this and asked me to ask Dorothy where they came from.

“It’s hard to say. We’ve been monitoring the only canyon here, but no one has come.” Dorothy was puzzled as well. “This group of people appeared as if they came from the middle of a snowstorm. They appeared in the blink of an eye, just around the corner, and they did not leave any footprints on the passageway.

Suddenly appeared?

It was very deja vu, right?

For some reason, I thought of the Frank on the mountain. Didn’t he also appear out of nowhere like this?

210 Replication

Selma Payne’s POV:

To confirm a certain conjecture, I had to know a few questions. “What was their state when they appeared? Are they panting as if they’d just walked a few thousand meters, or are they just standing there and chatting?”

“They’re panting. Everyone’s exhausted.” Dorothy immediately said, “We can all see that their footsteps are heavy, and their limbs are weak. They have been through a long journey.”

“Did any of them turn back to check where they came from? Or do they show an expression of surprise, excitement, or disbelief?”

“Oh... it’s hard to say. I didn’t pay attention to that. Emmett said that he did see some excitement on the faces of a few younger humans. What’s wrong with that?” Emmett was a member of Dorothy’s team.

The long journey, the journey, and the excited young people.

All of this evidence pointed to one possibility.

“Could it be that what we’re seeing is fake?” I muttered to myself.

“What?”

“I mean, could the canyon you and Emmett see be fake?”

“Fake?” Dorothy was confused. “But it’s right here. The snow is increasing, and small animals leave footprints on it. How can it be fake?”

The more I thought about it, the more likely it seemed. “I’m not saying that the canyon itself is fake. What I mean is, is there a layer of camouflage blocking your vision? It’s like building a platform on top of a real canyon. The road is real, the snow is real, and the existence is also real, but when put together, they are fake!”

Dorothy was shocked by my assumption. But they didn’t see any other entrance to the canyon. These humans also appeared out of nowhere.

“It’s right that you didn’t see them!” This proved that my guess was correct. “Is there a possibility that the canyon has been artificially replicated in space? Just like what we saw in the illusion at the second base, the canyon is covered by an identical space, so what we see is all fake. The real canyon is hidden under the illusion. That’s why these humans have appeared out of nowhere. They are walking in the canyon but are covered up, so we can’t see them!”

Eve, who had been listening and observing, agreed. “It’s a ridiculous conjecture, but it’s also very reasonable. We have to find a way to verify it.”

It was easy to prove this conjecture. Since only the hidden real canyon could connect to the other space, the fake passage, which was used as a smokescreen, would not connect to the same space. We just needed to see if someone had successfully

reached the corner of the mountain after walking through the canyon or if something else had happened!

But this path was the only way to the human camp. No one knew if people would come, so we couldn't easily expose ourselves.

"That's easy." Dorothy released the Soul Sparrow. "Birds are always more concealed than humans, right?"

We couldn't see the sunny side of the mountain, so we could only wait anxiously for the result.

Fifteen minutes later.

Dorothy said happily, "Success!" You guessed correctly!"

I almost couldn't help but jump up. Fortunately, I still remembered that I was on a mission and held back.

To prevent any mistakes, she didn't let the Soul Sparrow fly. Instead, it walked along the snow. Dorothy described the details of the experiment. "It started from the canyon's entrance and walked the entire path. However, the moment it was out of the canyon, it was back at its entrance! This means that this space is fake!"

Dorothy and I were thrilled. Eve also praised me with a smile, "That's great, young ladies. You're all natural warriors."

It was time for the shift change. I took over the shift from the team member who was keeping an eye on the afternoon shift and finally could soothe my frozen body.

The base of the reconnaissance team was located on a small hill in the blind spot of the human camp.

Since we couldn't start a fire, we could only eat the food we had brought this morning. Fortunately, the werewolf grandmaster's insulation spell was reliable enough, which allowed us to eat warm food.

Everyone was waiting for me to explain my conjecture, and they finished their lunch in a few bites.

"The path we're taking up the mountain is a new one specially excavated. The route is hidden so that we won't be discovered as much as possible. However, there is a ready-made passage to the outside world in the ruins of the witch clan, which includes the canyon, and this road is the only way to the witch clan before we start mining.

“But this road has been artificially superimposed with a false space. Combined with the history of witches, I think it’s likely that the witches don’t want to be disturbed by outsiders, so they set up a camouflage.

“In that case, is it possible for them to apply this illusion to other places? For example, hiding a house that doesn’t welcome visitors?”

“I’m guessing that Mullwica used a spatial spell to hide her residence, which is why our search for the past few days has been fruitless. It’s something that’s not in this space, so of course, I can’t find it!”

This was a wild guess, but looking at the current situation, it was the only explanation I could think of.

If demons could construct an illusion of folded space, why couldn’t Mullwica create an illusion of reality?

I believed that the Captain Frank situation might also be related to the overlapping space, but because this was a secret, I couldn’t air my thoughts publicly.

211 Refuge

Selma Payne’s POV:

Dorothy clearly understood what I meant.

While Eve and the others were discussing whether to send the news back immediately, she whispered to me through mind link, “You think that Captain Frank’s disappearance and reappearance could also be affected by spatial sorcery, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

“But I’ve been to that house with Master Hayley and Master Kevin, and nothing like the canyon has happened.

“Maybe the structure of the false space is different. For example, the canyon has the beginning and the end connected. However, Captain Frank’s cabin might be a simple overlap of two spaces, like a stack of cardboard boxes, sharing a common entrance and exit but leading to different spaces.

“So, we were in two different spaces that night with Captain Frank. That means the opening times of the two spaces are staggered! Whether Captain Frank was in a fake or real space, it would only open at a particular time.

“Since this period differs from the time we’re keeping an eye on it, it’s not open at least from 2 am to 5:30 am. The lights-out time is 10:00 pm, and Captain Frank usually

patrolled for nearly half an hour after the lights-out, which is 10:30 pm. So it would be open for business until 10:30 pm. In this case, its opening hours should start from 5:30 am and continue until at least 10:30 pm.”

“From 5:30 pm to 10:30 pm...”

I was not a top history student, but I recalled a history lecturer at Sivr Academy giving a public speech to explain the ancients’ lives to the students.

“... In fact, the life of the ancient people was not as boring as we imagined, and they did not always sleep early and wake up late. Just a hundred years ago, our ancestors lived from seven to nine. Doesn’t it sound similar to modern times? In fact, for the witches and wizards far away, this period could be extended to both sides. Some conservative witches even follow the routine of 5:30 pm to 10:30 pm because they believed this was the time experienced by the world’s first witch.”

Was this a coincidence?

The space was open from 5:30 am to 10:30 pm, and Mullwica was a famous conservative witch in history.

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Was Captain Frank in the real space when he disappeared? And was this space Mullwica’s home that we had been searching for?

But I didn’t have time to think about it because Eve had decided to send someone back to report our discovery.

This group of humans wasn’t surprised by this. It was as if they already knew there was a layer of fake space here. She said, “And their camp happened to be behind the canyon, which means this was not an accident. They have a way to pass through the canyon.

“No matter how they got to know about this, it’s obvious that they know more about this place and the ruins of the witch clan than we do. This is not good news. If their target is the ruins of the witch clan, we will not have the upper hand.”

I volunteered to take on the task of delivering intelligence. Dorothy will stay behind. If there were any other situations, we could communicate immediately.

“It’s hard to travel in the snow, be careful.” Eve sent the other team members and me off.

Compared to the morning, the snow was even heavier. Although it wasn’t as severe as a blizzard, it still caused quite a bit of trouble for our operation.

Misfortunes never come alone. Halfway through our journey, we saw the shadow of a pine forest in the distance – a piece of the demonic shard was waiting for us!

If there were other people around me, this would be an excellent opportunity to find the devil's seal. However, two people were not enough to support an operation team.

“Mark the location. We'll take action after discussing it with the headquarters.”

I had to give up this opportunity.

Due to the wind and snow, our speed was almost half what it was before, and we only arrived at sunset.

Frank and Master Mary agreed with my guess and believed that the folded space was likely to be a witch's work. There might even be many such folded spaces left in the ruins of the witch clan.

“There are indeed such records in some ancient European books,” Master Mary said. “Especially during the witch-hunt period, witches did everything they could to avoid being hunted down. Several extremely powerful or talented witches could replicate reality and create folded spaces as a shelter. However, these witches also pay great attention to protecting their privacy, so no detailed historical materials are passed down.”

This meant there wasn't any information on spatial magic that we could use as a reference.

Mullwica was a supreme witch who had left her name in history. She might have known spatial sorcery.

Then, the question was, even if spatial sorcery existed in the witch clan, how could we detect it?

Other than Mary, Hayley, and Kevin, there were a few other werewolf grandmasters on the team. However, none of them were skilled in spatial magic. They had only heard of it before, like me, a layman.

In fact, rather than saying that the werewolf grandmasters did not know, it was better to say that no one in the world knew. Even the existing supreme witches and wizards might be unable to do anything.

212 The Red Shawl

Selma Payne's POV:

After all, folded spaces were created to hide from outsiders, so they wouldn't be discovered so easily.

As a result, we were at a stalemate again. However, in any case, we finally had a breakthrough after many days of searching.

I was already exhausted from delivering the information, so Frank didn't allow me to return to the team immediately. He told another team member and me to rest in the ruins of the witch clan for the night and set off tomorrow morning.

Before the lights went out, Aldrich and a few other werewolf grandmasters came to find me.

As soon as he entered, Master Mary went straight to the point. "You suspect a hidden folded space in Frank's residence?"

"Yes, I even suspect that the house he's living in is Mullwica's residence."

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I told them about my conjectures, and with all the coincidences combined, it was hard not to be suspicious.

"As we all know, Mullwica fled from Europe to escape pursuit. The first half of her life was filled with fear and anxiety. In that case, even after she settled down, she would still use spatial sorcery to hide her residence. It's not that hard to understand.

"From 5:30 am to 10:30 pm, this is the sorcerers' active time in the old era. During this period, Mullwica would open her residence to her relatives and friends, but she would hide it at night to prevent possible accidental attacks.

"Dorothy had a precognitive dream before. The hints in the dream were vague, but she could see that Mullwica was resistant to the outside world. We're guessing that Mullwica was on guard against someone, not the church hunting her down or her ex-husband, but a third party that we don't know about.

"It's impossible to know whom she's guarding against, but this is strong evidence that she sealed her residence."

After confirming this, it was inevitable to go to Frank's cabin to confirm it.

The problem was that we couldn't be sure if Frank were a friend or foe, so we had to avoid him.

"We have to find a way to distract him," Aldrich suggested. "Why don't we get him and Master Mary to inspect the canyon tomorrow? As long as we can delay him for a day, it's enough for us to carry out our investigation."

This was a good idea, but how should we do it?

The next day.

“Miss Selma has a fever?” While I was pretending to be sick in my sleeping bag under the effects of the spell, Frank came to visit me in a hurry.

After coughing a few times, I weakly said, “Actually, I felt fine last night, but I suddenly had a fever today. I’m sorry. I’ll return to the reconnaissance team immediately after I get better and try not to drag down the team members’ work.”

Frank placed the blanket he brought over on me and said kindly, “Don’t say silly things, child. The most important thing is to take care of your body. Someone will take over your task in the reconnaissance team. You don’t have to feel guilty about this. It’s inevitable to have a headache and fever when you’re on a mission in extreme weather. This is a common thing, let alone a burden.”

After pretending to treat my condition, Master Mary suggested, “Why don’t I take Yuri with me? Although he’s a bit mean, he’s very efficient. I think he’ll be able to adapt to investigation work.”

“No.” Frank shook his head. “That kid, Yuri, was assigned a search job today. He left with the team a long time ago.”

“What about Alvin? Or Margaret? They’re both very smart.”

After thinking about it, every team member had already arranged their work, so it was not impossible for them to be transferred temporarily. However, this would not only affect the work of the reconnaissance team.

In the end, Frank said, “I’ll go first today. I’ll take the opportunity to inspect the situation of the canyon. Words and photos are never as straightforward as what you can see with the naked eye.”

Yay! The plan was working!

He did not always stay in the witch clan’s ruins. He had to patrol the other three bases regularly. Generally speaking, when he left the team, he would let Master Mary or the team’s experienced members take over the responsibility of the temporary leader. But now that Aldrich was here, an experienced general would be the best choice.

After they left, we immediately entered the cabin to investigate.

Now was when the dimensional space would open, but the cabin’s appearance was completely different from Dorothy’s dream. This made sense. Frank would have noticed something was wrong if the cabin had been different from day to night.

We carefully explored every corner, but we still didn't find anything.

Could I have been wrong? This was just an ordinary cabin?

I asked Dorothy for help and asked her to think about any useful details in the dream.

"Oh... that was just a blurry dream. I really can't think of anything special," Dorothy said. "If I have to say something that left a deep impression on me, it would be that 'I' – the daughter of Mullwica in my dreams – always wore the same shawl."

"A shawl? What does it look like?"

"I think it was bright red. I'm sorry, that's all I can think of. It's been a long time since the dream. I can't remember many details other than the specific plot."

Alright, it was just an ordinary-looking shawl. Didn't the women in ancient times wear that during winter?

But a bright red shawl?

Had I seen a red scarf somewhere before?

213 Mullwica's House
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Selma Payne's POV:

I was sure I'd seen it before, but I couldn't recall it at the moment.

"I saw a red shawl in Master Mary's room," Aldrich suddenly said.

"It's bright red, and there are patterns embroidered with gold thread."

That was right!

It was in Master Mary's hut. That red shawl looked a little familiar!

We immediately went to Master Mary's hut and found the shawl on the coat rack. 300 years had passed, and the time of this shawl had stopped along with the entire witch clan. Its beauty had also been fixed at its most brilliant moment. The dark red color and dazzling patterns seemed to be waiting for its owner to put it on and play with her friends after school.

I remembered why I thought it looked familiar – when the historical fragments surrounded me, and almost all the girls I saw wore the same red shawl.

“Dorothy, do you still remember what Mullwica’s daughter looked like in your dream?”

Dorothy managed to recall some details. “Oh... I think she has black hair, big black eyes, pale skin, and a mole on her jaw. I can’t remember clearly... I’m sorry. I lose my memory of dreams too quickly. I think this is the side effect of prying into the past.”

Black hair, black eyes, pale skin, and a mole on the left jaw.

There was no mistake! One of the girls in the historical fragments happened to look like this, and she was the only one who did not wear a red shawl!

She was Mullwica’s daughter!

It was evening in the dream, and they seemed to have just finished school. The red shawl should not be the uniform of the witch school, or Mullwica’s daughter would not be the only one who did not wear it.

These girls were not from the same family. They were walking in one direction. Did this mean that they were going to a girl’s house together?

Could it be Mullwica’s family? Was the red shawl that the girls were wearing some special symbol that could lead them into the real space through the false folding?

Thinking of this, I immediately decided to give it a try. Since there was only one shawl, only one of us could enter.

Without waiting for the others to speak, I took the shawl. “I’ll go first. Don’t worry. You all know my abilities. If there’s any accident, such as witchcraft or spells, I can easily devour them.”

“You promised me you wouldn’t risk your life again,” Aldrich said helplessly.

I made a funny face and argued, “That’s not a risk. We all know that the red shawl is the final answer. The chance of danger is less than one in a thousand.”

The red shawl was very soft, and its luxurious appearance was out of place in the gray ruins of the witch clan, which made me believe that it was special.

A complicated lock would always be matched with a beautiful key.

Putting on the red shawl, I pushed the door open and entered-

What I saw was a completely different world!

The dry pinewood floor was painted shiny, and the stone walls were decorated with various warm blankets. A soft sofa, a beautifully patterned chair, and a strong wooden

table were placed in a comfortable position in the living room. There were pillows, books, flowers, teacups, and tea plates on the table as if the host had just had a tea party to welcome friends and family.

The details were decorated with soft lace and colored ribbons, as well as some small sparkling gemstones. They were crooked and old but clean. They seemed to be a child's work and were often cleaned by adults.

There was even a fire in the fireplace, but there was no wood or coal, which seemed to be a product of sorcery. However, the flame was already very weak, and it would shiver from time to time in an attempt to extinguish itself. It seemed that the energy was about to be exhausted.

However, there were some disharmonious elements in the warm little house: The floor was covered in blood, the rocking chair and the coffee table were tilted, a few charred traces of sorcery, broken glass cups, and flower tea leaves that had long been weathered.

Based on all the signs, this was Mullwica's home and a house that no one had time to clean up after the tragedy.

I was extremely excited after learning about this. After such a long time, we finally had a breakthrough!

I immediately withdrew and reported my safety to the few anxiously waiting for me. I also told them the good news. Everyone wore a red shawl and walked around the house. The answer we got proved that we had indeed found Mullwica's house!

"Dorothy!" I excitedly called out to my best friend.

"I found it! We've found it! It's Mullwica's home. We've finally found it!"

Even the calm Dorothy was shocked by the good news and cheered softly.

"This is one of the best news I've heard this month." She said, "I have to find a chance to tell Master Mary secretly."

"Are you going to avoid Captain Frank?"

"Yes. Given that his identity is still a mystery and Mullwica's family is of utmost importance, let us hide it from Captain Frank and let someone more experienced decide if we should tell him."

"I think Master Mary will tell Captain Frank."

"Why?"

“Because he’s living here now!”

214 The Lost Residence

Selma Payne’s POV:

“Frank lives in the Mullwica’s house. If we want to study this place, we can’t avoid him. Even if we used the excuse of patrolling the stronghold to send him away, he would return sooner or later. And we can’t hide it from the other team members. When the time comes, will they not tell their captain about our operation?”

I’d also considered whether I should hide it from Frank, but I couldn’t do it no matter how I thought about it unless I sent him back to the pack, which was not feasible.

“Besides, we still need to search for more red shawls. I’ve seen in historical fragments that there are at least three or four more red shawls. The witches had been evacuated in a hurry, so no one had time to go home and pack, right? Once the search begins, the commotion will be even greater, and we won’t be able to hide it even if we want to.”

“You’re right,” Dorothy said. “I’ll tell them the good news in a while.”

I spent the entire day in excitement. Although I wanted to explore Mullwica’s residence again, I knew I didn’t have much sorcery knowledge, so it was better not to ‘destroy precious cultural relics’. I would wait to learn more from the professional team.

We didn’t waste the rest of the time. We gathered all the team members in the ruins of the witch clan to search for the same or similar red shawl. After searching, we found quite a number of them. We found a total of eleven.

They were all red in color; the only difference was that the patterns embroidered with gold thread had subtle differences. There were twelve different flowers in total.

For example, I found the first one embroidered with marigolds, daisies, dahlias, roses, and so on. I didn’t know if they were just for decoration or if they had some other special meaning.

In the afternoon, Dorothy told me that Master Mary and Captain Frank were returning.

“That soon? Is there any progress in the canyon?” I asked in surprise.

“No, or rather, there won’t be any progress.” Dorothy was a little discouraged. “Space witchcraft is too much of a test of talent. Even an experienced werewolf grandmaster like Master Mary can only barely detect a trace of magic fluctuations based on the existing clues. I think space sorcery is like the Eye of Insight. Maybe it’s a special power left behind by some divine blood descendant. That’s why it’s so difficult to learn, and there aren’t even many related records.”

In the evening, Master Mary and Frank came back, covered in dust.

After receiving news of our discovery, the one who was the most excited was Frank. After all, he was the person in charge of the entire mission.

“How did you guys find this place?” He stood in front of the house, unable to believe that the house he had lived in for so long was Mullwica’s residence. The answer that he had been searching for was right before his eyes.

In the face of his question, I couldn’t possibly say, “Because I suspected something was wrong with you, I came to search your house. Ultimately, I accidentally found a clue and Mullwica’s residence.”

I gave him the excuse we had discussed earlier, “Due to Dorothy’s precognitive dream and the images I saw in the historical fragments, we guessed that the red shawls the girls wore 300 years ago might be the key to Mullwica’s residence. Originally, we were prepared to explore the houses one by one according to the direction of the historical fragment, but we didn’t expect that the first house was the lottery ticket, and we found Mullwica’s residence.”

Frank didn’t suspect anything. He shouldn’t suspect anything in the first place. We should be the ones suspecting him.

Ultimately, the twelve red shawls were temporarily lent to me, Dorothy, Aldrich, Frank, the three werewolf grandmasters, the other team members, and their werewolf grandmasters. As the first team to explore Mullwica’s residence, we should ensure that we had professional quality and the ability to move.

I could feel Dorothy, beside me, getting a little nervous. Of course, this was because there was a high possibility that Mullwica’s residence was hiding information related to the Eye of Insight.

“Don’t be afraid.” I gently held her hand.

“Everything will be easily solved.”

“Yes.” she nodded.

Without a doubt, this was a very warm house without the bloody traces. The living room on the first floor had the double functions of a living room and a dining room, just like most of the ancient civilian houses. There was also a tiny kitchen.

On the second floor were four small bedrooms, one of which had a large patch of dried blood on the bed. It seemed to be Mullwica’s room.

The other three rooms had distinct styles, and we easily identified the bedrooms of Mullwica's children. The remaining empty guest room was used as a storage room. This was the place we focused on searching other than Mullwica's bedroom, and it was likely to contain a lot of valuable information.

Before they sorted out Mullwica's relics, everyone stopped in silence for a while.

Although 300 years had passed, the sorrow of Mullwica's death was still lingering in the room like an old fog. Every guest couldn't avoid being affected by this tear-inducing emotion. One of the emotional members even had red eyes.

"Alright, everyone. It's time to get to work," Frank said.

215 The Trail Is Gone

Selma Payne's POV:

Our carefulness was like a joke in Mullwica's residence.

The werewolf grandmasters had done everything they could do under the current conditions. Countless detection spells were stacked on suspicious targets, and the result was surprising – there was no protective spell in the residence of a legendary witch who had been hunted for life.

Dorothy even joked that she was prepared to carry a powerful curse for the rest of her life, but we couldn't even find a small trap, let alone a curse.

"It seems like Mullwica was much stronger than we thought." Master Mary sighed. "Being undefended is the arrogance that only the strong are qualified to show off."

Ignoring the traces of blood and fighting, Mullwica's residence was generally in good order. We didn't even need to spend much effort to collect all the books, notes, drawings, and other paper items. This mission, which was supposed to take a day to complete, was completed in a single morning.

It wasn't easy to imagine just how much of a learned person Mullwica was when she was alive. The pile of ancient texts alone was higher than Aldrich and mine combined. Not to mention the notes that she had written herself. Although she had not had time to organize them, Master Mary was sure there must be a lot of precious original information in them.

As the party involved, Dorothy did not need to participate in the follow-up work. She needed to read through the notes left by Mullwica, forgetting to eat and sleep and find clues about the Eye of Insight. Master Hayley would assist by the side and file the notes.

At night.

“Why do I feel like today is even more tiring than doing reconnaissance?” I lay on the sleeping bag, so sleepy that my eyelids were fighting. I didn’t do any physical work.

Dorothy handed me a hot tea and said, “Mental work consumes less energy than physical work. I feel dizzy after reading for a day, too.”

Yes, I also read books with Dorothy for a day, but I read the ancient books left behind by Mullwica. I knew every word, but I had to guess what they meant when they were put together.

I was a specialist in every field. I didn’t understand these books. Aldrich massaged my temple.

Dorothy was already used to our lovey-dovey selves.

Before the lights went out, a few werewolf grandmasters came.

“Good evening, children.” Master Mary said, “How was your work today? We don’t have to search for it in person tomorrow. The team members and the other werewolf grandmasters will take over sorting out the antiques. We only have to study the ancient books.”

“We might as well go to work!” I wailed.

Aldrich shrugged. “I’m not one of those who want to read. As usual, Frank is going to patrol the stronghold tomorrow. I have to take over the work of the temporary captain.”

I gave this bad boy a push.

“Speaking of Frank, we’ve lost all leads again.”

After we confirmed that the red shawl was needed to enter the real Mullwica’s residence, the theory that Frank disappeared into the folded space in the middle of the night was overturned.

Without the red shawl, there was no way that Frank could break through the illusion.

However, we didn’t have any other clues apart from this. The disappearance of Frank had become a mystery once again. Along with his identity, we didn’t know if it was true, but it had become a dark cloud lingering in our hearts.

“Don’t you guys think Frank’s disappearance is rather déjà vu?” I said, “When Frank, who was at the foot of the mountain, was recounting his experience, the Mullwica in his

illusion had suddenly disappeared and reappeared like an NPC that refreshed at a fixed time. The tracks of this Frank on the mountain are too similar to this.”

“You’re trying to say that this is evidence to prove that Frank is a fake?” Aldrich asked.

My mind was a mess, and I couldn’t be sure. “I don’t know. I feel that these two things are related.”

However, the Mullwica in the illusion was fake, an illusion created, and Frank was also trapped in the illusion at the foot of the mountain. However, this Frank on the mountain was a real person. At least, he existed in reality. We couldn’t be trapped in a large-scale illusion for so many days like Frank at the foot of the mountain and only find out now, right?

With the experience of a snowy night, everyone was cautious. Even the werewolf grandmasters regularly tested the authenticity of the illusion. If we still couldn’t defend against it, then we didn’t have any other means to fight against it.

Master Mary comforted us, “Anyway, everyone is tired today. Let’s rest first. We’ll talk about it tomorrow. It just so happens that Frank is about to leave, and it’s a good opportunity for us.”

It was a dreamless night.

Early the following day, Frank set off with a few of his team members, and Yuri was among them.

He didn’t have a good internal reputation, and his abilities were average. Why did Frank bring him along?

“Sorry to trouble you, Aldrich.” Before leaving, Frank reminded Aldrich of various things to take note of. “Besides the base, I have to go to the public order squad to see the situation. I’ll be back in about three days.”

In the morning, there was a discovery in Mullwica’s residence.

216 An Equal Exchange

Selma Payne’s POV:

“A stone tablet that contains the remnants of powerful magic fluctuations.” Master Mary showed us the stone tablet in her hand.

It was a stone tablet in Renaissance style, but its pattern was slightly different – thirteen kinds of flowers surrounding a moth with broken wings and fine vines firmly bound them together like a round shield.

The style of the stone tablet was extremely torn. The fresh flowers were beautiful, round, and warm, like a simple drawing left by a young girl in love with romantic thoughts and vitality.

However, the moths were sculpted in a strange and ugly way, like discarded food by sparrows, pecked to pieces by sharp beaks, exuding a strong sense of despair.

I noticed that twelve of the thirteen types of flowers matched the pattern on the red shawl.

“Yes, we also suspect this. Maybe there should have been thirteen red shawls.” Master Mary said, “But we didn’t find the thirteenth shawl in the ruins of the witch clan. It’s a coincidence, or the thirteenth shawl has been taken away.”

“Or perhaps it was destroyed?” Dorothy suggested.

“I’ve also suspected it,” Master Mary said. “But look at this.”

A flame gushed out of her hand and burned the red shawl on the table!

Before we arrived, the scorching flames quickly began to devour the bright red cloth. However, after almost half a minute, nothing happened to the red shawl, as if the flame was just a shadow that was bluffing.

“Any external force cannot destroy the red shawl.” Master Mary explained, “This is an unexpected conclusion. This morning, a team member accidentally dropped his red shawl into the bonfire, but it was unscathed when he took it out. We’ve tried all means of attack, but without exception, we can’t damage the red shawl at all.”

Now, I was even more convinced that the red shawl had something to do with the moths and stone tablet. At the very least, they all contained powerful magic.

In the design aspect, no one present could compete with Master Hayley, but even she had never seen the design on the stone tablet.

‘Flowers and moths are very common elements,’ she carefully traced the lines of the stone carving. “But I’ve never seen this combination in any known classics or cultural relics, let alone such a disharmonious style. I even suspect this stone tablet has been processed twice, and some think that the moth and the flower have been combined.”

“In other words, the moths and the flowers are not the work of the same person?” I asked.

Master Hayley nodded. “Judging from the style, that’s right.”

That was all we knew about the stone tablet. Maybe there would be some records in Mullwica's notes, but we'd have to find them from the mountain of words.

Mullwica was a supreme witch and a knowledgeable scholar and practitioner. Her notes recorded many unique and original sorcery, formations, runes, and theories. Not only did it include sorcery, but it also included the power theories of many other races. It even had alchemy and human theology.

On the second day after Frank left, Dorothy found clues about the Eye of Insight.

Surprisingly, Mullwica had already discovered a way to control the Eye of Insight!

"How could this be?" Dorothy was calmer than anyone else. "If she could control it, why would she waste her life in vain?"

We got the answer very quickly.

"The Eye of Insight is an unexpected mutated power. I believe that when the goddess of fate gave her descendants the ability to pry into fate, she did not expect such an accident to happen. Therefore, the Eye of Insight could not be considered a pass that the goddess of fate had granted. That is why, for fate, it was not allowed to spy on oneself through it. This also means that it wasn't the Eye of Insight that took away my life force but fate. This is its punishment for thieves.

"I used a forbidden spell and met an ancient ancestor. It was said that she was the first witch who knew how to control the Eye of Insight. She said that it all started in an accident. She was injured and lost sight while avoiding the pursuit of a group of human knights, and her sister, unfortunately, died in the battle. To save her, the witch with her used a kind of sorcery to exchange her broken eyeball for her sister's.

"Since then, I've known that everything was a joke of fate. The ancestor said, 'Ever since I put on Dahlia's eyes, I found that my life force, which was constantly losing, had inexplicably stopped. At first, I thought I had found a way to escape the tragic cycle of reincarnation, but when I exchanged the two sisters' eyes, I realized that the gift of fate was never free. Only one of them will survive. Even if I swap their eyes, only the first one will survive.'

"This is an exchange of equal value without a choice. Losing your blood kin, bearing sin, when fate is certain that you have received enough punishment, fate will no longer meddle in other people's business. It will only hide behind the misty veil and watch you fall into the abyss of self-destruction."

The solution to everything was in the notes.

As long as one found a blood relative with the Eye of Insight, he could exchange his eyes with the relative.

217 Ascendance

Selma Payne's POV:

This was a complex problem that had no solution.

Which was more important, to Mullwica; her own life or her only daughter?

The answer was self-evident. This woman, who had been wandering for half her life, finally chose her daughter and gave up on herself.

I even suspected that she accepted the fate of being beheaded by her son because she could have a legitimate reason to replace her daughter's eyes with hers. In this way, her daughter would not have to bear the suffering and sin in her heart and could live a normal life with her mother's silent gift until the end of her life.

However, she didn't expect the devil to interfere and turn her family into the victims of the tragedy.

"I don't think I can spread this discovery. In fact, I should keep it a secret forever. History has proven that anyone could easily turn into a demon in the face of life and power. The price to pay for testing one's humanity was too great. No one knew whether people would choose strength or kinship in the future for the opportunity to explore their fate. If you're not careful, the gift of fate will become the spark for your family's extermination.

"But is it right to hide it? Do I have the right to deprive my descendants of the chance to save their lives? I don't know. I was too selfish. I wanted Madeline to live a safe and peaceful life, and I hoped that countless children like her could live peacefully. However, this was simply a cycle of contradiction. It was either to kill one's family or die. Goddess of fate, can you give me some guidance?"

"Let death plunder my sins. If this can redeem any of my selfish consequences, I'll gladly endure it. Fate is like a play; some established plots can never be avoided."

Mullwica only had so much information about the Eye of Insight. After flipping through the notebook, there was nothing else.

Dorothy had been out of it ever since she finished reading the notes. We all knew what she was worried about.

Just like Mullwica's dilemma, did Dorothy have any other choice? The only blood relatives she had left were her grandmother and her parents. A werewolf couldn't have the Eye of Insight, so the remaining option was her father, whom she had never met.

But the problem was if we found her father, and her father, who had never shown his face, was willing to sacrifice for his daughter, would Dorothy accept it?

I understood this strong-willed girl. Her kindness was like a soft spring that couldn't contain a single grain of sand. She would always stick to her principles. Even if he was an irresponsible father who had never raised her, she could not calmly accept his life as compensation for the lack of fatherly love.

"Dorothy..." I pulled Mullwica's logbook from her tight, pale hand and said softly, "Don't overthink it. This is only a part of the records. There are still so many notes. Mullwica must have other research. No matter how much you think about it now, it adds to your troubles. As long as we keep looking, we'll find another way."

Dorothy forced a smile, still in a daze.

My words were complete nonsense. My empty and powerless consoling words had no effect.

Dorothy's abnormal behavior continued until dinner time. We did not dare to say anything more, afraid that this girl who had fallen into a state of panic would become even more anxious.

It was destined to be an eventful day. In the evening, Master Mary received news from the royal family.

"Linda is awake." Master Mary looked serious. "But she's not in good condition."

"What happened?"

"There have been some... changes in her." Master Mary showed us the pictures from the palace.

The picture seemed to have been processed in a punk style, and there was a silent noise. In the middle of the image was not the Linda we thought it was, but a lump – forgive me for using this quantifier term – a lump of soft silk-like thing that we couldn't see the shape of.

If I had to find something to describe it, I could only say that it was like a newly formed cocoon, as if there were butterflies or moths inside.

"This is Linda?" The picture gave me a strange sense of disgust, as if looking at it for too long would trigger something in my body. "How did she become like this? Is it the influence of the pine forest?"

Master Mary shook her head. "Tracy and the werewolf grandmasters were helpless. They can't break through the cocoon's defense and are afraid that using force will hurt Linda. So, they can only wait and see."

"This is 'Ascendance'," Dorothy suddenly said.

"What?" We looked at her in surprise. "How did you know?"

"In my father's notes, he recorded this phenomenon."

Dorothy took out a small notebook from thin air. This was a widely circulated sorcery among the sorcerers, commonly known as 'notebook'. It was usually hidden in the souls of the sorcerers and would only appear when used. Dorothy flipped to a page and showed it to us.

"Without a doubt, this is a complete transformation of evil. When a living being is willing to submit to the power of evil, he or she would gradually degenerate into a hotbed for the incubation of the demon. It could be an egg, a cocoon, or an embryo in the boiling lava."

218 Something Happened To Frank

Selma Payne's POV:

"In short, the moment the mutation begins, everything is irreversible. You can interrupt the process, but the part that has been mutated can never be reversed. This occasionally happens among witches and wizards, not because they believe in satan, but because of some personal feelings."

If what Dorothy's father said was true, then wouldn't Linda be turning into a breeding ground for the devil?

Damn it, when did it happen?

When in the pine forest?

After thinking about it, there was only one answer. While we were rushing to the rescue, something must have happened to Linda, who was alone in the pine forest.

Moreover, the term 'hotbed of demons' gives us a bad feeling. What is a 'hotbed'? Did this mean that the demons might be reborn through Linda's body?

Was the newly born demon a clone of the demon, or was it his original body? If that were the case, wouldn't the demon be able to easily escape the suppression of the seal with Linda's help?

I recalled the legend of the pine forest bewitching the pedestrians. Had the demon been waiting for such an opportunity?

At this moment, I somewhat regretted my idea of using the demonic shard to find the devil's seal. This gave the demon a chance to take advantage of the situation and even harmed a good person for nothing!

"Is there a way to break this?" I asked.

Dorothy found another passage to read to us.

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"Generally speaking, demons aren't a species that's afraid of death, but they're not stingy with the protection they provide for their hatcheries. The records include firmness, corrosive attacker, power rebound, vicious curse, death energy entanglement, and so on.

"But that doesn't mean that there's no solution. As long as we can resist the defense mechanism of the hotbed, it's easy to destroy it. However, like there are safe and dangerous periods in a ten-month pregnancy, there are also different conditions for a hotbed.

"Generally speaking, a hotbed is at its weakest when it's at its most chaotic state, and its connection with the carrier is also the most relaxed. Once the hotbed is formed, its defense mechanism will also mature, and its connection with the carrier will be closer.

"And one month after the incubation, the hotbed's defense mechanism relaxes. It doesn't matter, even if it's attacked. At this time, the carrier's self-consciousness has generally disappeared, becoming another evil creature. Even if it goes into premature labor, it can still survive with its strong vitality. But now the hotbed and the carrier are firmly connected. Once the hotbed collapses, the evil creature will die, and the carrier will also die."

In other words, now was an excellent time to rescue Linda, who was in the early stage of becoming a breeding ground for the demons.

It was just that we couldn't confirm what her defense mechanism was. It was fine if it was solid or corrosive, but there were ways to solve or cure it. They were most afraid of evil curses or spells, which could likely haunt them for a lifetime.

However, we were too far away from the royal palace. No matter how anxious we were, it would be useless. We could only hand the information to the royal palace and let my parents, Tracy, and the werewolf grandmasters handle it.

As a general, Aldrich sincerely thanked Dorothy, "Thank you, Dorothy. Linda was an excellent warrior; you saved her life."

He had seen many soldiers die helplessly on the battlefield because of all kinds of dirty tricks.

Dorothy quickly waved her hand. "All good. This is what I should do. No one can watch a warrior who has made countless contributions be taken away by a demon for nothing."

The third day after Frank's departure.

We hurriedly browsed through the books and notes left behind by Mullwica, but unfortunately, we didn't find any discoveries about the Eye of Insight.

Seeing that Dorothy's mood was worsening, I became anxious, but to no avail.

How I wish New Flow could evolve to the point where I could devour other people's special powers. Without the Eye of Insight, Dorothy's life predicament would have been easily solved. However, I could only absorb physical energy, which made me wonder if there was a possibility of New Flow evolving.

However, it was all a fantasy now.

That night, another piece of bad news came. There was news from the third base that something had happened to Frank!

When we saw the remaining members of the third base go up the mountain in the night, we had a hunch that something big was going to happen.

Sure enough, the team members didn't even have time to catch their breath before they hurriedly said, "Something happened to Captain Frank! He had suddenly fainted this afternoon. His heartbeat gradually weakened, and there were many ulcers on his body. No matter how he was called, he could not wake up. The medical team members couldn't find any problems either. We suspect that evil forces have eroded it, so we have come to ask for the help of the werewolf grandmasters!"

What an unexpected nightmare!

We didn't expect something to happen to Frank so suddenly. Did something happen during the three patrol days that we didn't know about?

"What about the team members that followed Captain Frank? Where are Yuri and the others?"

If something had happened to Yuri and the others, it meant that something had happened during the patrol.

However, the team members' answers made our hearts sink to the bottom of the valley. Yuri and the others are fine. Only Captain Frank was in trouble!

219 Something Happened

Selma Payne's POV:

Just as we were in a hurry to rescue Frank, we received another bad news from Master Mary.

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While Aldrich was arranging the team to prepare the first aid items, Master Mary pulled us to the side and whispered, "Something's happened at the palace. Frank has an emergency, and his high fever isn't going down. He's being rescued."

Something happened to both of the Franks?

Wasn't this too much of a coincidence? sS much so that the obvious conspiracy was hanging on the surface, afraid we would miss it.

The palace was too far away, and we couldn't reach it. The most important thing now was to find clues on this fellow, Frank.

"Keep in touch with the palace," I said. "We're ready to send back any news about this Frank on the mountain at any time to see if it has anything to do with this place."

The situation was urgent, so we couldn't wait until dawn. It was easy to encounter danger when traveling at night, so we gathered a large group of team members and formed a fifteen-man squadron.

Aldrich still needed to stay behind to preside over the overall situation. Master Mary and Master Kevin, who were the best at soul-related sorcery, accompanied him. Master Hayley was left behind. She and Master Mary's mind link could effectively transmit information.

To my surprise, the dazed Dorothy took the initiative to ask to join us.

"When necessary, I can see many causes and consequences. I know that everyone is worried about my health," Dorothy said. "But since things have come to this, why don't you let my eyes contribute more? If I can't find a way to control it in the end, I'd rather squeeze every last bit of value out of the Eye of Insight than let time pass miserably in waste."

The stronger members transformed into their wolf forms and carried the rest of the people on their backs. The strong limbs of the wolves were more suitable for the harsh terrain than their legs. We reached the third base before 10 o'clock at full speed.

The third one had the worst environment compared to the first two bases. Since no construction materials were available on the spot, the cold and hard stone house was built by the werewolf grandmasters using rocks and sorcery.

This place was like a miniature version of a warehouse. The area was not large, and most of the space was occupied by various supplies. Therefore, although not many people were left behind, the space seemed tight.

Now that fifteen people had suddenly joined them, there was no place to stand.

The person in charge of the third base was a middle-aged man named Chris. He didn't speak in an official way. After a simple greeting, he led us to the temporary isolation ward.

"Captain Frank's condition is terrible." Chris frowned. "We've tried many methods, but we can't lower his body temperature. His fever is very strange. It doesn't seem like a fever. His body temperature suddenly began to rise for no reason."

The werewolf grandmaster and Kerner checked on him, and the results were almost the same as what Chris had said, except that his body temperature was higher at nearly 40° C.

This was a hazardous warning line. Even for a werewolf, a continuous high fever could leave behind irreversible aftereffects or even death!

After using medicine and injections to no avail, Master Mary and Master Kevin had no choice but to try using sorcery.

"Those who are not needed here, please leave for the time being." Master Kevin prepared all kinds of props and did not even look up. Soul inspection was precise and dangerous sorcery. It was strictly forbidden to be disturbed.

No matter how worried we were, we could only retreat from the ward.

Only Master Mary and Master Kevin were left in the ward. Due to the poor soundproofing, we could hear their conversation. However, our hearts sank with every word they said.

"How's the situation?"

"In my opinion, it's not very good. The lingering black gas can almost condense into a physical form."

"What an evil curse. I've been with Frank for many days, but I couldn't tell. What about you?"

“If you didn’t feel it, I didn’t either. No matter who the caster was, he was brilliant and vicious enough. The curse was deep in the soul, like a sealed cheese box. Not a trace of its smell could leak out. However, these ‘cheeses’ are like seeds that have taken root and sprouted in the soul. Up until now, they have almost fused with Frank’s soul.”

“This is not good news. Do you have a solution?”

“Unfortunately, no... Wait, what is this?”

“What’s wrong?”

“... I am not sure. We have to let the people outside see this.”

The ward door opened, and Master Kevin walked out, exhausted and serious. He said, “I think you all heard everything, so I won’t say much. The situation is a little serious, so I must explain it to you.”

He was like a doctor who was about to inform his family of the bad news. He called a few people who could manage the overall situation into the ward and closed the door.

Even though we knew that the people outside had heard everything.

220 A Curse Integrated Into The Soul

Selma Payne’s POV:

“The situation is a bit special. I don’t know if I should keep it a secret.” Master Kevin said, “If you think it needs to be considered, then I will set up a soundproof barrier.”

He was a blockhead. How could he say something confidential loudly in everyone’s ears?

Then, I realized that everyone was looking at me.

“Make a decision, Selma.” Dorothy asked, “Confidential or public?”

No, how did this become something I could decide?

However, with Dorothy and the others staring at me, I suddenly realized that no matter if it was in terms of status or authority, I was the highest-ranking person present.

The werewolf grandmasters and Dorothy knew that I was a Princess. In contrast, the other members who thought I was only a relative of the Queen knew that I was the temporary leader of the squadron. Aldrich had personally appointed me before I left.

Without me realizing it, I’d already changed from an executor to an instigator.

Alright, then, it was time to say yes or no.

“No,” I finally decided. ” There’s no need to keep it a secret. Everyone here has the right to know.”

Frank was the captain of all the team members present. He was their superior and old friend. Everyone was anxious about Frank’s condition. Their sincere concern should not be deceived.

Moreover, it was time to let the team know what kind of power they were facing. Even if they had always known that they were facing a sealed demon, the words in the books were not as clear as the truth.

They had to understand the unprecedented danger they were facing.

I opened the door and saw many worried faces.

Master Kevin didn’t say much. He showed us the soul model he had temporarily constructed.

“As you can see, Captain Frank’s soul is contaminated by an unknown curse. The curse comes from the soul, like the root of a blade of grass, firmly rooted in the soul.”

The light blue soul simulated by magic power was entangled with an ugly black mist. It seeped out of the soul and back in, looking like some strange breathing.

“The curse caused fever and other symptoms. It has penetrated deep into the soul and even affected the body. If this continues, the first to collapse won’t be Captain Frank’s body but his soul. By then, even if we saved his physical body, we’d only get an unconscious body or a person in a vegetative state.”

Hearing this, everyone fell silent.

“Is there any other way to save the captain’s soul?” A team member suddenly asked. Then, dozens of hopeful eyes looked over.

Master Kevin lowered his gaze uncomfortably and shook his head stiffly as if he was not used to such annotations. “I’m sorry, but I’m completely helpless. In my opinion, this situation is beyond human means. I suggest that we send Captain Frank back to pack as soon as possible so that he can receive the blessing of the Moon Goddess in the temple. This might save his soul.”

Should I go back to the pack?

However, it was a long way to go. Even if we used their fastest speed, Captain Frank would only arrive at the pack by noon the next day. However, his situation was so urgent. Could he still hold on until tomorrow?

Even if he could, would the blessing of the goddess work? Unlike the other gods, Moon Goddess did not value the worship of the human world. The werewolves did not have a tradition of annual worship. The last time the temple was opened was three years ago, and the blessing of the goddess would have to go back tens to hundreds of years. Would the Moon Goddess be willing to descend for an ordinary believer?

I was pessimistic about this, and my team members' defeated expressions told me they thought the same.

But it wasn't like there was no other way.

Before Dorothy tried to speak, I said, "Why don't I try something? New Flow can devour all forms of energy and curses. I've devoured the curse Leviathan had cast on Dorothy and me before. I don't think the curse on Captain Frank is more terrifying than that."

The team members immediately regained their hope. Dorothy and I, the two successful cases, were right before them!

However, Master Mary was a wet blanket. "The situation is different now. The curse on you and Dorothy has only been around for a short time, so it's not that closely connected to you. So, as you said, it's as simple as picking corn out of a soup and eating it.

"But Captain Frank's curse has already penetrated deep into his soul. You can even say he's about to become one with the curse. Separating the curse from his soul is like separating salt from a cup of salt water. You can do whatever you want with the salt water, but your soul can't take any damage."

This was a difficult task, but I was still confident I'd succeed. Separating the curse from the soul was like separating the harmful elements from the power I absorbed. The former could do it, so why couldn't the latter?

"Let me try," I pleaded earnestly. "Even if we start returning now, we must wait for the plane in the safe house. Let's not waste time waiting for the plane. It's better to do something than nothing."

221 An Accusation

Selma Payne's POV:

My request was effective; no one was willing to see Frank die.

“That’s a good idea, but there’s still a problem.” This time, it was Master Kevin’s turn to be the wet blanket.

“This is why we need to be more cautious.”

Under his guidance, the soul model gradually transformed and distorted and finally became a cluster of broken and sticky things like tea leaves that had been soaked.

“Actually this is Captain Frank’s soul now.”

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To our astonishment, he explained Captain Frank’s soul wasn’t complete. Or rather, the soul we saw was only a fragment of the real soul. That was why it looked so broken and so fragile.

Kerner asked in disbelief, “What do you mean? Are you saying that Captain’s soul has been severed?”

“Yes.” Master Kevin nodded. “In terms of volume, this fragment is about a third or a quarter of Frank’s complete soul. Although it was enough to support a physical body, it also weakened its defense, allowing the curse to penetrate its body so quickly.”

“Quickly?” My intuition told me that his words had a hidden meaning. “Can you deduce when he was cursed?”

Master Kevin gave me a deep look – an expression that a straightforward person shouldn’t have – and then said, “Yes, based on my experience, it’ll take about twenty days.

About twenty days?

Looking at the time, I was shocked to realize that it was around when I first set foot in the Rocky Mountains.

During that period, the only opportunity for Frank to be attacked was the illusion on that snowy night.

Could it be that...

I was so shocked by my thoughts that my blood turned cold.

If this Frank on the mountain was a soul fragment, what about the one at the foot of the mountain?

“Send a message to the palace,” I said to Master Mary. “Tell them that Captain Frank at the foot of the mountain is likely to have a soul fragment too!”

There was an uproar, and there was no need to hide it anymore. We told everyone about the real and fake Shrek.

The team members found it hard to accept.

Surprisingly, the one who had the biggest reaction was Yuri.

“It’s all because of this ridiculous mission!” he roared angrily. “You just had to provoke the devil, and now you’ve killed Captain Frank!”

He pointed at Dorothy and my nose and scolded us as if we were the main culprits behind everything.

“We’re werewolves! Why would a werewolf care about a demon’s business? Whether the shamans suck up to satan or the sanctimonious black-robed humans, anyone has more reason than us to care about this mess. Why can’t we sell the information to them and watch them fight? So what if the demon has broken through the seal? We are believers of the Moon Goddess. Will she stand by and watch the demon invade her territory?”

“If it weren’t for the sake of finding that so-called ‘treatment method’ for you two young ladies, no one would come to this damn place, and no one would be sliced up and cursed by the devil! Dear Miss Selma, didn’t you obtain the power of disgusting gluttony? Haven’t you and your sister’s curses already been devoured by you as dessert? So what are we still doing on the snow mountain?”

“I’ve had enough of your willful faces. How can a girl who doesn’t know anything step on a soldier’s head and give orders? I think General Aldrich has also been blinded by love. Ha! It would be better to say that General Aldrich is also a noble Lord who used his family background to get a high position. A general who’s not even thirty years old hasn’t even grown out his pubic hair. It’ll be a joke if this gets out!”

“Are you happy now? Operation Glorious, which added bricks to your resume, has already lost Captain Frank. Who do you want to lose next? Let’s bury everyone with this damn seal of the evil demon!”

He barked like a dog whose tail had been stepped on. He glared so hard with bloodshot eyes that he was about to shoot infrared rays through Dorothy and me.

I didn’t feel angry when I saw him drooling and jumping up and down. I thought I would feel provoked as I did in the beginning, but listening to his unsightly accusations, I only felt bored and unbothered.

This was a form of contempt born from the fact that there was no need to fuss over it.

I was looking down on this warrior who had broken down. Could he still be called a warrior?

That was not important, and I didn't care.

Finally, Yuri stopped screaming. This wasn't because he realized how inappropriate his actions were but because a team member who couldn't listen finally covered his mouth and pulled him away.

Yuri's accusation was too sudden, so much so that most people didn't react. A small group of people gave up after a few seconds, and from their expressions, it seemed that Yuri was not fighting alone.

In fact, from the first day we arrived at the Rocky Mountains, I noticed that some of our team members were looking at us strangely. I knew this was inevitable, so I tried to use my actions to clear their prejudice. Some of them no longer looked at me as if they were looking at a rich, spoiled kid.

However, it seemed that my efforts had not achieved the results I wanted.

222 The Wasteland

Selma Payne's POV:

Some team members didn't like me, opposed me, or looked down on me.

If I were still like my 18-year-old self, I would have started to doubt myself by now. Would I ask myself what I did wrong? How do I look delicate? Where did I cause any inconvenience to my team members? What should I do to win the love and respect of my players?

But now I didn't. I still asked the first three questions but scoffed at the last one!

I was on a mission to find answers, not make friends. The acknowledgment of my team members was, of course, necessary, but it was definitely not my main problem right now.

Besides, so what if I could never gain the approval of some people? Even a god couldn't get everyone's approval, so what right did I have?

At the end of the day, their existences were of no importance to me.

What an arrogant way of thinking, but who could say I didn't have the right to be arrogant?

So, facing the indignant Yuri and the team members behind him who were avoiding my gaze, I just calmly asked, "Are you done venting? If you're done venting, please leave. The werewolf grandmasters and I will start operating on Captain Frank."

Yuri glared at me. "How dare you touch Captain Frank's soul! If it wasn't for you-

"I said, please leave!" I looked at him emotionlessly, as if I was looking at air. "As you were talking nonsense with me, Captain Frank's condition worsened. Perhaps you want to vent your dissatisfaction with me for a few more hours so that you can pray for Captain Frank before he dies?"

"I didn't mean that at all!" Yuri looked at me in disbelief. "You vicious woman who plays with words. You're as disgusting as your strange power!"

"Think whatever you want." I stopped looking at him and asked Master Kevin to draw a rune for me that could make contact with souls. "But you can't deny that my disgusting ability is Captain Frank's life savior, and your noble mouth has no use other than wasting time and making his condition worse, right?"

Yuri looked like he had completely lost his mind. He wanted to pull the dagger from his boots and stab my neck.

Fortunately, his companions were still rational, and they dragged him out of the cabin.

"Dorothy, stay," I said as the people left.

Yuri found another reason to stomp his feet. "Why can she stay? With that laughable aristocratic privilege? No one here has more authority than her to stay and monitor your actions! No other team member would be more concerned about Captain Frank's safety than you two little girls."

I was getting impatient with this annoying fly. "I don't mean to doubt anyone's sincerity, Yuri. Even if you said you wanted to die with Captain Frank, I wouldn't be surprised. But you still don't have the right to stay because you know nothing about sorcery. Dorothy is the only sorcerer apprentice here and the only one who knows how to assist the werewolf grandmasters. Perhaps you can tell us what taboos are in the face of souls and curses?"

My words were merciless, and Dorothy did not even spare him a glance, completely ignoring him.

Yuri was dragged away by his teammates, fuming.

The door was closed. Although it was still not soundproof, it was much quieter.

While drawing the runes for me, Master Kevin asked in a low voice, “You know how much risk you’re taking, don’t you? You’re like Doctor Who’s about to perform surgery on a patient with terminal cancer, and the patient’s unreasonable family members are outside the ward. If you can’t cure the patient or the patient dies on the operating table, the family members who think with their muscles will rush up and tear you apart.”

“I’m confident,” I said. “Besides, this isn’t a hospital. I’m not a doctor. I won’t accept medical disputes. I promise that I will do my best to save Captain Frank. Anyone who dares to challenge my authority will pay the price they will never forget. I promise.”

Master Kevin didn’t say anything else. After he finished drawing the runes, he began to help me feel the existence of my soul.

Captain Frank’s soul was as fragile as a piece of butter, and any small mistake could cause irreparable consequences. I entered a meditative state and held my breath, using the most peaceful state to approach the broken soul.

I entered Captain Frank’s spiritual world without a hitch.

This place was barren. Perhaps it used to be a boundless green grassland, but now, only bare soil and rotten grassroots were left.

The culprit who caused all this was taking root in the wilderness. It was a sparse pine forest stretching as far as the eye could see. Like scorched wood, the black and rotten pine trees wandered on the yellow soil like ghosts.

This was the manifestation of the curse in the spiritual world. They had invaded the grassland like wild grass, and it would not be long before they would plunder all the vitality in this place.

I tried to call out his name, just like I did in Dorothy’s spiritual world, but I received no response.

This made me understand that Frank’s consciousness was already very weak. If this dragged on, there wouldn’t be any way to reverse the situation.

I tried to pull out the dead pine tree that was rooted in the wilderness, but any slight movement would cause the wilderness to tremble.

223 Devouring Souls

Selma Payne’s POV:

The pine trees seemed to have taken root too deeply in the wilderness. If they were removed by force, it would only harm Frank’s spiritual world.

This was a problem, but it also benefited me.

I was afraid it would be a waste of time to devour the pine trees one by one. Now that they were connected, it was convenient for me to kill them all at once.

He pressed his hands on the pine tree, and a familiar strange power surged toward the dead tree like a stream. A few seconds later, all the dead trees within a few dozen meters were covered by New Flow. They screamed and trembled, trying to escape from the danger. However, the roots that stuck to them became the curse of their death. They couldn't move at all and could only obediently accept my devouring.

These curses tasted like chocolate that tasted like coal ash, both delicious and unpalatable. I kept devouring the dead wood, leaving a bottomless hole where the food disappeared.

The curses on the surface were only the tip of the iceberg. As I devoured them, I realized the roots hidden under the wasteland were the most troublesome.

If one were to compare the spiritual world of Frank to a flower pot, then the wasteland would be the soil for the flowers. And now, these intruders were growing barbarically. Their complex root system had already filled the flower pot to the point that the soil could barely contain them. If this continued, there would only be one ending – the flower pot would burst from the roots!

I had to clean up the roots as soon as possible to prevent them from continuing to grow, but I didn't dare to devour them too quickly. There was too much 'flower soil' between the roots. If I was not careful, I might consume this 'flower soil' along with the roots.

Yes, New Flow could devour souls. I discovered this by accident, and even I found it terrifying.

Back then, I was still in the palace, quarreling with Aldrich. One night when I was upset, I found a small uninvited guest in my room – a fat gray rat.

This was probably a common problem with ancient palace buildings. A long history meant that modern equipment could not be modified at will, and a large area meant it was challenging to take care of everything. In short, it was inevitable that there would be some unwanted residents, such as rats and cockroaches.

I was really annoyed then. Everything was an eyesore, not to mention a small rodent that disturbed people's dreams. I didn't even think twice about it. I grabbed the poor little thing and, in my extreme frustration, did something I didn't even realize I was doing.

By the time I returned to my senses, the rat was already lying limply on the ground and not moving.

Somehow, I realized that I had just 'devoured' this rat. What I had eaten was not its body but its soul. I realized that if I wanted to, I could dispose of the injured body elegantly and silently.

Of course, I was not crazy enough to eat rats.

After my parents learned of my ability, they immediately and sternly told me that I must control myself with a heart full of reverence for all life and that this must always be kept a secret, no matter how close I was with the person, even if it was a lover or a close friend.

I believed in the loyalty of the people you acknowledged, but I didn't believe in the various strange powers in this world. My father said, "There are countless ways to crack open a person's head and mouth without shedding blood. Loyalty is not the key to keeping secrets."

We hid this from the werewolf grandmaster, and my parents solemnly recorded this in the secret books of the royal family.

"Why not let it be a permanent secret?" I was rather puzzled. After I died of old age, no one else would know about this.

My father did not laugh at my childish words. Instead, he patiently explained, "This is a form of responsibility and a trump card to solve accidents. We can't guarantee that the characteristic of devouring souls will not bring trouble to you or your descendants in the future. Once the day comes that we need to solve the problem, this book will provide all the answers."

In short, the curse in Frank's spiritual world was mostly removed under my careful care.

It was so smooth sailing that I felt that something was wrong.

Even the curse trapped in Dorothy's soul had resisted with all its might, but the one in Frank's soul was even more complicated and powerful. Why was it that other than the dead wood on the surface, there was no resistance at all?

I could only pray that everything was as usual and that no strange accidents would happen.

However, misfortunes never come alone.

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As I removed the last root, I heard a strange movement behind me.

I was shocked that many dead pine trees had grown out of the empty holes I had left in the wilderness. New roots were increasing rapidly in the barren land beneath them.

How was this possible? If I devoured the curse, it would be gone. Its power would disappear, and it would be impossible to create a new entity.

Did evil energy not need to abide by the law of conservation of mass?

I soon found some clues.

Although the change was very slight, I still found that the soil under my feet had become thinner. At first, one would think that the pine trees were growing taller, but the horizon was changing.

The curse was absorbing Frank's soul as its nourishment!

I was too careless to believe I could do whatever I wanted with the curse. As long as there was a single root, the curse could plunder the power in the soul and easily regenerate.

224 The Pleading Eyes

Selma Payne's POV:

This was going to be troublesome. It took time to absorb the curse, and I couldn't make all the roots disappear instantly.

I had no choice but to withdraw from Shrek's spiritual world and seek help from the outside world.

Master Kevin helped me maintain the unstable spiritual world of my soul fragment, so he was the most sensitive to its changes.

"Frank's condition is getting better," he said. "But it's only for a while. Since just now, his condition has continued to deteriorate, accompanied by the dissipation of part of his soul."

As he said this, there was a commotion outside.

"Silence! We're doing a soul surgery right now. This isn't a market!"

Master Mary couldn't bear it anymore and roared. The voices outside quieted down, but the whispering still didn't stop.

"Frank's curse is rooted in his soul like a tree. I tried to devour the curse, and I succeeded. However, this curse is very cunning. Once I've devoured it to a certain extent, it will use its root-like tentacles to absorb Frank's soul as nourishment and replenish itself. I don't dare to take the risk, so I had to stop temporarily."

“It seems that the curse’s resurrection isn’t that fast,” Master Kevin said. “Captain Frank’s condition is much better than before, but he’s still getting worse.”

“Unless there is a way for me to devour all the curses instantly, letting go of any trace of the root system can promote its resurrection.” I continued, “Before we knew it, part of Captain Frank’s soul had been consumed by the curse. Yes, its desolate and broken spiritual world is the embodiment. But I dare not bet on who is faster, the curse or me, once the soul power is lost too much...”

“Then, this soul fragment will be completely shattered,” Master Kevin added.

However, neither Master Mary nor Master Kevin had a way to make New Flow wrap around the entire curse.

As we were at our wits’ end, Dorothy said softly, “Why don’t you let me try?”

We subconsciously looked at her.

She continued, “I have a guess. Since the curse is the same as the pine forest, they’re both sealed demons’ creations. Also, the curse in Captain Frank’s body sounds like it has intelligence. In that case, could it be like the pine forest, that the curse we thought of was also a piece of the demonic fragment? However, it was too small and weak, so it was mistaken for a curse.”

I was taken aback. I had to admit that this was a possibility. Demonic shards and curses came from the same source, so they were essentially the creation of a type of power. I could not trace the differences in their roots, so I subconsciously used the smell to distinguish them.

If it were a demonic fragment, then it’d be easy. Dorothy pointed at the core of the Soul Model. “Even the pine forest has a heart that coordinates the entire situation. Then, could the so-called ‘curse’ in Captain Frank’s body also have such a thing? It’s this ‘heart’ that controls the ‘curse’, allowing it to paralyze our vision to live in the host’s body like a roundworm.”

This sounded like a fantasy, but it was possible in theory. Whether it was the similar appearance or the power from the same source, it showed that it was very likely that a tiny demonic fragment had been implanted into Frank’s soul fragment.

As long as I could see it, finding the ‘heart’ would be as easy as taking something out of my pocket.

Dorothy did not say it, but everyone in the room knew what she meant.

“No, your body is weak.”

“My body is already done for!” Dorothy interrupted me. This girl, who had always been kind and friendly, was now so unyielding. “I’ve said it before. If there’s no way to save everything, then I’d rather throw away my remaining value than die in a cowardly manner. Selma, I know that you understand me. If it were you, would you be willing to watch a warrior with outstanding military service, who has been injured, live on in pain?”

“I...!”

Of course, I wouldn’t want that, but if it were Dorothy, I’d rather she live for as long as she could.

Perhaps this might sound a little cold, but Dorothy was my best friend, my emotional tie. I respected Frank and saw this great warrior as a friend. But between him and Dorothy, I would choose Dorothy without hesitation.

However, looking at Dorothy’s pleading eyes – not asking, but pleading – I was at a loss for words.

I knew she was begging for an acknowledgment that she could take responsibility and a promise that I would always believe in her.

What else could I do?

I gave in. Dorothy said happily but shamefully. “I’m sorry. Let’s start.”

She closed her eyes, and I felt those clear eyes surveying everything. I held her hand and brought her into Frank’s spiritual world.

The situation here was worse than before I left. New pine trees and roots had taken up most of the wilderness, and the land was drier, with cracks appearing.

In the spiritual world, Dorothy’s eyes were silver. They were as soft as the moonlight and also as bright as ink made of silver.

She only took a casual look and smiled determinedly.

“I’ve found you, little rat.”