

## H. Academy 191

Chapter 191 Chapter 42.6 - Trip

As the assailants retreated with Sylvie in tow, they regrouped in a hidden location. The leader, a tall figure with a hood concealing their face, addressed Mason, the one who had attacked Astron.

"Why did you attack him, you bastard? What if she breaks, huh? Can you take responsibility," the leader of the group demanded, their voice carrying a tone of frustration.

Mason, maintaining a calm demeanor, responded, "He was getting too close, and I had to make sure he wouldn't follow us."

"Really? Do you think he was in a state to do anything? We already know for a fact that he is just a weak bastard."

"It doesn't matter. A threat is a threat."

The leader's eyes narrowed, dissatisfied with Mason's explanation. "Tch. You bastard, just say that you didn't like him; why are you going around with your words?"

Mason smirked, revealing a hint of amusement. "Yeah. That bastard was getting on my nerves, okay. And it is not like, if we let him live, things would be different. He was already going to alert the authorities."

"Sigh... You know, until he had alerted the authorities, we would already be away enough from the start."

"Again, it doesn't matter. A threat is a threat. And I just eliminated it."

"And again, we already made sure he wouldn't be able to move. We already got his dimensional ring and his watch with us anyway."

"..."

"....You are a reckless idiot." the leader conceded with a sigh. "Now, let's focus on the present. Girl, are you alright?"

Sylvie, still reeling from the events, looked lifeless. Her eyes, once filled with determination, were now vacant, reflecting the deep shock she experienced. She didn't respond to the leader's inquiry, her gaze fixed on some distant point.

Mason, indifferent to Sylvie's state, added, "She's fine. Just give her some time. The shock will wear off, and she'll be more compliant once she understands the situation."

"I know, bastard. Don't order me." The leader said as he looked at his watch.

"The transport will be here in at most half an hour. Until then, keep an eye on her, Mason. We can't afford any unexpected surprises," the leader instructed, emphasizing the importance of vigilance.

Mason, unbothered by the responsibility, merely nodded. "I've got it covered. Just make sure the next part of the plan goes smoothly. I don't want any more hiccups."

Just like that, they started waiting for the vehicle to come inside the backside of the restaurant that was working for them.

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For someone who wants to operate from the shadows, what could be the most detrimental issue?

It is the possibility of their identity being revealed.

This is especially the case for me. After all, neither the government nor anyone could be trusted when it comes to what I have in mind.

Therefore, I needed to act in such a manner, making myself appear as if I had discarded. After all, most of the time, demon followers tend to be watched by something inside them, and that is something none of them know about.

While they gain powers, they also sacrifice their personal lives. The ones who have their powers can witness what is happening with their eyes.

Biting the small pill I had stored in my mouth, I felt the energy returning to my body. The

'Though, I really never expected Sylvie to do such a thing.'

She put her life on the line for me. Even though I was already prepared for the attack, what she did was something that touched my heart.

'Tch. Now, I feel like an asshole for playing with her feelings.'

Everything went as I had planned, aside from what Sylvie had done. She sacrificed herself...At least she tried to. I am sure she really thought she could save me.

That selflessness is what will make Sylvie the future Saintess, and witnessing it like that, a small knot appeared in my heart.

'Why am I remembering her now.'

Her actions made me remember someone in a certain scene. At that point, I almost lost control of my emotions and revealed myself. Anger soared, and I felt my hatred rising.

'Now, it is time for the hunt.'

With my eyes, I could already see the tendrils revealing the location of the assailants. And, now that I had created an alibi for myself, there was no need to hold anything back.

'Especially that Mason. I am going to pluck your eyes out.'

Whatever it is, I can still remember his smirk when he left with Sylvie.

Dash.

SWOOSH!

Swiftly and seamlessly, I blended into the shadows, the cloak of darkness becoming my ally.

With a calculated finesse, I activated the [Unknown's Armor], a gift from a stubborn old man who understood the value of adaptability as well as my trait [Shadowborne].

The shadows enveloped me as the armor's transformative ability came to life. My clothing underwent a silent metamorphosis, turning to the image I had envisioned in my head.

A mask slowly came to my face, and my whole body was covered by the black suit.

The once conspicuous attire now merged seamlessly with the darkness, each fold and contour designed to be indistinguishable in the obscurity of the night, and just like that, I disappeared into the shadows.

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"Hey."

As the leader left the room, Mason looked at Sylvie, who curled onto the side. He had a widened smile on his face as he finally felt like he had achieved his objective.

Mason leisurely approached Sylvie, his smirk widening as he observed her curled form. The dim light in the hidden location flickered, casting eerie shadows on the walls.

"Well, well, Sylvie," Mason taunted, his tone dripping with condescension. "Looks like your grand plan to stop us didn't quite work out, did it? A valiant effort, I must say."

Sylvie's gaze slowly shifted toward Mason, her eyes still clouded with shock but now tinged with a hint of defiance. She remained silent, unwilling to give Mason the satisfaction of a response.

"You know," Mason continued, crouching down to her eye level, "you were so confident back there, standing up to us and all. Thought you could be the hero, huh? But here we are, and you're just another damsel in distress."

Sylvie bit her lip, suppressing the anger welling up inside her. Mason's words were like venom, and she knew responding to his taunts would only fuel his satisfaction.

"How was it? Did you like the last gift I had left for him? After all, that guy was getting on my nerves for a long time, you know?"

Mason chuckled, relishing in the discomfort he was causing. He wanted to have a taste of this girl, but he couldn't because of the orders from higher-ups, so he needed to get this feeling from his chest, right? After all, he had been trying to get her to this point the whole semester. This whole facade was also taking a toll on his mind.

"Though I have to say, his bravery was almost adorable. Almost. Pity it didn't amount to much, did it? He immediately got right before you to protect you. Hahaha....You should have seen his expression the moment I threw the last attack; he was frightened."

However, most importantly, he wanted to insult that guy. After all, for some reason, he could still feel that 'gaze' on himself. That gaze seemed like he was looking down on him.

He reached out and tilted Sylvie's chin upward, forcing her to meet his gaze. His eyes bore into hers, searching for any signs of weakness.

"I bet he regretted that he was with you at that moment, thinking if it wasn't for you, he would have been safe."

Sylvie's head sank as Mason's words cut through her, each sentence heavier than the last.

'Right.'

Guilt gnawed at her, intertwining with the anger she was desperately trying to suppress. The image of Astron, standing protectively before her, made her remember the same thing she had felt at that time when she was much, much younger.

'Still the same.'

She herself knew it was impossible to become strong enough in just a bunch of days. But, even then, she couldn't help but feel anger towards herself. The fact that she was still the same pathetic girl haunted her once more.

"Well, no use of regrets now. After all, I am sure he will forgive you in the afterlife."

'Afterlife....Right, he is dead.'

Anger soared for a second, and her eyes lit up. Even though her mana was sealed, she decided to act one last time.

"-Pitu"

Making eye contact, Sylvie summoned all the anger, frustration, and sorrow within her and spat directly at Mason's face.

"....."

Mason, momentarily taken aback by Sylvie's sudden act of defiance, stood frozen as the saliva landed on his face.

He touched the liquid with his fingers, bewildered and unable to comprehend what had just transpired.

The room fell silent for a moment before Mason's confusion slowly transformed into a simmering anger, and his eyes narrowed at Sylvie. He raised his hand, attempting for a slap.

"You bit-"

FLINCH!

But at that moment, his hand stopped, feeling ants crawling on his skin.

'What?'

An intense feeling of danger, the senses that were strengthened because of his demonic evolution, was now warning him.

[Mason, we are un-]

-BOOM!

Just as a warning came from his earbuds, an explosion suddenly occurred, blasting him off.

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The moment I blended into the shadows, I started moving as fast as possible with maximum speed. The attackers seemed to stop as well since the tendrils showed their location wasn't moving.

'That is good.'

It was very likely that they were waiting for the transportation to come. Entering this city, where the government pays quite a lot of attention, wouldn't be easy, and escaping would certainly not be.

Therefore, it was understandable that they were waiting.

'Just as I had expected.'

With that thought, I reached the location where they were hiding in a matter of two minutes.

"Huff....Huff...."

I was slightly out of breath since I had used my body to maximum output.

I found myself behind a small restaurant. It was a narrow alley with a few trash bins scattered around, and it seemed like a perfect spot for them to hide temporarily.

'Let's take a look.'

I silently ascended to the rooftop, crouching behind a small ventilation unit. From this vantage point, I had a clear view of the scene below.

There were three of them, looking as if they were in their late twenties, dressed in dark attire that allowed them to blend into the shadows. They appeared to be discussing something, occasionally glancing around to ensure they weren't being followed.

'Three guards on the front. Two of them are the ones who attacked me, and the other one is probably the scout.'

From their body shapes and postures, I confirmed two of them were dagger users while the other one was a sword user.

Aurora Raven.

Calling my bond, I started moving it around the place, scouting the numbers. From another angle, I was able to spot another two. One of them was the leader, and the other one was non-combatant.

They were talking with each other while checking onto a device.

'Mana Observation.'

Within the last week, I wasn't simply only training my body. I also researched quite a lot of ways to use my mana and mastered Mana Observation to some extent. Of course, it wasn't fully mastered, but now I could somehow sense the prints of Demonic Energy around the place.

'And Mason and Sylvie are behind them.'

Sylvie's mana seemed to be sealed, but my tendrils were still connected.

'This is enough.'



The amount of information gathered was sufficient, and now it was time to act.

'Celestalith.'

I called my weapon and put it into its rifle form. And compressed the mana into the tip.

-PIU!

And then shot it forward.

Chapter 192 Chapter 42.7 - Trip

-PIU! PIU! PIU!

The moment the Celestalith fired, the concentrated energy propelled three energy bullets with uncanny accuracy toward the heads of the two guards.

The shots were swift, almost imperceptible, and they hit their marks without a moment's delay.

TAK! TAK! TAK!

The guards crumpled to the ground, their consciousness extinguished before they even had the chance to react.

No sound was made, and neither was there a loss of energy. My already trained eyes and body were able to react swiftly to the recoil, even if that did not count.

"Huh?"

The leader and the non-combatant were momentarily stunned, their eyes widening at the sudden demise of their comrades.

From their lips, I could see the leader speaking, possibly informing Sylvie while taking cover behind the desk. He also coated his body with his demonic mana to defend himself in a matter of one second.

-WROOM!

But I wasn't waiting while he was doing that. From the moment I had shot the first series of bullets, I already had a plan in my head.

Changing the form of my gun to the arrow in an instant, I channeled my hyper-energized Blue Mana into the arrow.

-SWOOSH!

And released it immediately. The arrow shot forward in an instant and arrived at the restaurant.

-BOOM!

As the hyper-energized arrow met with the target, a hearty explosion occurred as a result.

The explosion resonated through the narrow alley, creating a thick curtain of smoke that billowed into the air. The acrid scent of burnt debris mixed with the chilling air, further obscuring visibility.

Capitalizing on the chaos, I activated my trait, [Shadowborne]. My form blurred, melding seamlessly with the shadows cast by the smoke, with my presence concealed.

Now practically invisible to the naked eye, I swiftly closed the distance between myself and the leader, who was still reacting to the sudden turn of events.

As I approached, I shifted the Celestalith into its chakram form, the whirling blades gleaming in the dim light.

With practiced precision, I launched the chakram toward the leader, aiming for their weapon hand to disarm them.

-CLINK!

The chakram hit its mark, knocking the weapon from the leader's grasp.

"Where are you bastard?"

The guy with his body covered with demonic energy was looking all around the place; his eyes widened. He was clearly and seemingly annoyed by my presence.

'You must be feeling the ants crawling your skin.'

In the presence of death, everyone feels fear. This is how it goes.

'You will die here.'

SWOOSH!

Without giving him any chance, I immediately threw another bunch of chakrams, all of them already orbiting around me.

SWOOSH! SWOOSH! SWOOSH!

The chakrams streaked through the smoke-filled air, hurtling toward the disarmed leader. With nimble movements, he dodged most of the attacks, his demonic energy flickering around him in a defensive dance.

"Futile, you can't hit me!" he taunted, his voice a mixture of arrogance. But I already knew what he was thinking.

In life and death, psychological warfare is always important, and from his reactions and small mimic alone, I could easily see that he was trying to taunt me.

But, as a stealth user, losing my cool would be the last thing I would do.

And, the act of missing the chakrams alone was also intentional, after all, since I wanted to give him a false sense of security for a second.

Little did he know my trait. My control over the Celestalith extended beyond the initial throw.

"Who you are, you motherfucker. Show yourself!"

As he confidently avoided the frontal assault while shouting, the chakrams, guided by my manipulation of Gray Mana, changed their trajectory mid-air.

With a sudden curling motion, the chakrams altered their course, coming back behind the leader. His triumphant expression turned to shock as he realized the blades were not done with their assault.

-CLINK! CLINK! CLINK!

The chakrams expertly found their marks, grazing the leader's sides and leaving deep cuts.

"Grrrr....."

The surprise on his face mirrored the dawning realization that, despite his efforts to evade, the relentless blades had outsmarted him.

Dash.

And that momentarily surprise was all I needed. The moment he lost his cool for a second, I immediately activated my skill, feeling my speed increase.

SWOOSH!

Keeping Celestalith in its chakram form, I immediately dashed to him with instant precision.

Blade Dance, Silver Moon.

With the precision of a well-practiced dance, I activated the move set I had been practicing.

My movements became a blur, and the Celestalith transformed into countless chakrams sliced through the air with deadly accuracy, all of them orbiting around me.

SPURT!

And, in an instant, blood surged from the countless wounds I had created, turning him into a simple dead meat.

"I-imp-"

He wanted to utter one last word, but he couldn't.

"Die."

SLASH!

The last disc that I had used to target the non-combatant returned right to me while cutting his neck cleanly.

With the leader's body falling lifelessly to the ground, I didn't allow a moment of respite. The Blade Dance, Silver Moon, had left a trail of blood and death in its wake, and the atmosphere was thick with the weight of the executed strikes.

However, I couldn't afford to linger.

There was a non-combatant in the basement, someone who was ready to give her life for me. Well, even if it wasn't for that, it is not like I am going to let a demon follower go away, either.

The tendrils of my Shadows extended, seeking out the target as I swiftly descended the stairs, avoiding any creaking sounds that might give away my approach with my presence masked.

'Two traps laid at the entrance.'

The information I had known about the game came in handy at this time. I knew for a fact what Mason was specialized in. He was a demon follower who wasn't particularly good at direct confrontation.

He was able to move his Demonic Energy freely, but his talent did lay in laying traps.

With a calculated move, I grabbed the lifeless body of the leader.

It was heavy a little, but now that my strength stat improved a lot, it was no longer a hassle.

I flung it through the door into the basement.

SWOOSH! THUD!

The moment the body crossed the threshold, a series of traps were triggered.

-PUF!

The demonic energy within the leader's body reacted violently, causing an explosion that echoed through the confined space.

-CREAK!

Simultaneously, acidic bombs concealed within the body ruptured, creating a corrosive cloud that filled the basement.

"Heh, you arrogant bastard."

The sounds transmitted to my head from the entrance, and that sound would be the thing that made me locate the position of the last guy, even if I hadn't known.

'Foolish.'

No matter where you are, demon-follower inferior pigs will always stay inferior in the end.  
Bootlicker dogs of demons who have no purpose in their lives....

'Ah, I am losing my control.'

I had been trying to keep my calm all this time, but the hatred inside me was about to pour down.

Eyes of Hourglass.

Using the last bits of my logical mind to keep my emotions under control, I activated my skill, feeling the time slowing down.

From the [Keen Eye] characteristic of the skill, I could easily locate the position of the Mason and his weak points. Combined with my Green Mana, who was still connected to him, the skill became truly overpowered.

-SWOOSH! SWOOSH!

And then, I propelled two chakrams toward the Mason's location with precision.

"Huh? Leader?"

It seemed the guy finally realized the body that had entered the room wasn't me.

'Low-born pig.'

It took quite a while for a bastard whom I thought was clever enough to blend in the academy. It seems I was mistaken. I guess I had expected much from a low-born demon follower anyway.

The chakrams, guided by my manipulation of Gray Mana, whirled through the air, seeking their target.

-CLINK! CLINK!

The chakrams found their mark, cutting through the corrosive cloud with a hiss.

SLASH!

Mason's arms bore the brunt of the assault as the blades sliced cleanly through, severing joints connecting the arms to the main body.

THUD! THUD!

The wounds weren't fatal, but they were enough to make Mason a non-lethal target.

SPURT! SPURT!

Like a fountain, blood started surging from the wounds. However, both the color of the blood and the small texture underneath the skin weren't like humans. It was dark.

This is why I hate these cock-roach demon-follower bastards. They are no different than monsters; the only difference is that they look like humans outside.

"AAAAAH! AAAAAH!"

Mason shouted, feeling the pain in his supposed arms. The terror in his eyes and his expression was something to picture, but it was quite sad that I didn't have a photographer with me.

"Who... who are you?" Mason stammered, his voice strained with pain. Blood continued to spurt from his severed arms, staining the floor beneath him.

I didn't respond immediately, allowing the question to hang in the air. Instead, I began a slow, deliberate walk toward him. After all, this pain he was feeling right now couldn't even compare to what she felt at that time.

The sins they committed need to be paid, and this pain will be one of the currencies.



From the corner of my eyes, I could see Sylvie looking at me with frightened eyes. I guess this is still a bit much for her.

'Not that it matters.'

This won't be the first time she witnesses such a thing; as a healer, she will see more gruesome scenes.

The mask and suit I wore, thanks to [Unknown's Armor], also concealed my identity, leaving both Mason and Sylvie to face an enigma—an unknown force that had dismantled his plans.

"Why?" he pleaded, desperation etched across his face filled with demonic features. "What did I do to you?"

It seemed he was trying his best to stall time so that his Demonic Energy could heal his wound. Even in the face of overwhelming death, that guy still doesn't know his place; how annoying.

'Annoying, annoying, annoying.'

Hatred in my heart is growing each second, and I think I can no longer hold it in.

TAP! TAP! TAP!

"Please... Don't come," Mason begged, fear tightening his voice.

But I was past the point of listening.

With a swift movement, I closed the remaining distance between us.

The blades in my hands danced through the air, and before Mason could react, I executed a precise series of strikes.

SLASH! SLASH! SLASH!

The chakrams cut through Mason's body, targeting specific points where I knew the demonic core would be.

"AAAAAH! IT HURTS! IT HURTS!"

Blood spurted out with each strike, and Mason's agonized screams filled the air.

'It is nothing like how she felt at that time.'

"You asked me who I am."

Hearing my words, he looked at me with blood spurting from all around his body.

"I am Vengeance."

"NO! NO! DON'T!"

He realized what I was going to do, but it was already too late.

And then, between the lullaby of his screams, with one final motion, I reached into the gaping wound in his chest and extracted the demonic core.

The pulsating, malevolent energy emanated from it, a stark contrast to the wintry surroundings.

The other ones' cores were also in their bodies, but this treatment is special only to Mason. The annoying bastard who had been getting on my nerves for a long time.

After all, extracting the demonic core of a demonic human is one of the most painful things they could experience, and the pain in his eyes is my reward for holding it this long.

CRUSH!

As I crushed the demonic core with my hands, the light in Mason's eyes dimmed, and life left his body.

I threw one last look at Sylvie, looking frightened at the side, and then blended into the shadows.

RING!

Between the sounds of the police car ringing.

With this, my goal was accomplished.

Chapter 193 Chapter 43.1 - There are things that one can't control

It was said that there were things that lay dormant underneath the surface of what could be seen.

That was also the reason why Maya always liked to go beyond the surface of things. This was what kind of a person she was, and that had always been the case.

The moment the group dispersed, Maya and her friend Amelia started wandering around the city. Even though they were the seniors and she was the one responsible for the group, it wasn't like something was going to happen anyway, right?

"It was good that Mister Jones invited us, right?"

Amelia asked, looking at the city. Even though she had her own agenda for joining the club, it wasn't like she disliked seeing new things. Especially as a curious student, she liked seeing things out of the norm.

And Western Oxbridge was such a place. Everything about it was different from normal; it was refreshing.

"Yes. It really was." After all, this opportunity was only possible thanks to her father's connections, but even then, it was Mister Jones showing his favor.

As Maya and Amelia strolled down the bustling streets, they exchanged thoughts about the day's events while also taking some notes on their new smartwatches.

This was a new model where they could send their brain waves with mana, and they could operate the watches without even moving. OF course, the technology wasn't perfect yet. But even then, they were working with that out.

The elderly atmosphere and the difference in Awakened of the City were the main topics. Since they were both sophomores, their sensitivity to mana as an Awakened was a lot more. This was especially the case for Maya, who was a mage.

'But, what is this feeling I am getting.'

This had been bothering her for a while. Something about this city felt off for her; it was as if, even in the middle of the nostalgic city, there was something eerie going on.

"Maya, MAYA!"

At that moment, her friend's words brought her to reality once again.

"Why are you dozing off randomly?"

She shook off that feeling and concentrated on her friend once again. She knew it was rude not to focus on the conversation, and she didn't want to make Amelia upset.

"I'm sorry, Amelia. My mind wandered for a moment. What were you saying?"

Amelia chuckled with a smile and moved her hand a little, touching Maya's head as if she was caressing a child. At least, that was how Maya felt, though that wasn't the case for Amelia.

"I was saying, look over there. Something seems to be happening at that shop."

Amelia pointed at the small local shop, and there, Maya saw a slightly elderly woman crying while another tried to console her.

'I wonder what happened.'

Maya thought, both her curiosity and the need to help someone in her heart growing.

Without hesitation, Maya approached the elderly woman with a gentle smile, "Excuse me, ma'am. Is everything okay? Can we help you with something?"

The elderly woman continued sobbing without answering, but her friend stepped forward, grateful for the offer. "Thank you for your kindness. You see, her daughter hasn't come home for three days, and we couldn't contact her. We're really worried, and the authorities haven't been of much help."

"Ah..."

Maya gasped as her expression turned sympathetic. She exchanged glances with Amelia, and then she nodded her head. "We are sorry to hear that. If you don't mind, can you tell us a little bit more about the situation? We are students from the Arcadia Hunter Academy."

The elderly woman's eyes widened for a moment, a mix of surprise and hope evident on her face. "Arcadia Hunter Academy? Are you serious?" After all, the reputation of the Human Federation's best academy was all around the place; even elderly people watched the festivals organized for this purpose.

Maya nodded, her expression earnest. "Yes, we are. We might be able to assist you. Please, tell us more about her daughter and what happened."

The woman sighed, her voice shaky with worry. "I don't know what happened. One night, my daughter Emily went out for an outing with her friends, and she hasn't come back since. We've tried reaching her, but her watch is silent. There have been rumors of people getting kidnapped all around the town, and we're scared that something terrible might have happened to her."

"Have you reported this to Awakened Local Security?"

"We did, but they said we need to wait for the results of the investigation to come out."

"I-I see....."

Hearing all those things, Maya couldn't help but feel contradictory. After all, even though she was a very powerful mage, the situation seemed to be a little different, something that she couldn't solve just by being powerful.

She fell silent for a second, pondering about what she could do or if there wasn't anything missing.

Just at that moment, Maya felt a sudden chill running down her spine as an eerie feeling washed over her. Her sharp senses, honed by her training, picked up on something unnatural lurking in one of the alleys. It was as if something that shouldn't be in this world had found its way there.

Instinctively, she tightened her grip on the sleeves of her coat, exchanging a quick glance at the location of the place.

And thanks to her unique gift, she could see nature itself rejecting the energy. And that energy was something she was very familiar with.

"Demonic energy," she whispered, shuddering. A memory of a certain time came crushing on her. The level of energy wasn't the same, but the core of the energy was.

She felt disgusted. The energy and the things she heard.

Amelia looked at Maya with confusion as the sudden change in her demeanor caught her off guard. "Maya, what's going on? Why are you—"

Maya didn't wait for Amelia to finish her sentence. Without uttering a word, she channeled her mana swiftly, creating a surge of wind beneath her feet. In an instant, she leaped into the air, gracefully navigating the urban landscape.

SWIRL!

Her movements were quick and decisive as she dashed towards the alley where the demonic energy resonated, and just like that, she left the place.

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"I need more, more, more...."

It was dark. For him, who had been asleep for a very long time, the darkness was something he had been accustomed to.

However, there was something even that comfortable darkness couldn't satisfy.

It was his thirst.

"I am thirsty, I am thirsty, I am thirsty...."

Therefore, he went out in his comfortable darkness and quenched his thirst.

The night air was heavy with an otherworldly stillness as he ventured into the shadows. The moon cast an ethereal glow on the deserted streets, but his eyes, adapted to the darkness, sought something else entirely.

In the quiet alleyways, he found what he sought — unsuspecting souls lost in the solace of the night. His predatory instincts heightened as he approached, a silent wraith in the darkness. His fangs elongated, hunger pulsating through his veins.

A soft whisper echoed in the air, "I need more, more, more...."

The first encounter was swift, a dance of shadows and silence. His prey, unaware of the impending darkness, felt a sudden chill down their spine. Before they could comprehend the danger, he struck, sinking his fangs into the warmth of their neck.

The taste of crimson liquid flowed into him, a forbidden elixir that awakened a primal ecstasy. The thirst was momentarily satiated, but the insatiable craving lingered, haunting his every step.

As he moved from one victim to another, the city became his hunting ground. The streets echoed with hushed footsteps and muted pleas. Each encounter was a macabre ballet, a dance between predator and prey on the quiet canvas of the night.

"I need more, more, more...." However, it was a curse. The more he drank, the more he felt he was less satisfied.

This unquenchable thirst was breaking his mind. None of his preys were enough for him. He wandered more and more.

However, today, he felt something different. In this place filled with strangeness, he felt something familiar.

It was an energy that he hadn't felt for a long time.

'Ah...This....'

As if it was his own kin that he hadn't seen. Feeling it, he went to see his kin. And the more he approached, the more the energy became prominent. Even though it wasn't the comfortable darkness this time, he still went out.

The familiar energy led him to a place where the air itself seemed to hum with a unique resonance. But as he neared, he realized there was more to this encounter than the simple reunion of kin. A barrier, invisible yet palpable, surrounded the source of the energy.

He could feel it, a barrier of power erected to guard something precious. It intrigued him as this was a different application of his kin's power, but his unyielding thirst urged him to delve deeper.

With a predatory grin, he extended his hands toward the barrier, feeling the crackling energy resisting his intrusion.

"I need more, more, more...." The mantra echoed in his mind as he concentrated, channeling his dark powers. The barrier resisted, but the hunger within him was an unstoppable force.

His fangs bared; he sank them into the intangible barrier, metaphorically consuming the very essence that fortified it. The energy pulsed within him, invigorating his own essence.

And after a second, all of the energy was absorbed into his very essence.



"Ah...."

His body ached with ecstasy, as for the first time in a while, he felt as if his thirst were satisfied a little.

'It is not enough.'

However, that feeling soon disappeared, leaving him alone.

-SNIFF!

At that moment, his enhanced nose smelled something. Something different.

A scent wafted through the air, different from the metallic tang of blood he had become so familiar with. It was a fragrance that stirred ancient instincts within him, resonating with the deepest recesses of his nature.

The scent grew stronger, a delicate yet potent aroma that tingled his senses. He instinctively recognized it, the scent of a bloodline that transcended the ordinary.

It was not just blood; it was something he had always savored in the past, something special.

His crimson eyes widened, pupils dilating as the scent drew him closer.

The scent led him to a pool of blood. A small pool that seemed to hold the essence of celestial beings.

'Kin of Moon.'

He realized what it was.

His heart quickened with anticipation. He knew, without a doubt, that this was the blood of the Kin of the Moon—the source of the alluring fragrance that had captivated his senses.

Without a moment's hesitation, he dashed towards the pool of blood like a madman, driven by an insatiable thirst that only this essence could quell.

The moment he finished drinking the blood on the ground, an abrupt rustle in the air caught his attention.

Before he could even think, his instincts warned him of something approaching.

In the past, an encounter like this might have posed a threat, but the blood of the Kin of the Moon coursing through his veins had awakened dormant powers within him.

His senses were heightened, and a newfound strength surged through his limbs.

SMASH!

His claws smashed the combined spear of ice and earth elements strengthened with wind.

'Ah.....This girl is delicious too...'

And then, he immediately dashed to the attacker, his lips widening for the first time. After all, his crimson eyes could see the immense amounts of dormant energy inside his target —a girl with flowing purple hair, her eyes gleaming with an otherworldly intensity.

Chapter 194 Chapter 43.2 - There are things that one can't control

A group of executives and Hunters approached the place where the explosion occurred. It was a small restaurant at one of the back alleys.

The space wasn't that frequently visited and away from the city center, but thanks to the denunciation call, they immediately headed in this direction.

A small crowd had gathered, their faces marked with a mixture of concern and curiosity. Some onlookers whispered among themselves, speculating about what might have caused the explosion.

"Please get away."

The executives immediately called the crowd, covering the area and passing them rapidly. Since it was a possible crime scene, they needed to be ready. Their subordinates were also already in the way, so it wouldn't take too long for them to take control.

"Margaretta. Come with me."

Immediately signaling the officer with him, he slowly made his way towards the scene.

"Roger, captain."

The girl still kept calling him captain, even though he said he didn't want to. But, since the situation was urgent, he decided to let it slide.

They approached the scene. Smoke billowed from the damaged building, twisting and dancing in the air. The acrid scent of burnt materials lingered, assaulting their senses.

The first thing that caught their attention were three lifeless bodies lying on the ground, their limbs sprawled unnaturally.

"What is this?"

The lead executive narrowed his eyes as he examined the scene. The bodies showed signs of a swift and brutal demise, all seemingly felled by a single strike. His eyes concentrated with mana lead the flow.

"Three demon followers. All of them died with only one strike each."

Margaretta interjected as she also looked at the scene.

"Three precise attacks, all of them having the power to one-shot a demon follower."

A sense of unease settled over him, and his hand instinctively moved towards the weapon at his side. The possibility of danger lurking within the restaurant couldn't be dismissed.

After all, if it was one person, then the enemy would be strong. If it was more than one person, their numbers would make them dangerous.

[This is Captain Harlan. We have a situation at a local restaurant. Three demon followers were confirmed deceased. We have yet to investigate further, but it is suspected that there are more demon followers inside. Requesting immediate support from the Demonic Human Bureau. Over.]

A brief moment passed before a response crackled through the communicator.

[Acknowledged, Captain Harlan. Your request for a Demonic Investigation Team is being processed. You may proceed.]

"Tch, bastards. Always coming late." He mumbled as the response came.

"Did they refuse?"

"No, but they didn't accept it either. It seems we are alone for a while."

"Classic Demonic Human Bureau. Those bastards are always late."

"Stay vigilant," he instructed his companion, his voice low and serious.

The duo cautiously approached the entrance, stepping over the debris scattered around. The shattered windows and scorched walls hinted at the force of the explosion that had occurred.

Once inside, they found the interior in disarray. Tables and chairs were overturned, and the remnants of what used to be a bustling restaurant now lay in ruins.

The air was thick with the aftermath of magical energies, leaving an indelible mark on the surroundings.

"The Demonic Energy is thicker."

It was evident that a fight had occurred in this place, and this time, Demonic Energy seemed to be used.

As they carefully navigated through the remnants of the restaurant, the captain's mana-enhanced eyes caught a glimpse of another casualty lying on the ground.

The body was sprawled out, and upon closer inspection, countless distinct cut marks adorned it. The nature of the wounds suggested a swift and overpowering attack, leaving no chance for the victims to defend themselves.

"Look at this," Captain Harlan muttered, his voice grave. "The precision of these cuts... This wasn't a random attack. Whoever did this is highly skilled, possibly a High-ranking Awakened individual."

Margaretta's eyes narrowed as she surveyed the scene, her training and instincts kicking in. "Do you think it's a rogue Awakened? Or something else?"

Captain Harlan remained silent for a moment, deep in thought. The complexity of the situation unfolded before them, and the eerie atmosphere heightened their sense of urgency. After all, the demon followers and a rogue Awakened clashing were different.

"Regardless of who or what did this, our priority is to secure the area until the Demonic Investigation Team arrives. We need to be prepared for anything," Captain Harlan declared, his hand firmly gripping the hilt of his weapon.

After all, if he overstepped his boundaries and learned something he shouldn't have, then it would be the end of him.

Years of continuously working in this work made him very well aware of how dangerous just hearing something is.

As they pressed forward, the tension in the air grew thicker, and the mysteries surrounding the incident deepened.

"Let's move."

Confirming that it was dead, the two continued.

"There is a basement here."

Harlan's eyes saw the flow of mana and noticed the basement contained another source of energy. There also seemed to be a bunch of mana remnants, so it made sense that there were more people underneath.

The duo cautiously proceeded towards the entrance to the basement, their senses heightened and weapons at the ready. The shattered remnants of the door indicated a forceful entry, raising their level of alertness.

"Someone went through here, and it wasn't subtle," Captain Harlan remarked, his eyes narrowing as he observed the broken door. Margaretta silently nodded, her gaze sweeping the surroundings for any potential threats.

As they stepped into the dimly lit basement, the smell of blood and something else entered their noses.

The blood somehow felt thicker(?) and more disgusting (?) than usual. It was certainly a weird feeling, and Margaretta couldn't identify it.

However, that wasn't the case for the experienced Harlan.

"Demonic Core explosion."

He was well aware of what kind of smell this was. He once saw a demon follower being tortured. He was inside the torture chamber, actually, and he knew this kind of smell came from that disgusting core.

"What?"

Margaretta asked, but he just signaled there.

"Look."

The moment Margareta turned her attention to the side, the scene she saw made her puke.

"Burghk-!"

It was so disgusting that she couldn't hold it in. The nauseating sight before her was a lump of flesh that had been subjected to unspeakable brutality.

The arms of the figure were severed, the face beaten and rotten, and most horrifically, there was a gruesome hole in the chest where the demonic core had once been housed.

Captain Harlan remained composed, his face hardened by the grim reality.

"Demonic Core extraction. Someone wanted this poor guy to suffer," he stated coldly, his experienced eyes analyzing the scene. "And they made sure it happened."

Of course, in his eyes, the demonic humans were also traitors, but he never approved such acts. It was vile and disgusting.

"Huuuu..."

As Captain Harlan continued to analyze the gruesome scene before him, a faint sound caught his attention—an almost imperceptible exhale. His trained instincts immediately put him on high alert, and he turned sharply to identify the source of the sound.

"Hold on," he whispered to Margareta, signaling her to be cautious. His eyes scanned the dimly lit basement, searching for any signs of movement. The source of the sound eluded his senses, a subtle presence hiding in the shadows.

A moment later, he discovered the origin of the noise. A figure, previously obscured by darkness, came into view.

Tied with handcuffs, the girl lay on the ground, her body showing signs of mistreatment. Small bruises adorned her face, and her once-yellow hair was now dirtied.

He immediately realized that this girl was a captive. After all, the handcuffs on her wrists were something he was quite familiar with. It was the handcuffs they used to seal the mana of the Awakened people.

"What the hell..." he muttered under his breath, his senses sharpening as he approached the captive girl. Her green eyes held no light as she looked at the scene emptily, as if she had lost her will to live.

"Miss. Can you hear me?"

"Miss. Can you hear me?" Captain Harlan asked softly, his voice attempting to cut through the heavy silence of the basement.

The captive girl's vacant green eyes met his gaze, but she remained unresponsive as if the horrors she had witnessed had drained the life from her spirit.

Harlan continued his attempts to communicate, asking about her name and what had transpired in the basement.

The traumatized girl remained silent, the weight of her ordeal evident in her distant stare.

It was clear that whatever had transpired in this sinister place had left scars not only on her body but also on her mind.

"This won't go anywhere."

He realized that asking questions here wouldn't solve anything. The girl first needed to calm down; possibly, a bunch of pills would help.

"Margaretta, let's leave."

Frowning with concern, Captain Harlan gestured to Margaretta, signaling her to prepare for their exit.



The priority now was to bring the captive girl to safety and away from this nightmarish scene. As they carefully untied her from the handcuffs, Harlan reassured her, "You're safe now. We're here to help you."

With a gentle touch, they guided the girl out of the basement, leaving behind the grim remnants of demonic energy and the horrifying acts that had transpired in that dark and hidden corner of the city.

As they emerged from the dimly lit basement, the harsh contrast of the city's ambient light hit them.

"Ah...."

THUD!

And the moment the lights hit, the girl immediately fell to the ground, fainting.

"Careful."

At the last second, Harlan caught the girl, not letting her head hit the ground.

Waiting nearby was an ambulance, its red and white lights casting an eerie glow in the night.

"Quick, take her to the hospital."

"Understood, leave this to us."

The paramedics, aware of the situation, quickly approached to assist the traumatized girl. And after that, they took her to the ambulance.

-WROOM!

As the ambulance doors closed, the vehicle sped away into the night, en route to provide the girl with the medical attention and care she desperately needed.

After that, Captain Harlan swiftly reported the situation to his superiors, detailing the gruesome discoveries in the hidden corner of the city.

The eerie combination of demonic energy, mutilated bodies, and the captive girl painted a disturbing picture of the unfolding events. The response from headquarters was prompt, as they acknowledged the severity of the situation.

Shortly after the report, another communication came through Harlan's device. It was a direct order from his superiors.

[Captain Harlan, you are to ensure the safety and well-being of the captive girl until further notice. Partner her with Margaretta and follow any additional instructions given by the Demonic Human Bureau. This is a priority mission. Over.]

Acknowledging the order, Harlan understood the gravity of the responsibility placed upon him. The captive girl was now a crucial piece of the puzzle, and her safety was of paramount importance.

Turning to Margaretta, he conveyed the instructions, "You're tasked with looking after the girl. Follow the protocols provided by the Bureau. We need to find out what she knows about the incident."

"Understood."

With those words finished, Margaretta reached for the car and drove to the hospital room.

Chapter 195 Chapter 43.3 - There are things that one can't control

"Miss, can you hear me?"

In the sterile environment of the hospital room, Sylvie slowly opened her eyes.

The harsh fluorescence overhead cast a cold glow across the room. Blinking against the bright light, she found herself lying on a clean, white bed.

Immediately, she realized where she was, and the memories of the recent events flooded back, her eyes widening with horror.

The blood that was spilled....The feeling of dread that was emanated from that masked figure....Astron's death....

Everything felt so unreal that she could only feel empty inside. The reality of the situation weighed heavily on her, and fear gripped her heart. She tried to speak, but her voice felt weak and shaky.

"I-I can hear you," she stammered, her gaze darting around the room as if searching for an escape from the haunting memories.

A nurse, clad in a crisp uniform, approached her with a reassuring smile. "You're in the hospital. You had quite a scare, but you're safe now."

'Safe.'

The word echoed in Sylvie's mind, but she couldn't shake off the lingering fear. The room felt suffocating, and the sterility of the environment only heightened her discomfort.

As the nurse checked her vitals and asked routine questions, Sylvie's thoughts spiraled into a whirlwind of regret. She wished she could go back and change the events, prevent the tragedy that unfolded before her eyes.

Astron, the masked figure, the blood—images flashed like a nightmare she couldn't wake up from.

'I should have been more careful. I should have stayed out of it.'

She had never seen such intense emotions before. The hatred oozing from that masked man was so intense that, even if he hadn't done anything, she knew she would never be able to look into his eyes.

But then, the scene that followed was something else. Blood spilled, and screams echoed.

Even if it was the screams of that Mason, even if he was a demon follower....It was too much. She still remembered the horror in Mason's eyes, as if he knew that death had come for him from the start.

It was scary.

But most importantly, the regret engulfed her heart, suffocating it. Knowing the fact that she was the reason for his demise made it almost impossible to hold it in.

As Sylvie grappled with the weight of her emotions and the haunting memories, the hospital room's door opened, and Officer Margaretta entered with a calm and composed demeanor.

"Miss Sylvie, I hope you're feeling better," Officer Margaretta greeted with a slight nod, acknowledging the distress evident in Sylvie's eyes. She had already checked her identity from the database and face matching system, so she knew her name was Sylvie, and she was a student of the Arcadia Hunter Academy.

Sylvie managed a weak nod in response, still processing the aftermath of the traumatic events. Margaretta's presence, although professional, held an air of understanding.

"I'm Officer Margaretta from the Awakened Local Security. Captain Harlan has requested that I speak with you about the incident. Whenever you're ready, we can discuss what happened. Your cooperation is crucial for our investigation," Margaretta explained, her tone gentle and encouraging.

Sylvie took a deep breath, attempting to collect herself. The room seemed to close in on her, but she understood the necessity of recounting the events. Even though she was scared about the events that unfolded, she at least knew it was her own responsibility to recount everything.

'This is what I owe to him.'

Even though the one who killed him might be dead, she at least wanted him to be buried.

"I'll do my best to help," Sylvie murmured, her voice steadier than before. After that, Margaretta asked about what had happened and how she had been kidnapped.

Sylvie recounted everything that had occurred, starting from how they had come to this city because of a trip and how they had been ambushed. After that, she recounted what happened with Astron.

"Wait for a second." At the mention of Astron's name, Margaretta suddenly stopped Sylvie. "What did you say his name was?"

Sylvie took a moment to compose herself before answering, "His name was Astron Natusalune." Her voice wavered as she spoke Astron's name, and silent tears threatened to stream down her cheeks. The pain of the recent loss was still raw and overwhelming.

In response, Officer Margareta swiftly opened her tablet, her fingers tapping on the screen with purpose. As Sylvie watched, a picture of Astron appeared on the device. It was from the database, and Margareta was about to confirm if any updates were made in his name.

But at that moment, Margaretta's eyes squinted in recognition. She immediately remembered the body that was being taken to the hospital in an ambulance. The face also matched.

'Is it him?'

She thought. If it was him, then the possibility of him dying was very low. After all, even though he was injured and scarred, Margareta could see the flow of mana inside his body with her trained eyes, and she knew the boy wasn't in that much of a critical condition.

While waiting for Sylvie to wake up, she saw him more clearly. His unique color of eyes also matched. Purple eyes weren't that common, and the boy's features quite matched the picture.

He was quite handsome, and it was Margareta's hobby to collect the handsome faces in her mind.

After all, in this line of work where she had to see countless disgusting things, she needed something to cleanse her mind. Even though that face wasn't on the top of the list, it could probably enter the first fifty, and that itself was the biggest compliment.

"Wait, this could be a misunderstanding," Margaretta said, her tone softening. "Astron might not be dead. In fact, he might be in this hospital right now."

Sylvie's eyes widened at those words, and immediately, a surge of mana covered her body.

-SWOOSH!

Without waiting for Margaretta to finish, she rushed out of the room. It was so fast that even Margaretta was slightly surprised at the sudden burst.

However, she just watched Sylvie leave, shaking her head with a sympathetic smile.

While she could have stopped Sylvie or provided more context, she understood the urgency and the emotional turmoil Sylvie was experiencing. Sometimes, hope was the only anchor people had in moments of crisis.

Sylvie ran through the hospital corridors with unbridled urgency.

"Hey! Don't run in the corridors!"

Nurses and staff shouted at her to slow down, but the desperate concern for Astron fueled her speed.

As she turned a corner, she spotted the person she was looking for—Astron, leaving a room with some of his body bandaged.

The face was still the same, the same eyes she knew. The same hair she knew and the same emotions she knew.

'He is really alive. He is really alive. He is really alive.'

Without a second thought, Sylvie shot forward, her emotions overpowering her. It was as if she desperately clung to the feeling of hope at that very second, and now she felt the whole world lifted from her shoulders.

SWOOSH!

She reached Astron and enveloped him in a tight hug, her momentum crashing both of them into the nearby wall.

CRASH!

The impact, however, was secondary to the overwhelming relief and joy of finding him alive.

"Astron! You're alive!" Sylvie exclaimed, her voice a mix of tears and laughter. She pulled back slightly to look at him, making sure he was real and unharmed.

The worry and fear that had gripped her heart since the incident now released their hold, replaced by an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

Astron, slightly surprised by Sylvie's sudden embrace, winced a bit from the collision with the wall but quickly recovered.

'I owe her at least this much.'

He thought bitterly, looking at the girl hugging him with all of her strength.

He looked into Sylvie's eyes, his expression filled with guilt and bitterness. "Yeah, I'm here. Are you okay?"

Tears streaming down her face, Sylvie nodded vigorously. "I thought you were... I thought..." Her words trailed off as emotions overwhelmed her. After all this time, she really thought he was dead all this time and was trying to hold it in for the sake of him.

Even when she was in front of Margaretta, she refused to cry and talk about everything she could.

But even then, she hit her limit long ago and was holding it in very hard, and now she no longer held herself back, and that was the breaking point.

"I'm here, Sylvie. Everything's okay now." Even if he was an awkward, edgy guy, even Astron knew what kind of thing Sylvie went through.

'I really feel like a piece of shit.'

And knowing that he did it intentionally made it a lot harder for him not to care and brush it off.

In the end, all he could do was offer Sylvie peace of mind in his embrace and pat her back, reassuring her from the start.

"It is okay."

Astron gently patted Sylvie's back as she cried in his embrace. The mixture of relief, sorrow, and joy overwhelmed her, and the weight of the emotions she had suppressed finally found release.

The guilt and bitterness Astron felt were momentarily pushed aside as he offered Sylvie comfort and reassurance.

For some reason, he also didn't feel repulsed by the fact that Sylvie was touching him like that, but he simply shrugged it off and thought it was because of Sylvie's trait.

In the hospital corridor, some nurses threw scornful looks at Sylvie for running like that in the hospital, breaking the usual decorum.

However, as they observed her tear-streaked face and Astron's reassuring gestures, understanding replaced their initial disapproval.

It was clear something intense and emotional had transpired, and they allowed the moment to unfold without further interference.

However, this moment was not going to be that long.

After a minute or so, Officer Margareta interrupted the emotional reunion, approaching Sylvie and Astron with a serious expression. Inside her heart a little, she felt jealous of this girl.

'I should get a boyfriend soon, too.'

The loneliness that she fended off with her job appeared on the surface once again, and she wasn't happy with that fact.



"I'm glad to see you're okay, but we need to proceed with the investigation. We still have a lot to uncover about what happened back there. Can you both come with me to answer some questions?"

Sylvie, her eyes still swollen from crying, nodded, composing herself as best she could.

Astron also got serious and nodded his head. "Sure, we'll cooperate. Just give us a moment. She needs to calm herself."

He was about to continue, but Sylvie's words cut him off. "I am okay." Saying that she immediately got away from his arms, her face flushed.

What she had done now came crashing on her, and she didn't know what to say about it, so she desperately wanted to change the locations and the topic.

Astron looked at her and realized she was okay, so he also didn't object.

Margareta, maintaining her stern demeanor, accepted Sylvie's assurance with a nod. "Very well. Follow me, and let's get this done," she stated, leading the way to the room.

And just like that, they started recounting everything.

Chapter 196 Chapter 43.4 - There are things that one can't control

The moment Margareta called us to the room for interrogation, I already had a story in my head that would also match what Sylvie had recounted.

In the end, I had no intention of giving away the identity I kept hidden all this time. There is a reason why I am being this careful after all.

"Sit down," Margareta ordered, gesturing to the chairs on one side of the table. Once we were seated, she took her place on the opposite side, her tablet ready for note-taking.

"Start from the beginning. Tell me everything you know about the events that took place in that basement and even before. Leave nothing out," she instructed, her tone leaving no room for hesitation.

She first turned her attention to me.

"Sylvie had already explained what happened before in the alley. She said you were deadly, injured."

"Yeah, that's true. We were ambushed on the road. I tried to protect Sylvie, but I got injured in the process. The attackers were demon followers."

This was what Sylvie must have already told. However, I know how an executive like her operates. Endless doubt is the most crucial trait for such people, and from her little mimics, I am well aware that she has doubts in her head.

"Then, how were you here? According to what Sylvie told me, she thought you lost your life."

"Officer. Are you telling me I should have died here?"

"...."

She stopped for a second and looked at me. Twisting one's own words is actually one of the interrogation tactics they use, and now I was using it against her. Of course, she won't think I am doing it intentionally and will rather think that I was angry at her statement.

"No, I am not saying that, of course."

After all, this is what I am showing in my face as an emotion right now. Knit brows and clenched fists are all expressions of anger, and as an officer, she will be able to see that.

"Then-"

"I am just trying to put everything in the picture."

As she said that, it was time to back up a little. If I continued to avoid the topic, her suspicion would increase.

"Sigh...." Releasing a hearty sigh, I locked my eyes with hers. "I understand. After the demon followers left, I could feel Sylvie's energy. Her mana kept healing me. With her support, I managed to move from where I was and stagger to one of the local markets. They called an ambulance, and that's how I ended up here."

Margareta listened intently, her expression still stern but perhaps with a hint of acknowledgment. "You were healed by Sylvie's mana, even from a faraway distance?"

'I am sorry, Sylvie, but I will use your name a little. The academy will cover for this incident anyway.'

"Yeah, that's what I believe. It's a bit hard to explain, but I felt a warmth, and it helped me stay conscious and move. Without it, I don't think I would have made it to the market."

Margareta continued making notes on her tablet. "I see. We'll need to verify this information. Healing abilities like that are uncommon, especially in someone who isn't formally trained. Sylvie, can you confirm this?"

Sylvie nodded, her eyes meeting mine. "Yes, I could feel his injuries, and I tried to help him with my mana. It was the least I could do."

Her eyes contained an emotion that I knew pretty well. Determination is something those who experienced the despair had in common.

Margareta acknowledged the information but still focused on gathering details for the investigation. "All right. We'll look into this further. Now, let's talk about the masked figure."

This time, she turned her attention to Sylvie, looking at her. She also didn't exclude me from this part of the interrogation, meaning she already made her decision to share this information.

"The scene will be investigated further, but can you tell me what had transpired here?" She directly went to the topic.

"Sigh...." Sylvie took a deep breath before recounting her experience, her eyes filled with a mix of fear and uncertainty. "When that masked figure entered the basement, he never once looked at me. It was like I wasn't even there. He went straight for the demon follower."

She described how the masked figure swiftly and efficiently incapacitated the demon follower, detailing the brutal precision of the attacks. "He.... He seemed focused on dealing with the demon follower. I was scared, frozen in place. He didn't even care about me, and once the demon follower was down, he left without saying anything."

Hearing her recounting like that, I was deep in thought. I needed to manage my expression well to not give away anything. I felt a subtle feeling on my body as if something was observing me.

'Her mana is tracking me.'

As expected from the officer, though she was a little amateur. I guess being in a city where not many crimes had happened held her back a little bit.

Then, Margareta's eyes narrowed slightly as she listened to Sylvie's account. "Did he say anything during the encounter? Anything that stood out?"

Sylvie shook her head. "No, nothing. It was all so fast, and he never spoke. It felt like he had a specific target, and it wasn't me."

"I see."

After this question, Margareta continued to ask about the masked figure (me). Which weapons he used, what kind of style he had, and many other details.

But one thing for a fact: Sylvie's weak mentality came in handy at this point. When a person is scared, their brain plays games with them. This is the reality of the human mind, and that was especially the case with Sylvie.

The more she answered, the more it was far-fetched from the reality. But again, I knew for a fact that giving a reaction was a no-go.

"Thank you for your cooperation. We'll continue the investigation based on the information you provided. If you remember anything else, don't hesitate to contact us. For now, you're free to leave. But make sure to check your emails in case we contact you for anything else."

As she said that, she gestured for us to leave, and we both stood up.

'Now, ask it.'

But I knew for a fact that she wouldn't let us leave like that.

And just as I thought, Margareta halted us with a question directed at me. "Before you go, I have one more question. What are your thoughts on this case? Do you have any theories or suspicions?"

This was one of the crucial things. She was both testing me as a suspect and as a possible future worker for the executive case.

I maintained a careful composure, choosing my words thoughtfully.

"Considering the precision of the attack and the focus on the demon follower, my guess is that this was an internal conflict within a rival organization. The masked person seemed to have a specific target and wasn't interested in anyone else present."

Margareta's eyes studied me for a moment, her stern expression staying the same. "Internal conflict, yes. But why do you rule out any other possibilities? How can you be sure there aren't different motives at play or that multiple organizations might be operating in the city simultaneously? Or, how can you be sure if it wasn't an individual act?"

I was also expecting this question. But, even though her words were filled with suspicion, I could clearly see that she was satisfied. It seems she also came to the same conclusion, and my agreeing with it made her feel like I was both qualified and her point was stronger.

"It's not that I rule out other possibilities entirely. I just believe the precision of the attack, the specific target, and the lack of interest in others present point towards an internal matter within a rival organization. It's a theory based on the available information, not a definitive conclusion. As for the individual case, nothing specifically points to that, and many other things negate that point. Considering how the masked person acted, it is evident that he was informed. That means he or she is working with an insider from the organization that tried to kidnap Sylvie."

"Hmm...." After pondering about what I had said for a second, she nodded her head, satisfied. "We'll take your theory into account; thank you for your cooperation."

At this point, the only thing that remained was flattery. Nodding in response, I continued. "I want those responsible brought to justice as much as you do. If there's anything I can do to help your investigation, feel free to reach out. I want to ensure the safety of the people in this city."

With that, Sylvie and I exited the room, leaving Margareta behind.

"Hoooh....That was pretty long..." Sylvie exhaled a long breath as she looked at me. "I'm tired. It's been a long day."

Her eyes and body were filled with fatigue. It was expected. After all, what she had witnessed was something that was supposed to take a toll on one's mind, especially a naïve girl like Sylvie.

I nodded in agreement. "Yeah, it has. But at least it's over for now. We should head back and get some rest." Saying that, I started walking back.

TUCK!

At that moment, I felt a tuck on my clothes and saw Sylvie holding my sleeves. It seemed she wanted to say something as she hesitated for a moment before speaking. "Astron, thank you. For being there, for protecting me."

Hearing her genuine words and seeing her eyes, I couldn't help but feel guilty inside. After all, it was also me who decided to go this path.

If I wanted, I could avoid the direct confrontation and block Mason's way. I could simply make sure that we would never give them the opportunity to strike.

But I didn't; instead, I acted on my own interests, also making Sylvie swept away with it.

"W-why aren't you saying anything? I am suddenly embarrassed."

But it seemed I had been looking at her for a little long time as she lowered her head. I opened my mouth with guilt in my heart. "It's nothing to be embarrassed about. It's what I was supposed to do—what I signed up for, both in the past and now....."

After all, I knew if I had acted like this in the past, things might have differed.

Sylvie looked up, her eyes searching mine for something. "In the past?"

"Don't mind it," I reiterated, steering the conversation away from the past.

"I see..." Sylvie seemed to understand and didn't press further.

Noticing the strange mood, Sylvie continued talking about lighter topics as we made our way through the city.

My mood was also better since I had finished what I had intended to do in the first place, and I felt like I was able to progress in my goal, albeit it was still too little.

DING!

However, our conversation was interrupted as both Sylvie and I received simultaneous notifications on our smartwatches.

[Amelia: Everyone, come to the city center right now. It is urgent.]

The moment I saw this message, an ominous feeling grew upon me as if something wasn't right.

Chapter 197 Chapter 43.5 - There are things that one can't control

"Did you get the same message as me?" Sylvie asked, looking at her watch.

"Yes."

"I feel like something ominous is happening." She mumbled, looking at the sky.

'If it is her intuition, then...'

Knowing Sylvie's role and the power she held, her intuition was something I wouldn't ignore. After all, the player would benefit quite a lot from her in the game, and that was something I also had done.

"Let's hurry."

"Okay."

We didn't talk much and hurried our steps to the city center. It was evening time, and the sky was about to go dark. The chilly wind of the winter covered our skin.

As Sylvie and I reached the city center, the rest of the club members were already gathered. Senior Amelia, the vice leader of the club, stood at the center, her expression a mix of determination and concern.

The others also wore similarly serious expressions, indicating the gravity of the situation.

"Senior Amelia, what happened?" I asked, joining the group with Sylvie at my side. After all, the atmosphere was different than usual.

Amelia turned her attention to us and then looked around.

"Please wait until everyone gathered."

As we waited for the remaining club members to gather, I couldn't help but notice the restlessness in Senior Amelia's demeanor. She was a girl who mostly accompanied Senior Maya, and their relationship was good.

'Huh, Senior Maya?'

Then I realized something. Senior Maya was nowhere to be seen. Adding Amelia's usual composed and confident posture seemed to waver, I realized the two were connected.

'Don't tell me?'



"Mason is also missing."

At that moment, I heard Amelia mumbling. At the mention of the name Mason, Sylvie flinched. She probably remembered what I did to Mason before coming here, but even then, there were things that were more important than that right now.

"Also?"

The word "also" got my attention instantly. Facing Amelia, I immediately voiced my thoughts.

"Did something happen to Senior Maya?"

Amelia met my gaze, and her eyes reflected a mix of concern and determination. "Yes." She answered.

"What happened?"

At the mention of my question, Amelia released a sigh. "I wish I knew," Amelia confessed, her tone heavy with worry.

"We were strolling through the city, discussing and observing the city. Then, suddenly, her demeanor changed, and without saying anything, she left in a hurry, heading towards a specific location. I tried to follow her, but Maya was surprisingly fast, and I lost sight of her. I've been trying to contact her ever since, but there's been no response."

The moment I heard this, I narrowed my eyes. Something about this..... It made me remember the scene from the game.

'Senior Maya is also sensitive towards the demonic energy.'

She was a named character in the game, so I knew about her quite a lot. There was a possibility of her feeling the demonic energy around the city. After all, the people who are sensitive to demonic energy are rare and sought after a lot.

'If it was about this, it makes sense.'

"When did this happen?"

I immediately asked, seeking confirmation.

"It was around three past noon."

Hearing that, I nodded inwardly. It was also around the time when Sylvie and I clashed with the demonic humans. The information matched my initial assumption and strengthened it.

"Do you know something? If you know, please talk about it. Both Mason and Maya are missing, and it is not right."

Hearing Amelia's question, I contemplated how much information I should share.

'It will be soon revealed anyway.'

Considering the gravity of the situation and the urgency, I decided to reveal some details. After all, the members of the club also deserve to know what kind of person Mason is.

I threw a look at Sylvie and saw her nodding. It seems she also decided not to hide what happened.

"I don't want to say much, but Mason will no longer come here," I began, addressing the group's curiosity. Amelia's expression shifted, and she leaned forward slightly, urging me to continue.

"What happened? Why won't he come here?" she inquired, her eyes narrowing with suspicion.

I took a deep breath, choosing my words carefully. "Mason was associated with a group of demon followers. He, along with others, tried to kidnap Sylvie. We encountered them earlier today, and in the confrontation that followed, Mason... won't be causing any more trouble."

A hushed silence settled over the group as they absorbed the shocking revelation. Sylvie, standing beside me, clenched her fists, her expression a mixture of relief and lingering fear.

"Are you saying he was a demon follower?" Amelia asked a sense of disbelief in her voice.

"That's right," I said, turning my attention to the girl who always followed Mason before. She was the girl who was enchanted by his Demonic Energy and was under his control.

"You. How is your memory?" My question that came out of nowhere shook her a little, but all of the group's attention was on us.

"You. How is your memory?" I directed my question at the girl who had always followed Mason, her expression now reflecting confusion and anxiety. All eyes in the group were fixed on us.

The girl hesitated for a moment before responding, "It's a bit hazy. I can't remember much for a while."

I pressed further, "Do you remember Mason? Anything about him or what happened earlier?"

Her brows furrowed as she struggled to recall, "Mason... At the start of the semester, he asked me out on a date, and then I can't remember much afterward. Everything is blurry."

As the revelation sunk in, the members of the club exchanged hushed conversations among themselves, processing the unexpected turn of events.

"Mason asked you out on a date? We had no idea. It always seemed like you were the one chasing him..." one member whispered, expressing the collective surprise.

I clarified the situation, "She was under Mason's influence all the time."

Amelia, showing her characteristic composure, nodded in understanding. "So, are you saying the ones that tried to kidnap Sylvie are the ones behind Maya's disappearance?"

I shook my head, "No, that can't be. Because all of them are dead."

Silence settled over the group as they absorbed the weight of my words.

"You... Did you kill all of them?"

Amelia asked, her eyes widening. After all, it wasn't common for a random student to be able to deal with a group of demon followers alone, especially if that said the student was on the lower side of the rankings.

Of course, I intentionally didn't recount everything that happened since it was Sylvie's role as the person who was directly involved from an outside perspective.

"It is not like that. You can ask the details for Sylvie." I said and looked at the sky. "I just wanted to say Senior Maya's disappearance is not related to Mason's."

"I see...." Amelia made an understanding face as she pondered. "It must have been hard for you." And then she said, looking both at me and Sylvie. Even in the absence of Maya and such a situation happening, she was able to think clearly.

This was what made the students from the Academy an important resource. Even after one year of training, they can become this cool-head, and that itself is a huge quality.

Of course, there are also dogs like Trevor Philips, but I will clean those dogs sooner and later anyway, so it doesn't matter.

However, now we had a more serious problem, and it was urgent.

"This is weird."

It didn't make sense for Senior Maya to disappear randomly. After all, she herself was quite a powerhouse, and I don't think there are many people who can rival her in this city aside from some very high-ranking Hunters. She is quite overpowered.

Even if there were other demon followers or villains, I would know from the game. In the game, nothing happened on this trip since Sylvie wasn't awake. But even if she did, the consequence of that was already solved.

"Anyway, I had already informed Mister Jones, and he said he would contact the officials immediately," Amelia informed the group, her voice holding a tinge of frustration.

A somber mood settled over the club members as they absorbed the implications. The city of Western Uxbridge, which they were excitedly exploring, now became a place for a different memory.

"We won't be able to go anywhere like this," Amelia sighed, voicing the shared sentiment of concern.

She looked around at the group members and spoke, "I don't want to force anyone to stay. You are free to return to the academy if you feel uncomfortable staying here. We're not obligated to put ourselves in unnecessary danger, but I will stay and find my friend. If anyone wishes to join me, you're welcome, but your safety comes first."

The members exchanged glances, silently deliberating on their next course of action, and I could easily see what they were thinking.

'Most of them will return.'

Right now, they shouldn't have much connection with Senior Maya like I do. After all, they didn't spend the same amount of time as I did. Therefore, none of them would want to stay here and put themselves in danger.

But they are also hesitating since they know getting on the bad side of a Senior like Maya and Amelia will be detrimental to their future.

'They are so easy to read.'

"I won't hold any grudges against those who wish to return. Your safety is a priority, and you shouldn't feel obligated to involve yourselves in this matter," Amelia continued with a tone of compassion and understanding.

She glanced towards the group and noticed their gazes already. It was clear that none of them wanted to risk their lives.

As the hesitant members made their decisions, one by one, they awkwardly expressed their apologies and departed from the city center to the teleportation gate.

"Senior...."

"It is fine, I understand."

Amelia nodded in understanding, maintaining her composure despite the dwindling numbers. The decision to prioritize personal safety was a rational one, and she respected their choices.

Sylvie threw a look at me, and after that, she nodded to herself. It seemed she was going to follow my decision.

Soon, only Sylvie and I remained.

"As expected, junior. You didn't go."

Amelia looked at me with a smile, and I didn't back down.

"Of course."

'How can I go?'

Senior Maya is the one who taught me the most fundamental and important things for a Hunter. She may be annoying and overbearing a little, but even then, if not for her, I am sure I would be in a different state than I am right now.

Just like I remember grudges until I die, I also remember graces in the same way, and now that is the time.

Also, this overbearing feeling is in my heart. Something ominous was lurking in the streets of this city, something that was not supposed to be happening.

"Let's sit and talk. I also want to learn what happened with Sylvie and you."

Just like that, we went to a nearby coffee shop and sat down.

Chapter 198 Chapter 43.6 - There are things that one can't control

When it comes to the real world, we all know that we can't control everything. However, it is our human greed to know much more than others.

After all, knowing something others don't know means holding power, and we are all initially power-obsessed beings.

Especially the case for future knowledge. Knowing the future grants immense amounts of power to a person. And this is probably the biggest privilege one can receive as a transmigrator.

Or not?

After all, one question needs to be asked when it comes to future knowledge:

'How are you this sure?'

Information is power, but that power comes from a very specific thing.

It is the pillar that attaches that knowledge to the reality.

'Proof.'

How do we know about the rules of physics? How did Newton manage to derive those rules?

The first process was observing. He saw an apple falling to the ground, and from that observation, he proposed a hypothesis. After that, he looked for another bunch of physical evidence that would support his hypothesis.

This is how information and knowledge are created.

But we can't do that in the future. After all, how can you be sure about something happening without having evidence for that?

What is your source? Your dreams? For this world, your [Trait]? Or, for me, the game?

Even if what I had seen in the game is going to be the future, how can I be sure? And now these doubts are yielding their results.

As I sipped my coffee, my gaze remained fixed on Amelia, and I posed the question, "So, you are saying, before Senior Maya had disappeared, you were talking with locals?"

Amelia nodded solemnly, taking a thoughtful pause before responding, "Yes, Maya and I were engaging with the locals. We noticed that there was some commotion, and since we were curious and always on the lookout for any unusual activities, we decided to investigate."

"That is so like you and Senior Maya," I replied, picturing how they were doing such a thing.

"Yeah." Amelia also nodded her head with a slight smile.

"What was the commotion about?" I asked. Since Amelia mentioned that, it means there was a possibility of it being related to the disappearance of Senior Maya.

"Well, to be honest, it was quite weird." Amelia started recounting.

"I was saying, 'Look over there. Something seems to be happening at that shop.'"

"Maya and I thought it was unusual, so we decided to investigate. When we approached the elderly woman and inquired about the situation, she explained that her daughter, Emily, had gone missing for three days. Despite their efforts to contact her, there was no response, and local authorities hadn't been much help."

'Disappearance?'

Hearing that word, I thought for a second. What were these disappearances about? Was there even an event like this in the game?

Amelia's expression reflected the seriousness of the situation. "Maya and I offered our assistance, given our status as students from the Arcadia Hunter Academy. The woman was grateful and shared



that Emily went out with friends for an outing but never returned. Concerns grew as rumors of kidnappings circulated, and the family feared the worst."

'It is not a one-time thing then.'

More questions arose on the topic. After all, if it was a one-time thing, I could pass it as a local crime. But if there were more about it, then things would become more serious.

Western Uxbridge was a place covered by the government, and this city is an academic exploration site. Therefore, not many people are living here either.

"Did they contact officials?" I asked.

She paused for a moment and then nodded her head. "Maya and I thought the same thing and asked if they had reported it to Awakened Local Security, and they had but were told to wait for the investigation results."

"I see. This is how things like this work, after all."

In this world, everything has an order and procedure, especially for the cases related to Government. Most of the Civil Servants are required to obey the rules and laws of the government more than their counterparts.

Amelia continued, "After that, things took an unexpected turn. While we were discussing the situation with the woman, Maya suddenly left without saying anything to me. It was abrupt, and I was taken aback. She seemed to have sensed something and swiftly headed towards the other side of the city flying."

Hearing that, I nodded inside. If she had felt the demonic energy of the demonic humans, it would make sense.

I was also able to sense that they had already put a barrier covering the place we were in so that no sound or anything would go outside. That was also the reason why no help came to us at that moment since none of the officials were even aware of what was happening.

Her words lingered in the air, and I could sense the worry in her expression. "I tried to follow her, but she moved too fast, and I lost sight of her. Since then, I've been trying to contact her, but there's been no response. That is all."

After her words sank in, I fell into contemplation, evaluating the information she gave to me.

'The disappearance of the people and Senior Maya's sudden disappearance.'

The former one was rumors, and the other one was a definite possibility. Now, one may also think that Senior Maya might have simply hung out somewhere and didn't come because of that. But that is highly unlikely. Both Amelia and I know her enough to understand the fact that she would never do such a thing in any normal case.

'But, the information is not sufficient.'

I knew for a fact that what I know right now is not sufficient enough. We don't have any idea where Senior Maya is, and the only clue we have is the last place she headed and those rumors.

'I need to investigate.'

In the end, if you don't know about something, then you need to learn about it. It is that simple.

"What do you think?"

At that moment, I heard Amelia's voice coming from the side.

"The information is insufficient," I said as I stood up.

"What are you going to do?" Both Amelia and Sylvie looked at me, their eyes understanding what I meant.

"I will look around a little."

"I will come with you." Sylvie also tried to stand up, but seeing my hand, she stopped. "You are already tired; get some rest."

This whole day had been a long one for Sylvie, and even if she didn't want to show it, my eyes didn't miss certain details. Her body coordination became poorer, and her thoughts became slower as well. Her eyes were screaming her to sleep, and most importantly, her mentality wasn't as strong.

The whole ordeal had taken its toll on her, so she would be more of a liability than a help.

I looked at Sylvie, my eyes narrowing. "I appreciate the concern, but I've been through worse. I can handle a little more. You, on the other hand, need some rest. We'll figure things out and find Senior Maya. You just take care of yourself for now."

"B-but...."

"I won't accept a no. Stay and rest; you should also talk about what happened there with Senior Amelia."

Sylvie hesitated for a moment but then nodded, conceding to the logic. "Okay, but promise me you'll be careful."

Considering she put her body on the line for me, it made sense for her to say such a thing. But promises like these are meant to be broken....It seems our little Sylvie still doesn't know how much of a death flag those words are.

"I promise," I replied with a nod.

Amelia, hearing us, stepped forward. "I'll stay with Sylvie, and we will arrange the accommodation for this weekend. I also contacted the academy and officials, so I will inform you if something new comes up. We also won't stay idle and look around like you."

I looked at Amelia and Sylvie, both determined in their own ways. As expected from Amelia. With her friend missing, she also seems to be unable to stay in one place.

'Though, I doubt they will find out anything.'

It is not to look down on them, but I know what kind of person Amelia is. She doesn't have a stealth ability like me either, so what she can do is limited.

"Alright."

With those words, I left the coffee shop after paying for my drink.

SWOOSH!

The moment I stepped out, the cold wind of the winter night hit me like a sharp blade. I shivered for a moment, adjusting to the temperature drop. The city at night was a different beast altogether.

The bustling sounds of the day were replaced by the eerie silence of the night, broken only by the occasional distant howl of the wind.

'Then, let's start.'

As I turned my [Unknown's Armor] into a jacket, I also opened my smartwatch. After all, there was a special resource that I could use for my own good.

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Horde: How may we help you?

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It was the site of the same group of talented hackers I had sponsored and been sponsoring with the money I was making. Now that they had another bunch of money, they were able to rent a server and a proxy, making them less reliant on the black market interface.

Even though it was just a convenience and a face for the government, it made things a lot easier.

In any case, now that I needed them urgently, this came in handy at that.

[Omega\_1: I have a commission for you.]

I sent a message first. My ID name was Omega\_1, showcasing my high ranking and my being the first person to atone for it.

[Omega\_1: I need a detailed report on the recent kidnappings in Western Uxbridge. Focus on the specifics, patterns, and any leads on the disappearances. This is a priority task.]

I looked around, waiting for the hackers to acknowledge my request.

The Horde team had proven their prowess in the past, and now it was time to put their skills to the test once more.

[Horde: Understood, Omega\_1. Operation is initiated. We'll get back to you as soon as we gather substantial information.]

The acknowledgment came swiftly, and I closed the communication channel. As the seconds ticked away, I couldn't shake off the feeling of urgency.

Senior Maya's disappearance and the string of recent kidnappings were connected; I could sense it. But to unravel the truth, I needed concrete data.

Of course, while the hackers were doing their job, I wasn't going to stay idle.

'Time to take a stroll, then.'

And just like that, I entered the roads of the Western Uxbridge once again.

Chapter 199 Chapter 44.1 - Investigation

"How was it?"

"It can be said it was good."

In the office room of the Local Awakened Society, two officer partners sat at their desks, each of them holding a coffee in their hands.

"Really?" Harlan asked, looking at Margareta.

Since Margareta had returned from the hospital and interrogated the two students involved in the accident, she had been busy reporting everything to her superiors.

For some reason, it seemed the higher-ups were pressuring the Local Branch for information coverage, and they wanted the case to be assigned and transferred to the central branch.

"Yeah. The kids were shaken, but they provided good details for the case."

"They should at least do this much. They are the students of the Arcadia Hunter Academy, after all."

"Yeah. It seems it is not only in the name."

"Then, what was your conclusion?"

"I don't know. Even though everything is pointing towards the internal dispute, I had a hunch that it is not how it looks like."

"Hmm...Why do you think so?"

Margareta leaned back in her chair, a thoughtful expression on her face. "I don't know. It is just.....Everything seemed too swift and clean for only an internal dispute between two shady groups."

Harlan raised an eyebrow, intrigued by Margareta's instincts. "But, is it just because of that? You know, even the mafia has some strong guys under their hands."

Margareta nodded, acknowledging Harlan's point. "True, but it's not just about strength. Of course, we couldn't investigate the scene clearly, but from what the victim named Sylvie had said and what I had seen, I think it was way too brutal for a simple dispute. It was as if the killer was taking his anger out of the other demonic guys."

Harlan leaned forward, absorbing Margareta's analysis. "Well, that might be true. But that alone won't be enough to reach that conclusion, you know?"

"Right, it was just a feeling anyway."

"So, what about the other kid that was attacked?"

"Ah, that one. Astron Natusalune."

"Quite an eccentric name."

"Yeah. What about him?" Margareta asked.

"How was his condition?"

"Well, he was already healed when I was in hospital."

"I see. Thank god that he was in a good condition."

Margareta couldn't help but smile at the memory of the scene where Sylvie was hugging Astron. "He's quite something. Stood alone against a group of attackers and still managed to hold his ground quite a long time. Sylvie, the girl who was with him, was also surprisingly capable."

Harlan raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Sylvie, huh? That girl seemed pretty dead when we found him, though?"

"Well, I think she assumed Astron was dead."

"Ah...." Then Harlan realized and smiled slightly. "Then, it makes sense."

"Yeah. They seem to have some unique abilities. Sylvie, in particular, has this healing power. She practically mended Astron's injuries on the spot."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Astron recounted that she was the one who healed him from that fatal injury."

Harlan's expression turned more serious as the implications of Sylvie's healing ability sank in.

"If that is the case, it makes sense why higher-ups are so interested in this case. A healing power like that could be a game-changer."

Margareta nodded. "Exactly. The Academy might be trying to protect their students and the information about these unique abilities. It wouldn't be the first time they've kept such things under wraps."

"Indeed."

"But that kid, Astron.....He got what it needs to be an officer."

"Really?"

"He got what I had thought at the first try himself."

"You didn't give any hints?"

Margareta leaned back in her chair, her gaze distant as she recalled her impression of Astron.

"None. He has a natural instinct, the kind you can't teach. The way he handled himself in that situation and the conclusions he made—it was like he had the instincts of a seasoned officer. Not to mention, his quick thinking and ability to assess the situation were remarkable."

Harlan raised an eyebrow, intrigued by Margareta's assessment. "And you're saying he did all of this without any prior training or experience?"

"That's right. It's like he was born for this. If he chose to become an independent detective, he could climb the ranks pretty fast."



Harlan chuckled. "Well, well. Looks like we've got a natural talent on our hands. The higher-ups will be pleased to hear about this."

RING!

Just as they were talking amongst themselves, suddenly their phone rang. They were still using this old-school way of communication even now; it was a tradition.

"Here we go again." Harlan rolled his eyes, grabbing the phone.

RING!

Harlan answered the call, expecting routine information or updates. However, as he listened, his expression shifted from casual annoyance to a sudden jolt of surprise. His eyes widened, and the color drained from his face.

"What?!" Harlan shouted into the phone, unable to believe the information he was receiving. He exchanged a quick glance with Margareta, who had leaned forward, sensing something was amiss.

"Two in one day? Are you kidding me? What are the odds?" Harlan's frustration boiled over, and he slammed the phone back onto its receiver.

Margareta raised an eyebrow, concern evident on her face. "What happened?"

"Maya Evergreen, one of the Arcadia Hunter Academy sophomores, is missing too," Harlan grumbled, running a hand through his hair. "First, we have a mysterious attack on their students, and now one of their seniors disappears. What the hell is going on?"

Margareta sighed, realizing the situation was escalating. "Looks like we're in for a long night, partner."

"Tch....Now I regret applying for extra shifts."

Harlan grunted in agreement, the weight of the unfolding events pressing heavily on the two unlucky shoulders, and the two officers left their room just like that, heading to the students who had seen Maya last time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Being able to remember what you had seen is a very important strength, and it came in handy in this situation quite a lot.

"It must be here."

The first location I headed to was where we had clashed with demon followers. It was a backward alley where not many people were walking even in the morning, so this was the case, especially at night.

Even some of the houses were abandoned and empty.

The lighting wasn't actually that good, either. Western Uxbridge's slightly nostalgic atmosphere made it that way.

"Hmm...."

As I stepped into the alley, the fight started playing in my head again, how the demon followers moved on the roofs of the buildings.

SWOOSH!

I first jumped to the roofs and started looking for the traces left by the demon followers.

"They didn't leave many traces."

It was expected. The unit was probably focused on trailing and kidnapping. But, my focus wasn't on the path that demon followers had taken anyway.

I walked around the roofs with my [Shadowborne] activated without making any noise. My presence was also pretty faint, so no one would notice me unless they were exceptionally strong.

"These....."

And walking around the roofs gave results immediately.

There were subtle signs of disturbance on one particular rooftop. Broken tiles scattered in an irregular pattern hinted at a less-than-graceful landing.

I crouched down, examining the shards of ceramic under the dim moonlight. The fractures indicated a lack of finesse as if the individual who landed here wasn't particularly adept at rooftop maneuvers.

'It might be Senior Maya.'

She was a mage, a mage that mainly focused on fighting from range. Most of the time, mages like her don't have the acrobatic ability to land that gracefully.

My [Perceptive Insight] heightened my senses, allowing me to pick up on the faintest details.

The displaced dust particles, the slight misalignment of the broken tiles – these were the traces left by someone unfamiliar with the art of silent landings.

Mana Observation.

Putting mana into my eye, I started resonating my eye with the environment. This was to observe the leftover mana prints around the place.

I traced the trajectory with my eyes, trying to envision the descent, and soon, the faint wind psions on the place led me.

It seemed like the individual had landed at a slightly awkward angle, perhaps stumbling upon arrival.

"However, she regained her balance immediately."

After that, there weren't many traces of the walking. Senior Maya seemed to stop on the roof for a second after landing.

"Was she looking for demon followers?"

That would make sense. If I were in her position, I would do the same. However, since I hadn't encountered her, that meant she was late.

"In that case, she would have gone to the place where the fight happened." Since Mason and other demonic humans used demonic energy, the traces would still be available.

The rooftops guided me through the maze of abandoned structures until I reached the epicenter of our confrontation with the demon followers.

"This was the place."

The location I had chosen was specifically good to avoid fatal attacks, so it was a courtyard.  
"But...."

However, upon reaching the small courtyard, I had noticed something.

"These marks...."

There were already marks of clashing on the ground and many others, and most of them stemmed from us.

As I replayed the fight in my head, I could pinpoint which one of those marks came from our fight.

"But, there are more."

However, on the location, there were more. A small crack in the ground especially got my attention.

"Wasn't this place where I had collapsed?"

The ground was where I had collapsed, but there weren't any traces of blood. It would make sense if it was cleaned, but this place was a desolate alley, and it didn't seem to be cleaned specifically.

"Something doesn't match."

I thought and continued looking.

"Hmm?"

SLICK!

Then, a small, shiny thing got my attention, and I pushed my finger to the ground.

"Saliva?"

The mixture on the ground reminded me of saliva, and I couldn't shake off the uneasy feeling that crept over me.

I cautiously touched the substance with my finger, and an odd sensation made me flinch. It wasn't like any saliva I had encountered before, and its unnatural texture sent shivers down my spine.

"But why?" I pondered, examining the shiny residue on my finger, and then I realized.

"My blood was there, and this feeling...It is demons."

Whenever something related to demons appeared, [Vengeful Bane] would remind me. And this sensation coupled with that....

"Did a demon lick my blood...."

Disgust rose....If it was demons, that could be possible. Those dogs would do such a thing since many of them are anthropophagous.

"Tch."

The courtyard had become a battleground not just for our clash with the demon followers but also for an unseen confrontation that had taken place after it.

The cracked ground signaled a dash and an intense force.

"From the damage on the ground alone, I can easily say whatever this demon is, it is a lot stronger than your usual one.

The enemy's level was high. In my head, I envisioned how this crack occurred and in which direction the demon jumped.

Then, my eyes turned to the rooftop.

"Yeah...."

SWOOSH!

Immediately climbing to the rooftop, I put mana into my eyes.

'This....'

Faint traces of a mixture of demonic energy and a variety of mana psions could be seen.

However, the levels of energy were low, and the rooftop wasn't even damaged too much.

"This happened in an instant," I muttered, imagining the swift and overwhelming power that had left its mark. A demon capable of generating such force was undoubtedly abnormal, a threat that demanded further investigation.

As I continued to survey the rooftop, my [Perceptive Insight] caught a glimmer of something amidst the traces of demonic energy. I approached cautiously, and there, tangled in the architecture, I found a piece of fabric.

"Yeah..." Recognition struck me as I carefully retrieved the cloth. It was a fragment of Senior Maya's distinctive attire. The intricate patterns and design matched her unmistakable style.

"She was here." This final attire confirmed all my hypotheses. From there on, I continued to search the scene for any other details that I could have missed.

Chapter 200 44.2 - Investigation

DING! While I was investigating the scene, I suddenly got a message from my smartwatch.

[Horde: Sir, the files you have requested are all ready.]

Opening it, I noticed where it came from.

'Just in time.'

I couldn't find any more details about the place I was in, aside from some claw marks and saliva substances on the ground. None of them was enough concrete evidence to understand what kind of enemy I was facing.

Most demons had claws. If I had enough materials at my disposal, I would be able to analyze what kind of demon this was. But, sadly, I didn't have time for that.

Cooperating with local security was possible, though I had already sent a message to Amelia about that. They will probably come here as well and will investigate after Amelia's words.

I decided to head to a nearby coffee shop, a place where I could gather my thoughts and read through the documents sent by the Horde. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee wafted through the air as I entered, providing a momentary respite from the tension that clung to the night.

Choosing a quiet corner, I sat down, the smartwatch casting a soft glow on the table as I opened the files.

As I settled into the quiet corner of the coffee shop, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee enveloping me, I began delving into the files provided by the Horde. The soft glow of my smartwatch illuminated the table, creating an isolated pocket of focus amidst the ambient noise.

The compiled information detailed a series of recent kidnappings in Western Uxbridge, shedding light on the patterns, locations, and potential suspects involved.

The reports presented a grim narrative, and as I scanned through the documents, specific details emerged:

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#### Missing Persons List:

##### 1. Emily

Job: Office Worker

Last Seen Location: Maple Street

Last Seen Time: 7:45 PM

Last Seen Date: 8/11/2003

##### 2. Daniel Johnson

Job: Store Clerk

Last Seen Location: Riverside Park

Last Seen Time: 8:20 PM



Last Seen Date: 9/11/2003

3. Olivia Harris

Job: Waitress

Last Seen Location: Old Library, Elm Avenue

Last Seen Time: 6:55 PM

Last Seen Date: 9/11/2003

4. Benjamin Rodriguez

Job: Warden

Last Seen Location: Coal Factory, Oak Street

Last Seen Time: 9:10 PM

Last Seen Date: 10/11/2003

11. Sophia Carter

Job: Graduate – Researcher

Last Seen Location: Alley Behind the Arcade, Birch Street

Last Seen Time: 8:30 PM

Last Seen Date: 14/11/2003

Notes:

Serial numbers 002 to 011 represent additional names that have surfaced, indicating a concerning pattern of disappearances.

Each person's job, last seen location, last seen time, and last seen date are detailed for a comprehensive understanding of the incidents.

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Looking at the list in front of me, I noticed there had been eleven different missing people report cases.

'What is with this number?'

No matter what, the amount of people missing was too much for a small city.

'Are they waiting for orders, or is this common?'

I was not familiar with how things worked in Western Uxbridge; however, even then, looking at what was before me, it became evident that this case was something important.

"Tch."

This was one of the disadvantages of living in places like these. Most of the officers who view such cities as countryside will boldly assume nothing happened, and they will slack off.

"Well, thanks to that, I was able to have access to these files anyway."

Getting files from Arcadia City Local Awakened Security would be a lot harder and would take a longer time, so one can say this worked in my favor.

'Now, to start.'

Delving into the files, I started checking the case.

#### Occupational Variety:

The victims held various occupations, including an office worker, a store clerk, a waitress, a warden, and a graduate researcher. No discernible connection based on occupation could be identified.

Of course, the first thing was this. Since I initially assumed this was the work of a demon, it made sense that such a pathetic and lower creature wouldn't be able to discern what its target's occupation was.

#### Common Locations:

The last locations of the victims were diverse, ranging from warehouses to parks, libraries, and factories. There seemed to be no apparent geographical pattern.

This made things a bit harder. With no exact pattern appearing, that meant the demon could be anywhere around the city.

'Of course, it will have a hideout. But, how can I discern.'

Would it be in the middle of the city? An abandoned factory, building, house? Or was it different?

It was impossible to discern just by looking at the patterns. If they were concentrated on one part of the city, then it might have been possible.

#### Timing Discrepancies:

Of course, this part was not that valuable. A person's last seen time is generally reported by the person who filed the case; thus, the error rate is a lot higher. However, even then, from the disappearance times alone and them never appearing, it can easily be discerned that the demon is working at night.

'A demon that works at night.'

Different from what one thinks in general, demons are not that much of a night creature. Most of them prefer staying on light. However, there are also many who lurk at night.

'MistWraith is a perfect example of that.'

The demon I killed after coming to this game could be presented as an example.

'There are many others just like that.'

However, of course, knowing this fact alone, I could narrow the types of demons a lot, but still, that wouldn't make it concrete.

Last Seen Dates:

The last seen dates spanned from the 8th to the 14th of November 2003. The disappearance cases were just recent, and other than that, the last case before them was a month ago.

'That means the demon started being active around 8th November.'

But what could be the reason for that?

Did it come to this place right at that time from outside, or was there a different reason?

Also, from the dates alone, the frequency of the disappearance cases increased. One may ask, what if the dates don't directly represent the date they disappeared?

Considering most of them had regular jobs and none of them clocked in the following day, this can be concluded.

Therefore, the increase in the disappearance cases also indicated that the demon either got more comfortable around the city over time or needed to appear more.

'The latter is more likely.'

Most predators know the risks. Therefore, they have a biological clock inside them. If, for some reason, the demon needed to capture more people, then it would do its best to satisfy this requirement. Else, it wouldn't risk itself.

'In any case, I will need more details to find out what the guy's motives are.'

As I mulled over these observations, I decided to seek more detailed information from the Horde.

[Omega\_1: I have a critical mission for you. I need detailed information on each victim in the recent disappearance cases in Western Uxbridge. Backgrounds, habits, connections – anything that might shed light on the pattern or motive behind these incidents.]

[Horde: Understood, sir. We'll get to work on it right away. Expect the files shortly.]

[Omega\_1: Swift and thorough, as always. Make sure to dig deep; I need every possible detail.]

[Horde: Consider it done. We'll contact you once we have the comprehensive information; it won't take too long.]

Now that I had a bunch of things in my head and I took a small break, it was time to get to work once again.

"Sir."

"Here."

"Thank you."

After paying for the coffee, I slowly left the place.

SWIRL!

Once again, the cold weather hit me as I got outside. But it also acted as a reminder that I needed to be fast.

'It is getting late. At this hour, most of the people will start returning their home.'

Considering I was planning to talk with the people of the town to learn more about the local place, I needed them not to be suspicious of me.

'But it is still better to sit down and do nothing.'

Even if I can't talk with people, I could at least check the places where the missing people were last seen and try to find some possible evidence.

Opening the map on my smartwatch, I began heading towards the locations I had marked as the last seen places of the missing individuals.

The city at night wore a different ambiance, with the glow of streetlights casting long shadows on the deserted streets.

As I walked through the quiet alleys and dimly lit streets, I couldn't help but notice the contrast between the peaceful facade of the city and the underlying tension brought by the recent series of disappearances.

SWOOSH! Then, I immediately blended into the shadows using my trait and masked my presence. Rapidly moving on the roofs and to shorten the distance, I reached the first location.

The first stop was Maple Street, where Emily, the office worker, was last seen. She had been seen entering this place, and then there weren't any reports of her getting out.

Of course, the streets were long, and there were many houses that she could possibly be. But, if it is the work of a night demon, then it is highly likely that said demon has the ability to intercept other people's senses.

So, I just walked around with the most caution.

As I walked along the desolate street, my eyes caught a faint glimmer on one of the walls.

Closer inspection revealed claw marks etched into the brickwork.

'This.'

I closed my eyes and compared the small cuts with the ones I had seen in the recent location.

'It matches.'

As I carefully examined the claw marks on the brick wall, I noted the differences between these marks and those found at the more recent location. The width of the claws matched, indicating a similar origin, but there was a distinct variance in their depth.

"These marks are not as deep," I murmured to myself, running my fingers lightly over the grooves in the brickwork.

'And there are signs of struggle.'

Considering Emily was an office worker, then it didn't make sense that she was able to make such an overpowered demon struggle against herself.

This further indicated that the demon responsible for Emily's disappearance might not have been at its full strength during this particular incident.

It occurred to me that demons, like any creature, could have fluctuations in their power. If this night demon was weaker during Emily's abduction, it could explain the shallower claw marks and the struggle she put up against it.

My mind worked to piece together the puzzle. The demon's strength seemed to vary, and if I could understand the pattern behind these fluctuations, it might provide a crucial advantage in tracking and confronting the creature.

'I will be able to check it from other locations.'

Since this happened quite a long time ago, things like saliva couldn't be seen.

Acknowledging the significance of the information gathered from Emily's last seen location, I decided to move on to the next destination on the list. The realization that the strength of the demon might vary offered a potential key to understanding its vulnerabilities.

Leaving Maple Street, I traversed the quiet city, making my way to Riverside Park, the next location where a person had gone missing. Daniel Johnson, the store clerk, had last been seen in this area. As I approached the park, the atmosphere grew more ominous, a stark contrast to its daytime tranquility.

I swiftly ascended to the rooftops, using my [Shadowborne] trait to navigate the terrain without alerting anyone to my presence. Riverside Park was expansive, with several potential hiding spots. The challenge was to identify any signs that matched the pattern I had observed earlier.

As I moved along the rooftops, my eyes scanned the surroundings for any irregularities. The moonlight cast an eerie glow on the park below, emphasizing the emptiness and silence that pervaded the area. My senses remained heightened, ready to detect the slightest disturbance.

It wasn't long before I noticed a subtle glimmer on a nearby tree. Descending with caution, I examined the trunk and found faint claw marks. Unlike the previous location, these marks appeared deeper, suggesting a stronger and more capable demon.

'So, the strength of the demon is increased after the first time.'

Either it was related to the location, or the demon got stronger with time.

'This.....'

Though I didn't want to think about it, my mind was reaching an ominous conclusion.

DING! At that moment, I heard the notification coming from my watch.

[Horde: Sir, the information you requested is ready.]



RING!

At the same time, a ringing sound echoed.

[Received Call: Senior Amelia]

It was a call coming from Amelia.