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“...Okay.” Although Annan was somewhat curious about what she meant by “phantom”, he nodded without further questions.

He knew that Kafni had superb perception. Her ability to see worlds that ordinary people couldn't was expected.

Speaking of it, he still didn't know much about Kafni.

But at this moment, an idea flashed through Annan's mind.

He asked, “Kafni... is there anything you want or like?”

Annan's inquiry about Kafni's interests had nothing to do with his plans.

Annan intended to seek out information that would be helpful outside of the nightmare now that Kafni was still young and wasn't guarded towards him. After all, this was only a nightmare. Kafni would not remember anything that happened here by the time the nightmare was over.

That way, even if he had failed in challenging the nightmare, it wouldn't be too big of a loss if Annan had gotten crucial information.

Hearing this, Kafni was startled.

She was silent for a while, then replied in a soft voice, “I want... a gift.”

“...What gift?” Annan asked.

“A birthday gift.” She answered softly.

Those clear, glazed pupils always made her seem like an emotionless puppet. Yet only at this time, Kafni seemed to have more “humanness”.

Kafni turned her head away slightly. There was an intensely complicated look on that doll-like delicate and tender face. “Today is August 8th... It's His Majesty's birthday, and it's also my birthday. So his Majesty and I share the same birthday.

“But no one remembers my birthday. They would only remember His Majesty's birthday...

“I think, maybe only by becoming a king... would birthdays be worthy of remembering.”

Without waiting for Kafni to finish, Annan began to feel around his body.

Seeing his behavior, Kafni was a little stunned.

Is he going to give me a gift?

But then, a sense of urgency and anticipation bloomed in her heart.

Her father had been busy with His Majesty's birthday ever since he woke up in the morning.

He hadn't even wished Kafni a happy birthday.

Kafni's mother, on the other hand, didn't care about her birthday.

Similarly, her mother had disappeared before Kafni woke up as if she had evaporated from the world.

It was precisely because Kafni was feeling lonely on her birthday that she had snuck through the secret passage to paint in the garden despite the presence of guests.

"I do have a present for you..." Annan answered affirmatively.

He had checked before. Annan didn't have self-defense weapons on him, but he did have an azure blue ring, a badge, and a marble.

After this badge was activated, it could immediately call upon all Winter's Hands within the nearby area; the ring was a curse vessel made using the Austere-Winter Dukedom's craftsmanship. The effect was that it could detect hostility and even freeze all of the nearby hostile units for a while if it was used actively— it contained the frost element, which had to be recharged after each use.

Obviously, both these items couldn't be given to Kafni.

But that gem marble could.

[Frost Eye]

[Type: Material/orb/gem (blue)]

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[Description: Austere-Winter Dukedom specialty, an orb that stays cold even in boiling water.]

[Effect: Active use to attempt dispelling/abolishing mind control and hallucinations.]

[Effect: When equipped, keep the mind clear at all times to stabilize the holder's mental state.]

[Price: Every time an active effect is used, the body temperature of the holder would drop by one degree for one day. This cost is stackable.]

The blue-grade items were not considered valuable. Annan's curse vessels and materials would generally start with dark blue grade and then be mixed with hints of purple and gold. For example, the ring and badge were all purple qualities curse vessels.

It would not seem too strange to give such a gift.

Moreover, it was beautiful; it looked as pretty as an ice blue glass marble, just right for a girl.

It was usually in Annan's inner pocket, and Dmitri wouldn't ask where it went any time soon. After all, Annan could leave right after he was done with the nightmare.

And according to Annan's memory...

After a year or two, Kafni would become a Transcended and realize the existence of "Dream Stealer" Danton.

At that time, Kafni overloaded the curses on herself and became highly eroded by them. Only then did she resist Dream Stealer's Mind Manipulation ability.

If Kafni had such a treasure in the actual history, there would probably be no need for her to go through such a dangerous ordeal.

“It's for you.” With this thought in mind, Annan handed the marble in his arms over to Kafni.

He explained in a soft voice, “This marble can nullify mind control spells. If you carry it, you can also refresh your mind and help you remain clear-headed. It's not very useful to me, but it's an excellent item for you.

“Remember not to use it too much. Otherwise, you may catch a cold and get sick. It is best if you generally have it kept in a treasure box and use it once a day at a fixed time.”

“Is it a curse vessel?” Kafni, who was only tentatively asking for a gift, widened her eyes in astonishment.

She initially just wanted to ask for Annan's gloves or whatever accessories he had as a souvenir.

After all, Kafni knew what her status was and sorrowfully acknowledged that she and Annan would probably never see each other again after he returned to his country.

Annan was the first person of her age who didn't think she was a monster nor feared or hated her ever since she was born. He was also the only person, even compared to her parents, who sincerely thought her paintings were beautiful.

He was Kafni's only friend.

Yet it was unexpected that Annan simply gave her something that was not so ordinary.

The coolness she felt just by touching the “marble” was enough to tell her that it was nothing short of extraordinary.

Although Annan could wield multiple curse vessels, it was simply because there was a limited Austere-Winter family bloodline. But at this time, the Noah royal family had not died to the point where only three heirs were left... Instead, they had a large number of heirs. Plus, almost every heir had many sons of their own because of the old king's livelihood.

The only exceptions were Princess Royal Elizabeth, who was still single, and the fourth prince, who had only one daughter.

This was indeed a precious gift for Kafni, who had not yet become Transcended and had a low status in the royal family.

It was so precious that she didn't even dare to accept it.

Annan couldn't help but sigh as he realized Kafni's troubled state and vague inferiority complex.

You are a princess... is it normal for you to be like this?

“Accept it,” Annan replied sternly, “If it matters that much to you, you can give me a gift of equal value when you see me again.

“Let's not waste time. I'll go now— you must remember to draw, and your voice can be slightly clearer.”

“...Okay.” Kafni agreed softly.

She clenched the marble in her hand, feeling a little touched in her heart.

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Annan had activated his curse before exiting the secret passage— “The Last Work: David”.

[TN: Title is a reference to stealth assassin game, Hitman.]

The one who entered the secret passage was a nine-year-old child, but the one who exited the secret passage was a kind middle-aged man with black hair, black eyes, and well-defined features.

“...This height difference is too extreme.”

Annan felt somewhat dizzy when he had transformed into “Ghirlandaio·David·Buonaro” from Annan's young body. He finally got used to it after taking two more steps in the secret passage.

Basically, Annan had to take some time to get used to this height level every time he used this curse before he could re-establish an accurate spatial and distal sense.

Annan came out from the garden corner and followed the path to the kitchen.

It wasn't because he was hungry but because someone had blown his cover when Annan and Kafni passed by earlier.

It was a young man with red curly hair and freckles.

When he saw Annan and Kafni passing by, he unreasonably revealed a killing intent towards them.

Annan and Kafni walked past as if nothing had happened at the time as if they didn't notice at all. Therefore, they wouldn't have alerted him.

Never mind Kafni, even with Annan's Perception attribute, such killing intent would be as clear as a high beam from the headlights in the night within such distance.

An important piece of information was that Kafni did not know him. This meant that he wasn't part of the Noah Kingdom's high-ranking officials, yet he could freely move around the kitchen.

The possibility that that person was from Austere-Winter Dukedom, on the other hand, was much smaller than this. Therefore, it could almost be said as none.

So from these details, Annan could conclude that there was a severe problem with the palace's security system.

Right now was clearly a critical moment. Not only was it the old king's birthday, but it was also the day the dukedom heir came to visit. Yet someone whom Kafni had never seen before was able to mingle in.

Annan had roamed openly using the facade of “David” as a kind of test.

He wanted to see if someone would stop him.

He couldn't be mistaken as part of Noah's higher-ups.

At this point in time, no one knows who “David” was, except for Michelangelo.

Yet he somehow walked over here unobstructedly.

Those patrolling guards noticed Annan, but they just watched Annan with some vigilance. They didn't question Annan's whereabouts but instead stopped talking and stood there, watching Annan leave without saying anything.

This security system was ridiculously loose.

Annan instead let out a sigh of relief.

This just proved another thing.

These royal bodyguards were not the direct power under the Rotten Man Church. However, they seemed to be instructed by someone not to intercept or question any strangers during a specific period.

Who is it then? A suspect quickly appeared in Annan's mind — the Third Prince, Philip Noah.

It was the man who tried to murder Don Juan Geraint and Captain Klaus's boss.

Does he have the authority to command the guards?

There were many speculations in Annan's mind, and most of them were quickly disapproved.

At this time, Annan had arrived at the kitchen.

Following Kafni's instructions, Annan speculated that the core of the ritual here should be in the kitchen's basement.

He once again saw the sneaky red-haired man.

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He was already standing at the kitchen door with his arms crossed, anxiously waiting for something.

Unexpectedly, this man who revealed a killing intent when he previously saw Annan and Kafni had instead seemed relieved when he saw David.

There was no hostility whatsoever.

Annan realized this and walked over to him calmly.

At this proximity, Annan could paralyze his movements with “Slothful Eye” at any time.

After Annan came to a halt, the man whispered, “Why are you so late?”

“Two children passed by earlier. Can't talk, I'm going off... I'll leave the rest to you.”

“Two children passed by... Are you sure everything here is okay?” Annan wavered and asked somewhat dissatisfyingly, following the man's words.

He inquired on what the man himself had just mentioned. This could largely lower the other person's guard. For example, if Annan had suddenly said, "Oh right, by the way..." and changed the topic during their first meeting, the other person might suddenly become suspicious of Annan.

And with Annan's outstanding acting and probing skills, the person only said impatiently, "It's fine as long as they both didn't go in anyway... Go quickly. My mission here is done. I'm leaving. If I don't leave now, I won't be able to leave."

Annan glanced at him and walked into the kitchen without saying anything.

Yet he had secretly come to a great realization.

At that moment, the many clues and fragments had connected with one another in Annan's mind.

That's right. The peculiarity that someone had instructed the bodyguards, Kafni's mother who had gone missing, this suspicious man's audacity to stand so openly in front of the kitchen...

This could only mean one thing.

These Rotten Man believers— Assuming that they were Rotten Man believers, their progress in infiltrating the Noah Kingdom's upper class still wasn't considered too deep at this time.

To prevent the likelihood of the plan failing and being captured or betrayed, everyone only knew the content of their mission. Additionally, they didn't know each other nor each other's mission. They only handed over missions through the pre-agreed signals or other means.

There were many people in this kitchen, but they were all very busy inside— there were many fish barrels at the door.

Annan glanced around.

He found that no one was looking in his direction, and no one even saw that he had entered the kitchen.

The kitchen's basement was in front of him.

But he couldn't go in at this time.

The "NPC" who completed the shift wouldn't suddenly disappear. If Annan had replaced someone's identity and completed the mission handover with this man, then Annan wouldn't be able to do much in the basement even if he was a few minutes earlier than that someone.

After all, time was limited.

These two people would most likely meet on the way.

Annan turned his head slightly and looked at the red-haired man who hadn't gone far.

In "David"'s pupils, a fierce light appeared in a flash.

Without waiting for the red-haired man to leave, Annan followed behind him silently.

When he approached the man, Annan suddenly reached out and pressed on the man's mouth— his other hand was pressed against the back of the man, and his palm instantly turned blue-black.

[Chilling Touch]!

The man passed out before he had time to struggle or even make a sound. It seemed that he probably would never know who attacked him in the first place.

Annan simply threw him on his shoulders with ease and walked back in big steps. He opened a fish barrel and carelessly shoved the man into it. To prevent him from waking up halfway, Annan even punched the back of the man's head heavily with his marble-like fist.

This way, he probably wouldn't be waking up so quickly.

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Annan only began scavenging the man's belongings after stuffing him into the wooden barrel filled with fish.

All he had in the victim's pocket was a dagger, a lock pick, and two silver coins. At first glance, he wasn't a decent man.

Aside from that, there was a piece of paper folded twice in the inner pocket of his clothes.

There were two commands written on the front and back pages.

[Take the Magnetic Stone to the kitchen at 10:00 in the morning. Enter the kitchen basement under the guidance of a "tall," "black-haired and red-eyed" fat man. Give the Magnetic Stone to the person inside and leave the basement at 3:00 in the afternoon. Stand "impatiently" in front of the kitchen door with "crossed arms" and prevent any target from entering the kitchen basement.]

[There will be someone to replace you between 4:00 to 4:30 in the afternoon. He will come "alone" with "black hair and black eyes," and you don't know this person. If no one entered the basement during this time, just leave; if someone entered the basement, don't let him go in and ask him to leave directly. You then leave after twenty minutes.]

The handwriting on the note was scribbled, and there were traces of repeated folding and opening of the paper. There were also double underlines to emphasize some of the words.

If not mistaken, this should be the so-called "feature".

Fortunately, there was no need to remove his clothes.

Annan immediately stood in the position where the red-haired man stood before. He crossed his arms and looked impatiently at the passersby coming and going at the door.

In less than two minutes, Annan saw a man hurried over.

As the note said, black hair, black eyes, and alone... The only difference was that he seemed vaguely familiar to Annan. Yet it was hard to tell why he seemed so familiar.

The man saw Annan standing at the kitchen door impatiently and walked over quickly.

Annan frowned slightly and whispered, "Why are you so late? Her Royal Highness Kafni passed by earlier... We're lucky she didn't go in. Otherwise, what would I do?"

He revised the speech slightly and put himself out.

The man just chuckled, "As long as a stranger like you is standing here, Her Royal Highness Kafni will not enter.

"Okay, leave the rest to me."

The man took out a pocket watch from his arm as he spoke and looked at the time, "It's almost five... you should leave quickly, from the back door. Otherwise, you won't be able to leave in a while."

"Understood." Annan nodded calmly and walked past the man.

His pupils contracted slightly.

Because at this moment, Annan had recognized the man's identity!

Annan recognized that pocket watch.

It was an intricately decorated silver pocket watch with three-eyed birds with dagger-sharp feathers engraved on the case.

It was a silver pocket watch of the same style as Don Juan.

This was the Geraint family badge!

This young man seemed to be in his early twenties.

I'm afraid this man is Don Juan's eldest brother!

After walking past him, Annan stopped silently and turned back quickly. He reached out his left hand towards the young man's mouth like lightning.

But at this time, the young man seemed to have eyes at the back of his head.

He bent down and rolled forward quickly, at the same time taking out a delicate silver lady pistol from his top. He turned around and pointed it at Annan.

"Stay still, my friend. Just stand there." The young man of the Geraint family asked in a calm and soft voice, "Tell me, why did you want to attack me?"

He didn't want to make a scene.

Annan understood his subtext immediately.

This meant that these people might not have as many infiltrated guards as Annan imagined.

In the face of the young man's accusation, Annan pressed his left hand down slightly, revealed the silver ring between his fingers, and countered with a vigilant expression, "Because you are a member of the Geraint family.

"And that's not in line with what I've been asked to do."

Seeing the silver ring that Annan deliberately revealed, the young man's pupils shrank slightly.

He was silent for a while. Finally, he pointed the muzzle slightly downwards and tried his best to calm the situation with his tone, “That’s impossible— what is your mission description?”

“The mission says I don't know you... but that's not the case.”

Annan said slowly, “Because you are the eldest son of the Geraint family— I recognize you. You are then not the one I am waiting for.”

He wanted to see if he could manipulate him for some information.

It unexpectedly turned out to be successful...

The young man frowned slightly without denying, “I think there is a misunderstanding in this, my friend. I am indeed Ferdinand Geraint, but I have never met you. Like you, I'm a Rotten Man believer... Otherwise, I would have called the guards by now.

“Can you show me your list? Then, in good faith, I'll show you mine too.”

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As a sign of sincerity, Ferdinand put the pistol back on his waist.

He then took out the “mission list” from his arms.

Annan showed a hesitant look on his face and slowly took out a list that had been folded many times from his arms. The two exchanged it tacitly.

There were also two commands written on it:

[Go to the kitchen at 4:00 in the afternoon and meet a man standing “impatiently” at the door with his “arms crossed”. If the other party reports no one entered the basement, enter the kitchen basement; otherwise, stop the conversation and leave immediately to ensure safety.]

[Hide the linked Magnetic Stone on yourself and attend the banquet. Then, sit in the southeast corner of Table 3, and destroy the Magnetic Stone immediately after the explosion.]

Explosion? Annan was slightly startled.

He undoubtedly knew what a Magnetic Stone was. It was a standard component for more extensive rituals and functioned similarly as a remote control.

Its purpose was to enable the host of the ritual to control rituals that would become more dangerous once activated at a further, safer location.

In other words, Rotten Man wants to... cause a massive explosion? Annan jolted suddenly.

He seemed to realize something.

At the very beginning, Don Juan was sent to the border seemingly because he had provoked a certain someone. Yet, in fact, this was Don Juan's father's way of protecting him from political persecution encountered by the Geraint family.

At first, Annan thought the Geraint family was innocent.

The reason for persecution was that the Geraint family supported Princess Royal. That was why they were suppressed and persecuted by the Third Prince.

But according to Annan's knowledge of Princess Royal from just now, she wasn't the type to be weak and retreat. It was impossible that she would let Third Prince Philip attack her forces at will and be silent about it.

Unless...

She doubted the Geraint family's loyalty hence keeping silent when the Geraint family was faced with discrimination.

What was the most likely reason when the Geraint family was being suspected? If the Geraint family was truly disloyal, would they only have encountered discrimination?

Annan previously did not understand the reason behind this.

But Annan probably knew it now.

If Princess Royal was in doubt of the Geraint family's loyalty, then sending Don Juan away for protection and him then assassinated by Third Prince's people on the way, and even the consecutive accidental deaths of other members of the royal family in these past few years... were all planned?

Annan had always wondered if this was part of a bigger conspiracy, a bigger game plan.

And now, it all seemed so simple.

Ferdinand said it himself just now.

He was a Rotten Man believer.

If so, what did the Rotten Man believers desire most? Where had the Rotten Man previously failed? How did the Rotten Man believers please their deities?

Annan looked up toward Ferdinand.

The answer was now self-evident.

Ferdinand was Third Prince's follower from the very beginning. He had always been trying to kill his other siblings to gain immortality from this.

He was trying to kill other royal heirs to gain immortality for the Third Prince.

Immortality's ultimate servant... This seemed to be Rotten Man's biggest regret. If it could be achieved, they would obtain great power.

Looking back now, the Crow family's position in Noah's Kingdom was roughly equivalent to Winter's Hand.

If there were frequent "accidental deaths" that had "zero evidence" in which investigations had always yielded no results...

The Princess Royal's intuitive suspicion was indeed correct.

Ferdinand Geraint was a traitor!

It was just that the betrayer was not the entire Geraint family, but just one of them!

But this also seemed to be an opportunity now...

"Look, it's mentioned above..." Ferdinand frowned after reading Annan's mission list, then looked up and tried to explain to Annan.

But at that time, he suddenly noticed that Annan's pupils had unknowingly turned dull grey.

As soon as he felt vigilant, an incomparably immense and irresistible feeling of lethargy injected his spirit. Since he wasn't Transcended, he lost his defenses almost instantly.

In between Ferdinand's half-awake state, he saw the middle-aged man with black hair and black eyes approach him, revealing a dangerous smile towards him.

"I'll have some questions for you later." Annan added softly, "Before that, please sleep with the salted fish for a bit..."

He immediately raised his mighty marble fist and punched Ferdinand's temple!

Ferdinand blacked out immediately.

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Ding~

A crisp sound came suddenly from the door, and the servants in the kitchen all looked in the direction of the sound.

A middle-aged man with a kind smile, neat clothing, black hair, and black eyes walked in calmly. His unhurried, majestic aura made the servants uncontrollably begin to guess his identity.

He placed a silver coin in between his right fingers.

At this moment, that silver coin was rolling rapidly between his fingers.

"Excuse me." The middle-aged man suddenly stopped a passing servant and asked softly, "How do I get to the basement?"

Part of the silver pocket watch slipped out silently from his wide cuff as he spoke.

Seeing the familiar Three-eyed Crow logo, the servant's pupils suddenly shrank and seemed to have a sense of fear as she looked at the middle-aged man. He didn't dare look him directly in the eye.

"Go, go straight ahead from here... then turn left, and you'll see it." With that, the servant quickly bowed and excused himself from the black-haired middle-aged man.

"David form" Annan looked at his back thoughtfully.

I see.

Do the Noah people see the Crow family this way?

These servants only felt fear and dread toward these “Crow-related men”... But if it were those nobles, officials, and Transcendeds, it would probably not be so simple.

But this was also normal.

Looking back at the makeup of Noah's royal family, Henry VIII had a total of nine children... five daughters and four sons.

But after five years, only three remained.

Princess Royal, who was active in political courtrooms, had enthusiastic participation in politics, and was ready to be crowned at any time; the betrayer who intended to kill his father and all his siblings probably just to gain the power of eternal stupidity by drawing that sword; a lazy sloth who did nothing nor cared about anything aside from lazing around... and six poor souls that had already kicked the bucket.

In this situation where the percentage of problem children was close to 100%, it seemed expected that the servants working for the royal family would be disloyal and unruly.

No, that's not quite right.

This seems like the work of the Crow family, doesn't it?

As the Intelligence Director, Count Geraint controlled the Special Intelligence Agency “One-Eyed Crow”. Aside from collecting information for the king from all over the kingdom, his main task was to monitor, investigate, and arrest suspicious capital nobles.

Annan was suddenly lost in thought.

Is the Geraint family overly loyal... or too incompetent?

With their power, all they had to do was to pull out a portion of their men to be able to collect evil deeds, gather evidence, and even fabricate evidence to frame and attack their political enemies.

But they didn't.

Why is this...

Simply judging from the servant's unconcealed fear, it seemed unlikely that it was the latter.

There was a slight halt in Annan's footsteps as he then continued to walk towards the basement while maintaining composure.

He suddenly understood—This was probably Count Geraint's arrangements.

Although the Geraint family currently had challenges all over the capital, as if every heir would want to make Crow their enemy, they would immediately turn around and befriend Count Geraint as long as they persevered till one of them had a clear win.

Even the betrayer who deliberately wanted to commit patricide, the Third Prince, tried to contact Ferdinand. His intention to promise him benefits directly through Rotten Man was simply to win over a Crow family member.

It was because it was a must for new kings who had just ascended the throne to have intelligence support from the Crow family.

If so, Count Geraint's repeated emphasis that he was unbiased and only loyal to the king was probably not out of loyalty.

The Crow's plan was simple — nurture the enemy for self-gain.

The Crow Family placed their betting chips across all factions.

Henry VIII was soon going to be dying of old age, and they must find the next ruler. But Count Geraint of this generation wasn't aggressive enough or somewhat overly cautious.

He did not interfere with or hasten in any way the birth of the new king.

Judging from Benjamin's early awareness of the Third Prince's rebellion and even knowledge of his assassination plan, Benjamin must be a “One-Eyed Crow” member.

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They knew everything but did nothing.

In this infighting of the royal family, all the heirs could sense what would happen if they were short of the Geraint family's strength. Losing the source of local intelligence was like being outright blind. They would be unable to protect themselves in the face of assassins, especially Transcended assassins; they would be easily deceived and fall into conspiracies as they wouldn't know the true intentions of others; others might control even their minds.

These were all things the One-Eyed Crow could see, prevent, or even block outright.

They could, but it was not necessary.

They had a good reason — to maintain neutrality.

After going through a period without the protection of the One-Eyed Crow... Regardless of who was the ultimate winner, they must try to make good connections with the Geraint family after inheritance.

It was impossible that they would betray Count Geraint at this time and abolish his position as Intelligence Director. On the contrary, they would want to increase the count's authority to get their support.

Only with this could they sit firmly on the throne.

In other words, regardless of who the new king was— they would instead be kidnapped after taking the throne.

They had to pay Count Geraint to his satisfaction.

Otherwise, Count Geraint could simply turn to the losers for a higher price.

What is this?

Imperial Guards Succession Law?

Annan suddenly felt a little wary of Count Geraint.

He was now beginning to doubt the information he was given in the first place. Count Geraint sent Don Juan out to be away from the center of the fight.

The purpose of all this was to make Third Prince think that he had killed Don Juan. But as for the reason behind this, Annan was unable to figure it out at the moment.

Count Geraint only had three children in total!

To lure Third Prince, he even risked his youngest son's safety.

Plus, Count Geraint must have known that his eldest son was already serving Third Prince.

“So, is the count looking over these three matters concurrently?”

Annan squinched his eyes slightly, “To heighten Ferdinand's status by faking the death of Don Juan's status...”

If Third Prince was the one who finally succeeded, the Geraint family could also proceed.

Could he have made the heirs go at each other until there were only three so that he could achieve this goal?

—No, that's not right.

He was even betting on all four factions.

To this day, the Geraint family was still loyal to the king. If the king finally accepted Rotten Man's request and completed the immortality ritual, their status still wouldn't change.

Annan thought quickly in his mind.

This information might save lives when he arrives at the capital a few months later.

Now there was only one unclear piece.

Count Geraint had three sons. If they corresponded to the three royal heirs, the count himself corresponded to the king...

Then, Don Juan Geraint, who was his assistant?

Annan froze suddenly.

Images of himself, Prince Albert, Kafni, Roseburg, Rotten Man, Silver Sire flashed through his mind suddenly...

Did he count me in the plan?

Benjamin knew too much.

If he were a member of One-Eyed Crow, Count Geraint would have long known that he was impersonating Don Juan.

Unless his purpose is to let Don Juan get away with the feigned death...

And then let me be the one to help Prince Albert to the throne in Don Juan's place?

If so, what is Don Juan doing?

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Chapter 275: Quiet

Great, everything is going well.

I've gotten some new information...

Annan, in the form of David, squinted slightly. Then, he walked around the corner nonchalantly and entered the kitchen basement.

Ferdinand's pocket was empty, aside from the note and the silver pocket watch. There wasn't even a single silver coin.

But Annan got a surprise.

Surprisingly, that pistol was a curse vessel.

Because when Annan picked it up, its attribute panel was revealed.

[Miss Quiet]

[Type: Weapon (Purple)]

[Description: A silent gun. Its built-in 9mm bullet is as silent as it gets.]

[Effect: From pulling the trigger to the firing of the bullet, there will be no sound throughout the whole process; the person who is hit by the bullet of this weapon will not make any sound within ten seconds; the weapon will automatically fill in one bullet for every hour the holder is silent with the upper limit as four.]

[Price: The holder will suffer the curse "Speak No Evil", "Whispers of the Arrogant".]

[Speak No Evil: If the wielder is attacked before he is done speaking, this attack ignores all defense.]

[Whispers of the Arrogant: If the holder is engaging in four continuous rounds of dialogue with the attacked and announces that he is about to attack prior to shooting while the weapon is in possession, this attack will be a sure-fire and ignores all defense.]

This seemed to be in a similar ability domain of the [Tongue in the Mirror].

After reading the [Whisper of the Arrogant], Annan finally knew why [Speak No Evil] gave him a strange feeling.

[Speak No Evil] was the prefix of a specific series of curses. The purpose was to restrain such curses themselves.

For example, the [Tongue in the Mirror], or the [Whisper of the Arrogant].

And Annan suddenly felt a slight chill.

He figured it out.

After Ferdinand took out this gun, he had only four rounds of dialogue with him!

It was just that when Ferdinand said the fourth round of dialogue, Annan concentrated on reading the note and did not reply... So when he made a second attempt to have the fourth round of dialogue, Annan had already used [Slothful Eye] to hypnotize him.

If Annan wasn't so decisive and was just a little bit slower, responding only after the sentence that went, "Look, it's mentioned here..."

Ferdinand was bound to shoot immediately because this gun could make a sure hit without aiming at the enemy. There was also no need to worry that the sound of gunfire would attract other people.

Once Annan was hit by his sure-fire attack that ignored all defenses, Ferdinand would be able to fire three more shots in a row and kill Annan on the spot!

Although the physical features of the red-haired brother were not described on Ferdinand's note, he still had doubts about Annan and had murderous intentions!

And Ferdinand hid it very well... Even until the end, Annan's perception didn't warn him.

Was it that time?

Annan recalled that when Ferdinand saw the silver ring in "David"'s hand, his gaze suddenly stopped.

Does he think I'm a Silver Rank wizard?

With such vigilant thoughts in mind, Annan deliberately put in more effort— he wrapped Ferdinand's head like a giant dumpling with Ferdinand's clothes.

After that, Annan stuffed him into the fish barrel.

That heavy punch was enough to knock Ferdinand into a state of moderate concussion; the slightly confined space in the fish barrel coupled with the clothes on his head could further prolong his wakefulness. Of course, it also wouldn't matter if he were accidentally killed.

But to be on the safe side, Annan had to be out within 20 minutes—

Annan thought a concussion of this level usually meant being unconscious for twenty minutes to half an hour. He couldn't just bet that Ferdinand would get retrograde amnesia, so he had to take the victim away before it was too late. He would interrogate and then execute the victim.

Annan would then strangle the redhead, who was also unconscious while he was at it.

Although Annan had previously felt that he had accidentally cracked the skull of his red-haired friend, it was just for precaution.

It would be bad if he woke up and started yelling, leading people to find Ferdinand in an unconscious state.

Let's get it over with.

Upon entering the basement, Annan put the silver coin between his right fingers again. He then put the gun named [Miss Quiet] into David's overly loose left cuff.

In the kitchen basement, white cold air visible to the naked eye enshrouded its surroundings.

It was more of a freezer than a basement.

The temperature was at least negative.

The cold air was enough to make ordinary people start shivering shortly after entering but were pointless to Annan's marble torso.

Annan looked around and saw lots of fresh meat and vegetables set on different shelves. He also saw something bulging in the bags piled up in the corner of the room, probably food or something.

The kitchen basement was spacious, about the size of the warehouse where Vasily lived. The difference was its twists and turns. Each room was only ten to twenty square meters, and Annan had walked through five or six of them.

Suddenly, Annan stopped because he saw another person.

A grey-haired old man in a rough linen gown sat cross-legged on the altar with his back facing towards Annan.

It was a strange sitting posture.

His spine seemed to have been penetrated by nails from top to bottom—extremely straight. A red gem was placed at the top of his head, just so it happened to connect with his spine.

At this moment, Annan looked from behind. He could see that a red line spread from the ruby that emerged from the old man's back and entered the altar.

Through a complex Alteration, the altar dispersed this laser-like red line into a complex 120° that had six intersecting circles, with two lines extending from the circles.

Found it.

This should be one of the corners of the hexagon.

“Crow, take it away.” The old man spoke in a feeble voice, “Be careful, don't step on the red line...”

He seemed to be running out of energy, needing great strength to keep his eyes open.

He didn't see that it was not Ferdinand who walked in but Annan instead.

But Annan didn't walk over.

He just looked at the old man and silently took out [Miss Quiet].

The pistol was aimed at the old man's back.

The red line on his back led to the gem.

“If you want to do it... Crow, I advise you to take the Magnetic Stone first.”

The old man said slowly with a hoarse voice, "My spine is the root leading to the earth. If the root is broken, the tree will die. If the tree dies, the fruit will also fall. Magnetic Stones are very fragile."

A ritualist.

How much does he have to do with this ritual?

Annan's heart wavered as he heard these words and shifted the muzzle slightly.

Not towards the heart but the thighs.

Then, Annan pulled the trigger.

He pulled the trigger silently, the bullet flew out silently, and it hit the target silently. The whole process was as comical as a silent film, and there was no sense of reality.

But when the old man opened his eyes due to sudden severe pain and his body trembling— he opened his mouth up wide yet didn't make a sound.

He just fell forward and then silently to the side. His body silently crashed to the ground as he wailed silently. The ruby fell from the top of his head onto the ground with a crisp sound.

Then, the ruby shattered like an overly plentiful red fruit that fell to the ground and turned into a pool of mud. Yet the red gem that smashed onto the ground turned into a pool of soft red mud as if it was red crystal mud that was smashed to the ground.

The red light beam shattered instantly, but the six red rings on the ground simply disappeared.

Annan stepped forward without hesitation and dragged the old man off the altar.

Meanwhile, Annan tore off the old man's robe and threw it away, put the old man's hands together, and held them firmly with his left hand. Then, with the help of a temporary height advantage, he lifted the old man off the ground, keeping his tailbone away from the ground.

"You have been captured by me, old man."

David's voice came out of Annan's mouth, "I ask, you answer."

Annan put his right hand in front of the old man as he spoke to let the trembling old man see that a silver coin was sticking out of his fingers.

"If your answers are satisfactory, I'll heal you. I'll heal all of your wounds."

Annan said gently, "But if the answer is unsatisfactory..."

Annan raised his right hand towards the right as he spoke.

A silver blade pierced out silently from Annan's fingers.

"Do you understand?" Annan said slowly, "Remember... be quiet."

At this time, the effect of silence had ended.

The old man nodded shakily. Then, he said softly as his body trembled to endure the pain, "I... I will be quiet."

"Very good." Annan asked calmly, "First question, who are you."

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"I'm Ken Carter." The old man's voice was low and even trembling, "I'm a ritualist from the Natta County."

Natta County... Annan frowned slightly.

He had indeed heard of this location, and it wasn't a good place.

Natta County was at a viscount land close to the western border of the Noah Kingdom. The terrain itself was similar to Roseburg, but the difference was that it was barren further west.

Indeed, the westernmost side was the edge of the Noah Kingdom.

In the past few decades, the Natta County had its plains by the west of the city eroded by the Gray Mists, and a third of the urban area consumed in it. However, the erosion rate was halved after five years.

At this distance, the barrier couldn't block off the penetration of the Gray Mists completely.

The curse was like dust, visible to the naked eye, tainting the air in the city. The entire town was painted grey during the day, and the sky turned blood red as night approached.

Ordinary people who lived in such places were prone to developing chronic diseases within a few years. After all, the water source was quite likely to be polluted by the curse. Long-term living, polluted air, and water sources would greatly weaken the regular civilians.

Those food exposed to the air would even grow mold within a couple of days. The rate of decay for fresh meat, vegetables, and fruits was tripled than that of the mainland. If one were to eat food contaminated by the curse, the victim would most possibly die in a short time due to an acute infection.

Natta County's feudal lord had evacuated inland and abandoned the city because of the situation. The city guards and the polices quickly evacuated in the absence of wages. Without law and order, many vicious robberies and murders soon occurred. Consequently, many trading caravans no longer went to Natta County, and the Silver Sire Church had also evacuated because of that.

Soon, warning signs were installed, warning the passersby not to enter and persuading people in the city to leave as quickly as possible.

But obviously, the warning sign couldn't stop those Transcended criminals who craved power, ordinary people who were in a fanatical pursuit to become Transcended, and wanted criminals who committed serious crimes. Even the sign itself was stolen in the first month after it was erected.

In the end, Natta County became lawless.

The indescribable monsters in the Gray Mists would even go directly into the city to hunt. Some Transcended who were eager for power would enter Natta County and live near the Gray Mists while

staying inside the protective barrier. With that, their body would absorb the vicious curse in the Gray Mists. This would cause their erosion rate to rise sharply, and their temperament would gradually become violent and dark, but it would foster rapid growth in power, at least until the peak of Bronze Rank.

These illegal Transcendeds weren't monitored, so they naturally wouldn't obey the law and act high profile. As a result, fights happened intensely, leading to many nightmares.

With the uncontrollable mass of nightmares and the erosion of the Gray Mists, demons might be born at any time.

There were no "ordinary people" here at all.

Even those who gave up their social status and became refugees in an inland city had a far better life than living in Natta County.

In fact, in some cities within Noah's inland, "Natta County people" were directly referred to as "refugees".

This was a group of homeless people which the vast majority had a bad impression of them because they grew up in a vile environment. Many of them would become gang members such as thieves, scammers, human traffickers, etc. Those were their specialties.

But on the contrary, "Transcended" abilities, which were generally kept secret elsewhere, were nearly public in Natta County. They subconsciously absorbed many vicious curses, quickly turning them into a wild Transcended in a nightmare. However, Transcended born in this manner bore an erosion rate exceeding 50% at the start of their journey.

The taboo knowledge in becoming a ritualist would also be circulated in Natta County to fight against the Transcended.

The dangers of this technology wouldn't deter the Natta County's people.

Once you stay in a precarious city, the taboos and dangers of ritualist knowledge seem irrelevant. Similarly, creating explosions and utilizing poison was a norm due to the living condition.

Indeed, explosion...

Annan thought of this and asked, "Are you from Natta County?"

"Yes, I've been in Natta County for 40 years."

"Then why did you leave the Natta County?"

"Naturally... to serve my master."

The old man whispered, "I won't say his name. He was the one who took my child and me away from Natta County and let my child go to school and have a normal job. I owe my life to him..."

So why are you still telling me this much?

The corner of Annan's mouth rose slightly, but he didn't say much.

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Ken Carter should have realized it.

There were only two possibilities when Annan could use Silver Sire's divine art.

Silver Sire had seen through Rotten Man's scheme and intended to interfere;

Or, he was in the middle of someone's nightmare, and the person in front of him was the Silver Sire Church's Silver Hand.

There was no point in him hiding any information, whatever the possibility.

The Silver Sire's priest would launch an investigation if they already had suspicion on it, and these secrets were impossible to hide from the church.

As long as Silver Sire checked the accounts Himself, any secrets would be unveiled.

Silver Sire could see all types of "transactions" in this world, trace back to the time of the transaction, the content of the transaction, and the object of the transaction.

That was explained why even though He had no authority over "truth" or "secret", he couldn't hide anything from Him.

"So, either way. Your attempt to hide it is meaningless." Annan smiled and said calmly, "Tell me the truth. You don't have to pretend to be loyal."

Ken smiled bitterly. He sighed and said in a low voice, "Fine... I will tell you anything.

"They're holding a ritual, and this ritual is called the 'Feast of the Great Hunt'. It's the field involving the 'Tragedy Writer', the deity of murder and conspiracy. In the ritual, there shall be six people carrying the Magnetic Stone each, forming a 'stage' in a banquet, and setting up a designated area in range. Those within the area are considered 'actors', fulfilling the condition of a 'grand opening'. Sacrificing one person shall activate a large-scale chaos ritual, cursing the fate of every 'actor'.

"The order of killing is completely random and hand-picked by the 'Tragedy Writer'. Each chosen person, known as the 'speaker', can only temporarily save himself from bad luck by killing the other person and will pass 'the speech line' to the next person; or encounter a misfortune... The misfortune may be fatal.

"And every time one dies, the misfortune of the next person will be more terrible and even doubled. The cycle continues until the 'curtain falls' and the 'Tragic Writer' is sent away. If the 'closing' can't be completed, the ritual is considered a failure. When the final actor dies, all the 'curtain weavers' die painfully."

That's us.

Ken pointed to himself with a wry smile, "Including everyone who participated in this plan..."

"As for the price of the ritual and the reward after its completion, I don't think you will care because the process of the ritual itself is their purpose. They want to start a great fire first and burn one person as the opening. Then, the ritual has fulfilled its purpose."

“...them?” Annan keenly caught a keyword.

Ken nodded slowly and spoke in a complicated tone, “But please don't ask. I can't say or write his name. I don't want to be part of this plan either, but I don't have a choice. I don't think he will organize us to start a second fire to 'give a proper closure to it'. He may want all of us to die to keep this matter a secret.”

“He...” Annan murmured, “I know who it is.”

It's highly likely that the Third Prince, Philip, is the culprit.

Besides him, who would put the Crow's heir in a risky situation?

But, what about Ferdinand...?

Did he know that he was being put as a “possible victim”?

Annan finally understood how the heirs died one after another in a short period, but the murderer wasn't discovered, and how did the murderer do it!

Their fate had been cursed a few years ago, but they were unaware of it!

Many people had died before the culprit had successfully cursed and killed the heirs.

Annan suddenly felt a chill in his heart.

In other words, it's not just stopping the fire and explosions?

This was the first time Annan had come into contact with the power of “Fate”.

Of course, it wasn't actually twisting the destiny.

Judging from this false deity's or evil deity's authority, He was unlike Lady Luck, who was involved in the law of “accident” and “luck”.

The deity of murder and conspiracy focused solely on “manually” creating misfortune.

“Tell me! How do I stop this ritual?” Annan spoke out after reorganizing his thoughts.

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After another 10 minutes of interrogation, Annan slowly lowered the blade in his hand.

Ken Carter was cooperative.

Annan had already dug pretty deep in his questions — everything directly related to this nightmare, how should “Ritual: Feast of the Great Hunt” be interrupted, the people participating in the ritual, the time, the exact location, and the passwords.

He had also discovered some helpful periphery information. For example, the dark secrets looming around the royal heirs and the kingdom's higher nobility. He even found out about the Noah Kingdom's views, knowledge, and perception of the Austerians and the Austere-Winter family. All in all, he had looked into whatever rabbit holes he could find.

Of course, he couldn't be sure whether the information itself was correct, whether Ken was telling the truth, and whether what Ken knew was accurate.

But still, Annan didn't necessarily need so many "truths".

All he needed was a "general gist" and a direction in which he could investigate further. Since it was just a surface understanding, there was naturally the possibility of misremembering and forgetting.

Those would be the reasons Annan could use to avoid revealing any flaws in his character. As for the detailed information, he had to launch a further investigation.

"So, I can't stop them even after smashing the Magnetic Stones..." Annan frowned slightly.

The ritual was already established.

Even if no "Magnetic Stones" played the catalyst role, the ritual would still be activated. The difference was that the ritual was no longer restricted at the "banquet" but spread out.

For example, Ferdinand's position was at the southeast corner of the hexagram. The bottom right of the equilateral triangle.

If that particular Magnetic Stone were broken, the southeast corner of the ritual would be relocated to the kitchen basement once activated.

Consequently, the ritual would target everyone in the area between the banquet hall and the kitchen.

No doubt destroying the Magnetic Stones wouldn't "save more people". It might even take more lives. The Magnetic Stones weren't used to "activate the ritual" but to prevent this dangerous ritual from hurting itself.

Sure enough, putting efforts into the Magnetic Stones wouldn't solve anything.

It was a fine plan if the mission issued was to "reduce casualties". After those people realized that the Magnetic Stones were being destroyed and that the rituals were locked on them, they would hold the ritual differently.

If the "person selected to speak the lines" included their people, they could only choose to "close the curtain" and put an end to this ritual. Even to be on the safe side, they might end the ritual as soon as it started.

Annan knew in his heart that this should be the easiest way to clear this dungeon.

It was also the most preferred way for others.

Annan reorganized his plan. Typically speaking, the dungeon challengers would enter the garden and meet Kafni at the beginning. Then, they would quickly realize that Kafni was the key NPC at the first moment.

So far, the flow should be similar.

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What would be different was that others who entered the nightmare would have to struggle to find a way to gain Kafni's trust first. Then, they had to let her lead the way and find the six key locations of the ritual. This seemed to be the necessary route to clear the dungeon.

But if the dungeon challenger faced a problem in gaining Kafni's trust and the time was delayed, the redhead and Ferdinand would have completed their tasks in meeting up. Ferdinand would also get the Magnetic Stone and leave.

If the dungeon challenger couldn't get rid of Merlin when he came to the kitchen, then he couldn't directly attack the redhead under Merlin's surveillance and protection.

In both cases, the best the dungeon challenger could do was to figure out that "Ferdinand" was suspicious after observing him leaving or observing the exchange of shifts.

The time Ferdinand met with his accomplice was half an hour before dinner. In this short period, the only way out was to observe Ferdinand's movements in the banquet hall and find an opportunity to steal or destroy the Magnetic Stone. Then, the dungeon challenger would realize the key to completing the dungeon.

Then, he had to look for an opportunity to destroy the Magnetic Stone in the north, where the king was. With that, the ritual wouldn't include Henry VIII.

After all, the Third Prince Philip presided over the conspiracy. His purpose was to reduce the numbers and strengths of his siblings and possibly to please the Rotten Man by dealing critical damage to the Austere-Winter brothers. But he wouldn't really kill King Noah.

The reason was simple.

The current first-in-line heir was not Philip but Elizabeth. After Elizabeth, there was the second prince who was still alive. If the two of them didn't die first, then he wouldn't inherit the throne anyway when King Noah died suddenly without leaving a will.

So at that time, they had to end the ritual.

This should be the original trajectory of history.

This incident led to the tragic death of several heirs. Also, the Rotten Man's forces infiltrated the higher nobility of Noah Kingdom because many nobles and officials who participated in the banquet had also died.

All in all, the dungeon challenger who followed this process wouldn't know why their actions could resolve the dungeon unless they knew this ritual already. Hence, the decryption reward should be pretty low.

If Annan wanted more decryption rewards, he must resolve the root cause of the nightmare dungeon as much as possible and conquer the dungeon entirely.

Annan could only think of three ways to clear the dungeon.

First, he would transfer the four people he wanted to protect to a particular corner of the hexagram. Then, he would quietly destroy the remaining five corners of the ritual's hexagram without alerting the

ritual host. Soon, when the culprits realized that something was wrong, it was too late. They had to stop the ritual immediately with no way of fluking the ritual.

It would become unlikely for this ritual to kill anyone anymore. Even though the ritual operated randomly, the Tragic Writer would handpick the targets into the list. Since He wanted to capture the climax of a drama, He would probably kill the king first.

However, Annan doubted that resolving this nightmare in this way would offer any decryption rewards. The strategy was a fluke.

This was probably the reason why Elizabeth should be kept alive. As long as Elizabeth wasn't included in the king's ritual, the culprits had to end the ritual immediately. This was the quick fix in conquering the dungeon.

Secondly, the perfect way to clear the dungeon was to ruin the entire ritual. The ritual was already adequately arranged. Once the Tragic Writer was summoned as the audience and the explosions were triggered to "open the curtain", the ritual would start operating.

In this case, forcibly terminating the ritual must be in direct conflict with the Tragic Writer. The Tragedy Writer was so angry that he might even summon a few envoys to kill the people ruining the ritual. This must be the most brutal way to clear the dungeon. In this case, Annan wasn't confident that his identity could be kept secret anymore.

Annan could only choose the third way.

First, I have to figure out who is the owner of this nightmare... Who could it be?

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The direction in clearing this nightmare dungeon was clear-cut.

Annan needed to figure out a way to nullify the ritual, not continue it. Of course, it would then mean that this nightmare did not come from Transcendeds of the Philip faction... or rather, the Rotten Man's faction.

Other than that, there were only two other factions.

The official force of the two countries under the lead of Dmitri and Elizabeth, respectively.

Annan did not have the ritual immunity debuff given by the Old Vasily in the original history. In other words, this ritual was under the circumstance that the ritual was monitoring everyone, but it was still ruined.

It was also well known that Ferdinand did not die at this moment, nor was he wanted or exiled.

Then the one, or the few Magnetic Stones destroyed in the original history, must not have belonged to Ferdinand.

Who could detect the ritual and ruin it without arousing anyone's attention?

He must be an observant man whose whereabouts would not arouse the vigilance of others.

There was only one person who could pull it off.

That person should be Old Merlin — Merlin Manning.

He was a cripple and a mute—at least he was mute in the eyes of outsiders. As the most reliable protector, he would undoubtedly follow Annan's proceedings because only Merlin would know that Annan's "value" "had already surpassed that of Dmitri's at this time.

As a protector, he wouldn't look suspicious wherever he showed up as long as Annan wasn't far away.

His younger brother, Vasily, was a ritualist himself. As an elite in Winter's Hands group, one of his jobs was to arrest the illegal ritualists. So, how could he not have ritual knowledge?

If there was a person who was related to Annan, who could see through the ritual within a short period, whose actions would not arouse the vigilance of others, who had the intentions of ruining the ritual... and most importantly, who wanted "Annan·Austere·Winter", "Dmitri·Austere· Winter", "Elizabeth Noah" and "Kafni Noah" to survive...

Then the answer was self-evident.

This nightmare could have only been born from Merlin Manning, who died in Michelangelo's ritual!

"...But he was just a Silver Rank Transcended. Could he give birth to a distortion-level nightmare?" Such doubts quickly appeared in Annan's mind.

This was the only thing Annan couldn't explain.

Is Merlin that strong?

Generally speaking, only the death of Gold Rank Transcendeds or higher could give birth to a distortion-level nightmare, right?

However, the information Annan had gotten was already enough, even if he ignored this part.

I must get Merlin's support if I want to use the third way to tackle the nightmare dungeon.

The second method would arouse the anger and hindrance of the Tragedy Writer. So was there a way to resolve this ritual under a circumstance that satisfied Him?

—Yes.

The Tragedy Writer was the deity of murder and conspiracy. However, he was not the protector of murderers and conspirators, but their "accomplice" and "secret-keeper".

He was tight-lipped about murders and conspiracies and was fond of "perfect crimes." "Perfect crime in plain sight" itself was one of the Tragedy Writer's favorite rituals.

With that in mind, Annan decided to make a sacrifice to the Tragedy Writer.

He wanted to murder the criminal who intended to murder others, steal authority, and cause war in plain sight — Third Prince, Philip Noah!

He would deny sacrifice with another sacrifice, overcome a ritual with another ritual, prevent murder by murdering, and finally cover up an explosion with another explosion.

Not only would the Tragedy Writer not detest it, but He would also be pleased.

But if Annan were going to do that, he would have to get Merlin's cooperation because Annan could not reveal his identity during the whole process.

He couldn't arouse suspicion either. He couldn't let others think the murderer was an Austerian, and he especially couldn't let Merlin kill anyone.

“So I have to be fully prepared.”

He would murder Philip Noah just before the “curtains open” if everything went well. Otherwise, he would use the first method to get through the dungeon. There must not be the slightest hesitation in such a difficult nightmare.

It was as if the door had opened, but a teammate was hung on a tree and couldn't be saved. One must still flee when one could.

The point was that the killer must be Annan. In other words, it must be Annan in the form of “David”.

Because when Annan entered the “David” state, not only would his appearance change, his name would also temporarily become “Ghirlandaio·David·Buonaro.” Consequently, he could unconditionally deflect any “Prophet” spells and “Idol” spells below Gold Rank.

This would allow “David” to bear this crime. Regardless of what magic was used to investigate this matter, the spell could only find that a person named “Ghirlandaio·David·Buonaro” had committed murder.

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But as everyone knew, there was no such person in this world—- this was the name Annan gave to the last statue in Michelangelo's life.

“I will heal you.” Looking at Ken Carter, who was a little uneasy, Annan nodded and said in a deep voice.

He didn't retract the gun in his left hand as he spoke. He instead held the rapier in his right hand with his mouth and took out the last silver coin in his pocket.

He wiped the gunshot wound on Ken's thigh with the silver coin. The wound was wiped away by Annan as if it had been erased with an eraser.

Ken's expression also improved significantly.

He thanked in a low voice, “Thank you very much, Father.

“I won't attack you, and I won't reveal your identity... If you don't trust me, you can lock the basement. I'm not going anywhere.”

“This will be the best.” Annan nodded gently and raised the blade again.

There was a flash in the depths of his pupils.

In his mind, an image suddenly appeared.

Ken Carter was sitting in the empty basement with a hesitant expression on his face. He was frowning and looking down in thought.

In the end, he slowly got up from the ground. He found a few pigeons in the kitchen basement and removed their wings.

The image stopped abruptly.

—As expected...

Annan didn't need to finish watching it to know Ken wanted to arrange a ritual to tip off the news. This was understandable, and he had also expected it.

But Annan had never intended to let Ken go, so he wasn't furious with the betrayal.

He was just a little surprised.

Could this be the [Prophet Experience] of Prophet school wizards?

This is so cool!

Annan warned casually, "By the way, Ken... you'd better stay here obediently and not think about anything bad. If I could live to know..."

"—No matter how far, I will come back and kill you," said Annan nonchalantly.

Ken smiled and replied in a low voice, "I won't, I won't..."

"That would be best." Annan nodded nonchalantly.

He turned and walked out of the basement, but he was in no hurry to get out.

He just walked out slowly towards the basement door, silently aiming the muzzle at Ken's position that was across the shelf behind him.

Four rounds of dialogue and then followed up by a somewhat vague "death declaration".

Let's see if this level of death declaration could trigger the special effects of "Miss Quiet".

Annan pulled the trigger silently without looking across the shelf.

The negligible recoil of the gun shook slightly in his hands, but it did not move David's marble body in the slightest.

But no bullets flew out of the muzzle— the shelf was also not penetrated by bullets.

But Annan did feel the gun vibrate.

Could it be "that" type of sure-fire? Annan took two steps back without hesitation and circled the shelf.

He saw that Ken had been shot. He was lying on the wall in pain, struggling silently and violently— blood was flowing out from his heart.

“...As expected.” Annan nodded in satisfaction.

The distance from the “muzzle” to the “target” was directly erased. This level of sure-fire was indeed valuable. If it was only to the level of automatic tracking, it could be completed with just a curse.

The experiment was over.

Annan immediately stepped forward and utilized the [Sharp Object] in his right hand, intending to give this NPC a clean death.

With just a flash of light, and the support of David's robust strength, Annan slit Ken's throat without any hindrance.

A head flew out.

—One-shot kill.

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The nights in August were always pitch-black.

Before dusk, the guests attending Henry VIII's 80th birthday banquet had already begun entering the venue.

Annan didn't let Dmitri wait for long.

Before the guests had fully arrived, Annan and Kafni had already returned together. Kafni had even changed into a more voluminous, formal, and elegant dress.

Seeing that Kafni could dress up occasionally and tidy up her somewhat fluffy hair, Elizabeth nodded with satisfaction and smiled softly at them.

—Seeing that Annan was able to keep up with his words to return before mealtime, Dmitri also slightly relaxed his brows in satisfaction, showing a less indifferent look.

Dmitri was always like this. He didn't like surprises, and he valued tradition and commitment. When he was a teenager, he enjoyed mediating other people's conflicts, reasoning with others, and setting rules. He seemed pretty mature.

His working manner was also reliable.

When Dmitri was 14 years old, he was already following his father to handle government affairs. Even his younger brothers and sisters at home were under his care. Grand Duke Ivan was busy, so Dmitri had to bring up both Annan and Maria.

His constant honest and serious look, his inability to understand the jokes, as well as his brows that were always frowning and rarely relaxed. There was no doubt that Maria would always say that he looked like an old man.

But now, Dmitri's expression had suddenly become a little different seeing Annan and Kafni huddled in the corner holding hands.

It was like having constipation.

Have you only known each other for an afternoon?

It hasn't even been an afternoon. How did your relationship suddenly grow so intimate?

Is this appropriate?

However, it wasn't easy that Annan would be willing to take the initiative to communicate with others with his timid personality. Although Dmitri found it inappropriate, he did not want to stop the two children from playing together.

—After all, you won't be able to see each other once we return to Austere-Winter.

As for marriage and what not...

We'll talk later.

But what Dmitri could never guess was why Annan and Kafni were holding hands.

At this age, girls were usually taller than boys of the same age. Therefore, Kafni was the more “dominant” part between the two.

She held Annan's left hand with her right and put it in the side pocket of her skirt. This was undoubtedly a bold move, so much so that Kafni's face was slightly blushing.

Both their hands were in the same pocket...

...holding the same gun.

—Indeed, Annan gave “Miss Quiet” to Kafni.

Ferdinand was the Third Prince's follower. Therefore, there was a considerable probability that Prince Philip knew some of the attributes of Ferdinand's powerful curse vessel.

Annan had already done his experiment. Aside from himself and other players who have the system, nobody else would know all the attributes of a particular curse vessel. They would only know the domain of the curse vessel and then rely on experience and knowledge to judge its effect.

Aside from Prophet school wizards who could use [Curse Vessel Analysis] to get the attributes of curse vessels below Gold Rank, only Silver Rank Transcendeds and above could gradually understand its relevant attributes when holding a curse vessel to sleep.

Although Prince Philip didn't necessarily know all the [Miss Quiet] attributes, Annan still wanted to be on the safe side.

Since chatting awkwardly with Phillip alone might make him wary, then the two of them shall chat with him.

Conversations between two strangers would often fall into awkwardness and silence because of the lack of topics. But if you insert a “middleman” who knew both people at the same time, it wouldn't necessarily be a pleasant chat, but it at least wouldn't be so silent.

“Your Highness Annan, and... Kafni?” A somewhat surprised but happy and cheerful voice came about, “Wow, the relationship between the two of you is progressing rapidly!”

Annan widened his eyes slightly and turned his head.

The person who initiated the conversation was Prince Philip himself.

Prince Philip sat on Annan's right and started chatting with them, "Your Highness, did you know each other before? It couldn't be that you've met in a dream, right?"

Before Annan took the initiative to find Philip, he had come over himself.

But this was what Annan had expected.

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Because the two of them were sitting on the edge that was two seats away from the "stage", he deliberately lured Philip over.

Philip's intention in coming over wasn't to chat with them but to have a reasonable excuse to sit outside the "ritual area".

All of these were within Annan's expectations.

Annan also came to a realization judging from Philip's attitude — He indeed has no ill thoughts towards me, at least he didn't try to fool me into the ritual area...

...or is it that Dmitri was the only enemy of Austere-Winter to him?

Annan took a careful look at the prince sitting beside him.

Although Philip Noah was older than his younger brother Albert, he looked much younger than Albert and was also shorter than Albert.

He was wearing a black robe with dark gold embroidery, and like the rest of Noah's family, his buttons had a golden lion pattern. He had his trademark black hair, red eyes, and round babyface.

He looked extraordinarily harmless, with an optimist look on his face all the time. When he sat down, he even sneaked a piece of candy into Annan's hand.

Philip himself also picked up another piece of candy, took off the candy wrap, and stuffed it into his mouth. Then, he showed a happy and carefree smile, "Why are you not talking, Your Highness? Come and have a taste. This is a delicious toffee!"

"...Brother doesn't let me eat other people's food," said Annan earnestly with a straight face.

"But I'm not any other person. I'm Philip— Philip Noah. Don't judge by my youthful appearance. I'm actually Kafni's uncle." Philip laughed and said in a childlike tone.

Annan's eyes widened as he let out a young and tender voice, "...Really?"

"If you don't believe me, just ask Kafni!"

Philip had an ambiguous smile on his face when adults would ask children, "who's your friend in school?" He said in a low voice, "Speaking of which, Big Brother Philip also has a lovely daughter, comparable to Kafni."

“...Aren't you Kafni's uncle?” Annan blinked and inquired.

Philip laughed again. He squeezed Annan's face and said with a smile, “I'm young, and you're a big kid. Of course, you would want to call me big brother.”

“I would still want to call you uncle.” Annan said earnestly with a straight face, “My brother will be unhappy if I call you brother.”

“Oh? What will His Highness Dmitri do?” asked Prince Philip curiously.

Annan's face immediately showed a terrifying look, as if he was going to tell a horror story. He threatened, “—kill you!”

“Hahahahaha, you are so cute!”

Not sure what tickled Phillip's funny bone, he suddenly burst into laughter, “Then let him come! If he couldn't kill me, then you shall be my younger brother!”

“What are you guys talking about that's so pleasing?” It could be that Philip's laugh was too loud that Albert came over.

He looked like he was a decade older than Philip. He was over 1.85 meters tall, had broad and skinny shoulders, wore thin-rimmed glasses, and had a well-groomed mustache.

Yet Philip wasn't too polite towards him. He only laughed and called, “Hey, Albert! This child is much more interesting than you are, hahaha! How about we let him be my brother, and you can go to Austere-Winter? Your Highness Annan, have a candy. I still have a lot of candies!”

Albert frowned when he heard such frivolous words.

But before he could say anything more, several guards suddenly rushed in, looking flustered.

Elizabeth's expression changed. Instead of scolding the soldiers, she immediately reached out and beckoned the panicked guard over.

“What happened?” She asked in a low voice.

The guard stammered, “The Geraint family... Count Geraint's eldest son is dead!”

“We found the spell casting trace of [Chilling Touch]... on the corpse!”

Elizabeth was taken aback.

She immediately turned her gaze to Old Merlin subconsciously— then she immediately shook her head, dispelling her guess.

“Keep your voice down.” She whispered, “Take me there...”

Philip noticed something and moved in closer.

“What happened, my sister?” He took out another piece of hard toffee and stuffed it into his mouth. As he chewed, he asked, “Do you need help?”

Seeing him, Elizabeth frowned slightly.

—This was the first time Annan saw a somewhat “unhappy” expression on Elizabeth's face.

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“Stay put.” Elizabeth looked at Philip silently.

A vague sense of displeasure and caution flashed quickly across her eyes. If Annan hadn't been paying attention to her expressions, he would have missed it.

Immediately after, Elizabeth quickly showed a gentle smile that was very similar to the one before and said softly, “I can handle it, Philip. Take care of Your Highness Annan.”

“Oh~” Philip gave an inexplicable smile as he dragged his voice.

He was chewing the toffee that was beginning to melt with big bites. Accompany by the faintly audible chewing sound, the smell of milk came seeping out of his mouth. Droplets from his chewing splashed onto Elizabeth's clothes.

With a smile, Philip took out a few candies from his pocket and handed them to Elizabeth, “Then, do you want candy, sister?”

“It's serious business, Philip.” Elizabeth had already calmed down. She maintained a gentle and generous smile, completely ignoring Philip's rude behavior. She said leisurely, “You can't participate.”

“Oh~” Philip nodded in agreement and grinned, “That's true. After all, I'm an idler.”

He didn't seem displeased, and that cheerful smile remained. Then, he returned to his seat beside Annan.

He removed the candy wraps, putting the candies one by one patiently into his mouth. Elizabeth also didn't explain a word to Philip. Instead, she turned and left with the guards.

Annan sat quietly at the side, watching the ambiguous atmosphere between them, who had their apparent intentions. Not only was he calm, but he was also instead filled with interest. He somewhat even wanted more tension.

This feels more right! Yes, it's supposed to be like this!

With reference to the harmony between the three brothers in his family, Annan had thought that royal families in this world all had the same image. However, now that he had seen Noah's royal family, Annan, who enjoyed watching the drama, was immediately exhilarated.

Now, this is the taste of schemes between the royal heirs!

However, these two weren't good in their sarcasm.

They wanted to say something ambiguously sarcastic yet ended up spitting out such cheesy words. In my culture, this standard would not be able to protect our families.

But then again, the conflict between Philip and Elizabeth did not frighten Annan.

On the other hand, the way Philip ate candy made Annan feel some physical discomfort.

Big brother... Chatting takes up too many sweets for you, don't you think?

From the time he sat next to Annan less than three minutes ago, he had eaten almost 20 candies. On average, he would have three candies for each sentence.

This level of abnormality obviously could not be explained by the simple "love for sweets".

Annan looked down at the candy in his hand and peeled off the candy wrap with one hand.

This candy looked similar in size to Wangzai Milk Candy [1]. It had a creamy white color with a yellowish tinge.

He waited a long time, but the usual item description panel was not triggered.

It's not a curse vessel then, and it's not even medicine.

What the hell?

This is actually real candy?

Annan looked at it in disbelief and then looked at Philip, who was chewing hard on the candy.

Philip noticed Annan's gaze and gave him a cheerful smile, "Eat it. It's delicious!

"Don't worry. It's made of condensed milk, cream, syrup, honey, and brown sugar. It doesn't contain any magical ingredients. Anybody can eat it."

Philip laughed happily as he spoke.

Annan could see the gooey syrup hanging on Philip's neat set of white teeth. The rich fragrance of milk and honey permeated around him following his heavy breathing.

Because of Philip and Elizabeth's earlier scene, the people around had noticed them. Annan couldn't do anything at this time. He could only continue to hold the gun in Kafni's skirt pocket with his left hand and chatted with Philip politely, "Do you like sweets, Your Highness Philip?"

"Of course!" Philip replied cheerfully, "I like sweets, and I also like meat! My favorite is honey barbecue — all young people should enjoy sweets and meat!"

He looked at Annan kindly and said again, "You can call me brother or Your Highness. But you can't call me uncle! Look at me. Do you think I look like an uncle?"

After saying that, Philip patted the delicate skin on his face with great pride.

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In fact, it was true.

Philip had thick hair, delicate skin, and no wrinkles on his forehead. Unlike his younger brother Albert, Philip's beard was clean-shaven... he didn't even wear jewelry.

If he changed into younger clothes, it would be possible to think he was a teenager, judging from his voice and demeanor.

Is Philip so concerned about his youth?

About 10 minutes before the banquet started, Annan intended to continue inquiring about Philip's secrets and habits.

"Your Highness, you look 20 years old at the most," said Annan with a tender voice.

A compliment that was fake in the eyes of the general adult population would become immensely convincing when it was coupled with Annan's honest and bright gaze.

Hearing Annan's words, Philip couldn't help but laugh out loud without the slightest image of royalty.

A man who looked nearly 50 years old and had a traditional and steady temperament couldn't help but reprimand, "Philip, keep your voice down!"

"Yes, yes~" Philip dragged his voice as he responded indifferently.

After the man shook his head and left with a frown, Philip leaned closer to Annan's ear and pointed at the man with his chin, "This is my second brother... doesn't he look like your brother? They are all one type of people.

Philip said, pointing to himself, "You and me. We're another type of people. Happy—we're all joyful."

Annan did not lose his act at all.

When he heard Philip's evaluation, he looked over in confusion, "I don't quite understand."

Fuck off. Annan couldn't help but cuss in his heart. Luckily, the Winter's Heart curse on Annan was reversed, allowing him to ignore his fears. Otherwise, just that sentence itself would make his heart stop.

Is the Supernatural Vision the Noah family's unique feature?

"You will understand, Your Highness Annan."

Hearing this, Philip just smiled and whispered in a slightly bewitching voice, "Joy... I can see that you have a soul that chases after pleasure and isn't trapped. So if you feel depressed one day and want to break free from the chains of your destiny, you can come to me.

"I will grant you the secret to pleasure."

"...Cup-holding Lady?" Annan asked in a soft voice.

Philip smiled, "Naturally. Face the path of blood and desire directly, Your Highness Annan. Human beings are machines driven by desire... What is the difference between a life without desire and a puppet?"

"Then, what is the desire you pursue?" Annan probed further.

Philip was silent for a moment and then said calmly, "What I pursue is [Youth]."

"Youth?"

"You won't understand." Philip took a deep breath and shook his head.

Annan just continued to ask, "Is it youth or immortality?"

Hearing Annan's question, Philip fell into a moment of thought.

But that was just a brief pause that lasted a short breath.

He was quick to show his trademark bright smile again.

He took out a few more candies from his arms and stuffed them into his mouth.

"I... I want it all." Philip smiled slightly and replied in a soft voice, "I don't want to grow old. By just having to experience once, you will never..."

At this moment, a continuous explosion came suddenly from outside and obscured Philip's voice completely.

These weren't explosives— they were fireworks that lit up one after another at the palace gates.

The firework show had begun.

Annan silently clenched the gun in his hand. Then, he turned around to look towards the entrance behind him, pretending to be watching.

Feeling Annan's movements, or that the two of them got even closer because of Annan's movements... Kafni, who had been silent all this while, also tensed her body subconsciously.

—The opportunity is fleeting.