THE FALL OF THE DIVINE

Memories

The town of Alta sat beside a distant mountain range in Europe, shrouded in mist for most of the year, lending it an air of quiet mystery. It was in this remote place that Lucian and Freya grew up in a dilapidated orphanage. Lucian, back then, was a withdrawn child, always sitting alone in the corner, his gaze wandering aimlessly. The other children in the orphanage avoided him, as he was silent and distant, preferring to keep to himself. Even the orphanage director paid him little attention. To Lucian, it felt as though the whole world was painted in shades of grey.

However, Freya was the only one who dared to break through his wall of isolation.

"Why are you always alone?" one evening, Freya found him sitting in the yard, holding a small bouquet of wildflowers. Her smile was as warm as sunshine, breaking through Lucian's defenses. He didn't answer, merely lowering his head to avoid her gaze.

"Here, this is for you," Freya smiled, pressing a tiny daisy into his hand. Her voice was light, carefree, as if unburdened by any worries. "I found this on the hillside today. I thought it was beautiful, and I figured you might like it too."

In that moment, Lucian didn't refuse. He clutched the flower tightly as though it carried some hidden meaning—a warmth and kindness he had never experienced before. This was the beginning of their story, a connection that started with a simple wildflower.

Freya was the light in Lucian's life. When the orphanage director refused to give him meals for various reasons, it was Freya who would sneak him her own food.

Freya didn't just take care of him in their daily life; she also provided immense help in their studies. The orphanage lacked resources, books were scarce, and the director hardly cared about the children's education. Freya would often sneak out to borrow books from the town library, tutoring Lucian whenever she could. "Lucian, you're smart. You can do better," she would often encourage him.

They shared a secret: the cliffs outside of town. They would often run to the edge of those cliffs, where the view was vast, allowing them to see the distant mountains and rivers. When they felt down, they spent countless evenings there. Freya's boldness and fearlessness left a deep impression on Lucian. She was always the first to stand at the edge of the cliff, peering down into the deep, seemingly bottomless gorge below, while Lucian stood behind her, feeling the dizzying height.

"See? As long as we have enough courage, we can overcome anything," Freya would often say with a smile, gazing at the distant mountains. Her words and that smile gave Lucian strength, inspiring him to try things he had never imagined before.

One of Lucian's most vivid memories was the first time they left the orphanage to climb a mountain. Freya had always longed for freedom, eager to explore the world with her unique passion and fearlessness.

"Lucian, don't you think we should try something different?" Freya stood by the orphanage wall, her red hair fluttering in the wind. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, full of anticipation for the unknown future.

Lucian hesitated. The orphanage was the only place he knew. The world beyond seemed too unfamiliar, too dangerous. But when he looked at Freya, her vibrant face drew a reluctant nod from him.

And so, they sneaked out of the orphanage for the first time, slipping through the woods behind the yard and climbing up the steep mountain path. That day, the wind blew hard, almost as if testing their courage. But Freya never wavered. She was always ahead, occasionally turning back to shout with a smile, "Keep up! Don't fall behind!"

Finally, they reached the top. It was a vast grassy plain, the world below stretching out before them. Freya stood at the edge of the cliff, arms wide open, as if embracing the entire world. Lucian stood behind her, heart pounding, but feeling a freedom he had never known.

"Look! This is the world outside. It's so much bigger than the orphanage!" Freya turned to him, her eyes full of excitement.

Lucian stared at her, feeling something ignite inside him for the first time. He wasn't the adventurous type, but Freya's courage and fearlessness deeply moved him. That day, Lucian made a silent vow—he would protect her, guard her rare freedom and bravery.

Behind Freya's smile, Lucian found a sense of belonging he had never experienced. She wasn't just a friend; she was his light, illuminating the dark world he had known. Without her, he couldn't imagine what kind of person he would become. She would often tell him, "When we grow up, I want to travel far, to see where the world ends. You'll come with me, won't you?"

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Years later, they attended the same university, leaving the town of Alta behind. In the new city, rock climbing became their shared passion. Scaling

cliffs gave Lucian a sense of freedom he had never felt before, and Freya, like a free bird, flew between the walls of stone.

Lucian returned to the present, his eyes shut tightly, but the images in his mind grew sharper. Freya's smile, her voice, everything about her cut into his heart like a blade. The girl who always walked ahead, bold and fearless, now lay motionless in a cold hospital bed, her life hanging by a thread, while he was powerless.

"I promised I would protect her, but now…" Lucian whispered, fists clenched. He hated his own helplessness, hated that he couldn't stop the tragedy from happening.

That day, they had gone climbing as planned. She had excitedly said, "Lucian, today we'll reach the top!"

"You're always so confident," Lucian had replied with a smile, though his eyes stayed on Freya, always worried about her safety.

Halfway up, a strange feeling crept over Lucian, making him frown. "Freya, watch your rope!" he called out.

"Don't worry, I checked it. It's fine." She smiled back at him and continued climbing.

But then the sound of loose rocks crumbling filled the air. Freya's body swayed suddenly. Lucian's heart seized as though an invisible hand was squeezing it tight. "Be careful!" he shouted with all his might, but his voice seemed to be swept away by the wind. In the next moment, the rope snapped, and Freya fell like a leaf, her body tumbling downwards as time seemed to freeze.

"No—!"

Lucian's scream was hoarse and desperate, but his body moved before his mind could catch up, rushing towards where she had fallen. She landed hard on the rocks halfway down, blood seeping from her forehead, her body limp and unconscious. Lucian knelt beside her, trembling hands cradling her, fear and guilt crashing over him like a tidal wave. It was the first time he had felt so powerless, so hopeless. He couldn't accept his own weakness, nor could he accept the possibility that Freya, someone so full of life, could be taken from him.

Freya now lay in a hospital bed, her body connected to countless machines, the cold, mechanical hum of the ventilator filling the room. The daisy he once held was long withered, but the warmth it once carried still lingered in his memories. The cold hospital air pierced his lungs, pulling him back to reality. Three months had passed, and she remained in a coma. The doctors had little hope—her brain injuries were too severe, and her chances of recovery were slim.

In those orphanage years, Freya had been the only light in Lucian's life. She had always smiled so fearlessly, so warmly. And now, she lay there, as though all life had been drained from her. Lucian had tried everything— consulting countless experts, spending all his savings—but nothing had worked.

"I promised I'd always protect you, but I failed…" Lucian's fists tightened, his heart twisted by the agony of guilt and sorrow, tormenting his every thought.

That was the day Lucian prayed to the gods for the first time. Not for himself, but for Freya. Over and over again, he called out to the gods, hoping for even the slightest response.

"If gods really exist, why won't you help her?" Lucian's heart was filled with anger and helplessness. He often stood on the hospital rooftop, gazing silently at the night sky, praying for a miracle.

But you never know when despair and hope might arrive…