

DOROTHY'S FORBIDDEN GRIMOIRE

Chapter 5: Town

Dorothy trudged through the rainy river valley, accompanied by her undead servant. Her journey was anything but smooth. The persistent drizzle and the slippery, uneven terrain made progress difficult. The old gas lamp provided limited illumination in the dim environment, leading to several challenges along the way.

The greatest challenge came when she needed to climb a steep and slippery slope to return to the main carriage road from the muddy trail. The incline was treacherous, and Dorothy nearly tumbled down multiple times during her attempts.

Luckily, she spotted the bodies of the bandits she had earlier driven into the river. Using the power of the Corpse Marionette Ring, she animated a second corpse. With the assistance of the two reanimated bodies, Dorothy finally managed to reach the main road. This experience also helped her realize that the ring's limit was controlling two corpses at a time.

Once on the road, the journey became much easier. Dorothy pressed on for about an hour before the distant glow of lights appeared in the darkness. Exhausted but relieved, she knew she had finally reached her temporary destination, Vulcan Town.

At the outskirts of the town, Dorothy hid her two corpse servants and donned a headscarf to conceal her distinctive features. She then opened her umbrella and stepped onto the streets of Vulcan.

The rain and the late hour left the streets sparsely populated. Wooden buildings, two or three stories high, lined either side of the road. The structures were modestly adorned, with only a few windows illuminated. Streetlamps were spaced far apart, their dim and flickering light casting faint glows over the muddy streets marked with footprints and carriage tracks. Occasionally, a carriage would rumble by.

"It's a bit desolate..." Dorothy murmured to herself before quickening her pace. She needed to find a place to rest. Near the town's center, close to a church, she found an inn that seemed decent enough.

Entering the inn, Dorothy was almost dismissed by the plump proprietress, who initially mistook her for a scruffy beggar child. However, the clinking sound of several coins slapped onto the counter quickly transformed the woman's disdain into a warm, welcoming smile. Without asking for any

identification, she promptly directed one of the staff to lead Dorothy to the best room in the inn.

Dorothy had found approximately five pounds in cash on Edrick's body. Based on the memories of her body's original owner, Dorothy knew that the standard currency of the Pritt Kingdom was Pound, with one pound equal to one gold coin or one hundred iron pennies. In her rural village, Aunt Hannah earned only about nine pounds a year, and Dorothy herself rarely possessed more than five coins at a time. By comparison, the money Edrick carried was equivalent to half a year's income for a typical farmer. Paying for a nice room at the inn was a trivial expense.

Dorothy's room was on the upper floor, furnished with a lamp, carpet, and modest paintings. Most importantly, it was clean and included a private washroom with a bathtub for bathing.

Once inside, Dorothy shut the door and let out a deep sigh of relief. She nearly collapsed onto the carpet in exhaustion. After resting briefly, she quickly stripped off her clothes and took a long, soothing bath.

The bathing process wasn't straightforward for Dorothy. As she faced her youthful body for the first time, a mixture of shyness and curiosity filled her. In the bath, she alternated between bashful hesitation and bold exploration, the splashing water echoing her inner turmoil.

Her curiosity extended the bathing time significantly. By the time she finished, her face was flushed a deep red.

After her bath, Dorothy climbed into bed, turned off the light, and prepared to sleep. But in the complete darkness of the room, she noticed something unusual.

Her finger emitted a faint silvery glow. At first, she thought the Corpse Marionette Ring might have a luminescent feature, but upon closer inspection, she realized the glow came from a different ring.

This ring, unlike the Corpse Marionette Ring, had been on her left index finger all along. It was a simple design, adorned with a crescent moon pattern on top, and it emitted a soft silver glow in the darkness.

Dorothy was not unfamiliar with this ring. In her memories, it had been with her since she was very young. Aunt Hannah once told her that this ring was the only possession left by her mother, who had cruelly abandoned Dorothy and her brother. The original Dorothy had treasured it, wearing it constantly.

"What a pitiful child..." Dorothy murmured as she gazed at the glowing ring on her finger. Without overthinking, she sighed, lay back, and drifted into sleep.

A dreamless night passed.

When Dorothy sat up in bed, yawning and rubbing her eyes, sunlight streamed through the gap in the curtains.

After stretching and letting out a deep yawn, she quickly got up, washed, and dressed in her still-damp clothes before heading downstairs. Breakfast consisted of the inn's simple offering of bread and milk. Once done, she stepped out into the town.

Morning in Vulcan was far livelier than the previous night when Dorothy had arrived. The rain had stopped, though the ground remained damp. The streets bustled with people coming and going, and the number of carriages had noticeably increased. Along the roadside, beggars in tattered clothing could be seen pleading for alms, while in the distance, smoke rose intermittently from chimneys.

The activity in Vulcan surprised Dorothy somewhat, particularly the numerous carriages transporting goods and passengers.

From her memories, Dorothy recalled the now-dead coachman once mentioning that, despite its small size, Vulcan served as an important transportation hub. Many caravans traveling from the kingdom's western coastline to Igwynt passed through this town. Igwynt was a key city in the southwestern region of the Pritt Kingdom—and the place where Dorothy's brother resided.

Now, Dorothy could simply find a carriage heading to Igwynt to resume her original journey. But she didn't.

The contents of the two letters she had found on Edrick's body still lingered in her mind.

'Under the seemingly ordinary surface of this world... there exists hidden realm of beyond. And within that hidden realm, someone has already set their sights on me. Although don't know the reason, I can't just sit idly by...'

As she walked through the bustling streets, Dorothy pondered this. After the events of last night, she couldn't bring herself to just board a carriage and leave, ignoring the shadowy threat looming over her. Pretending nothing was wrong felt like burying her head in the sand.

If she didn't uncover the identity of the mysterious organization targeting her, she doubted she'd ever sleep peacefully again.

'I can't just wait for them to come after me again—I need to come up with a plan'

Dorothy thought to herself. Being passive would only put her at a disadvantage. Though she didn't know how they had obtained her travel details, if they could do so once, they could likely do so again. The next encounter might be even more perilous. After all, the original Dorothy had lost her life because of them, and she wasn't eager to repeat that fate.

Rather than waiting for them to strike again, she decided it was better to take the initiative—even if only to gather some basic intelligence about them. Knowing something was better than knowing nothing.

Fortunately, according to the letters found on Edrick, some members of that group were currently in Vulcan. For Dorothy, this presented an opportunity.

'But how can I take the initiative now? I'm just a thirteen-year-old girl...'

Dorothy frowned. A mysterious organization, possibly wielding mystical powers, was beyond what a mere teenager like her could confront. Even her limited knowledge of dragon shouts wouldn't suffice.

Direct confrontation was out of the question. As their target, merely approaching them would be incredibly dangerous, let alone trying to gather information.

"Ha... I can't just report this to the authorities, can I? Would the police even handle something like this? If the group really has mystical powers, the police might end up being overpowered themselves..."

As she walked, Dorothy wrestled with possible ways to deal with the mysterious organization. The vast disparity in power made it hard to come up with a viable plan.

Just as she was considering giving up on this opportunity and simply fleeing the town, her eyes caught sight of a shop by the street. She paused, her eyes lighting up.

The shop had a glass display window showcasing various black-and-white photographs. Looking up at the sign, she read the words.

Henry's Photography Studio.