

Endless 361

Chapter 361: Noisy World

Aimou was lost in the darkness, unable to respond to the outside world, only the light in her eyes flickering.

The solitary soul is imprisoned in a dark cage.

Bologue had experienced all this, he knew well the feeling of being alone in the dark, it's not pleasant, especially for the naive Aimou.

"Alright, I understand," Bologue replied.

The glass wall in front of him split open, Belli waited there, and Bologue walked alone into the room.

Bologue circled the glass container, inspecting Aimou, every inch of the mechanical structure reflected in his eyes, Ether flowed across it, weaving a pale blue light trail.

Aimou should have awakened, yet something seems to bind her, erecting a high wall between her and the perception of the outside world.

"Aimou?"

Bologue called her softly, looking somewhat foolish, but this was not a moment to care about foolishness.

He called several times consecutively, but Aimou still had no response, only a faint light continually flickering in her eyes, indicating she was still alive.

Bologue stopped, standing before the container, Aimou had lost all perception of the outside world, naturally, she wouldn't hear his voice.

Suddenly, Bologue felt he was caught in a paradox, pondering how to make Aimou, who had lost all perception abilities, become aware of his existence and awaken from the darkness.

"Bologue?" Belli's voice sounded from the speaker above, "Need to take a break?"

Bologue waved his hand, rejecting Belli's suggestion, looking gravely at Aimou behind the container, muttering.

"Don't give up so easily, Aimou, I worked hard to get you out from the Abandoned Land."

Bologue kept thinking, he wasn't an Alchemist, clueless about how to handle all this, but he was Aimou's only friend left, hoping for that elusive power.

He spoke a few more words to himself, though it was like conversing with the familiar Aimou, Bologue felt a strange sensation, as if they hadn't had face-to-face communication for a long time.

Indeed, he was used to being in Shared Chord Body with Aimou, words weren't necessary, a mere thought would convey his ideas and even emotions...

Wait, Shared Chord Body?

Bologue took a deep breath, at this moment he had a peculiar thought, slowly raised his hand, pressing it against the surface of the container, ethereal blue light trails spread across his palm.

Afraid of an accident, Bologue only released Ether, not summoning the glass, unsure what would happen if it was broken, it might harm Aimou.

"You should remember, Aimou."

Bologue muttered softly, they were, after all, bound by life and death, Bologue believed Aimou remembered all this.

She remembers his Ether reaction.

Aimou's perception of the outside world stemmed from the power of her shell, yet there was a power that transcended all this, and that was Ether.

Bologue maintained the Ether release, doing this for several minutes, yet Aimou didn't respond, only her pupils continued to flicker with faint light.

Perhaps... I wasn't that special either.

It's a noisy world, flooded everywhere with Ether, like stars, ether reactions were abundant, Aimou not remembering his ether reaction was quite normal, and whether Aimou had self-awareness now was another matter.

As Bologue prepared to withdraw his hand and leave, Aimou suddenly moved.

Aimou, even though she lost all communication abilities with the outside world, sealed in darkness, still had a certain degree of control over her body, even if she couldn't precisely control it.

She lifted her head, as if she could see Bologue, hollow eyes flickered continuously with faint light.

...

This is a world without light, apart from endless darkness, there's nothing else.

Aimou curled up in the darkness, after a period of panic and unease, she gradually accepted such a world, and such an end.

She still remembered the stories Bologue once told her about the world after death.

It was a void world, where mountain-like boulders collided and crashed, pulverizing into dust, dispersing into the darkness.

Aimou was now in a similar world, but this world truly had nothing, not even Aimou herself, only a wisp of consciousness, without a tangible shell.

Am I... dead?

After pondering for an uncertain duration, Aimou gradually accepted this answer.

Yes, she remembered in her final memories, the calamity she faced with Bologue.

A city in ashes, the ravenous and violent Calamity, and the cold rain of arrows descending from the sky.

Contrary to the fear and madness she once envisioned, this time Aimou remained calm, drifting silently in this void world.

Actually, this wasn't Aimou's first death, when she fell into the Great Rift, in the state of Shared Chord Body, she already felt similar experiences through Bologue's death.

It was a tremendously awful experience, breaking away from the empathy of death, Aimou almost collapsed, overwhelming fear and sorrow erupted in her heart, nearly engulfing her rationality.

This is death, lightless and tearless, enough to plunge everyone into hysterical madness.

Thinking of Bologue constantly experiencing all this, growing numb to death, prompts a complex emotion in Aimou's heart, of course, mostly guilt.

Death is so terrifying, so cold.

Before this, death was merely a fear-inducing word to Aimou, now she truly comprehended what death was.

"Have I died?"

Aimou murmured, her mood unexpectedly calm and relieved.

"It's finally over."

Sighs echoed softly in the darkness, now Aimou doesn't have to care about her own desires, nor the desires of others.

All social relations, all desires, all conflicts, all of everything ended with death.

Aimou also managed to escape from this painful contradiction.

In this world without light, the perception of time became blurred, even stagnant. Aimou, in the long silence, neither wanted anything nor thought about anything.

Until a certain moment when the darkness gradually began to writhe, and then a luminous figure appeared. Aimou looked at that familiar figure, somewhat surprised by her arrival.

I didn't expect that even until death, she would still accompany me.

"You seem quite happy? Why would you feel happy in such circumstances?" Alice asked Aimou with confusion, unable to understand her feelings.

"Is it because there's no need to think anymore?"

Alice approached Aimou, but Aimou ignored her, simply curling herself up like a cocoon.

Seeing this, Alice laughed as the darkness behind continued to writhe, as if something was there.

"Aimou, I'm your only friend. Friends should help each other; I can save you." Alice whispered in Aimou's ear.

Aimou said, "But I've already died, it's all over, don't bother me."

"Died?"

Alice stared straight into Aimou's eyes, as if hearing some joke.

"Death cannot bind everything. If you're willing, I can bring you back to the world, fulfill all your wishes."

Alice smiled at Aimou, her delicate face carrying an indescribable strange aura. Aimou felt something was amiss, but couldn't pinpoint what was wrong.

It seemed the mutation had started long ago, yet everything felt unchanged, merely an illusion of her own.

"Bologue Lazarus showed you all the beauty of the world and also the fearsomeness of death... Do you truly wish to end it all like this?"

Alice's voice became clear, without any seductive power, simply straightforward and plain communication.

"Moreover, are you willing to abandon your wishes?"

Upon hearing this, Aimou's heart was stirred, she slowly lifted her head, looking at Alice.

A halo of light surrounded Alice, making her seem like a sacred angel, ready to rescue Aimou from this pitch-black murky darkness.

"Aimou, it's time to make a choice."

Alice extended her right hand toward Aimou, as if waiting for her to kiss the back of her hand.

Aimou's will trembled slightly; no one had told her all of this, yet now Aimou could clearly become aware of certain things.

As long as she grasped this hand, all of Aimou's wishes would be fulfilled, but once she held onto it, making such a choice, irreversible errors would occur, causing lifelong regret.

But...

If it were only about fulfilling that wish...

Aimou slowly raised her hand, trying to hold Alice's hand, getting closer and closer, with an indescribable smile on Alice's face.

Just as all of this was about to be accomplished, a strange power surged from the end of the darkness. Aimou paused, then turned toward the direction the power originated from.

Somewhat hazy, but she could clearly feel that familiar wave; something was coming, something she was very familiar with.

Alice's expression slightly changed at the sight, yet she maintained composure, smiling as she said, "What are you waiting for, Aimou?"

Aimou didn't respond, only stared blankly at the darkness. She thought it was her illusion, but just as she was about to turn back and hold Alice's hand, the power surged again, and Aimou clearly discerned what the power was.

Aimou was too familiar with this power. She murmured.

"Bologue?"

In this silent, lightless world, she actually felt Bologue's ether reaction. How was this possible?

But Aimou quickly realized something, muttering to herself.

"I'm just an alchemy puppet. I'm not human, nor do I possess a human soul. For me, there is no death, only damage."

"There is no world after death for me. There is only the scrap heap."

Thinking about these, Aimou appeared somewhat saddened, then her gaze firmed, questioning the Alice behind her.

"Who exactly are you?"

"Me? I'm Alice, your only friend."

"But Alice is already dead; dead is dead, there's nothing left." Aimou retorted.

The atmosphere solidified, Alice still smiling, saying nothing, merely quietly gazing at Aimou, raising her hand.

After a long time, Aimou shook her head, giving no answer, then turned around, approaching the edge of darkness.

She did not possess the nature of death; for her, there was only damage.

Perhaps... perhaps she hadn't died, merely suffered too much damage, losing all communication ability with the outside world.

In this view, she was no different from death, but Aimou clearly knew one thing: she still possessed another ability, another ability to communicate with the outside world.

Aimou identified some so-called instinct, forcibly activating her power. She couldn't sense the existence of her body but awkwardly exerting force as long as it could have some impact.

Canyin's light encircled Aimou, and then she vigorously extended her hand toward the darkness.

Alice quietly watched Aimou depart; she wasn't surprised by Aimou's resistance, and she understood one thing, Aimou would eventually return to her.

This was destined.

...

Bologue gazed at Aimou, submerged in liquid, her hollow gaze fixed on him; she then awkwardly and clumsily uncurled her body, tremblingly extending her hand.

Chapter 362: Try?

Bologue's hand pressed tightly against the surface of the container, his gaze excitedly watching Aimou, who was reacting. Though she still looked like an empty shell now, Bologue understood that the soul within was struggling fiercely.

Canyin's brilliance surged through the mechanical gaps, Aimou's perception lost, unable to precisely control her own body, her movements twisted and bizarre.

But she saw it, in the vast darkness, felt the familiar Ether reaction, and sensed Bologue's presence.

This force transcended constraints, shattering the darkness.

Seeing this, Bologue no longer held back, the azure brilliance burned fiercely. After the triple trials, the intensity of his Ether was significantly enhanced, and the burning light in the darkness became even brighter.

"Could it be... it really worked?"

Belli watched all this from afar; she had used numerous means but couldn't make Aimou react, yet Bologue released Ether and somehow called Aimou back.

Her eyes showed disbelief, followed by a resigned smile, muttering to herself, "I wonder what kind of feelings the teacher would have seeing this."

"Aimou? Can you hear me?" Bologue shouted loudly.

There was no response; Aimou still couldn't hear Bologue's words. She only sensed the presence of the Ether reaction and thus extended her hand.

But none of that mattered, the azure pupils reflected a brilliant figure, she reached out to herself like an Angel.

"Aimou, you know what to do."

Aimou seemed to hear Bologue's whisper, the hollow pupils turning from a ghostly blue halo to a Canyin hue.

The metal palm pressed against the inner wall of the container, a transparent glass layer separated her and Bologue, no matter how much force was used, that boundary couldn't be breached.

No, there's no need to break it; from the start, it never could bind anyone.

Intricate patterns emerged on the metal surface, like growing vines, covering Aimou's entire body in a blink of an eye. She couldn't perceive the outside world, but out of trust in Bologue, she approached the light and activated Secret Energy.

Bologue remembered Aimou's explanation of her Secret Energy, and everything that happened next was just as he expected.

After a brief delay, the metal palm began to blur, and this illusion gradually obscured Aimou's body until her entire figure became illusory.

The barrier of the container vanished, Aimou's hand effortlessly penetrated it, intertwining with Bologue's fingers.

Bologue held her tightly.

The feel was icy cold, as if gripping a cold dead object, but he knew Aimou was still alive, living beneath the steel shell.

Soon, Aimou's palm overlapped with Bologue's. The cables grafted to Aimou's spine severed one by one. She lost the pull, and her body fell directly down.

Penetrating the solution, breaking through the barrier, she landed straight on Bologue.

Bologue wasn't knocked over by Aimou. At the moment their bodies touched, Canyon's brilliance flashed, and after the bright light, only Bologue remained standing there, Aimou had disappeared.

A familiar feeling arose again, like warm water flowing over his body, with a touch of gold added to the azure light trail.

A joyous sound echoed in his mind, then chirped incessantly like hungry chicks.

Normally, Bologue would tell her to be quiet, but now, these noises were surprisingly comforting.

The tense nerves relaxed, and Bologue couldn't help but show a smile. He looked at ease, but another person was getting nervous.

"Where is she?"

Belli looked around in a panic, wondering how Aimou could just vanish before her eyes. Disappeared right before her? This was going to be a big problem!

At this time, Bologue slowly turned his head; he looked at Belli behind layers of glass, Canyin rings floating in his azure pupils.

...

"So... the Shared Chord Body can be used like this? No one ever told me that?"

In Belli's chaotic office, after listening to Bologue's explanation, Belli finally understood what was going on.

Secret Power·Shared Chord Body.

Belli never thought this Secret Energy could also apply to other Condensers. It's not Belli's fault; Aimou had few friends, and there were very few to discuss these matters in detail. Before meeting Bologue, only Teda knew about the existence of this power.

"So, Aimou is now within you... inside your body?"

Belli sorted her thoughts, asking with an odd expression.

"To be precise, we're overlapping, from different dimensions, but if that's how you want to understand it, then yes." Bologue replied.

"Aimou can't control your body, right?" Belli asked again.

"Yes, she's like a tenant, only able to borrow my senses to perceive the world. The initiative is in my hands," Bologue continued, "but I can hear her voice in my mind, so I can act as a bridge for dialogue."

"Is that so?" Belli nodded.

At this moment, golden ripples appeared on Bologue's body surface, and another unreal figure emerged on Bologue's body, followed by a shadow divergence.

Aimou raised her arm, the illusion faded, a metallic entity slowly extended out, Bologue watched all this, correspondingly, this scene also reflected in Aimou's eyes.

She saw her own cold arm, recalling everything she had seen upon arrival, Aimou was very aware of the state she was in now.

Cold, bare, and pale... This was the posture Aimou hated the most.

The boundaries of humanity were broken, she reverted to a cold Steel Body.

Belli carefully observed the power of the Shared Chord Body, her eyes gradually heated up, a strangely sickly smile appeared on her face, making Bologue shiver involuntarily.

"Why... are you smiling?"

Aimou had awakened, indeed a matter to be happy about, but Belli's smile was too peculiar, forcing Bologue to remain vigilant.

Belli stood up, placed her hand on the back of Bologue's chair, circled around him, her cold perfume scent overwhelmed.

Suddenly Belli leaned down, face to face with Bologue, close enough for Bologue to feel Belli's breath, see her smooth fair neck...

"What kind of expression is that?"

Belli furrowed her brow, thinking she was still quite charming, could deceive men easily with her gestures, but facing Bologue, things were a bit different.

Bologue felt as if a predator had its eye on him, his muscles tensed, pretending to be calm, as if Belli was not a woman, but a monster that devoured people.

His gaze flickered constantly, avoiding Belli's eyes, not daring to make eye contact, as if she was the mythical Medusa, whose gaze would petrify him into a sculpture.

Belli's charm worked in vain with Bologue, even less effective than a promised Alchemy Armament, Belli didn't mind her confidence being dented, after all, she wasn't planning to prank Bologue; she truly cared about Bologue's inner self.

"I never expected... I never expected..."

The warm breath hit him, Belli reached out, pried open Bologue's eyelid, exposing his entire pupil, in the blue pupil, the golden halo violently trembled.

"I thought I knew you well enough, little sister."

The gentle voice entered the ear, Belli wasn't speaking to Bologue, she was speaking to Aimou.

Bologue's expression darkened, it's unclear what Aimou experienced in Belli's hands, now he could clearly sense Aimou's panicked emotions, if not for the control of the body in his hand, Aimou would've bolted away by now.

Belli retreated, sat on the office desk, crossed her legs, raised her brows at Bologue, her voice undeniable.

"Let her out."

Bologue shook his head, "She doesn't want to come out."

Belli sneered slightly, said, "Little sister, you don't want to stay bare, do you?"

She stretched, revealing her impressive figure, looked charmingly at Bologue, while Bologue was calm, unmoved; he knew precisely it was directed at Aimou.

"Bio-mimetic coating, gel filling, hair implantation..." Belli listed the processing items, delivering the final blow, "You should know, only the Sublimation Furnace Core can do this."

Belli offered an irresistible condition.

After a fierce internal struggle, golden light trailed across Bologue's surface, followed by another smooth, cold body stepping out, she stood obediently beside him.

"Hmm..."

Belli walked over, Aimou lowered her head, she disliked her current form, which is why she didn't want to release Secret Energy.

"Raise your head, lift your hand, turn your head, speak..."

Belli issued commands, Aimou obediently performed the corresponding actions.

"Hmm? Several previous awakenings failed, yet this time after awakening, she regained sensory control?"

Belli was somewhat puzzled, but at least Aimou appeared very "healthy" now, entirely new-looking, her movements lively, without delay.

Bologue watched all this, when he looked at Aimou, she turned away, looking like she wanted to curl up in the corner, then Bologue recalled something, he remembered Aimou possessed human shame...

Bologue silently turned away, though just a cold Steel Body, though merely an Alchemy Puppet, though everything seemed so odd...

Bologue's mood was very calm, like a stagnant pool.

"Stagnant pool" quietly sat aside, while another "Torrent" started exerting force.

Belli cornered Aimou, graceful face replaced by mad laughter, simultaneously with arrogant laughter continuing.

This Witch dropped pretenses, hugged Aimou, face to face shouted at her.

"Little sister! Let me try the Shared Chord Body right away!"

Chapter 363: Letting Go of Myself

Belli Yiyeta is someone with a multitude of labels: a talented Alchemist, a slightly crazy Witch, a traitorous apprentice, the current head of the Sublimation Furnace Core... Despite her complexity, Belli has one identity that dominates all others.

Scholar.

A Scholar with a fervent curiosity about all worldly knowledge.

Explorers see mountains and wish to climb, encounter deep seas and wish to dive; Scholars have the same desire, eager to solve all mysteries and learn all buried knowledge.

Belli is well-versed in many subjects, and few things pique her curiosity anymore. Those few that do, she currently lacks the ability to solve, much like Bologue.

Now, a brand new mystery has appeared, and it's hidden right beside her, unnoticed.

"Behave, little junior sister, let your senior sister guide you."

Belli clung to Aimou like an octopus. Aimou tried to resist, realizing suddenly that Belli's strength was surprisingly great; she couldn't break free for the time being.

"Don't bother, your senior sister here almost joined the Field Operations Department, you know."

Belli executed a perfect chokehold, pinning Aimou directly in the corner.

Bologue raised his hand, thinking it was time to stop Belli, but then Belli chuckled and said.

"You wouldn't want Bologue to be without new Alchemy Armament, would you?"

His raised hand halted, Bologue petrified in place, remembering why he came to find Belli.

If it were Palmer, that bastard would certainly sell out his brothers for profit, but not Bologue—he wouldn't abandon Aimou, his comrade in life and death.

"Alright, control yourself!"

Bologue called upon the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid, and the Silver Hand grasped Belli, lifting her into the air.

As an Alchemist, no matter how fierce Belli was when forging, she was still somewhat lacking when faced with Field Staff; unwillingly, she clawed at the air but was still separated by the Silver Hand.

Bologue's use of Secret Energy became more precise, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid stretching like multiple arms, placing Belli back in her chair while also helping Aimou to her feet.

As Bologue handed his coat to Aimou, he helplessly turned his gaze toward Belli, who was itching for action, seemingly ready to pounce on Aimou again given the opportunity.

"Mind your image, please, Madam Minister," Bologue emphasized.

"I'm bonding with my junior sister; what's it to you?"

Belli cared little for so-called image.

Bologue was rendered speechless, unsure how to threaten Belli into behaving.

"You wouldn't want Aimou to remain like this tin can forever, would you?" Belli turned the tables, smilingly threatening Bologue, "What do you think, little junior sister?"

The swirling halo in her eyes paused; Aimou knew she couldn't escape this situation, and whispered, "I... I don't have any objections."

"Are you sure, Aimou?" Bologue asked.

Falling into Belli's hands meant being at her mercy; considering Belli's craziness, Aimou might well end up with an indelible psychological shadow.

"I... I can."

Aimou, having just regained control over her body, needed some time to familiarize herself, her voice raspy, her stance shaky, struggling to keep steady.

As long as she was part of the Sublimation Furnace Core, she couldn't escape Belli's grasp; rather than anxiety and fear, facing her fear straightforwardly might be best.

"What do you want to do, senior sister?" Aimou asked bravely.

"Yo!"

Seeing this, Belli grew increasingly excited, while Bologue swallowed hard, considering whether he could report Belli's inappropriate conduct.

Bologue always thought Belli's usual Witch demeanor was the limit, but as he became more familiar with her, this crazy woman showed no restraint, becoming even more intense.

Now in retrospect, Belli's usual crazy demeanor was already restrained, and now with no one around, she simply let herself go.

"Of course you know what I want, don't you?"

Belli walked over, a head taller than Aimou, hugging her from behind, rubbing Aimou's face hard. Unfortunately, without the coating now, the metallic sensation wasn't very pleasant.

"Now, with the teacher missing along with the Alchemy Workshop, you basically have nowhere to go, only your senior sister here can take you in."

Bologue thought Belli would do well as a bandit with Palmer, the threat and coercion were executed seamlessly.

What exactly had she learned? Truly a misfortune for her sect.

"Teacher... disappeared?"

Aimou muttered, the halo in her eyes quickly cycling, seeking help from Bologue.

Bologue's heart sank; indeed, it had come to this point. He began explaining.

"The Delusional one... is Teda, remember? This guy chased us all the way for the Immortal Heart."

Bologue gave a bitter smile. He and Aimou fell into the Abandoned Land, instigated by Teda. The guy was truly mad, striking with relentless force, strong enough to not even seem like an Alchemist.

"Teda seized the Immortal Heart and then disappeared, taking the Alchemy Workshop with him. That Void Realm has a certain ability to move, and now the Order Bureau is searching for its location."

Looking at it this way, Aimou indeed had nowhere to return.

"Is that so..."

Aimou lowered her head, having anticipated it long ago, but when it really happened, she still felt a pang of loss.

"Why did Master become like that..." Aimou muttered to herself.

"Don't bother with that, anyway, the Field Operations Department will take care of this,"

Belli cheered again, shattering the melancholy atmosphere. It was unclear whether Belli did it on purpose or she was simply carefree and unconcerned about these things.

Grabbing Aimou's chin, the cold touch made Belli frown, needing to find a way to first get Aimou's coating on.

Without the bionic gel covering, Aimou was a size smaller than remembered, she seemed like a skeleton, and next, Belli needed to fill her shell with soft flesh.

But before that...

"Do you understand what I mean? Little junior sister, the Sublimation Furnace Core doesn't support idle folks," Belli schemingly said, "You get what I mean, right?"

Aimou clenched her fists, a surge of grief and indignation rose in her heart, finally taking a deep breath, she turned her head to look at Belli.

"Alright... I agree with you, but you need to be aware of one thing, our senses will be shared, as will our emotions."

"Hmm? That seems like once using Shared Chord Body, there's no privacy anymore, eh," Belli glanced at Aimou, then shifted her gaze to Bologue, "For both of us, it's the same, right?"

"We can only vaguely perceive it, our thoughts are still isolated from each other, it's not that bad," Bologue added.

"Hmm..."

Belli pondered for a few seconds, then loudly announced, "So what are we waiting for?"

Indeed, there was no escape after all.

Aimou looked at Belli with a complicated expression. For this so-called senior sister of hers, Aimou always felt quite helpless. From her understanding of Belli, once she learned about Shared Chord Body's power, she would definitely want to try it, which is why Aimou had hidden it till now.

If it were just trying, that would be fine, but from previous dealings with Belli, this matter definitely wouldn't end so easily.

"Don't resist me."

"How could I, you're my little junior sister after all."

As Belli watched, a gleam of light arose on Aimou's body. Before Aimou could react, she directly embraced her.

The two couldn't completely overlap, Belli didn't resist, but Aimou did. She looked at Belli as if looking at a pile of unrecyclable garbage.

In utter helplessness, Aimou's figure gradually merged little by little with Belli's until Aimou completely vanished, overlapping with Belli.

At this moment, Belli's eyes also reflected golden halos, with the abundant Ether flowing through her entire body.

"This feels not bad, the increase in Ether affinity, the enhancement of perception, and sufficient Ether reserves..."

Belli restrained her smile, like an expert, feeling the ability of the Shared Chord Body the moment they made contact.

"So, can I leave now?"

Aimou's voice echoed in her mind; besides Bologue, this was the second person in Aimou's Shared Chord Body, which felt very odd to her. She just wanted to leave quickly.

"Don't be so hasty, I haven't finished testing yet," Belli said, mentioning, "We can vaguely perceive each other's emotions, right?"

"Yes."

"That sounds quite interesting."

Speaking, Belli sat back on her office chair, crossed her legs, and fell silent, saying nothing.

Bologue couldn't understand what Belli was doing. After a few minutes, Belli gradually couldn't contain her expression. A storm was raging in her mind.

Aimou had no idea she had already walked into a trap. After a few more minutes, a brilliant light flashed, and Aimou clumsily crawled out of Belli's body, accompanied by wails.

"What the hell were you thinking!" Aimou loudly accused.

Even when facing Calamity with Bologue, Aimou wasn't this flustered; Belli's mind was practically filled with weird and filthy things.

The halos in her eyes continually flickered, Ether surged, as if it would overflow with scorching steam in the next second.

"Hehe,"

Belli didn't respond, only kept sending strange laughter towards Aimou, excited like a monkey finding a new toy.

Chapter 364: Brand New Factory

Bologue sat on the bench in the corridor while technicians in protective clothing hustled about, not paying him any attention. The roar of machinery was constant, and howling winds echoed through the ventilation ducts.

The Sublimation Furnace Core was a bustling place, noisy and restless. Few people lingered here to rest, but Bologue was an exception.

Compared to the days spent living in trenches during his time in the military, this harsh environment of the Sublimation Furnace Core seemed unexpectedly pleasant, mostly because Bologue was in a very good mood.

Having passed the triple trials, he was close to being promoted to a Prayer Believer, and Aimou had recovered. Despite some unexpected events, everything had gone smoothly.

It seemed like everything was developing in a positive direction, a rare and precious situation for Bologue.

Looking at the time, it was almost midnight. He had been waiting here for several hours, but being a patient person, Bologue didn't feel irritated.

A few more minutes passed, and as midnight approached, the tightly shut iron door slowly opened, with metal scraping against metal, producing a hoarse sound.

Finally, it was over.

Bologue stood up and walked to the door. As the faint mist dispersed, a hazy shadow gradually emerged, and a figure in protective clothing came out.

She waved a hand to dispel the rolling mist, sat on the bench in the corridor, and pulled off her breathing mask to inhale the not-so-fresh air outside the corridor.

After a brief rest, she unzipped her suit and slid out like a fish, simply folding and stacking the protective clothing to the side.

Belli was drenched in sweat, appearing tired as she sat on the bench. Her clothes were soaked and clung stickily to her skin, causing discomfort. She resolved to take a shower later.

"What are you looking at?"

Belli noticed Bologue's puzzled gaze and rudely spoke out.

"I just didn't expect you to actually wear protective clothing." It was the first time Bologue had seen Belli adhere to the safety regulations.

"The fumes are bad for the skin."

Hearing Belli's response, Bologue finally felt a hint of femininity from her. His gaze fell inside the iron door, waiting for something, but the door closed again, leaving him outside.

"She needs some time... hmm? To adjust a bit. We've waited this long, so waiting a bit longer isn't a problem, right?"

Belli understood what Bologue was thinking, flashed him a wicked smile, then patted the seat next to her.

Bologue couldn't refuse Belli; today she had been a great help, and he anxiously but obediently moved over to sit beside her.

After a short rest, Belli regained her energy, crossed her sleek legs, and gave orders to Bologue.

"I plan to have Aimou stay with me for a while," Belli said.

Ah?

Recalling the friendly interaction between Belli and Aimou earlier, it seemed like she was pushing Aimou into a pit of fire. Just as Bologue was about to strongly protest, Belli's next words left him speechless.

"She has my junior sister's Philosopher's Stone in her. The teacher will definitely try to get her back. If we let Aimou leave the Order Bureau, she might get knocked out and taken away by the teacher the moment she steps outside."

Belli looked seriously at Bologue, "You've witnessed the teacher's power, right? Pure Illusion Creation can craft a utopian paradise or bring about a despair-filled hell."

"But as long as we hold Aimou firmly in our grasp, she becomes bait that will draw the teacher to us. All we need to do is set a trap and catch him, reclaiming the Immortal Heart."

Listening to Belli's plan, Bologue felt a surreal sense of confusion, unable to reconcile the bawdy Belli earlier with this meticulous and serious one. The disparity was stark.

"What kind of expression is that? Don't you trust me?"

Belli seemed completely unaware of her dismal image in Bologue's mind. Even if she knew, she probably wouldn't care.

Leaning lazily against the back of the chair, Belli casually spread her arms, one even slipping behind Bologue's back, resting on his shoulder, as if she was about to embrace him.

"Don't worry; she's my junior sister, and I won't let anything happen to her."

Belli's tone was firm, and combined with her current demeanor, she resembled a big sister of the underworld in Opus.

This was Belli's turf. Whoever she said she would protect, she definitely would.

Bologue was moved, thinking Belli believed he doubted her, hence her reassurance. This person wasn't as frivolous as he thought, her delicate mind well-hidden under the guise of a quirky elder sister.

Belli didn't say anything more, maintaining her silence as she waited quietly.

In the long silence, Bologue thought back to the stories he had heard, his gaze casually wandering inside the Sublimation Furnace Core.

Seven years ago, Belli wasn't yet the head of the Sublimation Furnace Core; she was just an apprentice. That was the day she had a junior apprentice, and then... then Overlord Xilin descended.

That was the first time she met Alice, and it was also the last time she saw Alice.

Now Belli has a little junior apprentice, and she sincerely hopes that such a tragedy will not repeat.

"Belli, did you know?"

Bologue suddenly felt a sense of relief, a feeling that he was not alone... At least now, the head of the Sublimation Furnace Core was on his side.

"What's up?" Belli leaned on her chin, tilting her head.

"When you keep quiet, you're actually quite charming."

"Huh?"

Belli furrowed her brow, then quickly concealed all her expressions, adopting a cold demeanor, and gently embraced Bologue.

"Do you mean like this?"

Belli's voice was soft, Bologue faced Belli's advance with a blank expression, but the next second she let out her signature arrogant laugh, reaching out to pinch Bologue's ear, pulling it hard.

"You, a lowly field staff, dare to evaluate me, this minister? What status are you, and what status am I!"

Belli was brimming with arrogance, like a bully, and still unsatisfied, she gave Bologue a kick, but clearly, this minister couldn't move Bologue, this small field staff.

Bologue couldn't help but smile; sometimes he thought Belli was like a female version of Palmer, but he also felt that using Palmer to describe Belli was somewhat insulting to Belli.

Belli was incredibly self-absorbed, indifferent to anyone's opinion, unlike Palmer, who was a yes-man swaying with the wind.

Most importantly, Belli was at least an Alchemy Master, whereas Palmer achieved nothing.

"I never curry favour with anyone, it's always people currying favor with me, and you think you qualify?" Belli said with an air of arrogance.

"Alright then, Minister Belli, could you spare some Alchemy Armament for me?" Bologue said, "You and Aimou are holed up in the Cultivation Room, everything's fine, but I have to go out and match wits with Teda."

"You're not going to die, what's the rush," chuckled Belli, "what's this, begging for mercy now?"

Upon saying this, Belli felt a faint pain in her forehead, anger welling up, just as she was about to kick Bologue again to vent, the iron door slowly opened.

"I have a strange thought..." Bologue suddenly said.

"What?"

"Like you said before, we are like family waiting outside the operating room, and now the surgery is finally over." Bologue continued Belli's cold joke.

Footsteps emerged from the mist, a vague figure slowly walked out, looking brand new, like a newly born life.

It wasn't wrong to think so; Aimou was, in every sense, brand new and genuinely original parts.

But...

Bologue glanced up and down at the brand-new Aimou, Aimou looked familiar but somehow different.

For example, her platinum hair was lighter, the previous long hair was gone, and was replaced by a chic short hairstyle, and the once slender body had grown more ample with this reconstruction...

Bologue turned his head to look at Belli, who acted nonchalantly, her eyes wandering until she couldn't avoid it any longer, she then loudly declared.

"When the teacher created her, it was modeled after Alice; now it's my turn, can't I model her after myself?"

Having said that, Belli walked over and vigorously pinched Aimou's face, "See, it feels much better now."

"Most importantly..."

Belli suddenly got serious, locking eyes with Bologue.

"Now she no longer looks like Alice, doesn't she?"

Bologue was stunned, Aimou had harbored desires she shouldn't have under Teda's morbid longing, living like a shadow of Alice until this moment, where the overlapping figures finally diverged.

"Now Aimou is Aimou."

Belli said, pinching Aimou's waist, while Aimou displayed a look of numbness and despair.

Chapter 365: Shadow

"It's time to rest, I'll take care of some things and come back to get you later, little junior sister."

Belli said as she blew a kiss to Aimou, accompanied by a burst of arrogant laughter, she pushed the door open and disappeared down the hallway, leaving Bologue and Aimou in her office.

As the laughter faded away, both Bologue and Aimou simultaneously heaved a sigh of relief.

The quiet atmosphere didn't last long, Bologue stood up with a nervous face and straightened his clothes, the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid crawling over his body, ready to be unleashed at any moment.

"What are you going to do?" Aimou asked from the side.

"What am I going to do? Of course, we're going to escape, you can't seriously want to live with your senior sister, right?"

Bologue seemed relaxed, but being around Belli, this Witch, made him feel pressured, no one could tell what absurd thing she would do next. The worst part was, she was the head of the Sublimation Furnace Core, and nobody could control her.

Not exactly nobody, the old guys at the Scholars' Hall still had some say, but if they saw how the head was now, they'd probably have a heart attack from anger.

"Live... with senior sister..."

Aimou's tone turned awkward, with a look of panic appearing on her face.

Compared to Bologue, Aimou's fear of Belli was only greater, but after a brief moment of thought, Aimou stopped Bologue's actions.

"I think I can do it," Aimou said, summoning courage.

"If teacher goes missing, he will definitely come back to find me; it will only become unsafe if we're together, but it's different here."

Thinking along with Belli, Aimou realized, "No matter how powerful teacher is, he can't break in."

Teda was merely a Negative Power User, let alone breaking into the Cultivation Room, his strength was significant only against someone like Bologue, a Condenser. If he faced seasoned Negative Power Users like Geoffrey and Lebius, Teda's chances were pathetically low.

Bologue slowly turned his head, showing a disdainful expression, "Do you think I'm concerned about this?"

"Then what?" This time, it was Aimou who didn't understand.

"Guess what Belli is going to do to you next? An employee physical? Then issue a work ID, and finally, join the Sublimation Furnace Core?"

Aimou realized that they were on completely different wavelengths.

Bologue was grumbling endlessly, "You belong to our Field Operations Department, how can I let Belli intercept you halfway!"

"Huh?"

Bologue grabbed Aimou's hand, pulling her to her feet.

"This may sound conceited, but I worked hard to get you out, how could I let Belli enjoy the fruits?" Bologue exclaimed, "Even though Belli and the Sublimation Furnace Core have played a significant role, these things should be kept separate!"

It was only now that Aimou understood Bologue's point, he was actually competing with Belli over employees.

"Think about it, Aimou, do you really want to work with Belli?" Bologue asked.

Such a thing required no thought, Aimou shook her head vigorously.

"Then how about working with me?"

Aimou nodded her head.

"Good! Conversation over!"

Bologue happily patted Aimou on the shoulder, not even realizing that when he acted crazy, he wasn't much different from Belli.

Digging around in his pocket, Bologue brought out the emblem of the Special Operations Group and slapped it into Aimou's hand.

"Welcome to the Special Operations Group of Rupert's Tail."

Aimou was a bit bewildered, staring at the emblem in her hand, stupidly asking, "Is this... all it takes?"

"Of course it's not, but I think Lebius will like you, just go through the procedures casually," Bologue slowly opened the door, checking the hallway outside.

"More importantly, I have to find a way to get you out of here first."

If Belli knew he was planning to take Aimou to the Special Operations Group, she'd definitely be angry with him, but once they were out of here, he'd have plenty of time to argue with Belli...

If it really came down to it, Bologue could even sacrifice himself a bit and agree to Belli's strange requests, like exploring the Ruins District.

Aimou looked at Bologue's various actions and suddenly burst out laughing, her body shaking uncontrollably.

Bologue looked at her with confusion, followed by a surprised shout.

"Aimou, you can make expressions now?"

Unlike the cold demeanor he was familiar with, Aimou's face finally had expressions.

"Yeah, senior sister helped me with it."

Aimou rubbed her face; the modifications to her body took so long not only because of Belli's strange tweaks but also due to some upgrades she made.

Her appearance was somewhat like Belli's, but her features leaned closer to Alice, Bologue found it hard to describe Aimou's look now, luckily Aimou didn't take on Belli's terrible personality.

Aimou no longer looked like a shadow.

"Belli did a bit of the right thing, after all."

Bologue grumbled, completely forgetting that his threefold trial was hosted by Belli.

"Alright, stop for a moment, Bologue, I've decided to stay here." Aimou's words sent Bologue's heart plummeting.

"You're going to stay at the Sublimation Furnace Core?"

"Although the days of fighting together were joyful, you have to know, I am essentially an Alchemist." Aimou emphasized her identity.

Bologue was stunned for a few seconds, then remembered that the Deceitful Snake Scale Liquid was made by Aimou, and his mind became a bit confused.

After chopping people with Aimou for so long, he really forgot about this.

"Alright, I understand."

Bologue did not persist too much; he respected Aimou's choice, and he could also sense that Belli indeed cared greatly for her junior sister, albeit in a peculiar way.

Thinking about it, he could only conclude that rather than solemnly expressing care to Aimou, Belli preferred to mock her with a mischievous grin.

Belli was probably a good senior sister, but when this kind of care actually occurred, it was quite a psychological burden for anyone.

"There's one more thing," Aimou hesitated for a moment but asked, "When someone dies, they're just dead, there wouldn't be any echoes, right?"

"What's wrong?" Bologue sensed Aimou's concern, "Did you... see Alice?"

While in the Abandoned Land, the harsh environment left Bologue no extra time to ponder these matters, now being safe, reminiscing about it all, he realized how important the message Aimou conveyed to her was.

"Yes, I saw Alice again," Aimou explained what she had seen and heard, "I was trapped in a dark world, where only Alice accompanied me."

"As an Alchemy Puppet, I think I shouldn't suffer from any mental illness, similarly, when humans die, they're dead, there shouldn't be any ghosts talking to me, if that's the case..."

Aimou's voice lowered.

"I discussed these matters with Teda before, he mentioned that you might be influenced by a Mind Projection, making you increasingly resemble... Alice."

Considering the situation, Bologue still explained everything, "Perhaps it's the echoes from the Philosopher's Stone affecting you."

Bologue analyzed, then felt something was off, and asked again, "By the way, according to Belli, after the adjustments, you were supposed to awaken, but you didn't..."

As if he had grasped something, Bologue's expression became tense.

"Aimou, did Alice say anything... strange?"

If his assumptions were correct, then all the events suddenly made sense.

Facing Bologue's anxious gaze, Aimou recalled Alice reaching out to her, a familiar voice echoed in her ears.

"Aimou, it's time to make a decision."

If you choose Alice, all wishes will be fulfilled...

The ethereal blue halo stopped its oscillation, Aimou shook her head and answered.

"There was no abnormality, nor any strange words... it felt more like Alice's lingering memories, which I happened to glimpse."

"Memories?"

Upon hearing this, Bologue exhaled with relief.

The Devil's form is ever-changing, and the way contracts are fulfilled is not fixed. Bologue was worried that being too close to him might attract the attention of the Tyrant to Aimou.

This is not impossible, as Devils are a group of creatures filled with malicious delight, savoring human pain and struggles.

"Don't worry," Aimou opened her hands, "the situation is still under control, right?"

"Yes, under control." Bologue relaxed, letting out a sigh.

He had been through quite a torment lately, with moods fluctuating like a roller coaster, fortunately, all ended well.

"Aimou."

After a brief moment of peace, Bologue called Aimou's name.

"What's up?" Aimou looked at Bologue.

"Do you think you want to become Alice?" Bologue asked.

Aimou couldn't figure out the answer to this question either, after pondering for a moment, she smiled helplessly, "I'm not sure."

"Yes, who could figure such a thing out?"

Bologue recalled that in the Abandoned Land, Aimou mentioned to him that she felt she didn't possess a free will of her own, her actions and words were influenced by Alice.

"Aimou, I think Teda is a decent teacher, but when it comes to being a father, he's terrible," Bologue muttered, "this might be a cruel matter for you, but everyone needs to grow, facing harsh reality."

Aimou nodded; she understood what Bologue wanted to discuss with her.

When she closed her eyes, Aimou would recall the pale puppet mask, and the wild fantasies accompanying it, bringing death and destruction.

"In Teda's eyes, you're not an independent individual, merely a shadow of Alice."

Bologue's tone was heavy, he believed Aimou also understood these matters, but this was the first time they candidly brought the topic to light.

Aimou could previously pretend not to understand, immersing herself in her own fantasies, but now Bologue tore away the facade, exposing the bloody truth.

"Though you and Alice share almost identical appearances, although I've never seen Alice firsthand... I think your inner selves are different."

Looking at Aimou, perhaps she was a consciousness born based on Alice, but evidently, Aimou is now distinct from Alice, both in terms of appearance and personality.

"Anyway, welcome back."

Chapter 366: Misfortune in the Sect

The Cultivation Room is a large, completely isolated Void Realm, utterly cut off from the outside world. Many first-time visitors find it hard to adjust to the lifestyle within the Cultivation Room, with some even developing psychological disorders due to the oppressively enclosed environment.

Aimou, however, is quite used to life in the Cultivation Room. It feels like being on a wandering crossroad, devoid of dawn or night, as if existing in the gap between day and night.

The only way to judge the passage of time is by the clock on the wall. Aimou sits quietly on the bed, and based on the clock, it's already morning.

Even though Aimou said a room wasn't needed, Belli still prepared one for her. As an Alchemy Puppet, she requires no sleep. She spent the entire night lying flat, imitating the act of sleeping, waiting for the next day to arrive.

But after only resting for a few minutes, Belli knocked on Aimou's door.

Aimou opened the door, filled with apprehension, expecting another ordeal, but this time Belli was serious.

"This is a temporary pass. You can use it to freely enter and exit the Sublimation Furnace Core."

Belli hung a pass around Aimou's neck, with Aimou's photo attached to it, evident it was rushed and hastily made.

"Here are the uniforms. I brought several pieces, and you can change into them as needed."

Several garments were piled onto the table, ranging from summer to winter attire.

"And then there's this..."

Belli, like an overconcerned elder, rambled on about the items she brought, filling Aimou's table and placing some on the floor.

Aimou wanted to say that, as an Alchemy Puppet, she hardly needed most of the items, but Belli gave her no chance to interject.

"Oh, and the most important things are these."

Belli took off a bracelet from her wrist. At first glance, it looked like any ordinary bracelet, but Aimou could keenly sense the flow of Ether within it; this was an Alchemy Armament.

"Although I'm the head of the Sublimation Furnace Core, my own Tier is still somewhat lacking. If any accident happens, I have almost no capability to protect myself, so I've crafted many small life-saving gadgets for myself."

Belli placed the bracelet onto Aimou's wrist and explained, "These are little gadgets I made in my spare time, so they remain unnamed. This Armament can generate a powerful Ethereal Shock, utilizing its repulsive nature, it can knock back quite a lot of First-Stage Condensers."

"And then there's this ring. Its effect is quite simple; it can create an Ethereal Barrier to protect you, capable of withstanding the full force attack of a Third-Stage Negative Power User."

A bright, shiny ring was slipped onto Aimou's finger.

"The most precious one is this Alchemy Armament."

While speaking, Belli took out her earrings and gently clipped them to Aimou's earlobes.

"Unlike the previously crafted gadgets, this Alchemy Armament is at the Corruption Black Level; its effect allows you to teleport short distances."

Belli's words left Aimou dumbfounded; Alchemy Armaments capable of spatial displacement are extremely precious, yet she just handed it to her.

"Oh, also, the previous Alchemy Armaments can be reused after a cooling period, but this one is different. It's one-time use only and can support you for a single teleport before breaking. Unless you're really facing death, you shouldn't use it."

After Belli's diligent preparation, Aimou was now fully equipped.

Completing Aimou's outfitting, Belli stood aside, looked her over, and muttered to herself, "Even if the instructor comes, he'll probably be caught off guard by this."

That's the way of the Alchemist—combat strength isn't strong, but given enough time to prepare, Belli has the confidence to smother the opponent with Alchemy Armaments.

"Is it... really okay this way?"

Aimou asked cautiously; she was an Alchemist herself and knew just how costly these items were. Belli had practically given her all her equipment.

Belli reassured her, "Don't worry, these things were bought with public funds and didn't cost me anything."

Then Belli lowered her voice and whispered to Aimou, "I hired a very skilled accountant; he does excellent counterfeit accounting. Every month I manage to spare quite a bit of funds to do other things."

The absurd words reached Aimou's ears, and for a moment, she didn't know what to say.

"Well... that should be about it."

After organizing everything, Belli flopped onto Aimou's bed, her serious expression replaced with a familiar smile, then Belli patted the mattress beside her.

Aimou understood and sat beside her. She was prepared to resist, but the anticipated ordeal did not materialize.

Belli merely extended her arms, gently hugging Aimou, resting her head next to her, shedding her previously arrogant demeanor for a touch of vulnerability.

After quite a while, Belli murmured, "When I first saw you, I truly thought Alice had come back to life."

"Do you also wish Alice was the one who awoke?" Aimou's gaze grew somewhat dim.

Belli didn't answer the question directly, instead bringing up another topic, "Did you know? In my entire life up to now, I've only faced death once..."

"In the secret war?" Aimou knew of that past.

"During that calamity, I almost died too, but thankfully Balder saved me."

Speaking of Balder, Belli added, "Balder is the guy who always wears Protective Clothing; he is considered your senior, the instructor's top disciple."

Chapter 367: Unfortunate Sect_2

"To save me, Balder was nearly burned alive. Even though he was rescued, he was left with scars hard to heal, his appearance utterly ruined. When I saw him in the hospital, he was wrapped in bandages all over, with pus and blood oozing endlessly."

"Later, I asked Balder, why did you save me? If he hadn't rescued me, he wouldn't have ended up like this."

"I still remember he said he wanted to go to the beaches of Free Port in summer for a chance encounter filled with love, but now with his appearance, he would only give tourists a fright on the beach."

"Balder then said, encounters of love are like flowing water, but junior sisters are eternal. I am his junior sister, so he had to save me for the sake of our senior-junior bond."

Belli remained silent for a moment before continuing, "Among the people I know, Balder is the least adept at crack jokes. His jokes are extraordinarily unfunny."

Aimou said nothing, just quietly listening.

"Back to the previous question, do I hope Alice will wake up?"

"How could I? I also really liked my junior sister, but dead is dead, that's an unyielding iron rule."

"From the first moment I saw you, I knew you were not Alice. You seemed more like Alice's younger sister?"

"Well, it's quite sad that Alice couldn't be revived, but when I learned of your existence, I was quite happy. This might sound strange, but now I have another little junior sister."

Mentioning 'little junior sister', Belli laughed. She seemed to really like this term.

"I thought this would be a good start, but the teacher became more and more extreme."

"I know what he wants to do..."

"When Alice died, I couldn't protect myself, that was tolerable, but now it's different. I am the Minister of the Sublimation Furnace Core, I can't just sit by and let a second junior sister die."

Aimou probably understood her meaning, and instinctively reached out, then slowly hugged Belli. The two embraced into a bundle, as Belli continued.

"Earlier you seemed like Alice's sister, now you seem like my sister," Belli described in a strange way, "I think our generation's betrayal has brought enough misfortune to the sect, yet now we're starting a drama on ethics."

Belli hugged Aimou tightly, then lifted her head, kneading and pinching Aimou's face.

"Don't worry, no matter what the reason is, nothing will happen to you. The mistakes of the teacher shouldn't fall on you."

Belli said harshly, "He ought to retire!"

"Hmm."

Aimou responded softly, Belli's words caught her by surprise. She hadn't expected Belli to say these things to her, much less in such a manner.

Belli gave all the defensive equipment she could to Aimou. Aimou remembered Bologue's frequent troubles, maybe the field staff don't have such a good treatment as her.

"I thought, in your eyes, I was just a research project." Aimou said.

"Research project and little junior sister don't conflict, just like research project and Bologue."

"Ah?" Belli's words completely shattered Aimou's feelings.

"Just kidding!"

Belli grinned wickedly, and rubbed Aimou's head vigorously again.

...

Opening his eyes, Bologue skillfully moved Wei'Er to the side, tidied his clothes, and leisurely walked out of the room.

Sai Zong somehow returned to the Undying Club, sprawled on the stairs. Bologue acted as if he hadn't seen him, lifted his foot and stepped over.

In the bar downstairs, Serey, who was drunk, lay behind the counter, but even so, he prepared breakfast for Bologue. This guy's willpower is astonishing in certain aspects.

Bologue wasn't polite either, picked up a knife and fork, and started eating. Footsteps were heard as Bode came out with a bucket and mop, cleaning up the chaotic scene.

After spending time together, Bologue found the composition of the Undying Club much like a peculiar family, with Wei'Er and Sai Zong as family pets, Serey as the unsteady heir, and Bode as the enthusiastic old father.

"Serey, I recently made a friend." Bologue said.

"Who?"

Serey lay on the counter, looking like he was about to die.

"It's an Alchemy Puppet," Bologue added, "one with self-awareness. You could say, apart from the body being different, she is no different from a normal person."

"As long as she is maintained regularly and the Constant Motion Core and Mind Projection run normally, she could be considered an undead in a certain sense."

Serey gave a perfunctory nod, the night's alcohol making it impossible for him to think about complex matters. "Quite interesting, is it... that one named Aimou?"

"You know her?"

Bologue felt a bit strange, as there should be no connection between Serey and Aimou.

"Heard Palmer mention her before, he said she was your recent mission target." Serey replied.

"Didn't think Palmer would even tell you this." Bologue was surprised.

"You should know what Palmer's mouth is like as his partner?" Serey nudged the bottles, watching them roll around the counter, "Just a few bottles, you could even extract the asset distribution of the Clarks."

"Truly a shame to the Clarks family..."

"I think so too." Serey agreed.

If not for knowing beforehand, even a monster like Serey would find it hard to associate Palmer with the surname Clarks.

Thinking back to when the Clarks fought fiercely with him during the Dawn War, they were outstanding heroes, yet now with Palmer, it's just unbearable.

...

Chapter 368: Misfortune in the Sect_3

I wonder what the people of the Clarks thought when they first saw Palmer.

"I want to bring her here, do you think that's okay?" Bologue asked tentatively.

"Hmm? What made you think of this?" Serey asked curiously.

"She's too special; she might be the first Alchemy Puppet with self-awareness in history," Bologue pondered, "She's got a lot of unsolved mysteries about her; maybe you old monsters can figure something out."

"Most importantly, don't you want to see?"

"See what?" Serey retorted.

"Didn't you understand? The first Alchemy Puppet with self-awareness, even though you've lived for so long, you haven't seen anything like this, have you?" Bologue felt that Serey was drunk, not even clear-minded.

Serey's gaze was somewhat dazed, and after a moment of being stunned, his expression twisted.

"Alchemy Puppet?"

"Yes!"

"With self-awareness?"

"Yes!"

Serey suddenly sat up from the bar, his expression twisted, "These Alchemists have really created new life!"

After a few seconds of being stunned, Serey grabbed Bologue and loudly asked, "Wait, isn't that Aimou an Alchemy Puppet?"

"Didn't you hear Palmer mention her?" Bologue shouted back.

"Palmer didn't mention anything about the Alchemy Puppet part!"

Palmer only mentioned Aimou's existence but didn't touch upon her nature, which made Bologue's view of Palmer ease a bit; this guy doesn't blurt out everything.

"Palmer only said that Bologue, the bastard, actually got involved with the mission target, completely disregarding his good brother," Serey recalled the scene of being hungover with Palmer, "The guy was drinking and complaining about being kicked out by an Alchemy Puppet."

"God, Bologue hasn't gone out for midnight snacks with me for a week, all because of this damn Alchemy Puppet!" Serey mimicked Palmer's tone, repeating the words from back then.

"What?"

This time it was Bologue's turn to be stunned, but upon careful reflection, it seemed to be true.

Usually, after work, Bologue and Palmer would have cheerful midnight snack times, but ever since he moved into the Alchemy Workshop, this matter had been forgotten.

Serey's expression froze, and he suddenly realized he had said something he shouldn't have; as a drunkard, the biggest taboo is not to repeat the nonsense spoken while hungover.

"Alright, I'm very interested. Do you want to come at night? We can have a party."

Serey crawled up from behind the bar, changing the topic, while Bologue looked at him expressionlessly.

The two stared at each other for a few seconds, ending with Serey's defeat.

"Alright, alright, bring her over then. We have so many Undead here, we've seen a lot, there shouldn't be any problem that can stump us," Serey said.

"Then it's settled, I'll bring her over tonight." Bologue nodded.

He greeted Bode, who was mopping the floor, and pushed the door to leave. Living at the Undying Club these days, he fully understood what it meant to "live close to the company."

Previously, he could use the Key of the Crooked Path to take shortcuts to the Undying Club, but the nausea brought by crossing the crooked path was genuinely discomforting; now this point of influence no longer exists, coupled with Aimou's awakening, Bologue's mood was unexpectedly good.

Now there was only one thing left to solve.

Bologue stopped on the street, the winter ice and snow cloaking the city, and he recalled that name in his mind.

Teda Yazhede.

Chapter 369: Naivety

"Evening? A party?"

Aimou looked confused, clearly not quite grasping what a "party" meant.

"You could understand it as a group of people gathering for some strange reason to celebrate some strange things, but it's always a very joyful scene."

Bologue explained to Aimou as he understood it. All this time, he had hardly participated in any parties of the Undying Club, mainly because every time these lunatics partied too wildly for Bologue to handle.

But there was one good thing they did, which was making the scene genuinely joyful. Even someone as serious as Bologue could barely hold back a smile when he saw Serey's acrobatics on the pole.

"They're kind of... some of my friends, all Undead, and they're very interested in you. I think you might be interested in them too, right?" Bologue continued.

"Undead? A group of Undead?" Aimou repeated, the halo in her eyes slightly expanding.

She was already shocked to have met Bologue, an Undead, but from what Bologue described, he wasn't the only Undead in Opus; there was a large group of them.

Since when did Undead become so commonplace, found everywhere?

"They're also quite interested in you, want to meet you, and maybe they could help solve some issues for you, like... the part about Alice."

Every time Alice was mentioned, Bologue felt a slight unease.

Once someone is dead, that's it, nothing more. Yet Aimou could see and talk to Alice's apparition. Instinctively, Bologue felt this matter wasn't so simple.

In their conversations, Aimou, however, stated that everything was normal.

Bologue trusted Aimou, believing she wouldn't deceive him, yet he still felt that it wasn't that simple...

"Aimou? Come on, time to work!"

The two hadn't talked long before Belli's voice came through.

Currently, Aimou was interning in the Sublimation Furnace Core... as Belli's assistant.

"Finally, some peace to do my own things." Balder was very grateful for Aimou's arrival.

Spending just a few minutes with Belli already made Bologue feel discomfort, and he wondered how Balder endured all these years. When he asked Balder, Balder simply replied.

"You get used to it."

Such a simple statement, yet it hid so much bitterness and tears, Bologue no longer knew what to say.

"Alright, I'll pick you up in the evening." Bologue arranged a time with Aimou.

...

"I really can't bear to leave all of you, but as you know, as an excellent field staff member, I will eventually return to the battlefield."

At the Border Sanatorium subway platform, Palmer bid a sentimental farewell to the nurses who had cared for him, expressing his gratitude deeply.

"Thank you all so much."

Palmer bowed deeply, almost tearing up.

After being away from home for so long, he rarely felt such human warmth here. If it weren't for Lebius's message that he would automatically be dismissed if he didn't return to work soon, Palmer would have loved to stay a bit longer.

"Everyone! I will remember you! As long as I don't die out there, we will meet again one day."

The subway roared, stopping behind Palmer. He waved to the nurses who had come to see him off and, with reluctance, boarded the carriage.

Despite returning to work, Palmer looked as if he were heading to Hell. Considering the nature of his job, it wasn't entirely wrong to say so.

The nurses maintained their signature smiles, waving to Palmer through the train window until the doors closed, and the subway headed towards the Cultivation Room. Then their faces gradually stiffened and crumbled.

"Ah... finally got this guy sent off."

"This guy is so childish, it felt like I was taking care of a kid these past few days."

"Do all the field staff behave like this now? How is the Field Operations Department hiring people?"

Out of professional ethics, every nurse showed enough patience while taking care of Palmer, but the more patient and tolerant they were, the more reckless Palmer became.

Palmer didn't do anything excessive; it's just that his incredibly childish behavior piled up, inevitably frustrating the nurses.

"Actually... I think he's okay, though he seems childish, you could also see it as innocence, right?"

One nurse said quietly, and the others paused, recalling their recent experiences with Palmer.

This guy frantically tried to please the nurses, leading them to suspect he was up to something illegal, only for it to be him getting a few tapes. Or at night, he mysteriously messed around, and when the nurses kicked the door open, they found him diluting medical alcohol, exploring if he could make a drinkable alcohol mix.

After a brief thought, the nurses collectively agreed that Palmer wasn't a bad person, just a bit lacking in sense.

And then he recalled the rumors about Palmer. It's said that he used to be a normal person, even the Employee of the Year in the Field Operations Department. But during a later mission, there was an accident that injured his brain, causing him to become despondent. Even his family severed ties with him. Truly, he's a tragic figure...

Of course, Palmer couldn't hear these discussions behind his back. He was still figuring out what to do next.

Palmer could have been discharged several days ago, but he stalled with various excuses, lying motionless in the Border Sanatorium until Lebius finally couldn't stand it anymore and issued an ultimatum. Only then did he reluctantly pack his belongings and return to the Cultivation Room.

Given the current situation, Palmer's return was just to meet Lebius; there shouldn't be any tasks assigned to him for now.

Indeed, as Palmer imagined, the Sixth Group is tracking Teda, and until new developments arise, the Special Operations Group is quite idle.

"Does that mean I can go straight home?"

In the office, Palmer hesitated for a moment before speaking to Lebius.

"Theoretically, yes," Lebius replied without looking up.

"What do you mean, theoretically?"

Palmer didn't understand. Then he saw Lebius pointing to a pile of documents nearby, saying, "Yuriel is on leave today. You help me organize these files."

"Isn't that...not good, Chief?" Palmer didn't want to work. "I'm a Field Staff; I can't do clerical tasks."

"By approval, you should've reported to the Cultivation Room days ago, but you came back only today... Can I consider you absent without cause?"

Lebius hit the nail on the head, leaving Palmer speechless. Then... he said nothing and quietly started sorting the files on the desk.

Serving tea, fetching water, sweeping floors, giving massages.

Just hours ago, Palmer was living like royalty in the Border Sanatorium, meticulously cared for by nurses. After returning to the Cultivation Room, he became a subordinate, being ordered around by Lebius.

The drastic contrast stirred Palmer's emotions, but he had no other choice. Since the Clarks family cut off Palmer's allowance, his only source of income was his salary from the Field Operations Department. If that too disappeared, he'd have no option but to turn to Serey.

Palmer knew well that his relationship with Serey was superficial; if he really sought refuge there, and his family found out, he could never return to the Wind Source Highlands.

Busy until nightfall, Lebius finally let Palmer go. Exhausted, Palmer walked out onto the street from the Order Bureau.

On the brightly lit streets, Palmer wandered alone. Thinking about his situation, he suddenly felt a pang of sadness.

Ever since becoming a debtor, misfortune has clung to Palmer. His former good partner, Church, had abandoned him. He finally welcomed Bologue, who wouldn't die, but Bologue's focus was all on Aimou.

During moments like these, Palmer consoled himself, at least he still had a fiancée... a fiancée who only appeared over the phone.

Palmer suddenly felt his life was a failure. Overwhelmed by sorrow, like a stray dog, he wandered aimlessly through the streets, walking until he found himself at the entrance of the Undying Club.

Looking up at the familiar sign, Palmer felt a mix of emotions.

Unexpectedly, in the vast Oubos of Oath City, the only place that could accommodate him was the Undying Club. The only one with whom he could drink was the Night Race Lord, Serey Villeries, who had a blood feud with the Clarks family.

Palmer couldn't help but feel the mockery of fate. Yet in the face of this harsh reality, who actually cares?

Remembering the fine wines in the cellar, Palmer pushed the door open and entered. Inside, he saw the Undying Club decked out with decorations, tables piled high with drinks, reminiscent of the welcome party Serey threw for him and Bologue on their first visit.

Wait, a party?

Between balloons and streamers, a banner hung above the bar with faintly visible words of welcome.

Palmer's heart was touched.

Turning to see the busy Serey, who was fiddling with something by the dome jukebox, Serey then noticed Palmer. Before Serey could say anything, Palmer gave Serey a big hug.

"Didn't expect it, didn't expect an undead to care about me this much!" Palmer exclaimed tearfully.

True to the saying about rowdy friends, at such times, only Serey would celebrate his discharge.

Palmer's enthusiasm was a bit overwhelming for Serey, who quickly seemed to realize something and appeared conflicted.

"Serey, you are my true brother!" Palmer shouted.

But the anticipated response didn't come. Palmer looked suspiciously at Serey, while Serey uncharacteristically turned his head to avoid Palmer's gaze.

Palmer awkwardly released Serey and looked at the surroundings, "Is this welcome party prepared for me?"

Serey said nothing.

"Is... it?" Palmer cautiously asked.

Just then, a few balloons bumped and moved aside, revealing the words beneath the banner.

"Welcome new friend Aimou..."

Chapter 370: Barila

"Don't cry, Palmer, this happens all the time, doesn't it?"

Bologue and Aimou hadn't arrived yet, so Serey and Palmer started drinking first. Palmer was visibly distressed, while Serey kept trying to console him.

"No, I'm not crying, it's just the drink. I just... I just never thought that an Alchemy Puppet would take everything away from me."

By the end, Palmer's voice was trembling, and his whole body was shaking uncontrollably.

Palmer could understand why Bologue was attracted to Aimou; after all, his partner was quite a weirdo. He wouldn't be surprised by any eccentricities, but he never expected Serey to be swayed too.

Looking up at the welcome banner was utterly humiliating for Palmer.

He'd only stayed at the Border Sanatorium for a few days, and everything changed upon his return.

"Serey, what's wrong with you!"

Palmer's anger rose in his chest, but halfway through, he gave up. After all, the drinks were Serey's private stash, and the Undying Club was Serey's territory.

Most importantly, Serey is a Night Race Lord. Who knows how powerful he is? As a mere Condenser, there's no way Palmer could take him on, not even in a drinking match against this undead boozehound.

The more Palmer thought about it, the worse he felt. His chest tightened, and he clutched his heart as he collapsed.

"Hey, hey! Don't die here!" Serey slapped Palmer's face repeatedly. "This is the Undying Club, you know what 'undying' means, right?"

Palmer twitched a couple of times, but hearing Serey's bizarre joke made him laugh uncontrollably.

Wei'Er watched Palmer as he cried and laughed, "This guy must be crazy, huh?"

"Or maybe he's just plain dumb," Bode commented from the side.

The protagonist hadn't even made an entrance yet, but Palmer was already too drunk. He had hoped to return to the Order Bureau and have a binge with Serey, but ended up with this outcome.

Palmer felt bitter inside, lying next to the bar as his snores gradually began.

"You two really get along," Wei'Er jumped onto the bar, her cat-like eyes roaming between Serey and Palmer, "I haven't seen you play so joyfully with someone in a long time."

"Hmm? Don't you find this guy interesting?"

Serey pulled out a Polaroid camera, put one foot on the bar, and crouched beside Palmer, striking a thumbs-up pose.

The shutter closed, and a photo popped out. Serey shook it vigorously, and it looked pretty good. He immediately pinned it to the wall.

"I've lived so long, yet I've never seen anyone quite like Palmer," Serey leaned against Palmer, "this guy lives... rather purely."

"Purely?"

Wei'Er walked over to Palmer. His face was soaked, as if he would drown in alcohol; he didn't look anything close to pure.

"Yes, forget the Undead, even for ordinary people, what do you think can make them happy?" Serey pondered. "It should be something complex, but for Palmer, having a drink and working a few days less makes him incredibly happy."

"This guy's happiness is ridiculously cheap, even his troubles are," Serey laughed constantly, pointing at the banner overhead, "he's actually troubled by something like this, my goodness."

"More like idiocy than purity," Wei'Er commented.

Serey thought of Wei'Er's past, curiously asking, "Wei'Er, if it were you back then, how would you seduce Palmer?"

Few knew of Wei'Er's past, but Serey was one among them. This seductive witch manipulated many men and toyed with power.

"I don't seduce idiots," Wei'Er replied bluntly.

"Palmer, you're just awesome!"

Serey vigorously slapped Palmer's back, but Palmer was completely drunk, only managing to grunt.

At this moment, a knock sounded at the door; Serey turned his head and called out to Bode, "They're here!"

Bode nodded. They had glorious or painful experiences, but since entering the Undying Club, it was all in the past. Now they're just ordinary members, enjoying drinks and awaiting the arrival of fate's end.

The door opened; as the visitors entered, confetti burst, streamers cascaded, clothing was adorned, balloons were pushed aside, and the welcome banner hung high.

The dome jukebox began running, its mechanical arm grasping a record, slowly turning as the song played.

"September's joyous dance~ The golden, radiant dreamscapes~"

This was Serey's favorite song.

"Ba-li-la~ Ba-li-la~"

Suddenly, the bar lights dimmed, colorful disco balls spun endlessly overhead, and with dynamic dance tunes, Serey effortlessly leaped out from behind the bar.

Though he looked robust, his steps were surprisingly nimble. He grabbed the pole, swinging effortlessly in the air.

He gracefully spun several times, skillfully took off his shirt, and flirtatiously winked at the incoming guests. Bologue stood at the door, expressionless.

After spinning several times, Serey soared again, landing on a chair, then bounced several times before scooping up Wei'Er.

This time, Wei'Er surprisingly didn't resist, allowing Serey to toss her like a ball to Bode, who caught her and turned her over to Bologue.

After a few graceful passes, Bologue steadily caught Wei'Er, who nestled comfortably in his arms, purring contentedly.

Serey then jumped off the bar, landing in a flourish, followed by exaggerated gestures. Bode also hurried over, standing behind Serey with hands raised high.

And that wasn't the end; Sai Zong crawled swiftly on the ground, sliding to position under Serey as the lights came on.

Like a concert's ensemble entrance, they had rehearsed all morning to perfect such movements.

"Welcome!"

"New friends!"

"Bow-wow-wow!"

As expected... Bologue sighed, knowing he shouldn't have expected anything from this group.

With the welcome show over, Serey grabbed the banner overhead and walked directly towards the woman near Bologue.

Serey had initially thought Aimou would be a tin can, but didn't expect her to resemble a human, almost indistinguishable.

She was tall, her hair tied up high, and somewhat dazed by Serey's performance. Before she could speak, Serey draped the banner over her.

"Welcome! Welcome!" Serey's eyes sparkled, "You must be Aimou!"

Serey thought to himself, no wonder Bologue ignored Palmer; how could Palmer ever compete with such a lady?

Just like Bologue, she seemed to have arrived straight from work without even changing clothes, still in her Order Bureau uniform. Yet this did not obscure her beauty; on the contrary, the normal attire accentuated it, even Serey had to admit, she was stunning.

Beautiful people look stunning in anything; a ragged dog remains a ragged dog no matter what it wears.

"You... Hello, I am Aimou."

Another voice spoke, and only then did Serey realize someone else had been there, hiding behind Bologue, finally peeking out.

"Oh, oh, you're Aimou then."

Serey chuckled as he was about to hang the banner on Aimou, but as soon as he stepped forward, he suddenly realized something.

This lady was Aimou, so who was the previous one?

Serey turned abruptly, seeing the woman—unlike many first-time visitors who were shocked and confused—after a brief surprise, she smiled and started curiously observing everyone present.

As a former Night Race Lord, now an Undying Club bartender, Serey had lived for unknown ages, but when this gaze swept over him, he felt a pricking sensation as if he was being stabbed by needles.

"This is Aimou's senior..." Bologue began introducing, but halfway through, Belli interrupted.

Belli extended her hand to Serey, completely unfazed by Serey's odd appearance, and spoke.

"Hello, Belli Yiyeta, position: Sublimation Furnace Core Minister."

A silence washed over the room, leaving only the jukebox's song playing on.

"Ba-li-la~ Ba-li-la~"