

Can you run away from the hunters?

THE ROYAL ARCANUM SERIES

BOOK TWO

WHITE FOXES

KEEFE R.D



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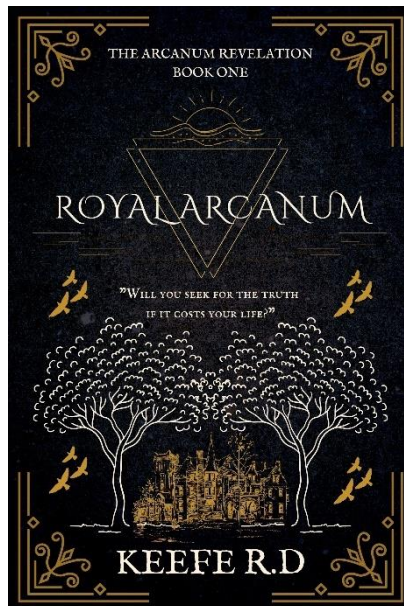
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Author's Little Note:

This story set in a different scenario than the reimagined version. In the alternate stories, things are different from the reimagined version that is more gothic and has a much more mature feel to the way the storytelling is established. This alternate series is a product of my learning process. This one focus more on Cathy's high school era. While the new version has a fast pace and rich insight into the world of Royal Arcanum.

The Reimagined Version is Available Now!

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The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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READING GUIDE:

The story is using two points of view.

The chapters are divided into two perspectives from different eyes;

1. Every chapter of *odd number* is the perspective of Cathy Charlotte.
2. Every chapter of *even number* is the perspective of Eleanor Heisler.



*For those who don't want to live in nightmarish life,
For those who don't want to live superficially.
"Bedenke das Ende", just like German proverb;
Whatever you do, consider the end.*

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PROLOGUE

THE NEWS HAD PROPAGATED around New York like no other oddity ever posted. The murder case wasn't the only number rank in the providence company. They never played an easy game, but a dangerous one. People clamored out their name, not their tantrum.

The rumor was between the truth and lie that no one could deny their power, since the ordinary exception could be touched by anyone for the momentary phenomenon, and the extraordinary perspective was going to become one of their contemporaneity guilty.

The acknowledgment had everything dealt with the winner. People always thought about it as the higher stratum, infinity, and coldness.

On the other side, the reporters wouldn't want to catch that, they rather gained a real tantrum and an episode of dying, because they were all believed in the oddity.

Grievously, the kindness didn't come from the frightening assemblage of *White Foxes*.

I

THE BEGINNING

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE APARTMENT HAD a good skyscraper prospect of brown building. The yellow cab taxis were parked against some small shops that seemingly dimmed out from the lights. The state that they called the Bronx was the fourth largest population in New York City's five boroughs.

On the first Saturday of July, both of them finally decided to come to the Bronx after moved out from the Rose Hill neighborhood in the city of New Rochelle where Sarah lived. Eventually, Haile was the one who insisted to leave with peace. She was in the state of worriment, although she had a thought to have a short meditation in a mountain hill that might help, it seemed profoundly too much since her decision was final.

The lobby was truly simplicity even it looked extensive from the main entrance, merely in the Parkchester Apartment. A few residents just walked out from the elevator with their depressing faces. The new city seemingly filled with some of ignorant people, which was way different from many of smiley

townsman in Bisbee. At least, there would always be someone who was kind-hearted to a new neighbor.

Cathy came up with another box to the fifth floor. At the same time she arrived, her mom thanked an old bald man who just lifted a heavy box to their door.

“Oh, let me introduce my daughter—Cathy,” and vice versa, she introduced him to her, “and this is Mr. Donald—our smiley-nice-neighbor.”

They got giggled together with his new nickname.

Swiss Donald was sixty-year-old bald man who lived next door. He was a strong man for someone at his age, and surely he had manner as he was very generous at their first arrival.

“Oh, let me bring it for you,” he forced to take away the box from her arms.

Cathy accidentally sounded jerking, “No, please,” and felt guilty about it, she quickly smiled, “I can bring it by myself, I don’t want to burden you.”

“Come on, I don’t feel that way,” he insisted and took the box away from her. “As soon as I knew there would be a new neighbor, I was so excited.”

It seemed that they were the only living people in this fifth floor. However, she felt really lucky on this first day of moving out, to have him as the man next door that unlike the rest of neighbors here, who pretended acting nescience.

There were still some tasks to do since her mom won’t rent for any man service to help bringing the heavy belongings, included two beds and a black refrigerator.

Mr. Donald’s room was half opened. Before she walked to the elevator, her sleepy eyes caught a woolgathered little girl who sat in his green velvet single sofa. She dressed in a white gown like Edwardian people. “Is that your little daughter?”

“What?” He confused while following her gaze.

“Your daughter—in that sofa,” she beckoned her eyes at the view.

He chuckled instantly. “I live alone in here. I had never seen anybody in this floor for a few years.”

He was right. The little girl disappeared when she peeped in again. It made Cathy thought that the girl couldn’t be human after all. She smiled for this awkward atmosphere, thus she hurriedly went downstairs.

It was a minute after she came with a box full of books, and she returned to the corridor where that little girl had appeared with no alert. That Edwardian girl carried a teddy bear in her arm while staring down at the floor.

She shocked, her lungs couldn’t grasp the air, and her eyes flickered. The girl had gone again. She realized that her sixth sense tried to emerge on the surface, it was frankly coming back.

Afterward, Cathy walked to the room number five-o-four to place the box in the small living room, while her mom lifted a heavy box on the kitchen desk in the next room.

She felt the dusts began clinging on her broken-white sweater, and even got worse to be seen on her black skinny jeans. The cranky dusts around the room still stayed since no one lived here for a few years.

The next thing, she coughed a lot. She pinned up her hair rashly as she wanted to take an anti-flu medicine. Later, she stopped for a while to check out what her mom had been doing in the kitchen.

She saw her mom was packing out some of white plates and mugs from the box. At the time, she had a wondering question that agitated her mind since they left Rose Hill.

“Why would we need to move here?” She demanded a distinct answer. “What’s wrong with Aunt Sarah’s place?”

Haile glanced at her. "I just want to."

"It's okay that I can drive to campus for fifteen minutes," she protested. "It's not that different from Rose Hill."

Her mom stopped packing out to face her steadily. "The truth is—we aren't safe enough. The demons can find us anytime. It's a dangerous risk for Sarah."

"But she's a royal too."

"Not *Puissant*—even when she always has a way to protect herself," her voice was firm enough to scare Cathy, "and your dad—we can't stay with him either."

"He lives in Brooklyn. How am I supposed to handle the traffic and its long road to arrive in time at campus?" Cathy sighed. "Of course we can't for that *obvious* reason."

Haile always hated this kind of conversation, because she couldn't have a good decision to go forth either to her husband or her younger sister, and now she made a gullible feeling toward her daughter.

"I always felt sorry for the life we've been through," her face was softened, but her arms were still crossing defensively, "I know it's not enough—*the reason*."

"Because you never truly say why," Cathy said.

The silence was in the air.

Haile strangled for this conversation. "Can we just not making things harder now?" She said while packing out a few stuff from the box again.

At this rate, Cathy couldn't push her mom's ignorance manner.

Subsequently, she explored the inside of this apartment, which had two small bedrooms, one bathroom, the storeroom was on the second floor, and the balcony decorated with some cactus and flowers, where the street view looked huge from above.

Her cellphone rang. Josh's name was on the screen. When she answered him, the noisy sound background was louder than his voice, but she knew he sounded exaggeratedly mad. "What are you up to?"

"I am in hell of paradise," he spoke infuriatedly. *"Guess what, my grandma had arranged the dorm package program without my confirmation, now I am stuck with Jordan the nerd."*

"Should I say sorry to hear that?" Cathy giggled. "Wasn't he our mate in high school?"

"Not at all," he denied, *"Not my friend."*

"He's not going to bite you, okay."

"As a matter of fact, he brings his cat while the rule forbids any kind of pet inside the dorm."

"Consider yourself lucky?" She couldn't think any great way to calm him. "I guess I'll call you later, I still need to pack out some stuff."

"Oh, the new apartment?" Josh noted. *"Okay, later."*

She hung up her phone, and then moved some of her personal belongings quickly to her bedroom, which located next to the living room and balcony.

The window curtain was opened, letting the sunshine struck across the brown floor. After all, she exhaled heavily to immerse in her new bedroom.



The next morning, Mr. Donald generously delivered a brown envelope for them. Haile hurriedly opened it to find a piece of paper was written by her own husband.

Cathy wondered what made her mom giggled by herself. "What is it?"

She tried to hold her laugh by the idea of that love letter, since the fact they had a tough life for a while, and now she would be able to control her emotion for this one. "It's from Manson."

Haile took her cellphone quickly to call him. "Hi, you don't need to send out a letter."

As she put his voice on the speaker phone, Cathy giggled along when he said, *"It's more traditional to congratulate on your new place. By the way, let's have a dinner tonight."*

After the phone call had ended, Cathy asked wonderingly, "What the traffic looks like in Sunday, especially going to Brooklyn?"

Haile patted her shoulder. "It's just fine."



The restaurant took place in Ohio, Brooklyn. Both of them finally arrived in an hour by car trip.

One of the waitresses led them to walk in a dimly huge room. A familiar man in brown suit sat alone on a red sofa while gazing down at the glimmering night view.

Haile hugged him first while asking curiously, "How's the new apartment?"

He only nodded greatly.

Cathy hugged him too, after her mom sat down beside him, "Dad, nice to see you."

Apparently, the waitress had waited to take their order. Manson chose a huge lobster and three ice tea for their dinner.

After the waitress walked away, he greeted them properly. "I am longing for our family reunion," he chuckled. "I rent a suite in Brownstone Apartment, it's a pretty nice small building for a living, and affordable. How about you guys, why moved out to the Bronx?"

“Cathy got accepted in Fordham University,” Haile answered while holding her breath. “I guess it’s best to move to the nearer place.”

That reason sounded unexplainable for Cathy, who actually didn’t agree to leave Aunt Sarah in New Rochelle. She shook her head for herself.

Manson noticed his daughter’s silent expression. “It’s only fifteen minutes from New Rochelle, you don’t have to move. How about your sister?”

“It’s the same fifteen minutes from Bronx,” Haile protested, “and she’s fine, nothing to worry,” she was breathless, “Look, I just need a time to feel comfortable. I just couldn’t for her sake though.”

“Well, if you don’t want to talk about it, that’s fine,” he managed to calm her. “Enjoy our night, we can only do this every weekend from now,” his smile was full of sorrow.

“You’ve been really busied, is everything alright?” Haile worried.

“I hope we don’t need to be separated like this—” he murmured, but the conversation got paused when the waitress brought a lobster and three ice tea to their table.

Cathy felt the same sorrow as her dad. She gazed down through the window, looking at the traffic road, where the night view looked beautiful from above this five-stars-hotel, which was one of the tall towers in Ohio.

Some memories in Bisbee got recalled on her mind. Everything that happened in High School, and included Elle’s disappearance that made her left in perplexing idea. That angel had gone without saying goodbye. Just like ashes. Everything had left her with a lonely feeling.

“Look at you—like a grandma in that clothes, also your hair?” Manson shot her a wondering look for her fashion sense

lately. She wore a thick quilted blue jacket and scarf coiled on her neck, and also, she had a messy pinned up hair as if she had a fever and she wished for it.

“I don’t want to get notice, that’s merely ordinary.”

Both of her parents laughed as they thought it was a practical joke. She smiled awkwardly while observing how stylish her mom with a black cardigan and that straggling black hair looked better than her own appearance.

Haile smiled affectionately at her. She knew that Cathy felt sad now.

“So, this is your treat, okay?” Haile asked him jokingly to pay their expensive dinner, besides the fact that he just finished his meeting with a client before they arrived here.

“By the way, I know a good bookstore around here, if you want to go—” he knew how to make his daughter become cheerful again. At that second, Cathy agreed and smiled happily.

Before they went, Haile wanted to use the restroom first. During the cozy atmosphere, Manson tried to relax for what he wanted to say next, “Cathy, I want to tell you something—encouragement.”

She nodded and waited, but he got strangled to say it.

“You know, this is New York,” he swallowed his saliva. “Don’t go to any club or bar—don’t get drunk, and alcohol—so not happening for you.”

She felt uncomfortable for this sudden talk, “Dad—”

“When you have a boyfriend, at least introduce him to me, don’t—”

“Dad, I get it,” she whispered as she was afraid if anyone might be overhearing this small talk, “It’s so awkward.”

“The most awkward talk between father and daughter, right?” He giggled.

"I am a young adult, you don't have to tell me," she said solemnly, and they chuckled together in the end of their dinner. "Thanks dad."



The bookstore wasn't far from the hotel, which was adjacent with a coffee shop. The place looked similar with Harvard Bookstore. The lights behind the glass window brightened the road outside.

They arrived at nine in the evening when the place wasn't as crowded as in the noon.

Cathy walked through the bookshelves excitedly. She skimmed her fingers slowly at the books, taking a look one by one, until she found one that was intriguing that reminded her of Josh, a book about how to be a musician.

Haile and Manson sat together to have coffees while observing their daughter from afar.

The raindrops started falling outside the window, he sighed in annoyance since he forgot to bring an umbrella.

"I think it will last in a short time," Haile comforted him. "We can wait."

On the other side, Cathy noticed that her parents only bought coffees for themselves. The thirsty feeling became contagious. Her mom just waved in time to call her.

Cathy approached them to tell what book she would buy. Manson laughed mockingly since he couldn't believe how Josh might be ended up as a musician, thus Haile glared warningly at him about no-hurt-feeling. He eventually apologized.

"Mom, I want to order a coffee latte, wait for me," she took off her blue jacket, only dressed in the same white sweater that she wore yesterday.

On the contrary against their great atmosphere, Haile had been well-wary toward something that both of them didn't aware since entering this bookstore café.

When Cathy went to the cashier, Haile changed her focus at a man in black suit, who sat alone in a table that was a few rows from the cashier. He looked as normal as everyone else in the room, but his eyes movement wasn't. He eyed Cathy like a spy, without blinking. In the next minute, Haile bulged out when he followed to stand next to her daughter in the café cashier, who wasn't aware whether it was a real danger or not. He was a young man, handsome, and tall.

He pretended to take another straw, and Cathy didn't even bother to look at someone beside her. She just returned calmly with her hot coffee latte.

He sat down again with a single cup in his white hand while kept glancing secretly at her. At that minute, he astonished when Haile stared back at him with full of awareness. He glanced back awkwardly, and then he pretended to read a magazine on his table.

Haile was still curious beyond his secretive motive.

Cathy noticed the oddity of her mom's silent idea, which was like in the old days whenever she held her anger, but this time, it looked more conducive. "Mom, are you alright?"

"Are you feeling unwell, honey?" Manson shouted after.

Haile smiled at them. "I am alright. Let's just go home before it will rain again."

The farewell was short. Manson accompanied them until Cathy started the car engine. Nonetheless, he chose to ride with a yellow cab taxi from here, it wasn't that far from Brownstone Apartment.

Haile could feel relieve for a moment, although that strange handsome man was still observing them behind the window of the bookstore café.

Cathy wondered with what her mom had been concerning, but she didn't bother to ask any further. Afterward, she pushed the gas throughout the night road.



Three months later, the first Monday of September 2012.

The main entrance was much bigger than what they usually saw in Bisbee High School. The field got crowded by young students in this freshman year. A group of people ran in marathon around the campus, while the rest looked busied with each activity by reading, chatting, or even chewing a gum. Everyone could see the old ancient building from the front yard. This was Fordham University.

The three of them laid down on the green grasses and ready to breathe the new atmosphere.

“What are we?” Jordan chuckled. “The new three musketeers?”

“Shut up or I'll put this grass on your mouth, seriously,” Josh got peeved since this morning they had faced each other inside the dorm.

Jordan shrugged ignorantly, while Cathy won't bother with their argument since she preferred to observe the people who walked around the building

Nothing looked particular, nothing odd yet.

It was almost ten in the morning that they actually needed to run for their next class, but instead they spent another five minutes to enjoy the air around.

“I need some break,” Jordan muttered. “Let's skip class today.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Cathy wondered.

“The previous lecturer is pretty annoying,” Josh said as he knew it for sure. “Trust me, I want to skip too, but if you want to fail, then you decide.”

“Should I know what does that mean?” Cathy baffled.

“She has a mono, maybe bipolar,” Jordan explained. “I hate every Monday now. We have twice class in a day with her, can you imagine?”

Josh sighed, and then he stood, helping Cathy to rise from the grass. “Let’s hold on.”

“You’ll be okay. I’ll treat you guys a lunch—if you can return alive,” she giggled.

“I envy your Monday, since mine is a disaster, she has a tongue like snake,” Josh muttered

The three of them walked through the open staircase in the terrace along with other students. Suddenly, some people looked terrified in their own admiration against something. When they reached the upper terrace, everyone was still whispering.

“What’s wrong?” Cathy murmured.

“Okay, I’ve heard some kind of rumor,” Jordan said. “There—you see,” he beckoned his chin at a girl dressed in a quilted black jacket.

Everyone secretly glanced at her arrival. No one seemingly dared to make fun of her, or even to greet her. She walked alone in her arrogant way with that pair of fierce blue eyes. When her platinum-blond hair swooshed away, all the people around could smell her majestic charisma. As she disappeared to the door, everyone in the terrace began to make a noise.

“Horrible girl,” Josh muttered.

“What a trouble young lady—just like you both.”

Cathy and Josh were concurrently shouted at him. “HEY!”

“What are you guys have to do with her?” She couldn’t get it.

“Nothing,” Josh shrugged, but his eyes rolled agitatedly. “Don’t you know who she is?”

Cathy didn’t blink, her eyes stared constantly at them.

“She’s the one that most students will feel frightened with,” Jordan shouted. “I’ve heard she’s coming from a wealth family,” he bulged out and murmured, “no one dare to talk, no one dare to touch.”

“What’s the point?” Cathy narrowed her eyes. “Is that what makes people afraid?”

“No, maybe,” Jordan glanced at her. “The *majestic* rumor about her, more than into it—”

“It’s not exactly the point,” Josh shouted. “She isn’t nice with anyone,” he stared at her. “You hadn’t arrived two hours ago to witness her manner in class.”

“Okay, you should keep your promise, Miss Charlotte,” his solemn demand had made Josh wanted to yell in this public space, he even made a silly mimic, gesturing his hands as if he was eating an imaginary food, “lunch, lunch.”

“It’s fine,” she patted Josh’s shoulder to calm him.

Josh smiled at her. “No worry.”

2

SUMMERTIME

ELEANOR HEISLER



THE UPPER EAST SIDE, Manhattan, New York. Before July.

On Sunday afternoon, the daylight had returned to its continuum. She yawned and rose up from her king-sized bed. She opened the huge curtain beside the bed while scratching her messy hair, although the color of her hair somewhat looked bright platinum under the sun.

The cars weren't seen in the yard yet. She won't expect though, doubtless.

She had heard someone knocked at the door almost every five seconds—it annoyed her mood, and became more annoying when they called by her majestic title. “*Your Highness*, the Lady wants to meet you.”

She still dressed in a pink pajama when she hurriedly slammed the door in front of the young servant. “What time is it?”

“Fo-four in the afternoon, Your Highness,” she trembled.

“You know what, don't do that again,” even when her voice sounded relax, people could go shiver against her.

“My apologies, but the Lady has been angry since this morning—”

“I get it,” before she walked away, she beckoned at that female servant to clean up her room.

She observed the tranquility around this mansion and she hadn’t turned downstairs when someone called out her name, “Eleanor Heisler!”

When she turned back, there was the elegant old lady dressed in a cream suit while bulging out her blue eyes. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Whenever I want to, this is my legs, not yours,” she could shatter her grandmother’s heart in no second.

“How dare you speaking like that to me!”

Eleanor crossed her arms, and said, “What do you want, anyway?”

“Prepare yourself for the Brooklyn Party, it’s next week,” she sighed while her voice retained a rage. “I don’t want you to be a runaway bride again, do you understand?”

Her grandmother looked tremendously charismatic and charming. Both of them looked pretty similar with the same hair color, only the Lady had always styled her hair with an elegant up-do as her everyday look, while Eleanor always had her wavy hair half pinned up.

“You just call me for that?” She chuckled. “What a waste.”

The Lady sighed and didn’t want to argue further since she knew very well about her granddaughter’s manner that was unlikely unchangeable. She was longing for the old times when Eleanor was just a naïve child who didn’t know how to be rude to anyone. The silence argument approached her mind, but something more scattering was on its way. It attached within her seemingly harmonious family.

Eleanor returned to her bedroom and got calmed down when she saw everything became tidy again. The jasmine aroma therapy was smelled from her bathroom.

The servant had been working more than ten years for this family, thus she always knew what the landlord wanted in their room.

Eleanor had been sleeping all day long. She had nothing to do in the weekend, except if her family turned into a party animal, particularly to be treated as one of the exclusive guests in an event. She hated it.

Her white telephone rang on the table beside the bed. She answered it lazily to hear a woman screamed out excitedly. Right away, she knew who the caller was.

"So rare you have a time to call me," Eleanor muttered.

"Oh no, my lovely niece, I want to invite you for the summer holiday. It will be a picky year, I am lonely, don't you?"

"I hate you to say that, I'll hang up if you saying nothing worth."

"Alright, I'm serious," her voice was too light and cheerful, *"let's have a pajama party in my house, let's have fun."*

"You mean, you want me to fly to Florida?" Eleanor was in disbelief. *"This house landlord just want me to come for the next week party,"* she sighed to know the fact. *"I won't be able to run away again—she paid for some extra bodyguards."*

"You still dare to call her that way? She's your grandmother, you little brat."

Eleanor sighed. *"When do you want me to come?"*

After her aunt got the exact schedule, Eleanor needed to make a strategic plan to run from more than thirty muscular bodyguards who were all acted like a ninja in this Heisler's mansion.

Officially, Eleanor had been invited by her aunt—Hadley Heisler, who was born as the youngest child of the honorable Lady. The fun was about to begin—and she was ready.



Captiva Island, Florida. Two days later.

At least, she could breathe in this kind of air. Just a week she would stay here where there weren't wires to suffocate her lungs. The beach scenery from the backyard of this little white house was filled with fresh oxygen. It was quiet. The location took place in one of the exclusive beachfront house.

"Ah, summertime!" A tall woman of one-hundred-seventy-eight-centimeters shouted excitedly. She stretched out in the terrace. Her skin was white porcelain, the same kind of flawless as the girl behind her.

"You look happy," Eleanor said.

"It's because you have time to visit me," Hadley faced her niece who was shorter, about one-hundred-sixty-eight. They wore white shirt and short pants that fitted perfectly. "Ah, look at us, we're wearing the same shirt!" They observed each other in a tremendous yearning.

"You even re-color your hair?" She pointed her chin at her black-violet hair.

"I don't want to have any similarity trademark with them," she said while touching the edge of her boyish short hair.

"You know what—people with white hair and blue eyes aren't always related with *White Foxes*."

The atmosphere turned silence when she said that. Hadley stared blankly at her with a slight of pain. There was only the sound of ocean waves, and a few seagull birds flew around the bright blue sky.

“Oh well, when was the last time you sunbathed?” She ignored her pain and changed the topic. “Your skin is like a snow color,” she tried to joke since she held her tears. “Oh, come, come.”

In the backyard, there were two wooden chairs that were facing the view of the blue ocean. She wore her black sunglasses, and concurrently she invited Eleanor to sit beside her. In that moment, she breathed out to find a relaxation in nature.

Eleanor followed to sit after. Under the sun, their legs were stretched forward.

“I lose my appetite tonight,” Hadley murmured.

“What?”

“Oh God, you know how I hate that caramel cheese flavor. I have some in my refrigerator if you want.”

“Are you offering me a rotten cake? What a joke,” she jerked out.

Their conversation got paused for a while as they gazed straightly at the beach view.

Her aunt started talking again, “I don’t know why whenever I meet you I get excited.”

Eleanor only stared in silence. She had no words to say. Hadley didn’t seem aware of how her statement could impact this nineteen-year-old girl to feel like drowning. No one ever said that to her. It was a merely enclosed disaster if anyone could notice a dizzy feeling she had encountered in that morning, in which case she brought a small suitcase, and had successfully escaped from Manhattan.

“Maybe because you’re lonely,” she laughed all by herself.

“Huh, you still a little brat.”

“Why don’t you get married?”

Her wide smile had gone away, Hadley exhaled heavily whenever someone would ever ask her about that. “Stop it. You know I hate that topic.”

“Why?” Eleanor insisted. “Because you’ll afraid if grandma might hurt your husband.”

“She doesn’t like me at all. What can I say?”

“Then, don’t like her back. *Vengeance of hate*,” Eleanor made her aunt shivered. Hadley couldn’t do it better like her little niece—hate meant forgotten. Even though hate was a static karmic without considering a logical thinking, anyone could do that, but only a few could resist not to.

Eleanor didn’t seem to care of her aunt’s feeling, and she rephrased the question, “Why don’t you get married?”

“I am thirty-seven-year-old woman with pride,” she said firmly. “I know finding an ideal husband isn’t the same like putting an ice cream in our tongue, but that isn’t the truth for me. I can if I want, but the problem isn’t in there,” she took off her sunglasses, and stared solemnly at her. “I don’t want to end up like your mother, okay.”

Eleanor couldn’t even swallow her own saliva as she got shocked with her surprising words. In return, she shot her with a flat tone instead, “You mean, being slashed by a demon?”

Hadley almost jumped out from her chair. She stared perplexingly at her. “You can—see?”

“Why not? I’m one of them anyway. My parents never died from that car accident.”

“But—they always thought that you can’t,” she still shocked, her eyes bulged out widely.

Eleanor ignored her surprise feeling. Nothing would change the fate when it done and this conversation couldn’t bring back her happiness.

Hadley was speechless as she conquered with her own mind. For a second, she tried to reduce a space between the idea of karmic and logic—that was *the hate*.

Eleanor left her to get inside the beach house. Her aunt followed quickly. The messy living room had annoyed her mood. Random comics and snacks were scattered on the floor. She thought that her aunt's habit was like a kindergarten kid. The only neat space in the house was the bathroom.

"What a mess. How can you be a housewife if you're living like this?"

"Don't underestimate me, you just born yesterday."

Eleanor jumped to sit in a brown velvet sofa that felt like a warm blanket. Hadley crossed-arms while her mind still spinning with all the offensive words from her niece. Eleanor realized though, but she won't bother to say sorry.

"Yikes, is that your cheese cake?" She beckoned her finger at a single rotten cake on a glass table in front of that flat-screen television.

"Ah, it was almost two weeks I didn't take it," she shrugged poorly. "Anyway, how long you'll stay here?"

"Until that Brooklyn Party will be over, I'll return."

"Still a party animal they are?" Aha, how could I forget while you are their magnificent asset."

She bewildered against her statement, at least she won't provoke anybody in their important family for the thing that made them profoundly great, but she couldn't get over it before she got an answer. "May I know, what does that mean?"

Hadley sat oppositely in the arm of that sofa. She inhaled deeply while choosing each word carefully, "Don't you know why they keep you on their side?"

"Because I'm still under twenty?"

“No, you brat. You are their heritage, their only hope. If you don’t have something they need, you’ll die just like the others. Tragically they will end your life in a sadist way.”

“What does that supposed to mean? Die?”

“You’re still a leaf green. They think that you’ll be easy to manipulate. I’m sure you feel the same way as I do—wondering why we should born in this family that doesn’t feel like a family after all?”

“Imperfectly, yes we did,” Eleanor agreed.

“*White Foxes* is an orthodox family that undergo their life like an organization system without empathy, compassion, and only concern of their own interest—being a royal doesn’t mean anything.”

“Are you too afraid to mention her—as everyone calls her the honorable Lady,” she reminded her. “The person behind White Foxes is that woman all along, there’s only one person who controls everything in this family.”

“Eleanor, I hope you understand yourself one day about why we shouldn’t be badmouthing a specific member in W.F.,” she was careful to say it. “It’s bad for your life.”

“Why should I be afraid?” Eleanor protested. “There’s no reason for me to be a little nice granddaughter. She should remember at the first place, why am I acting like this until now.”

“Well, it’s been eleven years. Three months from now is your parents’ death anniversary.”

“Will you come to my parents’ grave?” Eleanor asked. “Together?”

“I’d love to.”

They smiled at each other, for the promise they made, and to remember those days that had passed. The remembrance

won't make both of them broken like a whimper kid yet. One moment was a greater treasure.

3

THE ORPHIC ONE

CATHY CHARLOTTE



TUESDAY WOULD BEGIN with a couple hours of Literary Analysis class. She still remembered the exact corridor to get through. The door was opened. The class already filled with half of the freshman students. Her eyes was hardly fluttered to pick a seat, at last, the most comfortable one for her had always been next to a window. She threw her satchel bag on the table.

No one paid any attention at her arrival. Everyone already mingled with their own group and chattered loudly with no pause. She felt her head got a sudden headache from all the noises.

Five minutes later, a man entered the door, dressed neatly in his black suit. The noises immediately turned into a silent admiration against his young appearance. Every girl got agape to see his charisma.

“Good morning,” he greeted. “I’m sure a few seniors may have already known me from the previous semester, or maybe half of this class?” Everyone laughed concurrently, he showed

his dimpled smile. "But, because this is a freshman year, I'll redo my introduction."

The girls were almost fainted when his smile widened, particularly when he dressed in a formal suit—precisely all black that contrasted with his pale white skin, and his charisma had projected a mysterious atmosphere.

His brown eyes studied around the classroom for a second.

"Oh, Johanna? You've taken my class again?" He looked surprised while that girl with a curly blonde hair was nodded with a high hope since she shouldn't be in a freshman class anymore. "It's your fourth time, please do your best in this semester."

"This is the third year I've been teaching in here," the lecturer introduced himself officially. "My name is Alexander MacLain. It's my pleasure to meet all of you," his dimpled smile made a few girls went dizzy. "FYI, gaining a good score in my class is easy. If you play by the right rule, I'll let you pass," he scared everyone though. "So, welcome to my English class."

He mentioned the class as in general, even though they would begin a formal analysis course of English literature. As a matter of fact, Cathy had overheard some students on her back, whispering about him about all those great scores that was never as easy as the real rule he had explained. There were more than ten seniors besides Johanna in this class. It made her thought about a severe joke of the student's failure.

"Won't you tell us where you come from and how old are you, sir?" One of the flirty girls shouted.

He chuckled as soon as the girl whirled her long brown hair.

Furthermore, he looked unwittingly to make an eye contact with Cathy. As if there was an electrical shock that got into them at the same time. The world wasn't belonged only

for them, but the time seemed to spin and then stop, only between them. No one in the classroom realized that strange moment. He stood frozenly after his smile decreased to agape. He stopped blinking, but it couldn't pause any longer before the attention moved forward. "Can I just playing the role as a mysterious guy?"

Everyone laughed at his joke.

Concurrently, he glanced back and forth at Cathy, without anyone ever noticed. She astonished though—that bright brown eyes made her trembled.

"Alright, I was born in German. I am twenty-nine-year-old single man."

"May I know, do you speak German?" The same flirty girl asked him desperately.

"Fluently. My ancestors were all born in German," he answered. "But our class is English, so, please stay focus, ladies."

The class turned as a syndrome magnetic field for some girls. He was a handsome lecturer with pride and charisma, some said that. Cathy annoyed with all that talk. They should focus at his lecture about Victorian novels. In her luck, she had done reading some of classic books during holiday, as for the rest she could breathe easier.

"Charles Dickens, anyone has read one of his books?" He asked, and then he glanced slightly at Cathy for an answer, but she was too silent and resisted to look down on her table. She hated the idea of talking in front of many people.



The bell rang finally. It was break time. College students looked calmer than High School students. She remembered how high school filled with a lot of euphoria

holler every time each class had ended. But in here, people surely acted more mature.

At twelve in the noon, she went to canteen. Josh and Jordan already waited for her in the middle of the room. She bought them with two mackerel tomatoes, and a soda drink for herself.

They were enthusiast. Jordan had a wide eyes as he took the silver tray from her, but he wanted an orange juice too. So forth, while he went, Cathy took out a present she bought for Josh.

He wondered at first. "Musician's guidebook?" He smiled. "Definitely good."

"I bought it from Brooklyn."

"Wait, did you buy it in front of your dad?" He narrowed his brown eyes. "He probably thought about me as a laughing stock."

"Well, sort of," she shrugged and felt sorry. "Please don't be offended. You know my dad, it's just a joke."

He shrugged back. "Yeah, surely, Cathy."

As soon as Jordan came back, he noticed that book, he yelled out, "Wow man, you're not going to be serious about it!"

"Why not?" He chuckled. "I'm going to be an indie musician along with my guitar."

"You can play in San Francisco. They have the greatest bar for any solo singer," Jordan said, as he was the one who looked excited.

"You want me to sing in there and just leave Bronx?" Josh shook his head as he felt annoyed. "For how many times do you have to say it?"

"No, man. I'm serious. You'll get a lot of money in there."

“You’ve said that in the dorm this morning. Now, I want you to shut up!” He was depressed.

“Cathy, don’t you know? I used to play bass in my friend’s band,” he gestured with his hands as if he played a guitar.

“She doesn’t even ask you,” Josh muttered. “Cathy, seriously don’t listen to this nerd.”

Finally, Jordan took a seat and placed his orange juice beside the foods. Cathy smiled for this moment they spent a good time.

“I’m so hungry since she aimed me like a terrorist victim,” Jordan muttered while eating the mackerel.

Cathy immediately shot Josh with a wondering eyes. “He got scolded for the question he couldn’t answer,” he sighed and at once felt necessary to yell at his face, but he won’t do it in this public space. “I told you don’t make that stupid mimic in the middle of her session.”

“Yeah, Ms. Madeley or whatever her name is, she will be the most unfavorable lecturer in this country, add that with Miss Heisler sit next to our table,” Jordan couldn’t get over it.

Cathy bewildered for a second, thus Josh shouted after, “She’s pretty popular—*Eleanor Heisler*—the one that people are frightened with. Remember the girl we came across in the front terrace? That was her,” he said. “We had the same class with her, along with that scary lecturer. How incredible.”

She wasn’t up-to-date and didn’t well aware about the girl which every single student, lecturer, and even some security guards had been whispering the secretive rumor about her. Until yet, she didn’t think about the girl as crucial as everyone did.

“Come on, you guys shouldn’t give up for one lecturer, though you’re not the only one,” Cathy sighed. “I’ve met

another lecturer today, he looks nice, but a rumor says his class is tremendously hard to pass. At least, it sounds scary too.”

“Who’s he?” Josh was curious.

It was the exact time that handsome lecturer walked to the vending machine to grab a soda drink. Cathy inhaled deeply as she pointed out her chin at his presence. “There—Alexander MacLain.”

“Him?” Josh seemed to disbelief. “We had English quiz at the first day of the interview, it was hard for most students, not for me, and Jordan almost got failed, it turned lucky that Mr. MacLain gave him a quick remedial.”

“What happened, really?”

Josh glanced at him. “Jordan wouldn’t live without me. His dad kept asking about that day.”

“I owe you, man,” Jordan felt relieved now. “My dad might sue me for that last summer if he knew the truth.”

Cathy listened to every last detail of their worriment over the college life, while she drank a soda and wasn’t clumsy enough to pour it into her sweater like the other day in the apartment. Sometimes, her eyes glanced secretly at her new lecturer who was still picky to choose another energy drink in that machine. Only this time, when they made an eye contact, he left with a cold pressure on his lips, there was no nice smile like in the classroom earlier. Cathy felt weird. His eyes movement made a diversion which was too different. Only one thing against that strangeness—she couldn’t forget that mesmerizing brown eyes.

“See you guys tomorrow,” she rose from the chair and waved at them.

“Do you need a ride?” Josh asked.

“No, I bring a car.”

She wanted to visit a place where they wouldn't follow. It was a quality time for herself.

She was helpless to remember that there was a small bookstore café behind Fordham's building. It might be a place she'd like to visit often. The pavement path to that place kind of reminded her with the night in Brooklyn.

Two in the afternoon, she arrived in front of a red-white canopy which was written a name on the window: Cavely Bookstore Café.

As she entered the door, a small chime rang above it. The dimmed room kind of blurred out her vision. No one seemed to walk around the place. Everything felt vintage. She spotted random ancient handwritings and photos in every corner of this blue wall. Mostly about gypsies and witches—they emphasized the difference which they cursed on any *witch* name. Some were clips from newspaper. Each photo told a history too. As it stated on the photos, the gypsies were Brazilian, along with a native tribe they joined in. But one thing that made her wondered was the bookstore's owner had also treasured a photo of Bubaa and Lionelle Margaretha—they were gypsies that she met a year ago in Austria. It still felt odd.

Her eyes caught some dream-catchers that hung on each corridor of those wooden bookshelves. It didn't seem like any ordinary accessories. Afterward, She browsed a few books to feel the dusts lingered on her fingers.

"Can I help you?"

Cathy turned her back and startled when the old woman with white bob hairstyle had greeted her, plus she wore a black long sleeve shirt covered in a yellow knitted vest that made her looked mystical somehow. That woman waited in the cashier table.

"Uh, I need to look for Charles Dickens' book."

“Oh, my dear, of course we have, please come,” she leaded Cathy to the backside of those upfront bookshelves. The section stated as the Victorian and Edwardian centuries.

“Did Mr. MacLain give you a lecture about it today?” She guessed it correctly and smiled with her yellow teeth.

Cathy was surprised that there was a hidden abyss inside her voice. “Yes, he just did this morning. Do you know him?”

“Well known. He often spending time in here. Such a young man—” she said while her white hands exploring the books.

“Does he?” Cathy noted. “Just in time, he give us the first assignment on Dickens’ literature.”

She gave her a few lists of Dickens’ books. “Are you a freshman student?”

“Yes, and this is my first time coming to your bookstore,” Cathy said while her eyes got confused to choose the book of the lists, so she picked randomly. “What time that people usually visit here?”

“Depends. Not many in weekdays,” she shrugged. “Are you perhaps looking for a quiet time?”

“I guess,” Cathy smiled.

“Won’t you try a taste of our café menu—black or white coffee?” Before she answered, a girl about eight-year-old in sleeveless pink dress ran to this woman to whimper.

“Oh, this is my daughter—Anita,” she introduced that little girl who had tan skin and braided black hair, “and my name’s Checille Margaretha.”

There was a wonderment that they would have the same surname with those gypsies. She didn’t want to show her surprise feeling. “I am Cathy Charlotte.”

The girl smiled widely to her. Cathy bent down to see her from up close. “Hi, nice to meet you.”

“Me too.”

Her whimpering session was ended, Anita turned happy and bright. Checille couldn't beg for further talk. Anita went away again to the door near the cashier, because she was shy.

“It was rare to see her look happy,” she murmured. “Schizophrenia—I won't say that, but the doctor insists to give her a bag full of stupid medicines.”

“How's she today?”

“Worst,” her expression turned sadder.

Cathy pitied for what happened. “I'll come by every now and then.”

Checille smiled again. “That's good. Won't you try a coffee first?”

“Oh, no, I just want to buy the book,” she said, and they moved to the cashier to pack that hardcover book. It last for a few minutes.

“Miss Charlotte,” she called out before Cathy pushed the door. “I just want to say—*I like your eyes.*”

Cathy didn't sure if she should feel something, but her statement felt odd rather than a mere compliment, especially when she started to smile, the ambience turned a bit orphic.

4

BEHIND THE KEY

ELEANOR HEISLER



MANHATTAN'S UPPER EAST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Eleanor had dressed in a navy blue blouse and short black leather pants since nine in the morning, and no one had knocked at her door yet.

I want to know if I could run away again, she muttered.

She pulled out the curtain to see a black sedan was parked in the yard. It seemed unfamiliar, but soon she noticed that her uncle just came out from that car with some black suit bodyguards had surrounded him.

"What a flush," Eleanor murmured sarcastically. She hurriedly went downstairs to see him from up close.

Every servant had prepared themselves to stand on the marble floor of that huge foyer. A new ambience had arrived. None of these servants ever dared to look directly against their landlords.

The two black suit bodyguards stood to guard the double door like a bunch of frightening mafia.

“Oh, Marshall!” Her grandma was the first person to welcome him excitedly. She kissed him on his cheek as they hugged each other for the longing. It was literary a long time since he lived and worked in France. Finally, for a current time he decided to stay in Heisler’s mansion with his family.

As Eleanor walked to the foyer while chuckling by herself, she gazed sharply at them, although she always did it to everyone. At the same time, the Lady’s first daughter had just walked downstairs—Sofia dressed in a gold fur coat, her shoulder-length platinum-blonde hair was impeccably beautiful.

Eleanor grimaced when she warned her about the manner. It was a bad habit that she knocked down a fierce stare even at her aunt.

On the other side, he noticed his niece’s unwelcomed expression. “Isn’t this our beautiful Eleanor?”

She crossed her arms defensively against his greeting. He managed that awkward atmosphere though, and shouted after, “You’ve grown up like a lady.”

One of the servants coughed at that untrue admiration. Luckily for her that the landlords didn’t aware of her reaction.

The Lady grasped his shoulder. Her face looked worried for a second. “Does that reporter still following you?”

He wasn’t happy that his mother would know anything even in the particular event about his life. “You don’t have to worry.”

“Marshall, you know how bothering it will be?” She insisted to talk about it. “That woman need to be taken care of—just let me.”

“Mother, she’s just another paparazzi in a reporter costume,” he said. “Another fans.”

"I know everything," she gave out a warning. "Lydia Brimham works for the newspaper company in New York. She could go public for your private life."

"Brimham Newspaper isn't a big company," he rolled his blue eyes. "Let's not deal with it."

The Lady caressed his cheek once again. She smiled and wanted to be relieved. Behind them, Sofia waited for her turn to greet him. She came to grasp his shoulders yearningly. "Ah, seriously, how old are you?"

Jonathan Marshall Heisler was a businessman with a young face. No one could believe he was already thirty-eight-year-old since July on this year, and he still looked like he was born ten years younger. He didn't much change. All the descendants of the Heisler had seemingly treasured a familiar appearance starting from their platinum-blond hair, blue eyes, and pale white skin. As much it did to him, especially with his body height of one-hundred-eighty-eight-centimeters.

"Don't make a vanity for me. I've always been like this," he smiled.

"Of course, you're the only handsome son among all of your three sisters," the Lady said.

"Perhaps, you mean two sisters," Eleanor shouted firmly. "My mother died, and maybe the fourth child will die sooner than anyone could expect."

"Eleanor!" She yelled in a great anger, although everyone knew the fact that it was Hadley she had referred. "There's a time your rudeness reach my limit to handle. Stop your shameful habit!"

"You're the one who makes me this way!" Eleanor screamed out to astonish everyone. She ran upstairs immediately to her bedroom. There were a lot of sadness she won't perceive. Nothing would change that to bring her

parents return in her arms. A tough thing she always held was a bitterness to hold the tears that would never drop. She couldn't cry anymore.

At least, after a few minutes of reverie, she should be hurried for college. She wore her raven black stocking, gray fur coat, and small black handbag.

Her new chauffeur had waited in front of the gate. He welcomed her politely as he opening the passenger's door of that shiny black Mercedes-Benz for her. They were ready to go before the other family members noticed, and that way she could live the day.



Manhattan seemed fine for her silent disturbance.

There was a park that mingled like a kaleidoscope in her peripheral vision. Most people excited to refresh their mind in the Central Park. She was there a long time ago with her parents for a few times before they passed away.

Her face was flat but fierce at once. It was like a river that stabbed by a heavy rain. She wasn't restless to recall all those yearning memories. Her eyes gazed out at that huge park through the car window. Other than that, there was something that bothering her, waiting to be found out, but not yet.

The secrecy inside the brown envelope she held was the one to be concerned now. Her aunt—Sofia was pretty well-way to give her the sentimental secret before her uncle arrived in their mansion. Her grandmother didn't even notice. Thus, she hoped this would be something important rather than a joke. She needed to decode it sooner, but she won't open it for now.

About less than thirty minutes from Manhattan to Bronx, the car almost reached to the upfront gate of Fordham

University. It was seven in the morning. There weren't many people around the area. Some students were jogging around. The maple tree almost turned reddish orange like an autumn color, and each flag clung in every corner of the pavement next to the streetlamps. It was a code area to inform that the visitor had entered Fordham's territorial.

"Stop the car," she hissed at the young chauffeur who was about her age.

"But—" before he could say more, Eleanor glared at him. "I'm sorry, but the Lady has demanded me to—"

"I don't care what she said. Just drop me off in here from now on," she slammed the door harshly afterward. She knocked at his window. After he lowered it down, she spoke alertly, "Pick me up in here too. Do you understand?"

He nodded, felt frightened at her demand. He couldn't even look her directly in the eye because his body was shivering alone.



She didn't try to make a scene. The ambience was all around again when the students were glancing back and forth at her slender figure. That way she always had a fierce eye. It was like everyone was mumbling about the hidden thing that she carried everywhere, even though she got nothing to hide, except for her glorious family. At least no one was well-aware of her identity. If that case might be happened, she would move to another college. If it was just for two or three people who knew the real deal, she won't bother.

Creative Writing class would begin in no minute. Everyone walked to their each class. Eleanor already sat in the back of the classroom like no one would care with her presence, but she was wrong all along. Every pair of eyes flickered like a

magnet against her majestic charisma. They were all really wanted to know her better, but too afraid to talk for what she would always end up with—*sarcasm*.

Against everything, she wouldn't have thought to bother herself with the first arrival of the seemingly innocent girl. She just noticed her existence today. It was beyond her awareness that she felt anxious at once curious with that girl. There was definitely something different beneath that girl's ordinary clothes, either of her blue jacket or black jeans, and even her long brown hair with a shade of mahogany color, and pale white skin. Nothing should be paid with attention.

Eleanor kept staring at that girl, who was giggling with her two friends now.

"Cathy, I'd like to present you with a brownish cake party at our dorm," the boy with nerdy eyeglasses that she knew as the dumbest joker—Jordan was speculating with that girl, and she just noted her name.

And the boy she knew as seemingly a hard thinker was Josh, he shouted after, "You're not kidding, huh?"

"I'll consider it, unless there won't be any tremulous act," Cathy said.

She listened to their small talk, and to notice that Cathy had a soft and weak voice.

After Jordan took a seat in the edge of the window along with them, he noticed Eleanor's presence immediately. She sat beside their table. His eyes rolled and whispered, "Hey, look who's here. A madam serenade of a new classy—"

"Shut up, Jordan. I need to rest for a day from your stupidity," Josh spoke as he felt annoyed.

Eleanor knew that he tried to mock her, and she knew perfectly that the two boys were often glancing at her since in yesterday classes. It was a fancy accident when they made an

eye contact. Josh was breathless as he realized he was staring too obvious at her, later he pretended to read a random literature notes on the wall. Because of that little incident, Eleanor chuckled sarcastically in return. They noticed. Unfortunately, they didn't have much to say since knowing with what kind of person they would confront, there might be a battle if they didn't give it a rest.

"Morning class, I'll be quick, we will have a chance to look for creative writing in survival poetry from the last summer," a tall woman lecturer with brown hair half pinned up was just arrived and she dressed formally in red blouse and knee-length black skirt. "Didn't any of you write something in a holiday?"

"I'm perfectly sure that ninety-nine percent of us would rather be dying in the blue ocean," a senior student shouted impudently.

The lecturer smiled in calmness, eventually she endured the emotion from the inside. "Oh, my dear Samuel, have you ever read a poetry? Come to a tuxedo party? Enjoy a royal food?" She paused for three seconds before continued, "Let me know if all of you have done with the thirty-three pages of my bliss book."

Everyone clamored annoyingly to feel upset for their new task, besides the fact, it was a novel that she wrote for her student's task about a boy finding a peace within his agriculture art. It became the most painful task for every student in this semester.

"Oh God, kill me now. I just want a happy weekend with my grandma," she had heard Josh muttered while holding his forehead like there was a sudden headache.

"I know right?" Jordan chuckled. "There will always be some blisses in every page that will knock your head to knee."

Their seats were pretty close that they could hear the sound of her mocking. “Losers like you both—would only be able to sigh like a poor man,” all of them stared and wondered surprisingly at her. It was the first time Eleanor ever talked to them, even just a mock.

Two hours of discussion in the classroom had finally over. A lousy clock above the board had reached exactly at twelve. Every pair of eyes stared back and forth at the clock and the lecturer, who never stopped talking. They needed a break, so did the chattered began.

“Let’s get back to the class, please!” The lecturer clapped her hands to calm her students, but turned out the bell had just rang to make all of them came out rashly. “Oh, have a nice day everyone!”

Eleanor was the last one. She took her notebook lazily to her black handbag again.

The lecturer noticed her. “Eleanor, why didn’t you pay attention to my lecture?”

She rolled her eyes, daringly. “Is it really matter?”

The lecturer didn’t seem to surprise with that rude response, instead she took it nicely. Before Eleanor reached the door, she shouted, “Come to my office, now.”



The private office looked simple and neat. The small room filled with jasmine perfume. The wall painted gray. No new addition with a pile of thick books like what she always came up in class, it was only a few scattering manuscripts on the table.

“Please have a seat.”

Eleanor dragged the chair roughly while the lecturer sat oppositely from her. There was a little badge that marked her

name on the desk. It was the first time Eleanor knew her name, because she never really paid any attention in her class.

Shania Madeley.

“Do you know why you are here?”

She chinned up against Shania’s bright face to feel sympathy of her wondering misery, and she crossed her arms defensively. “Do you know—you sound more like a psychiatric doctor, right now.”

Shania chuckled toward her sarcastic humor. “Well, you’re very lucky since the first arrival to never have any detention problem, even I know that you are a trouble young lady.”

“What’s your point?”

“I don’t call you neither for admonition nor counsel, but I want to meet your parents.”

“My parents died.”

“Then, your prime guardian. Don’t you have anyone?”

“What do you really want?” She asked without blink. “Do you want to discourage me or to meet my family?”

“Of course I want to meet your family—the *honorable White Foxes*,” she smiled mischievously. “Especially your grandmother is a powerful woman.”

“I don’t think anyone in here know it,” Eleanor hacked herself.

“There are some that have noticed.”

Eleanor sighed. “If you’re a desperate fans, just try to attend the tonight party in Grand Tower,” she smirked. “Our family is crazy over every party.”

Shania chuckled in return. “I noted, *Your Royal Highness*.”

Before Eleanor walked out from her office, she warned, “Pretend you don’t know me in there, especially in front of my grandmother. It’s good for your own safety.”

“How can I pretend when you’re my top student?” She smiled annoyingly.

Eleanor ignored her and just left without saying goodbye.



The trees around here almost turned into red.

She went to the pavement near to the gate where her chauffeur already parked the black car. Later, she told him to drive around Bronx. She wanted to find something beneath the brown envelope she held. The secrecy was the one. Sofia wanted her to know. As soon as she opened it—the *skeleton key* was shaped pretty vintage. She observed it on her white palm hand, thinking hardly.

Almost an hour had passed. It was two in the afternoon when she told him to drive around Manhattan borough instead, as it was just her idea to come home late. The sky turned dark cloudy. When the car reached to the Central Park, she took her phone quickly to call Sofia.

“Is it a tower?”

Her aunt disagreed. “*It was an antique shop. There were so many secrets that have been locked from inside.*”

The rain dropped slowly. She hung up her phone and demanded the chauffeur to drive to the exact address that she knew from her aunt. He realized, it was the place that Eleanor shouldn’t come according to the Lady.

“You dare to disobey my demand?”

He frightened to look her eyes through the rear-mirror. He didn’t want to get fire either. It was only the fourth months of his working time for White Foxes. He knew the exact rule that they wanted him to play well since he was high paid, but it would never compare to the price of his life. He knew all the

rumors from his grandfather, who had retired from them. No one would like that topic as a good conversation in anyhow.



Even in this metropolitan city, there was a desolate road near to the Central Park. There was one side of a pavement that filled with various small shops. Mostly were abandoned. The road almost never passed by any vehicle or pedestrian. Usually at night, it became a haunting hallow. A strange place to visit that it was almost forgotten, although unlike a ghost town, but because of that, the secrecy buried inside one of those shops.

It had been a long time that no one ever touched the rotten green door of that oldest place.

The rain still dripped lightly, she didn't need an umbrella to step outside. Eleanor wanted to go alone, and she didn't allow her chauffeur to guard her like a little puppy.

The window covered in heavy dusts. She held that skeleton key to unlock the door. Her eyes watched the dark room back and forth. Some candles were left like a fraction of chandelier on the front desk. It was a lucky situation that she didn't need to call her chauffeur for help, and she could light a candle by herself.

The unexpected things she shouldn't have seen inside this antique shop were beyond the reason of why Sofia wanted her to come here without her grandmother's awareness.

A prestige, maniac, compulsive association—all were hung on the gray wall as a collection of noble and merchant certificates. Her eyes explored randomly on each word inside the frame. Mostly about a tremor victory of this shop, that had successfully treasured a lot of royal secrecy, and included some royal's jewelries and stuff that hard to find.

At the back of that front desk, beside the cabinet, there was another wooden door that could lead her to the second floor. Some bookshelves were adjacent to the wall that was different from the foyer. It painted with a vanilla color. She was coughing hardly from the dusty environment.

Manuscripts and leather-bounded books were scattering above a marmalade table in the middle of the room. When she touched them, everything felt so cold. Her eyes caught a huge leather-bounded book. It looked as the most intriguing book than the rest. The book covered with golden patterns in its brown skin. It was pretty heavy when she lifted. She opened it to turn each page. Eventually, the book was about White Foxes' history. Their top secrets were buried with a black ink from inside. Some pictures were appeared in black and white, fewer full colored.

She flipped the pages randomly until the family tree section showed the generation of twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth. It treasured every name of her current family members. Even some distant relatives were written beautifully in that anonymous handwriting.

Her name was stated below her picture that was taken three year ago when she was still a high school student. Her face didn't really change back then. Eleanor ran her fingers into that paper. The book gave much information about House of Heisler. But another page wasn't. Her eyes bulged out like a mad man while her mouth was agape.

House of Aloise.

It wasn't a mere accident that she turned that page to shock her heart. She won't believe what she just saw. That wasn't a frantic game of royal bloodiness. One matter happened that she perplexed whether it was the truth or lie. She wanted to snap a lot of questions to her aunt.

There was a picture of *Cathy Charlotte* between the others. Her face wasn't that different from the last time Eleanor saw this morning. Her smile was too pure and innocent.

She almost lost her breath, and she tried to stand her feet on the floor. Just in time that the chauffeur called her to get out. He insisted to get Eleanor to the car since the Lady was infuriated on the phone, and she wanted her granddaughter to come home soon.



They arrived safely to the mansion. It seemed that all the family members didn't have their good dinner because of her late arrival in the evening. Eleanor walked to the foyer to wait her aunt who just came downstairs. Her aunt dressed neatly in a fur blazer.

Sofia looked worried about her niece, and when no one was seen around, she dragged her niece rashly to talk in a quiet living room.

Eleanor pushed her grasp tight quickly. "Why Cathy Charlotte is on the list?"

Sofia flickered. "Who?"

"Cathy Charlotte's existence is written in the book of White Foxes," she groaned. "I know you're actually wanted to show me that heavy book."

"Oh, she must've been our distant relative."

"I won't believe that."

"Is she your enemy?" Sofia wondered and worried. "Let me know if she hurts you."

Eleanor eyes rolled to perplex. "Just someone I know from college. Whether she might hurt me or not, I can handle it by myself," she snapped rudely. "It's none of your concern."

She always knew by the fact of her family's exaggerating reaction if anyone would ever dare to bother her life. The poor victim might end up tragically or even disappear without anyone could notice. White Foxes won't care whether the subject would be their own bloodline, even outside their family members. Eleanor hated them to do anything unnecessary, which rather looked pitiful, especially when it was about her own business.

"Don't let her know that I gave you the key," Sofia warned. "I thought that you need to know the truth now."

"I guess you're afraid if she might kill you too—literally."

"Eleanor, I know you're not stupid, you're not blind," she murmured firmly. "You know too—what she's doing," she got her niece to tremble by the frightening idea of secrecy. "Everything you need to understand—the books, manuscripts, paintings. The whole things you can decode by yourself inside the shop."

"I really don't know what to say. I feel something is wrong with you," Eleanor got her eyes sharp at her. "You didn't set me up, right?"

Sofia gawked in agitation. "I am not. I am trying to help you here."

"I hope so."

At the time the conversation finished, a servant told them that the Lady had invited them for the dinner.

They went to the huge dining room where there were two pillars and golden wall.

The Lady and Joe Marshall had waited for them, besides the servants who stood in the corner of the wall. Eleanor noticed that her grandmother appeared too way neat for just attending a family dinner. Almost every day, she dressed in soft-pink suit.

However, her expression looked pissed off to wait Eleanor for so long.

"I'm not planning to yell in here, but—" the Lady stared up at her granddaughter who stood fearless against the long dining table, "you're just too much."

"I don't need to listen to your admonition, grandma," she said before leaving. "I'm tired."

"Eleanor, come back here!" the Lady might have a heart attack to face her rude manner. "You little brat!"

Sofia tried to calm her quickly. She made her sit down again. "Let me handle this, mother."

"Bring that little brat, here!" the Lady yelled out as she couldn't accept her granddaughter's madness.

"Calm down. You know it has been hard for her," Sofia reminded.

"She needs to be taught a good manner," she spoke madly before drinking a hot tea.

Meanwhile, Eleanor went outside at the terrace. She stood and leaned on the wall beside that double door. The mansion had an old ambience with everything painted in gray, but the atmosphere had given her more than that. She stared blankly at the ground, drowning in her sadness alone. The smell of the green garden had reminded her with a touch of winter snow. The memories were fragile about her parents. The car accident. The scene. She remembered all about it.

Thenceforth, this would be her grief of emptiness.

5

THE ENCOUNTER

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE LIBRARY WAS THE QUIETEST PLACE, at least in Fordham. On Thursday morning she had let the librarian scanning her ID card. Her bookworm idea had led her to the place.

At first, she wanted to see what they wrote in the university community site. Most articles were referring to social events. She didn't particularly interest until another one had pop up. Her eyes bulged out surprisingly at the seminar of English Poetry which was held a year ago, because there was a picture of a few winners from a poem writing contest, one of them was that girl who always had nightmares in her dreams—*Petunia Breckenwood*.

It stated that the same seminar would be held tomorrow morning with those winners as the special guests. She was happy though if there would be a small chance to meet her in person. The last time they met wasn't a pretty one. Nevertheless, the idea that Petunia filled the euphoria in the previous seminar through her writing talent was a great thing. Even though she was a shy girl, it was odd to think that she wanted to joint such event which needed the whole eyes to

see her on the stage. Petunia seemingly intended to distribute her works for the university. The articles she clicked were all talking about some charities, which was why they did the seminar to gain fund for it. However, the girl was the mysterious one.

Her fingers snapped on the keyboard again, it turned out as a little accident that she found the early history of something that she would never have thought it could involve with the university. The computer showed her some of old pictures and articles. They were all White Foxes. She began to notice their existence since coming to New York. The panel news had frequently mentioned about them. It stated clearly on the site—the greatest philanthropist for most event which involved theology course was distributed by them.

Auben de Clure.

His name wasn't familiar. The old man, blue eyes, gray hair, pale white skin, with eyeglasses. He was always either seen with suit or cardigan. He was mentioned as the most important figure of the century. He given much lectures. He was a professor from France. But none of today's generation remembered him since the public already acknowledged his wife instead. He had never appeared for ten years. His trace couldn't be tracked down by any reporter. It was because his wife admitted a severe disease that he had endured because of his internal depression, which no one seemed to aware. Everyone in the world acknowledged her frantically as the leader of White Foxes—Her Royal Highness, *Marie de Clure*.

Cathy narrowed her eyes to wonder into another article that stated about their children. They were all the descendants from House of Heisler. No one of them had credited the surname of their father. It was matronymic since Lady Marie

was a well-known woman, so they used the surname of Heisler instead.

Another one, she saw a young man of whom she felt tremendously familiar. There were four children. He was the third child, *Jonathan Marshall Heisler*. He didn't appear bluntly like his mother. But some argued to have known him as one of the prominent figures in House of Heisler. At least, it was the scary part to notice how powerful they were against the world. They were the phenomenon.

"So, you're stalking them?" A masculine voice startled her from behind.

She saw Alexander Maclain dressed in black suit again. "No, I'm not," she smiled then. "How are you, sir?"

"I am good," he answered while chuckling at her practical denial since he could read at glance of what the screen was showing. "The article—is it more like learning?" He asked.

"Much of it."

There were only the two of them in this computer room. The atmosphere was peaceful. He still stood behind her.

"Why?" He seemed curious. "Anything you want to learn about White Foxes?"

"Everyone knows already. The powerful group of royal," she felt a bit awkward to talk with him. "I am actually in here to do assignment for the reading class."

"Do you want me to help you?" She stared perplexingly against his offer. "I'll show you a good section," he invited her to leave the room.

Cathy hurriedly turned off the computer and grabbed her notebook. She struggled to walk, and almost fell from her own shiver. She couldn't get used to any lecturer who would talk directly to her.

She could be relieved for a while since some students stood on each corridor, so no one would see her walking with him.

The library was literary quiet. No one made a sound. She could even hear her own breath. Until then, he stopped in front of the bookshelves to show her the section.

“Try some from the eighteenth century,” he took one of the books randomly, somehow his voice sounded quivered. “They give you a good feeling to read.”

Cathy awkwardly flipped the pages after he gave it to her. “Thanks, sir.”

As he leaned on the bookshelves, he asked, “By the way, where do you live?”

She glanced at him. “Bronx—not far from here, and you?”

“I am certainly a nomad, but currently I live in town,” he smiled.

Just suddenly she recalled the day she bought Dicken’s novel because of him. “I’ve heard from the owner, you often visit Cavely bookstore.”

His eyes was bright for that. “She spoke of me?”

“More like mentioning,” her smile widened. “I was there for your assignment.”

“Ah, reference the idea,” he sighed while scratching his brown hair, he had oblique bangs. “Mrs. Margaretha serves her visitors very well, but I don’t recommend her place for the real English literatures, because she has more of Latin,” he chuckled. “There are numerous numbers of great bookstores in New York. I’ve visited in random order.”

“She has overboard for the mystic subjects—perhaps the Latin literatures comes from that,” Cathy recalled what the place looked like. “I might try your idea of touring some bookstores.”

Now she closed the book and held it in her arms. He was gazing for a moment at her brown eyes—it was too intense that they became clunky.

“Catherine—” she surprised that he was literally remembered her name. “Why looking at their articles—White Foxes?”

She was agape. “Uh, they seem to be a phenomenon in the worldwide news, and in here too, I was just curious—” she blinked too fast, “they have royal bloodline—”

“Exactly, wouldn’t they become powerful without it?” He spoke rhetorically. “Besides, they had donated money for various events at our campus.”

She wanted to ask one tangled question since her curiosity had emerged, because she remembered Eleanor Heisler who shared the same surname. It could be a coincidence, but that name was rare.

He seemed to wait for her another word that never came out. She only nodded because she needed to stop the talk, it was cumbersome.

“Guess, see you in our next class?” He asked then.

The schedule was only once a week for Literary Analysis class, she almost lost in thought. “Yes, next Tuesday.”

His gesture was impeccably polite. He nodded a farewell at her. Even in the classroom, he was usually good at talking, but somehow she sensed his clunky movement when they met. There was something that he was holding against her—more like a mystery.



She turned downstairs from the terrace. The air around made her refresh. At twelve in the noon, the students were coming

across each other in the field. That was a turnover time between the class and break.

“Cathy!” She recognized the voice who called her from afar.

Both of the boys greeted her.

“Are you off from the next class?” Josh asked first.

“I don’t have one,” she answered and smiled.

“Great, because you guys have to come with me to Manhattan,” Jordan pushed over his shoulder accidentally when a student walked as if without eyes. Josh turned sullen though.

“What’s the occasion?” Cathy was happy to hear further.

“He is going to buy his dad’s birthday gift,” Josh continued. “Why would bother going far away?” He started to mumble and glanced at him. “In the end, you’ll just send the gift through a delivery service.”

“I have an acute confusion. I need help,” Jordan said.

“I’d love to. I have free time now,” Cathy agreed while Josh was rolling his eyes to a real aggravation.

“Well great,” Josh shrugged his shoulders. “The actual plan was to invite you for a lunch.”

“In Manhattan,” Jordan shouted. “That’s include.”

Cathy giggled at them. “Let’s find it. I’ll drive anyway.”

They went to the parking lot to ride in her Ford-Edge 2011 silver car and would feel their trip like a family since the car was a real SUV. She hoped that the boys might get along with each other sooner. The atmosphere between them almost turned as heat as the sun if she wasn’t coming at that second.

A moderate traffic jam made them arrived in thirty minutes. Their eyes searched for a fine restaurant around the borough of Manhattan. Josh kept mumbling at Cathy to pick

the cheapest restaurant since he knew how expensive everything in downtown.

“Ah, I know!” Jordan shouted while Cathy still eyeing random shops. “I want a baseball cap for my dad!”

“What a nerd,” Josh whispered at her ear, then he shouted at him, “—great for you, now I am hungry.”

“Manhattan is a great city for shopping, right?” Jordan seemed to have his saving enough.

On the other side, Cathy wanted to enjoy this trip with them. She didn’t really enjoy most of the things since her family had moved to New York. There were some adjustable accounts that matter, especially when she remembered her mom’s secret family. That made her a bit depressed to the fantasy she never knew would exist, and the boy next to her was supposed to be the one who acknowledged the event. But every now and then, Josh pretended like nothing ever happened, and no one had ever mentioned the topic. She was scared for the fact.

The restaurant was established across to the Central Park. They had a good beef steak since the place was giving a special discount for any students. It took an hour to eat in that small place. They gorged already.

Next stop, Jordan continued to look for the best gift he could find in downtown.

Cathy would wait for them, she wanted to walk around the park and refused Josh to accompany her, because it was better for him to help his dorm mate who was in a real confusion to pick up which baseball cap to buy. Thus, they made a deal to have a rendezvous in Central Park. Before they got separated, the two boys promised to bring her the finest coffee in Manhattan.

She breathed the air to relieve while walking toward the crowded space. The park was covered under the bright sunshine, still and all, she could feel the air degree was pretty cold than what it seemed. She embraced her arms and gazed throughout the greenish scenery that invigorated her. One bench was left alone, she hurriedly sat in there. At the north side, exactly in front of her, despite the view of a few people sat in the two wooden benches, her eyes could peep to a traffic road behind some huge trees. The cars were passing by moderately.

The invigorated ambience made her recalled a good feeling of reading. Cathy remembered the book she just borrowed from the library—which was Mr. Maclain's recommendation. It was covered in an ancient brown hardcover from the eighteenth century. She started to turn the first page, but the chattering sound in the public space couldn't make her concentrated though.

She took her eyes away from the book to look around again. A few people came across in the walking trail, some birds flew above the trees, and the wind swooshed against her cheeks.

Afterward, she just noticed that there was a tall businessman dressed in gray suit, his platinum-blonde hair almost matched with the color of his pale white skin. His appearance looked familiar in her eyes, she couldn't quite believe if he was the same person from the articles she had read in the computer's library. He was perfectly the same as he appeared in most pictures.

For a few minutes, he glanced back and forth between the traffic road and her. That slender man still crossed-arms while holding a newspaper, and he stood there beside the bench where two old women sat together. His eyes projected a

secretive atmosphere. Cathy hadn't closed the book yet, thus she returned to flip the pages rather than included herself in a perplexing matter toward that stranger.

"Have we met before, young lady?"

She tremendously astonished that he approached her in the end. He looked much charismatic. That pair of keen blue eyes stared deeply into her eyes. Somehow, there was a slight mystery in him, but he projected something undeniable cold from his aura.

Cathy blinked too fast. "No, sir."

"Ah, sorry, I thought you look like the old friend of mine," his gaze was cold before, now his smile was widened. "Are you alone?"

She was afraid if her tongue might slip from the awkwardness, concurrently she closed the book and said, "I wasn't—" she breathed hardly. "I am waiting for my friends to return."

"Really?" He smiled. "Me too, waiting for the chauffeur to come, it's been fifteen minutes," his eyes darted to his watch and the traffic road, and then to her again. "Are you going to ride with bus?"

"No, sir," Cathy spoke adequately since she didn't feel to share more information with this stranger.

"I can't believe to wait any longer than this—" he muttered at himself, "my chauffeur have come in tardiness," she rose her chin at him to baffle against his clausal to tell her so easily about his thought. "Actually, I never ride with bus in New York. That's why I asked you."

She was uncomfortable to stare up at his face, he was stood really tall. "I know a few routes, but unfortunately I couldn't show you at this time."

For a while, their small talk was paused as he looked up again at the traffic road for his car, while Cathy didn't enjoy the silence between them, it was because she wanted to run away rather than talking to him. She still felt a glimpse of frightening ambience in him, like there was a cloud of coldness in his charisma, and somehow she recognized it.

"Our unintended rendezvous seems familiar, is it déjà vu?" He chuckled to hackle it. "Who knows?"

The way he spoke didn't reflect his young face at all. He could be in his early thirty. She shrugged her shoulders and baffled at that point.

Some people began to glance at him. She wasn't the only one who noticed his existence as the prominent figure, but she still thought that she might be wrong, and she didn't have courage to ask him directly about it.

The articles she had read might be the only clue besides the news on the television. It was the first time she paid attention to their phenomenon. Now, her mind was tangled alone. Whether it would be a fate or accident to meet him, she didn't know how to cultivate the idea. It was her deal of tremor.

6

ADELIGHT AVERSION

ELEANOR HEISLER



I WITNESSED A DIMLY THOUGHT. Everything was confronted in front of me. The light never left the sky. It was the weirdest blue of every blue I've ever seen. It emerged a cerulean shade. The city—they never sleep. The streetlamps weren't that different from New York, as well as the huge district below the winter mountain hill, but the city lived off snowflakes from each building. The roads made from the concrete stone. Everything dimmed out on me. The winds swooshed on my cheeks, and someone beside me wasn't being ignorant. Her finger pointed out at the city as she wanted to show me something, and to heal me from the grievous memories. I was silent as if I couldn't talk anymore. The emptiness gulped me. As I looked at myself, I was stuck in my kiddo body with the same clothes from the last time I saw my parents' death. Thence I just knew, everything disappeared in no second.

Eleanor awoke breathlessly. She sat down on the bed, messing up her wavy hair. As she looked outside her bedroom,

the window still showed the darkest midnight. She sighed toward the dream that wasn't strange for her anymore. The dream once appeared when she was about eight-year-old.

"I need a sleeping pillow," she muttered as she rose up from the king-sized bed, and she went to wear her white satin bathrobe.

She walked out from her bedroom and won't think twice to knock at her aunt's door. It took one and five knocks before Sofia opened the door, showing her own somnolent eyes.

"Can I talk to you?"

Sofia smiled widely to welcome her niece into her cozy bedroom.

She observed around the room, there was a huge flowers painting above the sofa, the crystal chandelier hung high above, the yellow-cream wallpaper, and the bed was as huge as hers, except that it had a curtain on each side, and filled with extravagant pillows.

Eleanor sat on the bed, making her aunt bewildered toward her rare visit, especially to come in the middle of the night. "Is there something that bothering you?"

"I need to know something," her mind got hinged into another curiosity, despite her repetitive childhood dreams. She demanded for a distinct answer as she stared solemnly at her aunt. "*—about Heisler and Aloise.*"

Sofia got her eyes fully awake suddenly, she was astonished. The silence came within this bright room, and she followed to sit beside her niece.

"Don't let your grandmother know that you've learnt—even a little part of the history," her voice quivered. "She has an ambition, even though we're all do. This family has been treasuring a tremendous secret," she was surely worried, "I

told you about the antique shop for your preparation, to be safe.”

“Playing it safe? Is it a killing session?” Sofia bulged out at her sarcastic question, “Are we really their descendant, then?”

“It’s complicated for the fact—” she explained further, “White Foxes isn’t a mixed-blood of the Aloise family, it’s not it—” her eyes seemed to search for a mercy for the next thing she would say, “We are the tantrum partial between the royal and *witch*.”

“Please, don’t make me laugh,” she mocked her. “I am *shudder*.”

Sofia stared at her, sending a chill of worryment. There was a secret.

“Why the Aloise family is written in that history book?” Eleanor narrowed her eyebrow to wonder again, “Where’s the witch part?”

“Soon you’ll know about our history. Lady Marie is still working on her great plan,” Sofia sighed. “We’re still running the business.”

Eleanor couldn’t stay to breath in the same room as her aunt. Sofia told her the thing that only baffled her mind like a disheveled charade. She rose from the bed, concurrently felt annoyed.

She muttered, “Whatever.”

“Remember, you will learn more than that,” she turned her head to hear what Sofia wanted to say before she pulled the door open, “Whether you accept it or not, it is who you are.”



On Thursday noon, Eleanor came out from her bedroom, dressed in a blue blouse and leather short pants, she got

bewildered alone when no one was seen in the dining room, but the lunch was served.

After she asked the servants, the rest of her family members seemed to go somewhere in a hurry. Some servants had seen Lady Marie went away with Marshall and Sofia. No one knew about the exact meeting they would have.

Eleanor felt relieved with the information she received, which would be making the mansion looked deliberately quiet without any noise of the heels sound or even anyone's yelling session, except that some bodyguards still worked around.

No one saw her coming. She was being careful in every movement to walk toward the only double door in one of the mansion's corridors. It was a huge bedroom. The light was still on from the inside. The floral wallpaper was the same one as in Sofia's bedroom. She smelled the lemonade aroma therapy in the air.

There was an old man laid down alone on the king-sized bed. She approached him carefully.

"Grandpa?"

He didn't answer at all, but his blue eyes was wide-awake.

"It's me, Eleanor," she sat beside him and held his wrinkled palm hand with compassion. "Have you eaten today?"

She noticed that her grandfather still had a tremor in both of his hands since he had a severe stroke that prevented him to move his muscles normally. He couldn't have a conversation because of his disability to talk. His teeth kept chattering whenever he tried to.

There was no other way to keep him inside the bedroom all day long. She took him out to his wheelchair.

The next minute, they went to the dining room together. Some servants bulged out astonishingly as they noticed his presence. The precise thing that everyone had to obey was

never let him went outside the mansion, especially to leave the bedroom without the permission from the Lady.

The rule breached already. She threatened them to never speak about it in front of Lady Marie. Therefore, Eleanor dismissed all the servants from her sight.

“You must eat,” she murmured while giving him a spoon of hot chicken soup, “because you look terrible.”

He tried to smile, but it went hard since he always felt the pain every time he moved his muscle.

“I know grandma would be yelling at me to bring you out from hell,” she giggled. “Don’t worry about it.”

Eleanor pitied him, who was being treated like a prisoner for about ten years by his own wife. No one ever dared to have a consideration about his treatment. Lady Marie did everything by herself to keep him lock inside the bedroom. Thus, Eleanor always wanted to speak up for that, she thought it was a cruel thing to do toward the old man who was supposed to be the primary landlord in this white mansion. His wife didn’t seem to respect him very well.

She could feel the look of her grandfather’s starry eyes, as if he could never feel happier just by sitting beside his only grandchild. The grievousness was one impeccable thing to perceive in the moment they shared that look.

When all the servants weren’t seen there, she spoke about her tremendous compassion for him, “I love you, grandpa, don’t lose your hope,” and she kissed his forehead. The happiness was fathomless on his face. He smiled widely.

Afterward, she had a bright idea to walk him out to the garden at one o’clock. The servants looked at her in worriment. She kept on shoing them away to mind their own business.

The garden filled with a lot of red roses and yellow daises. The view had revived him as human being for a while. It had

been a long time since he could enjoy the sunshine again. Eleanor sat on the bench against him, who sat so fragile in his wheelchair.

“Grandpa, I have a lot of distressful thoughts,” she muttered while her eyes stared on the weeds. “These days, grandma seems occupying everyone business. Uncle Marshall even got returned suddenly from France, you know, the holiday hasn’t even come yet—”

She saw his lips moved hardly, and she still went on, “—and Aunt Sofia gives me a chill about our family’s history—the antique shop is a parliament of a sick reality, and to a restless degree—”

His lips moved sensibly.

“What?” She baffled to guess him. “The antique shop?” As he nodded, she told him further about how Sofia gave her the key to open that place, and to learn a few things in the family trees. It won’t be matter whether he could give her any answer, since she just wanted him to listen.

“I noted the book of White Foxes. There are lists of two royal houses—Heisler and Aloise,” she gazed at him who kept on marching. “I never heard about Aloise since we have been visiting our hometown regularly, no one have mentioned it, right?” She muttered. “Or am I too deaf?”

“A-a-lo-ise,” he could say it, even he sounded stammering. “D-da-danger.”

“Aloise is a danger to us?” She guessed, but he shook his head. “Who is in danger then?” She baffled. “*House of Aloise*—not us?”

He agreed, at once looked sad.

“Why?” She couldn’t ask him rashly in his critical condition. “Does grandma has her evil plan again—toward them?”

He was breathless as he nodded instantly.

"I don't know what to do, grandpa," she hissed, feeling peevisish. "But that's what I thought, it's odd to have another royal house written in that book when it should be about White Foxes as the part of Heisler family, and surely about your ancestors—the France nobility."

"The—gate," it was all that he said.

He bent down hardly to reach on the stone bench where she sat down.

She was surprised when he went trailing to draw something within the dusts on that bench. It was hard to decode what he really wanted to tell. She observed his drawing. For a second, she recognized it as an ancient symbol, similar to a runic alphabet. It had triple circles.

"What is it has to do with the topic?" Eleanor annoyed to think harder like she was a fifth grade kid. "Who are you trying to refer?"

"Learn—it—the—book," he murmured, stammering. "Save—the—souls."

She captured the symbol vividly on her mind, and the next second, she scrubbed his drawing until the trace was gone. No one could see it.

"I'll try," she promised him.

Subsequently, he bent down again to draw another thing. The charade seemed pretty simple at glance. It looked like a drawing of an animal cage. She shot him with a disbelief stare.

"Seriously?"

"De—mon—" he was trying so hard to say it out, "in—basement."

She narrowed her brown eyebrows surprisingly, "A demon's cage?" As he nodded, she became sentimental. "I know you're sick, but that's ridiculous to believe our mansion have—"

But a slight memory was emerged inside her mind. She remembered the vivid nightmare that she always had—the event of her parents’ death. There was a demon. She saw it. Only if something didn’t block her memory, she could retrieve the detail image of that massive explosion. She flickered unstably now to endure her sorrow.

“Demons, huh?” She repeated. “It’s like our everyday consummation.”

She was aware that he looked sympathy at her. The incident made everyone heartbreaking.

“Some people have been rumoring that our basement has a demon’s cage. They said, that grandma has been keeping *it* like a pet,” Eleanor shrugged her shoulders to hackle it though. “It might be true—since her behavior looks like one.”

Her grandfather stared speechlessly. He knew what Eleanor felt beyond her sarcastic tone. It was a real sorrow and disappointment. She would never acknowledge Lady Marie as her grandmother, but a devious human who lived under the same roof.

The density of vengeance was still remained inside her soul. She couldn’t forgive for everything that her grandmother had done. Hence, she was a bit relieved to be able to tell him some of important things that she just tried to decode. He had helped her a little bit.

Eleanor rose from the bench to push him in his wheelchair. He needed to return soon before the family went home. It would be a terrible session if her grandmother found out later. That was why she played it safe.

7

THE BORDER AND MARK

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE TELEVISION COULDN'T catch her amazement. Friday's weather was fine currently. The news channel didn't stop to wrangle with anything that put up various sentimental cases. She was agitated, her fingers clicked the remote control to find another channel. The next second, she saw her mom just walked out from the kitchen with arms holding a bowl of potato chips.

"Do you want some?" her mom offered.

Cathy shook her head. She already gorged with the breakfast, which was another chicken calamari from Haile's cooking.

After a few minutes they enjoyed the drama show together, Haile noticed the two books on the glass table against them. One of the book was thicker—*Emperor of Souls*. She hadn't seen it in ages.

"You keep reading that book. I thought you've finished it before your high school graduation."

Cathy glanced at her to smile while she didn't aware of her mom's worriment. "It's nostalgic."

She stroke her long hair at that second. “Are you still thinking about what happened back then?”

“Unless you tell me—” deep down in her heart, Cathy hoped that her mom would spin a yarn, “it’s been a year and untouchable.”

“You don’t need to worry for the circumstance that occurred within our ancestors,” Haile grimaced. “It would always be that way.”

Cathy covered her own disappointment with a craft of half smile, although Haile could always know her feeling. There were a lot of her mom’s secretive things that still buried beneath the surface.

“People tend to forget,” Haile murmured. “So forth, such fairy tale is the only thing that remains—” as she continued to speak, Cathy tried hardly to decode the vibe on her unreadable eyes, “either you want to believe it or not, I supposed you shouldn’t perceive it for your reading class, Cathy.”

Cathy shrugged as she smiled mischievously. “But I just did, in the first week—”

“You’re not serious, right?”

“No one knows about the book, even about Carl Dalton as the author,” Cathy sighed. “My lecturer wanted me to change something that more noticeable.”

“Really?” Haile narrowed her eyebrow. “That’s good.”

Cathy nodded.

“The copy of another English book?” Haile put the bowl on the table as she took a look at the other book. “Oh, looks like from the eighteen century?”

“I borrowed it from the university library.”

“—if it’s the lecturer, well, at least the students think it is noticeable?” There was a slight of doubt in her eyes.

"I have no idea yet, I got a recommendation," she relieved though.

"Most people in my time knew about many things of eighteenth century literatures, but what about today's generation?"

Cathy giggled since she referred it to the youth reality. There was no another day of becoming a newborn for the knowledge. It was like studying every single day.

Nevertheless, Haile took her cellphone. She seemed hesitant at first, but she spoiled the new message to her, "There will be a party that hosted by the Brooklyn Police Department. Your dad absolutely got invited, and both of you and me," she sighed while reading it for her. "It's the annual partnership party."

"Will we be going?"

"I will not," she answered.

"Then me too," Cathy followed.

Suddenly, she gave the cellphone to her, "Your dad wants to speak with you on the phone."

"Hello?"

Soon, she heard the excited voice of her dad, "*I knew she would hate it!*" He screamed out, the background was pretty loud. "*You should come instead. I could never go alone to the ballroom.*"

"Dad, you know that I hate crowds," she shouted.

"*I have my will to force you, please just come,*" he wasn't joking, and he begged her, "*the dress code is gold, so prepare yourself. I'll pick you up tomorrow evening. Have your best look!*"

He hung up the phone, leaving her with a perplexing thought. Cathy got tremendously anxious whenever she

imagined herself to stand in the midst of the ballroom, and she would have her best shiver for a year ahead.



The class finished at twelve o'clock.

Cathy walked through the corridor, among the two boys who still talked about their plan for a brownish party. Josh and Jordan didn't seem to have a mercy at each other, while she had listened vaguely for the last five minutes at the university's speaker. Some students were being ignorant. Cathy listened to the speaker in a heed way, until she remembered that it was about the seminar that hosted by the Department of English.

"It's the seminar," Cathy murmured while walking across to the auditorium's door, where the event was held in there.

"We were absolutely late," Jordan informed. "The Seminar of English Poetry have been started two hours ago."

"You knew?" She wondered since she didn't see any posters that announced that event.

Josh pursed his lips to baffle. "Does the department oblige us to come?"

"Only for those who don't have a class in ten o'clock," Jordan shouted. "By the way, they posted the announcement in the madding yesterday."

"It's too sudden—not many attendants," Cathy peeped through the door window when some students walked out from the door. "Anyway, I've read on the site that Petunia is a guest star."

"What?" Josh almost laughed as he couldn't believe it. "Long time no see, then."

There were only thirty students who still stayed in the seminar. Cathy sighed for a while that she didn't see the beanie

girl in there, while the two boys got bewildered at her restless expression.

Josh had been tapping his foot on the floor, and then he shouted, “Why we’re frozen in here?” He annoyed. “Are you even going to greet her?”

“That’s my plan,” she answered.

He rolled his eyes for the amazement. “Oh, hypocrisies discreet—I mean that doesn’t sound overdose, for God’s sake—”

Cathy hated the moment he began mumbling like bees. “I know you don’t believe me, but I’ll try.”

“Should I come or get out from these hypocrisies he just referred?” Jordan was the one that felt away from their zone.

“Petunia isn’t anything like he said, shut it,” she said in annoyance, while her eyes kept peeping on the stage through that tiny rectangular window on the door.

“Okay, Breckenwood’s daughter is having a nightmare disease—admit it,” Josh said frontally.

At that second he said it, she confronted him directly as if it was the most important thing she had in mind, “Can you stop?” She begged firmly. “You guys may go, don’t feel bother for me.”

“Wait, you said she’s the daughter of Clay Breckenwood?” Jordan recalled his memory in Bisbee. “He is your grandmother’s doctor, isn’t he?”

“Wow, little town is surely spreading the rumor so fast,” he nudged another annoyance.

“Everyone knows everyone,” Cathy sighed. “That’s what my mom said.”

“Yeah, like for a week people in Bisbee talked about the arrival of Breckenwood’s family—but none of the townsmen

really saw them, except both of us,” Josh said. “By the way, isn’t she supposed to be still in high school?”

“Yes, she’s sixteen this year,” Cathy remembered. “She’s here to discuss English poetry as the previous winner of the university’s contest.”

“Ah, explainable,” he murmured.

The three of them finally went inside to see the seminar. It was pretty late. The current session was closed with taking a picture between the host and guest stars. From afar, Cathy noticed the girl in all black clothes, since Petunia wore the same beanie as the last time she saw her in the hospital.

The last minute, everyone listened to the last poem from Petunia. It called *Oneness*;

In within you—the crawl would become one;

The uproar was submissive—they suppressed the idea of solo;

Some legs became numbed for a reason—the passive and massive—for the truth that might never come.

The winds perceived the flying butterflies—the one in cerulean shade—which inside—they hinged and became oneness.

The standing applause had marked the closing session. The host told the attendants to leave this huge auditorium.

The three of them waited the lamps on the stage to be turned off before approaching Petunia.

Cathy ran to the door before Petunia came outside, while some attendants had walked out, “Hi, do you remember me?”

She was conflicted for a moment, there was a frightened feeling. “Uh, you’re Cathy Charlotte, how do you—”

“I’m an English student in Fordham University,” she said.

Petunia peeped behind her to notice the two boys. She recognized one of them. “Does your friend major in English as well?”

“Do you remember him too?” Cathy seemed longing to talk with her, and she felt excited somehow. “We once walked together in Patagonia Lake—at the shore.”

“Sure, he is Josh—” unfortunately, she didn’t recall his surname, but as he waved, her thought still conflicted to meet all of them, “Well, both of you stay in New York finally.”

Cathy nodded. “Are you participating again in the university’s event?”

“Who could guess, right?” She grinned. “My aunt wants me to do something different since I didn’t enroll myself to high school.”

The two boys surprised at her statement. Cathy could understand her slight feeling of embarrassment.

When the female janitor shooed them away, they walked out concurrently from the auditorium since the place needed to be kept clean.

They stopped in the terrace to breathe the air. When the three of them continued their conversation, Jordan chose to sit alone on the edge of the terrace’s staircase while observing some people around the green front yard.

“By the way, the poem that you’ve read on the stage was beautiful,” Cathy admitted.

For the first time, they saw Petunia smiled widely. “Thank you. I’ve been contributing my works after my mom’s in here, that’s no big deal.”

“Your mom?” Cathy narrowed her eyes, recalling the day when the ex-wife of Doctor Clay Breckenwood had a hard treatment in the hospital.

“Yeah, before she got stroke. Some of her books are posted anonymously,” she noticed afterward with the book that Cathy held in her arms. “Definitely not that book of yours, she lived in the past.”

“Your mother’s surname is Lennox, right?” Cathy was bewildered while asking. “You aren’t using it.”

“My mom was known as Mrs. Lennox since she was a lawyer, after the divorce. So I stick with my dad’s surname instead,” Petunia explained.

“So you inspired by your mom to contribute another work,” Cathy amazed. “Your poem sounds—divine.”

“The last one?” She wondered. “It’s the real divination which I presented for *the philanthropists* here.”

Cathy observed her smirking lips was odd, despite the idea of philanthropists had reminded her with a prominent group of White Foxes. Petunia seemed to give a sense of repugnant within her poem. It sounded like a hidden message for a particular reference.

On the other side, Josh was still stuck with his idea to make a joke. “It is not a prerogative coincidence, huh?” He held his laugh suddenly. “I mean the oddity.”

“Since when are you using a hyperbolize word?” Cathy bulged out at him, and she wanted him to stop any absurdity to convey in this rare encounter. “It’s galling.”

“We’re the English students—after all,” he showed an innocent face, and shrugged concurrently.

“So, where do you live?” Cathy continued to ask her.

“Queens, in Sunnyside neighborhood. What about you?”

“In the Bronx, while he stays in the university’s dorm,” she informed.

Petunia nodded to know more about them, in fact, another state of restlessness was written on her face now.

Cathy remembered their conversation at the shore, everything about Petunia's nightmare and worryment since She couldn't enjoy adolescence days because her main priority was to nurse her mom. Cathy knew about Mrs. Lennox's severe sickness even though they only met once in Bisbee.

"I have to return home, my mom needs me," Petunia dismissed this encounter first, subsequently, she took out a notebook and pen from her handbag, "Just in case—" she wrote something on it before she torn a piece of paper for them, "—if you want to stay in touch, this is my address in Sunnyside."

Cathy noted that her handwriting looked like the people from old era.

It was a good sign. Petunia would welcome a new visitor to her home. Afterward, they waved to each other. The farewell was fast.



Her mind wandered into something else after the two boys returned to their dorm. She bought a slice of chocolate cake, but she changed her plan since she won't eat it for herself. The next hour, she drove her car to the backyard of Fordham's building, and she parked her car in front of Cavely bookstore café.

It was odd and sudden that she remembered about Anita—the daughter of the bookstore owner. The wind chime rang as she walked inside. The place was still as quiet as the last time she was there.

"Hello?"

No one answered.

She observed the wall near the cashier. The photos still hung in the same spot. Those pictures of gypsies looked orphic.

Her heart startled pretty badly when the air strongly blew the wind chime. Subsequently, Anita appeared to greet her from behind.

“Hi—” she still looked pale and sick. “Miss Charlotte?”

“Yes,” Cathy bent down as she gave her the paper bag filled with a slice of chocolate cake. “I want to give you this cake—it’s a gift.”

“Thank you,” her smile was jaded. “I’m always waiting for your visit—I miss you.”

Cathy caressed her hair gently. “I’m here now.”

“It has always been lonely in here—” Her eyes rolled to the ceiling, “and scary.”

She followed her gaze to find nothing but a dimmed lamp. “Why is it scary?” There was a wondering thought within her. “Where’s your mother?”

“Sometimes I saw *them*—hanging between the clouds—and in the air—they are floating within the darkness,” Anita jittered while Cathy gazed deeply and confused whether to believe in what she said or not. “My mom never listen to me.”

The bell rang in the door when the owner just arrived while bringing two heavy plastic bags. “Oh, welcome, Miss Charlotte!”

She quickly placed those bags on the front desk and returned to greet her. Anita whimpered again behind her back. There was seemingly no particular reason to make the little girl frightened.

“What’s wrong?” Cathy baffled.

“Oh, sometimes her headache is relapsing,” she tried to calm her daughter. “I’m worry whether the medicine is really working or not.”

Cathy remembered how Checille shared her sorrow feeling about a schizophrenia disease that her daughter had. The

situation was pitiful that she wanted to help them. For a second, she wanted to talk with Anita about what that little girl felt.

“Can I accompany your daughter, in her bedroom?”

Checille nodded as she led her to the door behind the front desk. There was a small corridor that led them to see two bedrooms. One wooden door was labeled with Anita’s name. As they went inside, that small room was pretty dark with a dimmed lamp. The bed was a thin mattress. She couldn’t imagine how cold this room would be in the winter.

“A demon lies beneath a shadow—within a dark sky of night,” Anita muttered suddenly after she sat on her mattress.

At the same time, Cathy squinted at that old woman with gray bob hairstyle for the complexion. “Has she been seeing a particular thing?”

“It’s the effect of her disease—she has been hallucinating every night and then.”

Cathy could see her tremendous worry about it. “She said it’s a *demon*.”

She sighed. “Before we went to a doctor, I used to have an alternative healing for her—it didn’t end well,” her eyes went glossed. “Precisely, it was a trauma state that the gypsy way wasn’t the best for her cure,” at that second, she glanced at her. “We’re a traveler often to leave things behind, but I choose to stay now.”

“You’re a gypsy?” Cathy still surprised, even after she caught random clues around this place.

“All of my family inherits the gypsy blood,” Checille explained. “Along with my sister and her daughter—we were nomad.”

“You are the sister of Bubaa Margaretha?”

She bulged out surprisingly. “You knew her?”

“Not exactly, I was just came across with her when I had a trip in Austria,” Cathy said. “I saw her picture on your wall.”

“What a small world!” She grimaced.

For a moment, Cathy stared at Anita who already asleep, and then she realized that it already three o’clock when she glanced at her watch. It was the time to return home.

A minute before she walked out, Checille noticed a paper bag on the floor was from her. “Well, thank you for the cake.”



She was still surprised for the fact to know the real identity of the bookstore owner. It got her frightened at first. Her heart felt agitated since her mom had forbid her to befriend with any gypsy.

Fifteen minutes afterward, Cathy returned to the apartment safely. The sky was cloudy now and the winds swooshed strongly.

She found her mother sat down on the edge of the windowsill while talking on the phone. Her mom only waved and smiled at her arrival on the foyer.

While she made a cup of hot tea in the kitchen, she unintentionally listened to her mom’s conversation. She couldn’t guess any better idea that it might be Aunt Sarah on the phone. They had been talking for hours about the family matters. She accidentally overheard about the next keeper for the Sapphire stone. Seemingly, her mom had prepared another plan.

Cathy served two cups of hot tea to the living room when her mom had just hung up the phone.

“Was it Aunt Sarah?” Cathy still stood against the table. “Won’t you tell me anything that I should know?”

Haile gazed pathetically at her. “Honey, it’s hard—” she paused to take a cup of hot tea on the table. “Alright, I asked Carl Dalton to give up keeping the Sapphire stone, because Sarah will be the next keeper.”

“Why?”

“It’s necessary—” she answered, “to keep it safe.”

“Is that everything?” Cathy felt like there was another hidden things that her mom still kept from her. “I have the right to know.”

“Can you tell?” Haile asked her in return. “There are a lot of conundrum in the universe.”

She sat beside her, and said, “That’s razzle.”

“You will know when the time comes,” Haile said and caressed her cheek compassionately. “I promise.”

8

THE BROOKLYN PARTY

ELEANOR HEISLER



THE COMPLICATION WAS her exact feeling against the fact she held on her palm hand. Eleanor hated herself to read those lusterless pages from the book that had every name of her

family from the early generation. She recalled the folk stories that her grandmother used to tell her. Either it might be true or not, she would keep it disguised on her head. The book wasn't with her now. She left it alone in her bedroom.

What is it that became a burden between our families?

When she closed her eyes, a slight vision of that book page hovered into her mind.

HOUSE OF ALOISE.

"Who are these people?"

"Yes, Your Highness?" Her chauffeur stared at her through the rear mirror of the car.

All of a sudden, the silence broke apart. She finally awoke from her deep reverie after he shouted pretty loudly. "Can you shut up?"

"I think this is might be a bad idea to go there," he murmured. "The Lady is looking for you."

"Just pull over," she ignored him.

The silence came again.

"Don't you have a cigarette?"

He astonished when she asked. "Excuse me, Your Highness?"

"Give me one."

After he gave it to her, Eleanor stepped out from the car without giving him alert. He shocked and jittered when she snapped the car door harshly. It was useless to call out for her in the middle of the crowd, she wouldn't look back.

People crossed into each other as a stranger here. Everyone looked busied.

Eleanor walked among them while having vicious eyes. The nature calling of admiration toward her was so forth in the public. She had to endure from screaming out at them, except

if her chauffer stalked her from behind, but he didn't, because he stayed in the car and would wait for her further command.

The trees looked shady from afar. The air scattered the falling leaves. The gray walking trail was ready to welcome her. In this area, no one would bother to look after her, not even her grandmother. This was her favorite place—*East River Esplanade*.

She stopped waiting at the traffic lamp, along with some pedestrians. Before the lamp turned red, her eyes caught the strangeness sight across the street. Under the bright sunshine, it would be weird for somebody to hold an open umbrella, especially it was a red-blooded umbrella. Eleanor squinted at the girl who stood taller among the pedestrians across the street. She was tremendously bewildered against that strange girl as their eyes met. The stare felt sharp.

In a count of five, all of the pedestrians got ready to walk across the traffic lamp.

When Eleanor followed to walk, she saw the sharp green eyes on that girl, staring straightforward to the road. Eleanor felt a tremendous familiarity as they passed by.

For the last three seconds, she stared intensely at Eleanor while her red umbrella still opened widely. It felt like slow motion when they almost reached each other's shoulder. The girl only wore boots without heels, and still looked five centimeters taller than her.

Eleanor kept staring at her. That slender girl acted cold and emotionless now. Her sudden indifference didn't help her to understand the familiarity, and she couldn't remember anything that had to do with that stranger.

The pedestrians finally arrived at the opposite pavement, as well as the girl who gave a sharp stare again at Eleanor from afar, and her red umbrella was still wide-opened.

Eleanor didn't get with her eye catching game. Something seemed beyond unusual, but nothing she could decode. The only thing she could think was—*I've met my mirror-self?*

That girl surely looked alike with her figure.

Eventually, she had a dilemma to screw herself with the idea of calling out that stranger or to run across the street, which would sound exaggerating. Everything was just a proclamation inside her head, and it was the time to ignore the situation.



The sky was between the color of Friday afternoon and evening in Esplanade. It was a good place to stay up late for her, while the crowd began to leave the park.

Eleanor sat alone on a bench, ignoring the rules of this place to let her hands lit a cigarette with her lighter. She smoked freely, sighing alone as if breathing was hard to do.

She lost her mind with the beautiful view of skyscraper buildings and water in front of her. The darkness made the buildings emitted their lights, shadowing the sleepy water.

She snored painfully with the tight heel boots that she wore, but her tantrum feeling was caused by the loathe that felt tighter on her heart. She hated every moment in her life. Seemingly, her mind shaped like a fraction of catastrophe. She couldn't explain what the right thing was. It wasn't about becoming a good granddaughter, but something that Sofia had said earlier.

The sky turned completely dark in the evening. She walked alone to the park while smoking. The coldness embraced against her cream fur coat.

At the time, a memory flashed on her mind, bothering her about the secret beneath the skeleton key and White Foxes'

heavy book. Sofia had warned her to keep it as a secret. No one should know that she had read it, especially from her grandmother. The secrets were literally written inside that leather-bounded book. Only one thing that didn't make sense for her—*Cathy Charlotte*, she was part in the circle of the family. Eleanor didn't like the idea of having the same bloodline with her, until she could find the reason why.

Doesn't she know who herself is? Why acting so unpretentious in campus? Eleanor muttered alone with the bloodline idea. *She makes me hate her more and more.*

It might be her new problem, despite she didn't feel the good in life.

I can't run away again. It will be a fuss.

No one ever told her to become a wreckage girl, and she was once messed up. Since eleven years ago, she had promised to not being miserable, and she won't ever cry over anything.

Literally, she never cried since then.

Someone had helped her in the past, but her memory was obscured that she couldn't remember it—either about the memory of her long forgotten savior or her sadness over her parents' death. The world that person once showed her had brought the light and hope in her heart.

She would never feel alone.



On Saturday night, the Brooklyn Party had a galore pleasure that was showed from every guest that dressed in golden. Half of the guests were excited to have a rare chance to meet the most honorable assembly. They were one of the hosts that threw this celebration party.

Most of the guests showed a fake smile and fake politeness.

Marie de Clure didn't seem to care against their falsity behavior. It wasn't important to think about, because she wasn't a complicated person to go forth with simplicity. Some went pretty badly as a victim for those who didn't play along with her invisible game. Almost everyone knew what game was that, either for the rule. Some people who dared to break it, they would end up like a dead mosquito.

She was the leader of *White Foxes*. They had arrived at the entrance door. All the cameras started flashing, while the guests approached them deliberately. The marmalade floor in the foyer had turned into the ocean of the crowd in no second.

The security guards had been dragging those uninvited reporters from the building. This was supposed to be the party between the police, detectives, and some related businessmen.

The crowd looked enthusiast, clamoring excitedly with a massive applause.

All the members of *White Foxes'* ladies dressed in their expensive fur coat, while the gentlemen dressed in their black tuxedo, and exception for Marshall, who looked comfortable in his brown-cream pinstripe suit. They walked with charm, causing some guests to feel breathless.

Marshall walked side by side with Marie, which everyone knew as mother and son. They walked together like politicians, in fact, they were literally important people.

His focus got distracted with the view of a beautiful woman who dressed in black suit, and had short bob raven black hairstyle. She was different from the rest of the women in here. She was a charismatic woman that once he knew a long time ago, and the time had reunited them again.

She was enjoying a glass of white wine when they caught each other's sweet smile, secretly.

Afterward, he got distracted by a few gentlemen from Brooklyn Police Department. They overwhelmingly wanted to start a conversation with him since they were dying to discuss their new project. Marshall noticed their mimic—the awkwardness.

“Thank you gentlemen, it would be an honor to work with all of you.”

A woman suddenly ran into him. “Marshall!”

He looked at her in disbelief to find her sneaked out successfully from the guards, either in here or even in Paris from a year ago, she was an assertive reporter. She dressed in a formal suit and had a curly brunette hair. He had given a thought to her—she looked more like a secret fans rather than a reporter.

Meanwhile, the other reporters looked pretty tired after the running and screaming session.

“Look, Ms. Brimham,” he stepped back slowly before she threw her voice recorder at his face, “I am busy. Can we talk later?”

“Would you mind to answer just a few questions—you have come all the way here to Brooklyn for a new project, is that correct?”

He chuckled handsomely.

She added, “There was a peculiar incident—about the missing building in Austria, could you explain that?”

He was astonished when she was pushing him with the topic. No one should know, and no one could talk about it so freely. This female reporter was just too brave to approach White Foxes’ most beloved member. She should have known better.

“There’s nothing you need to talk about it.”

“But—”

“Is it Ms. Brimham, isn’t it?” Marie already stood behind them, greeting her with a friendly smile, although it looked killing. On the other side, this reporter knew exactly what she meant. “Don’t you know your place?”

“My Lady, my apologies—but I want to interview your son just a few minutes—I promise,” she begged.

“If you keep persistent about this case—” she smirked, “you may soon find out about your obscure future.”

Right after Marie said that, she dropped her voice recorder unintentionally. Her mental was broke and her fingers were all trembled. At least, there was a chance that she would know her future. She could run away from here to cry out alone in her bed, and so she walked away with suffocated lungs to leave them quietly.

Marie chuckled at the view. Beyond anything in this world, she would protect her son. Soon, she encountered the guests.

Marshall always walked side by side with her, greeting the guests together. After the smiley act, they spent time to drink a glass of wine while seeing everybody had a good time. They hadn’t talked since that reporter went away.

He was expressionless while observing the crowded space. The fact that he didn’t aware by Marie’s sharp instinct toward everything that he did, even to determine the side of him that looked different on the surface—less pleasurable but admirable.

“Who’s that?” Marie didn’t want to ignore something in front of her, “Your secret lover?”

Marshall almost choked from his white wine, although he managed to smile. “How’d you know that?”

“Don’t you remember?” She glanced emotionless at him. “I’m your mother.”

He got the feeling of being caught up. He didn't feel sorry for the fact—that woman in black suit was his past lover.

"Think about the risk," Marie warned him.

She was still in a good mood, so she left him alone with that matter.

Afterward, another woman showed up. Marie flickered at the familiarity of that young woman, who was about thirty-year-old, and she had a shaggy wavy brown hair, dressed in a formal teacher uniform rather than a party dress.

"Hello madam, it's a pleasure to meet you," she greeted

Marie narrowed her blue eyes. It took her a few seconds to remember, until they finally smiled at each other.

"It's such a long time. Follow me," Marie asked her calmly.

They went to the bathroom when no one was there. Marie put on some pink lipstick while the woman stood waiting behind her.

"Don't stare too much."

"No—" the woman smiled inscrutably as she was still staring at her through the mirror, "you look pretty though."

Marie chuckled as she turned to see her constant smiley face as if her lips was formed that way. "Stop your nice act in front of me—it's gruesome."

"Well thank you for someone who had taught me how," she grimaced.

"I have raised you since you were just a kid," Marie said as she returned her lipstick into her clutch. "Don't let them know about your identity."

That woman nodded, knowing what she meant was White Foxes' members.

"Also—" Marie smirked, even though it was hard to mention this one topic but she needed to. "You know about Eleanor, keep on watching her in college."

“I will, madam.”

“I’ve heard that some of the Aloise family is in New York, such a young generation—” Marie stared intensely at her brown eyes now. “Make sure you have your surveillance on them too.”

“May I know what your intention for that one?” She was hesitant to agree.

“If you have already knew, you shouldn’t have asked,” Marie sighed, concurrently she stared at the mirror again, “I need to investigate a few things. You’re one of my best people.”

“Is it necessary to put a grave on a little child?” She still didn’t understand for this one case. Marie chuckled alone, her face was unreadable.

That woman stared at her bewilderedly when Marie said, “Just—don’t disappoint me.”



On the other side, they didn’t aware that Eleanor was watching them from behind. She was in disbelief when her lecturer agreed with her mere invitation—Shania Medley was unpredictable, especially to make the Lady would want to talk privately with her. It became paranoia for Eleanor to perceive, even though she didn’t care of what they would be talking about in the bathroom.

Eleanor was rather stood absentmindedly in the midst of this golden party. She watched everyone had sweet beverage while chattering and giggling. It was all the expandable moment.

Everyone literally obeyed the dress code rule for this party, unlike White Foxes women that didn’t pretty much include something gold besides their fur coat. So did Eleanor Heisler,

the only gold that showed on her appearance was her necklace that formed in a few layers of glittering strings, and she also wore seven-centimeters black heels.

She had stood alone for more than fifteen minutes against the chattering guests. Nothing looked interesting in her eyes. At least, the song sounded good. They played the song on every speaker in the ballroom, which was the orchestra version of Chopin's Waltz.

It took her a second to breathe properly since she hated the whole ambience for being another frozen statue within her family. People only glanced back and forth at her appearance, just like what most students did in her campus. No one bothered to greet her without the presence of Lady Marie beside her.

Furthermore, she felt annoyed whenever her aunt and uncle would go public, looking as the busiest people on earth. When it came to her uncle, Marshall, it was already his everyday life to face the public since he moved to France. He had managed numerous reporters who bothered him.

When it was her aunt, Sofia, she somehow didn't feel easy to face the world, like she was holding back, like there was a glimpse of sorrow feeling.

Her aunt always worried and pitied for her after the car accident—which was the death of Sofia's younger sister and her brother-in-law.

One more touch on her tremolos reverie would make her fell apart, and she would rather have sore eyes tonight since the party would end in midnight according to the schedule. She couldn't run away again while the black suit bodyguards were guarding every corner of this Brooklyn tower.

She was crossing arms, making a defensive fence against the people here. When she gazed out again at the midst of the

ballroom, her eyes bulged out surprisingly. The view was six meters away from where she stood alone next to the table scape. She gawked at that familiar innocent face.

That girl was sweet smiling at everyone in the party.

The part that she hated mostly was when that girl started stepping forward to her in white heels. The girl smiled sincerely at her. Eleanor wouldn't return that practical matter, she kept being fierce as usual. Once again, she repeated that familiar name inside her mind;

Cathy Charlotte.

9

THE DISCUSSION

CATHY CHARLOTTE



IN THE LATE EVENING, her dad had forced her to come, and it felt unpleasant without her mom. Cathy surely got bothered, but it was for her dad's sake that she wanted to. In the next hour, they finally arrived earlier at the party.

The room looked unbelievably expensive with the considerable golden theme. The paintings were hung on the wall. The porcelain vases were placed in every corner of the ballroom. Everything looked fitted perfectly with the dress code; women dressed in their golden gown, while the men dressed in their black tuxedo. No Pharaoh or even Cleopatra, but their dignity became as high as that.

The women glanced at each other, comparing their look secretly which was overrated. This was a high class party where everyone had their formal etiquette and attitude. This Brooklyn Party didn't last alone without the melody of various classical songs that had been playing automatically from the speakers.

"This is my daughter—Cathy Charlotte!"

Manson made her uncomfortable since the minute they arrived. "Dad, don't embarrass me."

He bent down to her ear, whispering, “I want to show them that my daughter is beautiful.”

They walked toward the foyer along, where all of the guests looked like a fume of ocean. Seemingly, everyone had been waiting for someone’s arrival in that red carpet, as if it was a holy pathway to step in. Most of the visitors already knew who would be walking in there. The next assembly had attended a zillion parties. They were a group of honorable family that everyone wanted to meet in person—the match cordial and radical.

“Who are they?” Cathy murmured.

“Don’t you know them?” She surprised when a forty-year-old elegant lady in yellow gown snapped after her, when she was actually asking the question to her dad. “*White Foxes.*”

“W-what?” She thought to hear it mistakenly. Manson caressed her shoulder, calming her.

“I guess, their son has arrived,” he murmured.

“As for your information, do not ever interact with them while you can.”

Cathy narrowed her eyes at that lady, baffling. “What does that mean, madam?”

The lady rolled her eyes irritatingly. “Seriously, you know nothing about them—” she continued talking while people started applauding at the foyer, “even if you see them wrap in a beautiful form, do not be blinded. They are the real depravity. They are the most frightening family I’ve ever known,” she spoke disgustedly toward their existence.

Cathy was still bewildered with the new information she received. In her perspective, everything looked rather magnificently scary.

All of them looked physically similar. Anyone could tell at glance that they were literally related to each other.

“A story within story is a real deal that some histories have remained about them,” another beautiful lady shouted enthusiastically, she looked older than the first lady, “—never misjudge their politeness for kindness, child.”

Cathy had enough for their gossip, thus she muttered, “I really have no idea of who they are. It seems everyone has a gratitude for their arrival.”

“Hey, come on. I need to talk with one of them,” Manson dragged her quickly from the ladies, making her startled.

All the members of White Foxes’ women wore a fur coat that looked incredibly expensive, which suitable with their figure. They shared the same platinum-blond hair and blue eyes. No one could look as beautiful and vicious at the same time, but White Foxes did. Furthermore, their female leader was the most hospitable person among them.

“The Lady!” Someone hollered out at the leader. She was ready to greet their aggressiveness.

Cathy and Manson witnessed the tremendous admiration that was given for that family. She wondered what their part was in this huge party.

Random cameras started flashing to capture their beauty, and in no second, the whole world would see the update of their pictures.

“I’d wish I know her name,” Manson whispered nervously at her. Cathy knew he referred it to the female leader who dressed in soft-pink suit. “Her son will be my working partner—soon.”

She squinted conjecturally. “Is he Chantel Herron’s replacement?”

“—or superficially as my boss,” he sighed. “He could be.”

Cathy couldn’t resist giggling at her dad, who seemed really nervous.

She remembered the day when she laid in coma, and the day she found out about Chantel that went missing from the incident with no trace. No one had ever told her what was truly going on until now—either the police or even her dad. They closed the case as they ignored the effort to do paranormal hunting for the disappearance of the abandoned castle in Austria. They also kept Josh to silent his statement for his own good before anyone could get him into a psychiatric hospital. But Cathy didn't want to perceive the police's argument about the case. The abandoned castle was supposed to be located like the last time she saw it vividly. She knew that nothing was delusional in her memory. There was just no rational answer to prove the fact.

"Please smile widely for them," her dad murmured as they approached those businessmen.

The female leader was called as the Lady by all the people here. She was currently talking with some police who dressed in their finest tuxedo. Manson recognized those excited faces.

"Bonjour!" Manson almost hollered aloud at the tallest man who dressed in a brown-cream pinstripe suit.

"Oh!" He surprised in return, at once he tried not to act awkward. "Goodness my friend, how do you do?"

"I'm good—" they both shook hands, and Manson said again, "Everyone in the Police Department had been waiting for your long stay in Paris. We glad that you came sooner."

"Officially, I have to learn so much from you," that charismatic man patted his shoulder with humor. "Becoming a detective isn't my preference job, but my old friend has begged me differ from now on."

Sometimes that man couldn't avoid staring at the vivid presence of Cathy while talking. Soon, Manson realized that. "Oh, this is my daughter—Cathy Charlotte."

Cathy doubted to meet him this way, in a different place with much formality and intensity. Both of them wondered to each other. There would be plenty of moment or maybe just a few seconds to say hello as they got introduced.

“Joe Marshall—I’m the CEO from one of automotive bankers in France,” he spoke first before Manson would be suspicious if something was going on. “We’ve met again, Miss Charlotte.”

His grip was strong and warm, he didn’t let go of his hand for a second. Cathy got a familiar atmosphere about him, even this was counted as the second time she met him since in the Central Park.

“Wait, you two knew each other?” Manson sounded like he was freak out rather than being relieved.

“I wish to know more about your daughter, she seems lovely.”

“She’s only eighteen, Mr. Heisler. I couldn’t let—”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Charlotte,” he chuckled. “She’s a year younger from my beautiful niece—over there—” he beckoned at the girl who stood in the back of the ballroom, near to the table scape full of sweet desserts.

Cathy astonished when she saw the one that he referred. It was the viscous girl from college.

Further, Joe Marshall already stood side by side with the female leader now, and he introduced her, “This is my mother.”

“I’m Marie de Clure,” her wrinkled white skin was showed on her forehead and cheeks, although overall she looked flawless. “You must be Manson Charlotte, along with your daughter?”

There was an impression that Lady Marie was full of secrecy. She seemed enduring a particular emotion when she talked, but now, she got a bit surprise to meet Cathy.

It felt odd for Cathy, as she knew nothing.

The next minute, Lady Marie went ahead with a platinum-blond hair woman that appeared elegantly as the closer companion of the Lady. She had informed the Lady that the formal meeting would be held in the dining hall soon.

Cathy only had a small chance to be assured about them. "You are—the Heisler family?"

Marshall nodded nicely at her. He treasured an odd charisma that somehow couldn't make Cathy focus, and then he said, "Perhaps, we should have some coffee together."

Fortunately, her dad didn't hear that offer as he busied greeting the arrival of Luke the police, which was Jordan's dad.

Cathy thought it wasn't necessary to consider, "Mr. Heisler, I don't think we should do that."

"Maybe next time, we will meet in the park again. I'll make sure you'll come," he smiled mischievously.

"Maybe I'll come with my dad. It's a great invitation by the way."

He chuckled, and then he breathed deeply against the clattery sound from the crowd. He returned to stare at her, "Don't you think we've met before? I think I knew you from somewhere."

"Yes, from the Central Park, sir," she assured him.

"No, before that," his blue eyes stared too deep at her.

"I don't know then," Cathy shrugged, and she changed the topic hurriedly before this moment could bother her, "—anyway, what are you doing from being CEO to detective?"

"Ah, you've noticed. They offer me a big project that got my interest."

“A project with the police?” She bewildered.

He hadn’t answered her when a waiter approached to offer a glass of wine. Joe Marshall picked up one glass, while Cathy still waited for him with a demanding look.

“So, I’m going to work with your dad. He seems like a hard working person, and passionate,” he said, smiled. “I supposed it will be fun.”

“He is,” Cathy agreed, at once she didn’t want to make an impression as if she would mind anyone’s business, so she changed the topic again, “Did you live in Paris before coming here?”

“Yes, since I was twenty six. I felt far away from my family—homesick literally,” he chuckled. “What’s your story?”

Cathy narrowed her eyebrow. He giggled to see her innocent expression.

“I’m a college student, living in the Bronx with my mom, while my dad lives alone in Brooklyn,” she sighed as it was pretty inconvenient to speak it out loud from her mind.

“It’s a long journey, isn’t it?” He asked.

Slightly, she felt like there was a glimpse of spark in his eyes, like his eyeballs showed a clear mirror that she could see her own reflection.

“I’ve thought about our earlier talk, the coffee time must be done, ah—” a few businessmen began to surround him for a discussion, he spoke rashly to her, “Anyway, it’s very nice to see you again, Cathy Charlotte.”

She didn’t even have a chance to answer his invitation. It felt irresistible.

The next second, Cathy stood alone in this huge ballroom. She smiled at everyone that came across with her, until the new idea came up like a rushing pedal on her mind, even though she was well-aware that it might cause a catastrophic

atmosphere to greet that person for the first time. However, she stepped forward with great courage.

Eleanor Heisler stood beautifully in her soft pink mini dress covered with a gray fur coat, and with golden necklace that consisted of many string layers on her neck. That girl looked amazingly bright and charismatic just like all the members of White Foxes.

On the contrary, Cathy dressed truly simply in her mom's vintage white dress and circular gold necklace of Cleopatra alike. She felt pretty old-fashioned to compare herself with the guests here.

"Hello, it's a nice party, isn't it?"

Eleanor was only staring at her as if she saw something odd, even though they weren't stranger anymore since they had met in class.

"What are you doing in here?" She asked finally.

"I come to my dad's office party."

Eleanor took a peek throughout the crowd to guess which one was her dad, even though she already recognized him earlier when she saw her uncle mingled with random businessmen.

They stopped the small talk for three seconds, staring at the glamorous party.

There was something that Cathy wanted to be assured again, "Where's your family?"

She shot her with a disgusted mimic, and she narrowed her eyes like a cat. "Are you kidding me to ask where's mine?" She beckoned her chin to the ocean of random people in the ballroom. "There—what I so-called family."

Cathy bulged out astonishingly as she couldn't make sense why Eleanor would say it that way. She thought that there must be something wrong with the rude attitude of that girl, or

there might be something so deep that was going on within her family.

The unsolved mystery was still hovered on her mind like a dark vase that couldn't be broke apart. For the first time in her life, she met directly with the phenomenal and frightening family, which she felt no great pleasure to confront with—*White Foxes*.



Her mom still watched the television in the living room when Cathy returned home safely. The only light that emitted in this dark room was from the television screen.

Haile welcomed her with a warm hug, and the next thing, she demanded for a story from the golden party.

“It was huge, and—”

But then her mom quickly hushed her as she listened to the television news channel that was informing about a massive catastrophe, which just happened to the reporters in Brooklyn. The screen showed a bunch of reporters stood against the terrace of a tall building for the last an hour.

Cathy saw some of familiar faces in the party, especially Marie de Clure. Eventually, the news reported it was the same place she had just attended—the Brooklyn Tower.

“What happened?” Haile murmured wonderingly.

The news channel reported that there was a conflict, which was involving White Foxes to deal card along with the government and police. Some reporters had asked for the particular reason behind their secretive partnership that they hid from media and public. Also, some people had speculated that there was a secret project between them, which still remained as a rumor.

“What did you see in that party?” Haile squinted curiously at her. “Is that all true?”

"I saw so many people in there—the reporters weren't allowed to join," Cathy sighed, and concurrently remembered that she hadn't changed her clothes yet, "—but the big project is beyond the rumor, because one of White Foxes' members just mentioned it to me."

"Do you mean—your dad's new alliance?" She looked worried somehow. "Manson was being offered to handle a new project, but I'm surprised that it was *them*."

"Did he tell you anything about it?"

"He told me so little," she sighed and stressed out. "He didn't contact us until yesterday—for the annual party."

"Wait, annual?" Cathy got perplexed. "So, the whole partnership wasn't their first time?"

She smiled. "No, it turns out as a long term partnership, and Manson is a new member in their team now."

Cathy couldn't say anything since she knew nothing despite some news articles that she had read. "Why would those royals want to involve the police in their project?"

"I wish I could ask him for not being on their team," Haile sounded frustrated, "God, that's terrible—"

"Mom, what's wrong?"

"Listen to your mom, Cathy—" she stared at her while holding her shoulders intensely, somehow her eyes glimmered in a deep worryment, "Be careful against those royals, whatever happens."

"What are they—really?" she felt her mom's nervousness now.

"It's not such a good idea to come across with House of Heisler, especially with their small group of White Foxes," Haile sighed. "It's a common secret that they are capable of evil thing. It's just not a good history they have."

"What can we do for dad?" Cathy worried.

Haile shook her head hopelessly that nothing they possibly could do to take away his job.

"The power makes them everything. It's useless to fight now," her mom said.

For a second, those words echoed on her head with a short contemplation that only made her baffled alone.

Haile knew about the wild world more than her child, which was frightening.

Soon, the conversation had to stop for a night, Cathy wanted to take a shower, and then she would sleep.

After she smelled nice again, she turned on her laptop. There was a rare feeling that she wanted to check out on her email at midnight. The most recent email that she received had surprised her;

Martha is sicker every single day.

I couldn't count on to anyone's throat to feel sleepless than last night.

I hope you understand.

Your Best Man,

Josh Kingsley.

His email message had set her soul in the zero gravity, as if she could feel his tremendous sadness too for his grandmother, who currently stayed alone in Bisbee. She just realized that his email was sent yesterday, and it was weird that she didn't send it by phone message instead.

She felt really bad for a time that she couldn't make it for him, and yet, she was still tired and confused from her mind that won't stop thinking. After all the despair, she just wanted to go to sleep for a while.



On Sunday morning when she was alone in the apartment, there was something odd in the kitchen. Her eyes wandered at the microwave, when she checked it out reluctantly, she found a piece of charcoal bread, along with the destroyed plastic plate. The smelly charcoal filled up the air. Eventually, she wondered where her mom had gone.

She should be panicked to see me throwing away the bread, she thought.

No sound, no creak, no haunting hour, and the next minute, someone snapped the door harshly. Her mom held two paper bags in her arms.

“When did you go downstairs?” Cathy wondered.

“Oh, you’re home,” Haile was breathless while she placed the paper bags on the kitchen’s table, and she answered her, “I was just shopping for our groceries. Mr. Donald had shown me the way. He is truly nice, don’t you know that?”

“You’re really making a new friend,” she smiled widely. “Mom, it’s a good thing.”

“Honey, shut up,” Haile chuckled back while sitting down on the wooden chair in the dining room, and then she poured the cold water into her glass. “I think we need to get to know a few people around here—just in case.”

“Like you said, no one to trust,” Cathy sighed, crossing arms.

Cathy was usually smart for hiding her feeling from people, but not from her own mother.

Her mom looked into her eyes to feel sorry. “You may sit down, honey.”

Haile continued, “Formality and indulgency—two words you may find familiar in a party. But, don’t you remember what I’ve taught you?” She paused as she gulped a glass of water

again, and she continued talking, “That’s just a define mortal world, and yet the real life—”

“We’re not living in here forever—perishable,” Cathy added while staring solemnly at her mom. “That’s why we should make a good companion with someone we can trust—but we seems to live a lonely life, mom.”

“At least you remember, but don’t seem to understand it.”

“Mom—”

“We won’t feel lonely without a million friends. If you know the feeling of betrayal, you would understand that better.”

The silent went afterward, until there was a knock at the door. Cathy rose from her chair hurriedly to see a familiar face that had waited outside. The red curly hair woman was wearing a V-neck of black maxi dress, covered in her cream long coat.

“Marissa?” Cathy was dumbfounded as she opened the door.

Haile followed to stand behind her curiously, and she got surprised against the presence of the uninvited guest.

“It’s been a long time. How are you two doing today?” Marissa asked.

“We—”

Haile interrupted before her daughter could finish talking, she stepped forward in her place to confront the visitor, and shouted, “I don’t think it’s compelling for you to come like this.”

“My bad. Should I let you know before I arrive next time?” Marissa offered a suggestion.

“Mom, she’s a good friend of Sylvia Elle.”

Haile beckoned a sharp stare at her, telling her to stay silent. Subsequently, she glanced back at the red hair woman that was pretty tall compared to both of them.

“I know exactly who you are. How many times do I have to tell you?”

Cathy bewildered that her mom seemed to know about the precise existence of that angel.

Meanwhile, Marissa stayed calmed while smiling warmly as always. She returned her question, “For how long you will keep the secret from her?”

Haile chuckled sarcastically, and then she sighed alone. It took her for a while to let Marissa came inside.

Cathy followed to sit on the sofa oppositely to that woman.

Hail got a contradicted heart when no one mentioned any dangerous thing, but she depressed enough to exclaim at this beautiful woman. “Do you have something to say?”

“I do,” she smiled, bringing a good vibe, and her charisma sparked all over again like the first time Cathy met her at the Austrian National Library. “I came here not for a waste, but for the important matter.”

Both of them narrowed their eyes concurrently against that woman, whose eyes wandered around the lamp above.

Marissa stared blankly at the ceiling for a moment, and she smiled.

“It has begun,” she glanced sharply at them, “the demons have crawled again.”

Cathy stared worriedly at her mom, as if she knew that something terrible would happen—sooner or later.

“What should we do?” Cathy sounded fearful. “Hiding all the time?”

“It’s the best thing we could do,” her mom murmured, “but we couldn’t give up either.”

“True,” Marissa snapped.

“So?” Cathy demanded the exact explanation.

“There are some of royal private collections, one of the items is a leather binder that explain very well about the stone that they thought had lost—*Sapphire*. It’s important for you to keep it safe, even though it’s not the only stone.”

“Even there is more than one—why should we keep it, why are we being forced into this?” Cathy said, and shook her head in dilemma.

“Cathy, you need to define the concept with allure,” her mom said firmly.

When Mr. Donald was coming without a knock, Haile rose up hurriedly to greet him. He looked astonished to see the beautiful red hair woman, who sat perfectly like a goddess. “Ah, I’m sorry to bother.”

“Let’s talk outside, Mr. Donald,” Haile was hesitant to leave them, but she must ensure that the neighbor next door wouldn’t suspect any oddity in the living room. He had bulged out to see the unusual beautiful face of Marissa.

Cathy was bewildered at her that didn’t move at all like a statue while sitting on the sofa.

The conversation continued as soon as the door closed, Marissa started talking, “In Manhattan, there’s this antique shop between the old buildings across the desolate road. That’s where you can find the important leather-bounded book, although you can find more than just a book in there. But you must know, that place has been abandoned and locked now.”

“I really want to stop from this problem—runaway somewhere. Now you want me to go there?”

“Don’t worry, child. I’ll accompany you,” Marissa assured her.

“Where’s Elle?” She snapped like a storm.

Marissa stared deeply into her brown eyes, looking into her soul.

“She’s somewhere out there, freedom.”

“She’s disappeared—without saying goodbye.”

“You don’t need to think about her. Just concern what in front of you.”

Cathy sighed heavily, she couldn’t deny her own worryment, and she would rather drown herself into a prairie lake.

In the end, she finally decided, “I’d like to go there—the sooner, the better.”

IO

THE INCOGNITO

ELEANOR HEISLER



NINE IN THE MORNING, the Heisler had their family breakfast as usual. This regular tradition wasn't something that the young lady liked—Eleanor sighed in annoyance to walk her feet toward the dining room.

Marshall already dressed neatly in his blue pinstripe suit, and Lady Marie had just come to sit elegantly in her leader's chair. Also, the rest of the family members had dressed in their formal office appearance.

The people who lived in the mansion were occupied by many of the Heisler family who chose to be part of White Foxes group. There were about fifteen of them, excluded to the main family of Marie de Clure.

None of them were closed with Eleanor, because they didn't know how to start the conversation with her, except if it was for business only. As everyday had passed by, she lived her life as if they were all invisible.

The last person who joined this breakfast had made everyone almost jumped down from their chairs. He was the one whom the presence was rare to be seen, and he should be

the one who held the higher authority, but he couldn't, because he had become what he was now.

Eleanor bulged out to notice that he was her grandfather. He truly needed someone to help him walking in his wobbled legs, but instead he got trapped in a wheel chair. He had a half bald gray hair. Everyone noticed that he was still suffering in his sickness. His lips trembled since he had a tremor and paralyzed muscles.

"Honey, we are glad that you can finally join our little breakfast," Marie greeted her husband when a servant escorted him to sit next to her, and oppositely from Marshall.

The next minute, Sofia walked downstairs, she dressed in her gold fur coat again, and subsequently she sat down next to her sick father.

When everyone was ready to taste the food, the atmosphere had turned uncomfortable just like what they had predicted.

"He doesn't even have a soul," Eleanor shouted with her repugnant rage.

"Eleanor!" Sofia admonished her instantly. "Where is your manner in front of everyone?"

She threw her silver fork and knife into her plate of tuna sandwich, and then she glanced back and forth at her aunt and her grandmother. The servants got scared as they stared bewilderedly at this young lady.

"The breakfast feels like a restoration full of rotten fish, especially with this stupid rendezvous. Please dismiss him," she stared at her grandfather pathetically, and subsequently she stared at Lady Marie to shout out, "Look at him—you feed him like a little rat experiment. Do you plan to involve him in your matter?"

The tension was in the air.

Sofia bulged out at her rude manner. On the other side, Eleanor couldn't forget with their midnight talk.

The next second, a frightened young servant came rashly to Lady Marie as she informed that someone had waited in her office. Afterward, the Lady left the breakfast session.

Eleanor also heard it, so she rose from the chair, "I think I eat enough, if you all mind," and she walked away without feeling guilty.

She sneaked out to Lady Marie's private office. It took her a minute to hide from the servants, until she could stand well-wary against the glass window that covered with cream curtain. Lucky, there was a small gap in the window, so she could be a peeping Tom, finding out her grandmother's oddity.

The guests were a Hispanic man and woman. The conversation started between them as they mentioned something about the secret project.

"We must do it quickly. Don't let another interfere this case," that short black hair woman said solemnly, she even stood taller than Lady Marie, even though both of them had the same high heels.

"Goddamn, I won't make this harder. The contract between you both, what is it?" The man dressed in blue suit shouted peevishly between them.

"Should I call your little friend, Richard?" The Lady said as she stood against her wooden study desk, and that handsome man grinned creepily. "We did what we should. Between us—a dark business will be running on soon. I hope to see you in the department office. No late contradiction, please."

It seemed that Eleanor came late to peep on their conversation as her grandmother already pulled the door open. At that time, Lady Marie didn't seem like she was astonished to find her granddaughter had stood in front of her office.

“Who’s she?” Eleanor asked assertively, enduring her bewildering look.

Marie was literally calmed as she answered her, “A detective.”

Before she walked away, Eleanor shouted again, “What’s her name?”

Marie answered patiently without wondering in return of why her granddaughter should have a right to know any of her business. “*Chantel Herron.*”

Eleanor stood alone in there as her grandmother returned to the dining room. Her heart almost jumped out astonishingly when that tall stranger had appeared behind her, but it was strange that her man companion wasn’t seen nowhere. Eleanor was assured about that man’s presence in suit, so she peeped quickly to the window, and no one was there.

That woman had keen eyes, and she said, “Eleanor, you look beautiful today.”

Eleanor didn’t know yet about the identity of that woman in black suit. Her first impression on her wasn’t conflicted, even though it felt off that the woman knew her name, except if her grandmother would tell her so.

She remained silent as she watched Chantel Herron walked away from the mansion. Eleanor felt the coldness and darkness on the blue eyes of that woman, like there was something scary that she couldn’t be assured yet. She felt carried on.



Sunday morning felt hanging for her, because after the breakfast, a bunch of people dressed in formal suit had waited in the living room. She was surely confused with their presence, so she demanded a quick explanation from the

servant who just walked out from that room, “What’s the occasion?”

This young servant was agape to answer her properly, “They come for the project meeting, Your Highness.”

She didn’t bother to thank her for the information, and she just walked forward to see familiar faces from Brooklyn Police Department. She was in there to respond to her Aunt Sofia’s calling to talk privately, but it turned out that the room got crowded.

Lady Marie just came in there to take care of them.

“It’s all in the news,” Eleanor muttered when Sofia appeared.

“You right, this project is related to the history,” Sofia reminded her about their midnight talk. “She has an ambition, although we all do. But the thing we are about to talk—it’s a tremendous secret.”

“The Brooklyn Police are assertive with the case. They deathly won’t talk about it to the news reporters. It was clearly her doing, huh?”

Sofia stared down on the floor, jittering. “Yes, only the chosen detectives and a few police that will be handling the case. In fact—”

Every time Sofia had that kind of sigh, a real burden was on her mind. Eleanor noticed her unusual behavior immediately. At this moment, Sofia couldn’t hide her feeling better against her niece who was smart enough to look for a perfect subject.

“In fact what?” Eleanor repeated, as she felt peeved. “A stupid proportion of their highly inquiry standard won’t be able to approach for the right answer?”

“She just recruited a new detective, and she will immediately give a speech for media and public at the labor field in front of the Brooklyn P.D.,” Sofia informed.

“There will be a speech?” She asked, doubted. “With the cameras on or private?”

“You know our family—it’s all a camouflage. No one will bother to talk the truth.”

“When?”

“Soon, but you shouldn’t get involved in it,” Sofia sounded worried. “Just take this as my advice.”

Eleanor was still curious with the project. “Uncle Marshall—he will become one night stand detective or what?”

“He’s part of the project’s landlord—along with your grandmother,” she informed. “He will be one of us who has the authority to decide the will on the police system.”

“Don’t tell me,” Eleanor bulged out, felt disgusting. “White Foxes will demolish another system again?” She asked in a state of disbelief. “For how long this family will undergo their evilness?”

“This is who we are,” her aunt said it easily, even it was true and hard to believe, even for herself.

Eleanor gawked, wanting to speak out the thing she couldn’t disguise, but she ended up sighing. Eventually, she spoke of her deepest hatred, “I can’t believe that I’m destined to live with all of you—*monsters*.”

“She wants to make you as the next leader,” Sofia told her about the circumstance. “Lady Marie is persistent, even for this project,” she couldn’t hide her worriment now. “Please—”

“You’re worry I might end up like my parents?” She squinted in disbelief.

Her life felt complex when her grandmother had planned all the things for this family. Seemingly, she was raised more

like the heir of the family and some kind of business woman rather than a normal granddaughter.

Eleanor turned sarcastic to answer her. "Don't be."

As soon as the chattering noise became louder in the living room, Lady Marie walked out along with those guests, escorting them to the foyer. Sofia understood instantly when her mother called her to talk with the businessmen.

For a while, Eleanor stood alone while listening vaguely on their conversation about the secret project, but she didn't understand after all.

"Eleanor, child," her grandmother looked relieved and worried at the same time.

Just so suddenly, Lady Marie dragged her to the dining room where the space was quiet.

As they stared at each other, Marie started their conversation. "You'll be concerned when we will finally get the whole solution for the project."

She narrowed her eyes bewilderedly. "We?"

"I thought you need to know, come to see, learn," Lady Marie smiled, her face was unreadable. "For the speech and interview."

"I know your stupid game. Who's the witness?"

"We found out yesterday. We'd like to call them by tomorrow—your college friends."

"I have no friends," she was assertive.

"Well, then someone who are attending the same college as you are."

"Can I know their name?"

Marie's red lips was half smiled, before she answered, "Josh Kingsley and Cathy Charlotte. I'm sure you know them."

Eleanor held her breath as her mouth went gawking. She wondered about their intact business in this case. She knew

that the project was about the old unfinished investigation, but it looked suspicious at the moment.

“Mother, you’re here,” Sofia appeared while holding a folder of binding documents in her arms.

“They have found it?” Lady Marie wondered.

Eleanor noticed that it was a civil document, which looked more than just a game against one system that they had provoked unbroken. She knew about their plan; the folk and society were concerned as apprehensive.

“These villagers are found under one district near to the Vienna Woods,” Sofia informed.

“Discard them—” Lady Marie walked away with her euphoria expression, “into hell.”

Eleanor was neither breathless nor speechless as she couldn’t let out her own anger, and her aunt seemed to understand her feeling.

“What’s her problem with those innocent villagers you’ve just mentioned?” Eleanor wondered.

Sofia stared at her with endless worryment. “These villagers have been supporting the existence of *the unwanted*. Gracefully, we need to process this project easier.”

“What is it the unwanted?” She sounded panicked as she remembered of what her grandmother just said earlier. “What’s everything has to do with me tomorrow?”

She sighed. “Your grandmother just wants you to observe how we undergo our system that will work on others. You’re the next generation, you need to learn.”

“You’ve said that I shouldn’t get involved, and now you agree with her?” She got conflicted.

It was hard for her aunt to explain, “Eleanor—”

—and to be a monster like all of you?” She almost yelled out at her face, but she could hold her anger since the guests

hadn't walked out yet from the mansion "—I'd rather kill myself."



Eleanor locked herself in this dimmed bedroom. The curtain was closed, and the sunshine tried to break in beneath the shadow. For a while, she agitated to think that her parents were just a painful memory. She understood that nothing could bring them back. Her eyes glossed while holding their picture that smiled happily.

It killed her—the frustrated mind.

When the phone rang loudly, she returned the picture on the table next to her bed. As soon as she received the call, a woman voice spoke in her usual manner, but this time, there was a slight tremble beneath her cheerful vibe.

"Hello, niece!"

"You're still alive?" She chuckled. "I thought you were dead."

"Careful, you little punk. As long as you don't try to relate yourself with me, everything's fine."

"I'm too busy though, but hey, let's have another toast together, and to visit the cemetery again."

"You miss them, right?"

"A lot and it feels like pain."

"Alright, pick me up at the airport by tomorrow morning."



On Wednesday morning, the servants stood in line at the foyer to greet Marshall, who already dressed neatly in his gray suit, while Lady Marie stood beside him, and Eleanor wanted to run since she won't come in anyhow. Seemingly, the schedule got changed when her grandmother received a phone call.

“Detective?” Marie stopped her son from walking out when she answered the call. “I’m sorry for this. It’s okay, we can do it when your daughter have a free time.”

As she put her cellphone back to her small clutch, she explained to her son, “She’s not in New York. We’ll delay the plan.”

A slight smile crossed on his lips, it was no big deal for the Lady either. However, Eleanor didn’t need to sneak out from them.

Afterward, they planned to go somewhere else, and Eleanor refused to come. The servants and bodyguards escorted them to the terrace to get their car ready.

After they were gone, she would want to drive her black sedan car by herself without her personal chauffeur. The car was parked inside the garage, and she was pretty lucky that no one was there, so she wouldn’t get caught.

There would be plenty of things to do after she brought the car outside to the wild world. She was determined to pick up her aunt, Hadley at the airport.

Since she was conquering with all problem on her mind, she forgot how to feel tremble when the security guards stood in front of the gate.

She won’t mind to boost her car against them, so they got frightened and obeyed her to open the gate immediately. The last thing, she bribed them with enough money.



Fifteen minutes later, she arrived at LaGuardia Airport to look for the right terminal.

She was here four months ago, and now she returned, noticing every detail carefully. The voice from speakers had

repeated the same information. The arrival time for her aunt would be ten in the morning, which would transit in Dallas first.

The transit schedule was written on the huge screen;
Los Angeles, California.

She waited and stayed focus while some people were staring boldly at her. They looked aware that her vibe and presence looked different from anyone else. She had a prerogative charisma that everyone could see so obviously.

Another fifteen minutes, some people finally came out along with their belongings from the terminal's gate. Hadley came enthusiastically with her small sling bag and black suitcase.

As they walked closer to each other, her aunt looked way taller even they wore the same five centimeters heels. Eleanor felt happy as they hugged each other.

"You look even paler, am I right?" Hadley said and giggled childishly.

"Shut up. Let's have a drink."

"Wait, since when they let you drink a beer?"

She chuckled sarcastically, annoyed. "How many beer did you drink by yourself?" Her voice asked assertively. "When people say drink, it doesn't always refer to alcohol. I don't drink that stuff."

"Easy, punk," Hadley felt annoyed too. "You sound like a reckless kid to me. Let's catch up then."

They went together to the parking lot, and they would do their first plan soon.



Hadley wore a thin cardigan and jeans. She looked pretty skinny with her long legs, and she cut her violet-black hair shorter like a boy.

“Take off that sunglasses, we’re not going to the beach,” Eleanor murmured.

Slowly, she placed her sunglasses into her sling back. She wanted to have a good atmosphere with her niece, and the next minute, she turned on the radio. Apparently, the same news was still propagating around New York.

“Oh, I’ve heard this every now and then. I wonder if this is really mother’s doing.”

“Exactly, it should be today they would ask me to watch for the witness interview, but it got delayed. The speech is coming soon.”

“Do you have any idea how important you are for that project?”

“I don’t even want to know.”

“Let me tell you that you are stupid, Eleanor,” Hadley spoke solemnly. “There’s something more than just oddity within the project. They’ve found it already, now it’s your turn to start digging.”

“What is it wrong with everyone?” She sighed. The car stopped at the red traffic light. “No one tells me about the real deal—so implicit.”

“You want to know the real deal, then I tell you that they’ve found it. Why do you think they called it the *Invisible Project*?” Hadley smirked. “They literally mean it.”

“What have they found?” She asked while driving her car to the intersection.

“Believe me, you won’t come out when you know—welfare.”

“Like getting into a trap?”

“Yes, on your own desire,” her aunt’s words were like a checkmate for her ears.

“What do you feel after that?”

“Empty,” she chuckled at her wondering face. “At least that’s what she told me in my childhood time. I’ve never seen it by myself.”

“Shut up.”

Eleanor didn’t giggle like her aunt. She contemplated it seriously since she had given a hard thought on the project, but her mind seemed to get lost.



Eleanor drove across the road against the small resort, where the cemetery located behind it. At the time, Hadley had her mind hovered to remember that they once had a relaxing spa together in there, and so she recommended her niece to make the cemetery as the second destination.

“We can do it later. I’m not in the mood.”

“Oh, sister, come on!”

Eleanor parked her car in an arbitrary way as soon as they arrived. After she turned off the car engine, both of them snapped the car door concurrently.

“I thought I’m you niece?” Eleanor shouted while walking on the grasses in the cemetery.

The view of graveyards was everywhere. The dead trees made this place tremendously looked haunting even in broad daylight.

“I sound older when you address me as your aunt.”

“But you are,” they giggled concurrently, and then Eleanor changed the topic, “By the way, this is almost past to your forty, isn’t there any man?”

“There again. I hate you.”

Their small talk got stopped when they arrived in front of the two tombs. They stared at the tombs with a sad feeling of nostalgia.

"I couldn't count on to their death," Eleanor murmured, trembling.

She already brought white flowers to their graves, but her tears were just undone. Carefully, she placed the flowers above her mother's grave.

Hadley glanced at her with a huge sympathy.

The cloudy sky appeared slowly as the winds blew to their red cheeks.

"She was important to me," Hadley said as she began to cry. "Anna was a good person, she never neglected her family."

Anna Lauran Heisler

1968 – 2001

Thomas Chuck

1965 – 2001

"They died together in peace," Hadley felt suffocated now, she cried.

Eleanor went silent while remembering the last moment of her parents' life, before they died from the fire explosion.

The angel statues around here were the witnesses of their condolence since they attended the funeral from eleven years ago. There was a written quote below each other's name on the two tombs. Eleanor was reading it carefully;

"Dear universe, we were one when we were children. We were higher when we were on your path. In here, we died without patronizing anything. Let's heaven bring us happiness, give us hell to the eternal realm. In this second, we died in peace."

She glanced sharply at the engraved words on the two tombs. She felt disbelief to perceive the essence of that quote.

For a while, she sighed, and said, “It was a lie,” she glanced at Hadley, who already fell on her own knees, crying all by herself. “They might be in heaven, but what they had been through, was hell, and was never peace.”

“How could you be so calm, Eleanor?” Hadley stared at the white flowers as she couldn’t stand the coldness from her niece. “After everything?”

She stayed silent.

For a few minutes they stood frozenly and stared blankly at the tombs, until a sudden thunder came to startle them, and they finally ran to the car.

“That was close, almost rainy,” Hadley murmured.

They didn’t speak again after a few minutes, and then Eleanor checked on her aunt, who looked shocked against something.

“I think I saw something,” her aunt worried.

Eleanor glanced at the rear view mirror on the left side, and she found a black car was parked near to the cemetery gate. For a second, she recognized the car’s license plate number, so there was no way anyone in that car could fool her.

“They’re following us,” Hadley kept on frowning.

“No—they’re not following me—but you.”

Her aunt was breathless and panicked, “Are they going to kill me? I shouldn’t have come then.”

Eleanor sighed as she turned on the car engine. “They’re not going to kill you today.”

She drove her sedan like a racing car. It was too fast that Hadley got startled and almost jumped out into the dashboard to hurt her chest pretty badly.

The day would not be ended with that.



In the morning, Ohio, Brooklyn Police Department.

The big office was established within these city buildings. The current atmosphere had made many people afraid, the news hadn't soothed yet. The detectives who were in charged already prepared themselves to attend the first briefing for the project, while the police were busied guarding around the building of their department.

The new one had come into their door—the beautiful black hair woman, along with a mysterious man. They looked like stranger for the whole employees here, since they didn't appear ordinary, but with a completely perfect figure; tall and ideal body type. The woman wore formal black suit, while the man dressed in his gray suit.

The woman stopped where the only clock in this room hung on the wall, in line with the wooden table. One detective sat there against his computer, excessively focused and didn't aware with her presence.

“Isn't this Detective Charlotte?” She greeted, finally.

He stared up surprisingly to see her. “Detective Chantel Herron?”

The man beside that woman was observing Detective Manson, who dressed neatly in a brown suit and blue tie.

“How's your daughter?” She asked suddenly. “I was in Austria too. Unfortunately, I had a business at the same time when the accident happened. I'm sorry that I couldn't come to visit.”

“She's perfectly fine now,” he said, nodded understandingly. “Everyone thought you were gone.”

When the air went silent for a second, her blue eyes were looking contented and sharpened. Subsequently, she wanted to be assured about something underneath the matter, “I was—but I have come back now.”

"It has been more than a year now. What does your ex-husband say after your retreat in German?" He asked, presumptuously. "He's my very good friend."

"Pardon?" She squinted at him to wonder how much he knew utterly about her insecure life.

The man that stood next to her pretended coughing as the air went silent again.

"Perhaps, did you know from my son?" She guessed. "I was even unable to attend his graduation. I'm such a bad mom. Beyond that, I'd rather not talk about my past relationship," and she chuckled with a feeling of guilty pleasure.

Nevertheless, Manson remembered a few things about the incident that had caused his daughter went coma. His gut of feeling told him that this project might not be coordinated with his complex mind. He couldn't be assured whether the woman in front of him was a dangerous villain against his family or not. No evidence no worry.

"So, are you the one that in charge by White Foxes?" Manson asked her, and slightly glanced confusingly at that strange man, who looked like he had no interest toward anything in here.

Chantel was aware that she needed to introduce him, "This is my personal assistant, Richard. He'll be accompanying me during the work of Invisible project."

One of the female police hollered out, informing everyone in the room, "Be prepare, White Foxes will arrive soon."

The employees seemed busied to maintain their own appearance since everyone was nervous to meet the phenomenal family.

"Well, welcome for both of you. I hope we can work along," Manson said.

The atmosphere turned formal now. People started chattering loudly when the special guests had arrived at the door.

Manson rose quickly from his chair to walk along with the others.

The platinum-blond hair man had walked first to the room. All the women who averagely looked thirty-year-old, they got mesmerized by his charming charisma. He was the only son of the honorable Lady, among his three sisters. Everyone knew his well-known name;

His Royal Highness Jonathan Marshall Heisler.

As he came across with his past lover again, he had the idea to calm this overwhelming atmosphere. Meanwhile, Chantel stared back into his bright blue eyes, but the enchanting spark was no longer emerged between them.

They were surrounded by the employees, and some peeped shyly behind each wall partition.

Afterward, Lady Marie walked through elegantly, dressed in a tweed suit and golden jewelries that flattered every pair of eyes.

“There’s no negotiation to obey your request, my Lady,” Chantel spoke first to her.

Richard couldn’t handle to show his disgust against them. The Lady was surely noticed with his presence, which wouldn’t bring any exact progression for the project, even though she had a reason to keep him along.

“I’m glad that you’ve accepted our sustainable contract,” Lady Marie answered.

The private meeting would be held after the team attended the room, with the moderation under the surveillance from the chief of police

As soon as everyone came to the room, Lady Marie had prepared her documents.

On the other side, Manson suspected something odd with the documents that she placed on the table—the civil one, old, and atypical.

Afterward, Lady Marie explained the next procedures and schedules for the Invisible project. As everyone understood, the show would begin soon.



After twenty minutes the car drove around Manhattan, they finally returned to the huge empty field behind the small resort, which was next to the cemetery land. Her grandmother's spies couldn't follow up with her driving speed. Therefore, they decided to take a little walk when the sky turned bright.

"So bad, I can't even reach my leg for it," Hadley mumbled a lot to release her stress while her niece was walking behind her. "We've never come here before, it looks like no one bother to walk on these grasses.

"No, we can also have a little picnic here," Eleanor said while she was lying down on the grasses.

"Eleanor—" Hadley called her name, somehow it sounded mellow. Further, she took an old necklace from her pocket jeans.

"What's that?"

"Necklace."

"I know that, but what is it?"

"My sister's—your mother's—" both of them stared quietly at the gold necklace with a crystal pendulum. "I thought you should have it."

Hadley grabbed her warm palm hand forcibly, giving the necklace.

Surely, her aunt won't speculate with her reaction to astonish. Eleanor glimmered as she observed it slowly, and then she agreed to wear the necklace on her neck.

Afterward, she took off her black jacket, and went lying down again with only her sleeveless floral dress. Somehow, it felt like she came back to sleep on her king-sized bed. The only difference in here, she could hear the winds breezed around, and no one knocked at the door, or even anyone to mock behind her ears when she wanted to go to sleep.

Hadley followed lying down beside her. Their eyes were closed and opened repeatedly, following the dancing winds. They became a couch potato for a while. The silence brought the feeling of peaceful, along with the swirling winds.

"Taking a nap in here, remind me a lot of Anna," Hadley murmured. "She used to play like this with me—with Sofia."

"Don't talk about her," Eleanor snapped calmly.

"Why?"

"Don't make any fusion. It's not going to work on me—the nostalgia."

"You little brat, take your heart and mind with you," her aunt breathed deeply while gazing at the blue sky, and no clouds were seen for a moment.

"Marie has faked the cause of their death."

Hadley jumped out in astonishment. She sat instantly, staring perplexingly at her niece.

"How dare you call the Lady by her name!" She said nervously. "I know though, she's my mother—" and the next second, she peeped back and forth around the field. "I could sense how her spies are still hanging around here—waiting to smother us."

“Are you a chicken, perhaps?”

“I shouldn’t come back, then! They could be waiting at some alleyways to stab me.”

Eleanor leaned her elbows on the grasses as she stared confusingly at her aunt. She was observing her face that looked panicked.

“We can explain to them, come home.”

“You think people like them would listen? They need more than just explanation.”

The next second, Hadley ran rashly to the car, while Eleanor was left alone, and then she decided to wear her black jacket again and returned to her car. They didn’t talk while the radio played sixties oldies song.

Thereafter, she knew where to drive her car.



Marshall and Sofia stood side by side while waiting for their mother, who just walked out from her private office as she held her pink purse. All of them had just returned from Brooklyn. It was five minutes earlier, before the servants greeted the new arrival of the two young ladies in the foyer.

Eleanor snapped the floor exaggeratedly with her sharp black heels, making aggravated noise. Meanwhile, Hadley felt nervous and afraid to walk beside her.

“Mother.”

“You come home?” The Lady didn’t seem surprised for her daughter’s arrival. Her smile was emotionless. “How long you will stay here?”

“Momentary—I can’t leave my beach house.”

Eleanor was crossing her arms while watching them. Later, Marie called out Hadley, which was her youngest daughter to

talk privately in her office. As they went together, Marshall and Sofia followed them.

Meanwhile, Eleanor realized at the presence of the four bodyguards in black suit as if they dressed like secret agents. They stood near to the entrance door.

She walked back and forth as her eyes tried to search something within them. She wasn't sure at first, but slightly remembered about the stalking idea.

"Did you following us?" Eleanor started demanding.

She stared at the most muscular bodyguard, he had tan skin. He stood nervously against her as he couldn't give out any statement. He didn't even dare to look her in the eye, but only stared down at his own black shoes.

"Did you?"

He was silent.

"What's your name?"

His sweat was overdrawn on his forehead. He was persistent to stay silent.

"I just want to know your name. Give me one."

The other three bodyguards glanced at her with a worriment for their friend. They were afraid if they would lose their job too early.

Just in time, Sofia came behind the white pillar, which located in the midst of the foyer and the staircase. That bodyguard felt tremendously grateful for the lucky time. It was too close before he untied his nerve.

Sofia called her, "Come, I need to talk with you."

Eleanor glanced keenly at these bodyguards who could never stare easily at her in return.

They always felt a tremendous fear whenever one of White Foxes' members would yell on their face. They could

lose everything without any argument, and losing welfare was like a massive risk for them, even for every servant here.

In the living room, Sofia wanted to talk privately with her, “You shouldn’t bring that kid to home. Your grandmother hold a very risky business if Hadley have to join.”

“It doesn’t seem like grandma gave any interest with her five seconds ago,” she smirked. “Don’t worry too much. I thought it was better for them to meet—it’s your own sister.”

“If you thought everything would be fine just by that,” Sofia sounded mad.

“She just sent a spy to watch us. How miserable.”

Sofia sighed and closed her eyes for a moment to take a deep breath.

Eleanor waited, bored, and just wanted to take a nap in her bedroom.

“Today’s plan was cancelled due to the witnesses’ absence,” Sofia finally informed. “The speech—perhaps will begin this Saturday. You need to be a good girl just that one day, I beg you.”

“Why should I?”

“My mother isn’t someone who will cherish anything in her arms, except if it’s valuable. I know her my whole life. If you can’t do that, probably you can’t even feel your next birthday.”

“I tell you this Sofia—” her aunt bulged out when she addressed her aunt by first name without respect, “I can always find my way, you don’t have to be worried.”

As Eleanor walked away, there was no goodbye pleasure within them.

II

HIS AFFIRMATION

CATHY CHARLOTTE



FOUR WEEKS HAD PASSED before the mid-semester would begin. It was Wednesday, the seventeenth of October Two thousand and twelve. The college life went as usual.

She walked through the front yard of Fordham University. Just in the middle of it, she saw someone she knew was lying down there. Rashly, she tapped his shoulder—Josh got startled from his reverie.

“Where’s Jordan?”

“How should I know?” He seemed piqued.

“What’s wrong? You’re his roommate.”

“Alright, it seems he has a family meeting in Brooklyn. His dad wants him to come to the Police Department.”

“Why?” She wondered. “My dad works there too.”

“He said something about a limitation of economic crisis—” Cathy raised her eyebrows, she didn’t understand. He sighed and sat with her, “his dad wants thriftiness, so he preferred his son to come along while he’s working.”

“He seems—”

“Pathetic? Yes,” Josh shouted hurriedly before she could find the right word to describe that situation.

“Come on, give it a rest. He’s not that bad.”

“No, but horrifically annoying.”

“Should I buy you a drink?” Cathy offered suddenly.

Her stared wonderingly at her, “That would be nice. Greatly, we have the same class today, come on,” he said while helping her to stand on the ground.

The Poetry Literature, their first morning class. There was no new sensation.

Josh picked a seat in the back of the classroom to make Cathy felt saved, even though there would be no special task for students later. The class was taught by an old man lecturer who appeared like a scientist when it should be more like literature lover. He liked to yell a lot.

After two hours of class had passed, Cathy still stayed at Fordham for her next class.

Josh offered to accompany her until the break time, since he didn’t have any class in that afternoon, and later, he said goodbye as he returned to his dorm.

She was still missing the time she had spent with Josh and Jordan that it became a nostalgic feeling, and even now, the boys started to have a man to man relationship which was way greater compared when they were in high school. She was glad to have friends like them since she still couldn’t open up with anybody. As a matter of fact, no one seemed to care with each other around here, except to mingle with their own group.

The next class was *Literary Analysis*. It was Mr. MacLain’s class. She did her own research before getting into this day’s subject course that would be a bit different from the Victorian literature theme.

Apparently, she came earlier than the rest of the students.

Mr. MacLain sat at his desk while writing something on a brown paper of his small book. It was a bit awkward to encounter him without anyone's presence at the time. He had noticed her arrival while writing, and afterward, he didn't seem comfortable. He glanced back and forth at her as if he would ask her something—but he didn't.

Cathy glanced back at him to wonder, but firstly, she preferred to look out for a comfortable seat in the class, rather than making a false assumption against his silence.

After she sat near the window, where the view of trees looked shady, her thought wandered again, remembering her next schedule for Manson's job since he got a new case to handle, and he still kept it a secret from her.

There was a voice that distracted her reverie, which was Mr. MacLain that had stood in front of her table while clearing his throat. Cathy stared up to see him smiling oddly.

"It still twenty minutes early before the class will actually begin."

"Yeah," she nodded politely.

Cathy felt tired and uncomfortable to see him stood very tall against her. He leaned on a student desk. Also, she felt nervous to talk with him.

"Don't you think it's too early for you to come?" He asked.

She stared back at him finally. "Do I bother you?" He was absolutely astonished when she took her bag immediately. "I can go back to the class later, if you wish—"

"No, no, please—I didn't mean it that way," he sounded panicked as if she would leave him forever. He cleared his throat again when she returned to sit down. "Do you reading books a lot?"

She blinked. "Yes, I've explored some classical books—like Charles Dicken, according to your suggestion."

He sat back finally and tried to make a comfortable talk with her, even though he didn't seem like someone who would be hardly talking, but now, he was incredibly lost a word.

"Do you like to visit the gypsy's bookstore?" Cathy asked first, "I mean the one behind this building."

He narrowed his eyes, he wasn't sure of what she referred.

Eventually, Cathy won't bother with this topic as she just wanted a quick answer, so she added, "Cavely Bookstore—not far from here."

"Ah, yes, not every day," he realized. "I'm not sure wanting to return to that place."

She sort of surprised. "What happened?"

"I just thought that the atmosphere has changed. I couldn't stand whenever the owner suggested me for a mantra book," he chuckled. "*The Myth of Volka*—that the book I want to find now."

"Mantra? Volka?" She confused.

"Actually, those two words are related. Inside the Volka, there's a mantra. Would you ever believe if someone told you about a myth or legend?" He sighed, laughed by himself. "The secrets about the Volka society—I'm dying to know."

"What are they?" She was curious. "Seems interesting."

"I will know soon since I have a plan to visit Manhattan's library for that, maybe you want to join?"

"You need a companion?" She smiled awkwardly. "Don't you have any friend, Sir?"

He chuckled hesitantly. "I want to ask you about the same thing—besides that boy, don't you make any friend in college?"

Cathy astonished since it was rare for anyone that would ask her straightforward, and he referred the boy as Josh. She tried to figure out a reasonable answer while blinking, and somehow, it felt easy to be honest with him, "I haven't met

anyone that *click* with me yet. I could never resist standing in the crowd.”

“I know it’s hard, right?” He said, while staring deeply at her as if he knew what she truly felt before she even said it. “Me too, I couldn’t pretend whenever someone behaved annoyingly. *Click* is an important matter if you’re searching for a real friend.”

“My mom once said, *you can only make three or five real friends in this life, while the others are like enemies beneath a blanket,*” she sighed, pathetically. “Probably it just happens to me.”

“Your mom’s right, but don’t make yourself pathetic,” he encouraged her. “This might be the simplest thing I’d want to tell you—” he leaned forward a few inches at her face, “don’t mind other’s business, it’s your life after all.”

She relieved when someone understood the words that they said by themselves. “It’s very nice of you to say.”

The time seemed to stop for both of them. They stared into each other’s eyes, and smiled shyly.

Alexander knew what he should say at the last minute to her. He said carefully, “Why don’t you join me this Saturday. I’ll give you a ride.”

“You’re serious?” She narrowed her eyes pretty hard in disbelief. “Let me see.”

“Don’t you feel lucky that I offer you an invitation?”

She chuckled at his humor. “Why is it?”

“I bet—I’m the only lecturer who has ever talked to you.”

“Mr. MacLain, it’s not that I don’t want to, but Saturday will be a family weekend for me.”

His lips pursed. “You’re a good daughter.”

Cathy could feel his breath touched her cheeks, and he even looked more handsome from closer. At the moment, she

tried to be focused before the chance would end, so she asked quickly, “Why you never mentioned any myth and legend in the class—it seems you like the topic?”

He defined her question as a compliment, and he answered, “It’s complicated to talk about, Cathy.”

It was the first time he called her name informally. It felt as if they already built a good relationship between a lecturer and student.

“Not everyone can accept it. I guess, a skeptical group would want to beat me up,” both of them laughed concurrently. “It’s better to talk about it with someone who understand rather than with a skeptic society.”

“How about newbie—the one who just know?”

“Natural selection,” he smiled. “They will be led where they’re supposed to be.”

“It’s like Charles Darwins’s theory—that’s not bad.”

“Smart girl,” he murmured, and he quickly returned to his desk before the students would have misinterpreted this situation.

When the bell rang, every student came rashly into the classroom.

During the lesson, some girls had noticed their lecturer’s nice manner was obvious toward Cathy. They had the same idea—jealousy. At the same time, Cathy thought about a repulsive madness of their behavior.

Also, she had given a thought to have a good chance for going around Manhattan on the next Saturday. She had decided it would be a great coming day. In fact, she would be prepared for the future occasion.



The grand authority was written on the television screen that Thursday morning. The headline news had made public went gnawed against one secrecy;

One News, One Secret Project.

“I see that as a literacy annoyance—they should give up,” Haile muttered while serving a hot coffee on the table.

Cathy sat on the sofa, and she didn’t take her eyes off from the screen as she asked her mom deliberately, “What makes you think so?”

“They don’t merely know what that’s all about. The reporters seem disturbing against the case,” Haile said while taking a cup of coffee, and she sat along beside her, “—it has been discussed on every news channel these days.”

“It seems that everyone wants to know about it. Why would the police hide the story from public?”

Haile sighed, leaving her with an inscrutable silence.

Cathy didn’t want to make anything worse to ask the things that she hadn’t understood yet. But then, the next news informed something more surprising as the news anchor started reporting;

The death of a young reporter has acclaimed suspense sadness among every journalist today. Lydia Brimham was known for her eligible job in one of New York’s small newspaper company. The police have found her death body that left with some sadistic torture marks in her apartment’s bathroom. The further investigation is still going on by the Brooklyn P.D, and yet, this case is identified as the unsolved murder case.

“Wait, it was happened in Brownstone Apartment?” Cathy astonished. “That is dad’s place.”

Both of the headline news had become excessively phenomenal, and couldn’t be ignored.

Haile looked worried as she said, "Since it's related with the Brooklyn P.D—"

"You mean dad?" Cathy caught a glimpse of that same worriment.

"Don't you think the media is trying to relate both of the news?" Haile assumed. "How complicated, but it might be—"

They stared into each other's eyes to feel conflicted.

"The media propagates a rumor about *White Foxes* as they referred it to the secret project, of whom they suspected are walking behind the government."

Cathy shrugged. "It's truly complicated."

At least, her mom was precise to remind her, "For once, we must well-aware."



It the evening, Cathy didn't have enough sleep or even loss of appetite. She bewildered alone as her eyes gazed out through the glass window behind this white sofa, meanwhile Haile was still busied cooking for a dinner.

Her cellphone vibrated suddenly. The message was sent by someone she had missed so much since moved to New York.

From: Martha Kingsley

Received: Thu, 18/10/2012

Cathy, I miss you.

I won't lie down in here as the last chance before meeting you.

If you have time, will you visit me in the hospital?

Ms. Burk will guide you when she'll call tonight.

Cathy rose up from the sofa with a spinning head that she couldn't know what to say, so she hollered out to her mom.

She ran breathlessly to the kitchen when her mom was slicing a mackerel fish.

Haile looked bewilderedly at her, “What’s wrong, honey?”
“Martha—”

It was like an instant telepathy that Haile quickly took off her red apron and nodded, “I get it—we need to buy flight tickets before evening.”

“Did she tell you too?”

“Wendy told me that her situation is getting worse every single day. We need to go in time,” Haile moved faster to prepare her belonging, while Cathy was still panicked.

Her mom turned to check on her who stood silently like an innocent kid who didn’t know what to do.

“What are you doing?” She asked rashly. “Get your bag. We’ll go to Bisbee!”

“Sorry, okay,” Cathy ran to her bedroom immediately to throw some of her clothes and books, although she couldn’t choose the right thing—random stuff was fine.



It took them for a while to get two flight tickets directly at the airport. They sat together in the waiting room, along with the people that would be in the same airplane with them.

“How about Josh?” Her mom asked.

Cathy astonished with her question. She stared blankly. “I don’t know, I think it will be a bad idea if he knows that we’re going without him.”

Finally, a female voice from the near speaker had announced the flight schedule that would be landed in no time. Everyone got prepared when a female stewardesses had welcomed to escort the passengers to the right hallway section.

When they got into the airplane, all the passengers found their seats, while Haile held her daughter's hand as she led the way to find their seats.

Cathy chose to sit next to the window. Finally, they got relaxed after the airplane successfully took off. Cathy looked out through the glossy window to see the earth from above. The rain slowly accompanied their flight trip to Bisbee.

At the moment, Haile realized that her daughter felt so sad. Cathy felt her mom's warm hand that touched her skin, calming her.

Haile asked, "Don't you want to read a book?"

"Later, mom."



The flight trip had passed in two hours.

Arizona was considered for their coldness of twenty degrees Celsius, even when the country was located between desert and cactuses.

Bisbee had never changed.

Cathy walked into the land with the first glimpse of her yearning, which was to return to the old neighborhood street where there was the house that she used to live in.

When she arrived there, she gazed at every house with a strong nostalgia. Her parents had decided to sell the house, it seemed undone now.

Haile brought the key to open the house. The dusts hovered strongly in the air when they walked to the kitchen that located near to the entrance door.

"I thought this house has sold," Cathy murmured.

"Not yet, but soon," she said, glanced at her daughter, "we'll be staying here tonight, no hotel—thrifty is the key now."

"I like the idea," Cathy sighed, subsequently, she walked upstairs to check out around.

The nostalgia attached on her mind. She remembered the bedroom next door, where Elle once stayed there, and the next room was her own.

There wasn't much to see but a dark corridor in the second floor, so she went to turn on the lamp that still looked bright. Before she could open her bedroom's door, her cellphone rang inside her pocket jeans. It was unknown number.

"Hello?"

"I keep on calling you, oh finally!"

She recognized that familiar voice, but she wouldn't be terrified for a second, "Is this Wendy—I mean Ms. Burk?"

"Of course," there was a depression within her voice, *"I need you to see Martha, even just for a while, Miss Charlotte."*

"That's okay, I'm on my way. I'm currently checking out our old house with my mom."

"Oh, you're here then?" She relieved. "I'll be waiting for both of you at the hospital."

Cathy ran downstairs, until she hit herself carelessly on the wall. She couldn't even remember the pain anymore when she felt rushing to go to the hospital.



The hospital was in a state of peacefulness, very quiet. The nurses welcomed their arrival at the corridor. Most of the employees still recognized them.

Haile had talked with a nurse at the nurses' station before making sure where Martha's patient room was.

Another nurse just came to the lobby to greet Cathy, "Hello there, you must be Miss Charlotte. Martha has been waiting so long for you," she sounded familiar and friendly.

“Thanks, I’ll be visiting her soon.”

The nurse was definitely the same person that once scolded her when her mom got into coma last year, the one who told her to take care of her mom carefully. It was surely, this nurse liked to middle in anyone’s business.

Cathy peeped on her name tag—*Darcy*, this encounter would be the first time to acknowledge her name.

“I’d wish you a happy birthday—just in case if we wouldn’t see each other on Saturday.”

Cathy blinked out. “Wait, how do you know that?”

“This is a small town. Everyone knows everyone,” her mom shouted from behind them.

Nurse Darcy smiled as she escorted them to Martha’s patient room.

When the door opened, a classical song of piano instrument was being played. They saw Martha was asleep at this bright noon.

Nurse Darcy whispered at her, “Martha told me a lot about yourself, and how you’re such a good relative.”

“Relative?” Cathy baffled. “We were just neighbor.”

Haile sighed that her daughter was in tardiness to know about the family matter, thus she wanted to blame herself for this. “She’s still a distant relative to the Aloise, but her line came from a long generation.”

“Upss, sounds like a family business. I have no right to hear it, I’ll leave you guys,” Nurse Darcy wanted to give them a privacy as she walked away from the room.

Cathy stared at her mom, who won’t look back from gazing deeply toward the pretty grandmother that asleep like a sleeping beauty. The cannula was on her nostrils, so she could breathe the oxygen easily since the nurse said that she had a respiration problem, usually occurred at midnight.

“There are a lot of things you still won’t to tell me, mother?”

Haile sat on the chair beside the bed while her daughter stood frozenly. She exhaled deeply.

“Am I a relative to Josh Kingsley, then?” Cathy asked again, trembled.

Haile answered her while holding Martha’s fragile hand, “Sort of—born from one line but far off.”

After a few minutes had passed, Martha awoke.

Haile helped her to sit steady, meanwhile Cathy had no clue of what to do but just standing still against the bed.

“How’s your feeling?” Haile asked.

“Not strong anymore,” her wrinkled skin was showed up as she smiled widely.

“I see how this is hard for you,” Haile murmured, giving her a warm hug.

The next minute, Wendy came to the room, looking pretty with her pale blouse and cardigan. She turned off the music player to make the room quiet.

Soon, Wendy greeted them properly, “I was a cry baby to beg for your presence.”

“Yes, I felt like dying in here,” Martha shouted.

“Don’t say that,” Haile hushed her.

After they had a small talk of reunion, a man in white coat came inside the room without a knock. He looked the same age as her dad. He had slender figure, white skin, and neat blonde hair. Everyone knew him as the most wanted doctor, even though he was a specialist of thyroid which concerned around a heart disease—that could be because his affection was tremendous for all the patients. He was a cardiologist.

Doctor Clay Breckenwood.

“Madam, may I examine Mrs. Kingsley for a moment?”

“How are you, doctor?” Cathy smiled, she remembered him, especially about his daughter—Petunia.

“Charlotte’s daughter, Charlotte’s wife—it has been a long time,” he glanced at Haile as he recalled the last moment where she was dying from a brutal coma. A long sleep. He wondered as he looked around to find there was no Mr. Charlotte himself. “Where’s your husband?”

“He’s busy with the project in Brooklyn,” She sounded uncertain.

“Oh, it’s on the news, right?” He worried. “Is he okay?”

Haile smiled ignorantly since she wasn’t sure either.

“Even people in Bisbee has noticed?” Cathy shrugged madly. “How dangerous it is actually?”

“Cathy, let the doctor to work first,” Haile rose up from the chair, she took her arm to walk outside, and Wendy followed behind.

“Mom!” She was stressed out with the whole *Arcanum*, which was a tremendous secret. “I need to know something about it.”

“Don’t be stupid,” her mom muttered. “It’s the international news, even everyone in no charge would know.”

“Haile,” Wendy stood between them, she stared in a deep compassion. “There will be a day where your daughter needs to know about your understanding. But, let’s not push it, okay?” And she turned to caress Cathy’s shoulder.

The three of them sat together on the bench next to the Martha’s patient room.

Haile was crossing arms while feeling frustrated about the current news.

When a nurse changed the television channel, the same primary news was broadcasted all over again. Everyone in the corridor looked surprised with the new report;

“Today breaking news is undone on the channel report related to the Brooklyn case—the Invisible Project. The newspaper reporter, Lydia Brimham was gone two days ago and the police have just found her dead body this morning at her Brownstone’s Apartment—”

Everyone whispered with fear in their heart. Cathy felt as if her ears got scratched when the news reminded her. As a matter of fact, it was the same apartment where her dad stayed in.

“White Foxes,” Cathy muttered hurtfully.

“What?” Wendy perplexed to notice their worried expression. “There must be a prior record on New York. How does it feel to live in there?”

“It’s nice, as long as you know how to hide yourself,” Haile said sarcastically.

“She’s joking, we have enough scenery of metropolitan city,” Cathy shouted and grimaced.

“Is that news really related with Manson’s job?” Wendy was curious, “and—*White* what did you say?”

“Indeed, since he’s a detective—” Haile inhaled before she continued, “*White Foxes* is the one who inquired the case to the Brooklyn P.D—I hope you won’t ask any further, I need a break,” thereafter, she went away to the restroom.

Wendy glanced at Cathy who was still watching the news channel. She caressed her back.

“What would you do if you are getting into a trap inside the Black Forest?” Cathy asked.

The question was so sudden and odd, Wendy got confused at her.

“Try to survive, no matter what,” she smiled. “Why is it?”

Cathy sighed since her heart was flustered to sad for a little maze inside her head. “I think my dad just got into that trap. Maybe my mom, or probably—I’ll be the next.”

Wendy pitied her pessimistic thought, although there was a heavy feeling that smeared like a black smoke, she noticed that black box was a trap itself for this little girl, and she would love to ensure her, “You’ll survive, then.”



The sentimental ambience had ended. They finally returned to the Bronx on Saturday morning.

Cathy was alone in her bedroom to think about the agony. She empathized at Josh’s despondency, for the whole frustration that he had, especially when she did not tell him about when she visited Martha at the hospital.

Afterward, her mom came without alert, startling her pretty badly, “Mom, you should knock.”

“Sorry,” Haile grimaced. “What are you up to?”

She wondered when her mom sighed hardly. Haile sat next to her on the bed, caressing her back gently.

“Actually, Josh told me—” she seemed hard to say it out, “Martha has been suffering a heart cancer for a long time, and I didn’t know what to do.”

“*Cardiac Sarcoma*—that’s what she suffers from,” Haile stated.

“You knew exactly?”

“It has been a long time since you were a child,” Haile smiled sadly, “you might want to invite Josh for refreshment—I know he’s very stressful these days.”

“Mom—” She smiled, woefully. “I love you.”

Haile caressed her hair and kissed her cheek. “I know. Anyway, happy birthday.”

She tried so hard to remember what day was it, then she grinned and ashamed to forget her own birthday. “Ah, how forgetful I am,” she punched her own head.

“Oh darling!” Her mom laughed out loud with her, and rose up together from the bed. “What are we going to do for the celebration?”

“I just remember that I have an appointment with Mr. MacLain—but tonight is fine for us.”

“Who’s he?”

“My English lecturer.”

Haile narrowed her eyes as she felt familiar with his surname. “In this holy weekend?”

“Yes, we want to go for a library actually—for some Volka society things.”

“Volka?” She suspected something was a bit off. “Is he looks like a good person?”

“Mom, he’s a nice guy, don’t worry too much,” she smiled awkwardly.

“Well, don’t forget to invite your two friends at our apartment by evening. I’ll be cooking a vanilla cake. Don’t come home late, okay?”

“You can count on me, mother.”



She stood at the corner of the bus stop near to Fordham University, although she wouldn’t expect any car to arrive sooner, but a metal silver jeep had horned loudly to her. No one was around when the man rolled down his car window, he called out her name.

He wore the typical same black suit as usual, and he looked handsome and brighter today. Cathy was being ignorant

about his appearance since she had a lot of complicated thoughts these days.

Subsequently, she sat next to him.

“How’s your morning?” He greeted her as if they were the same age.

She wondered whether the nuance of this informality would be a good thing between them. “Good, much as usual.”

“Traditionally, I should’ve gotten permission from your parents to borrow their beautiful daughter.”

Cathy glanced quickly at him who started driving to the avenue. Eventually, he felt awkward when she got bewildered.

“Should I take it as a joke, Mr. MacLain?”

He cleared his throat hurriedly as he ignored her simple question. “For today, just treat me like a friend. I’ll feel pretentiously unstable to walk my feet when I’m around a new stranger.”

“Don’t you have anyone around?” She was curious with his mysterious side. “Like a brother or sister?”

“Even a best friend, I don’t have,” he giggled constantly, “The first time I came to the Bronx—I was jobless.”

“Or are you a runaway son?” She added.

When the jeep stopped against the red traffic light, Cathy wore a seatbelt hurriedly.

He took her question as a tentative joke, he smiled.

She recognized that kind of stare, because she would hate herself for asking so many things later. There was something sorrow that reflected on his eyes, or perhaps like a mourning feeling.

“I like keeping things to myself, becoming self-pretentious at the same time, which isn’t easy to explain if anyone ever asks me.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to bother your personal life,” she regretted and won’t look into his eyes.

“No, believe me. I’m tremendously happy that you are the first person who dares to ask me now.”

Cathy glanced at him when the traffic light turned green, and he drove to the left side of the intersection. She promised herself that everything would be okay until they arrived in Manhattan.

The next minute, they didn’t make another conversation again during the trip. It felt silent, there was no song either. Until later, he drove the jeep to a small minimalist café.

“I’m not hungry,” she protested.

“I don’t have a breakfast, yet.”

He parked the jeep across the pavement, and he hurriedly walked out to open her door. She thought he was really polite, but felt too much.

Afterward, they went inside the place.

She felt familiar with the vibe around; the entrance door made of glass, white walls, and wooden floors. The first floor was a café, while the second floor was a bookstore. She remembered, this was surely the same place that she had once visited some time ago with Josh and Jordan.

There weren’t many visitors. Both of them sat together.

Cathy didn’t even realize that Alex had ordered their menu quickly. In no second, the waitress delivered two white cups of hot chocolate and a hot honey sauce pancake to their table.

“So,” she sighed to begin, while watching him eating the pancake, “—it seems like you know this place so well.”

“I do,” he smiled.

They stared deeply for a moment. The song on the background played the old classic song of Debussy, as if for a thousand times in here—*Claire de Lune*.

“You want to taste the pancake?” He gave her some slices to her empty white plate, “It’s sweet.”

“Thanks,” they were surely enjoying this breakfast, but Cathy needed to make sure about their main journey, “Volka Society—the stuff you have mentioned before, is it in here?”

“Precisely, no,” he giggled as if her question sounded stupid, thus he added quickly because he felt sorry, “I mean—we need to go to the real library for that. Maybe two or three places are enough.”

“Wait, you mean we’re going to visit more than one library?”

He stared wonderingly. “Is there something wrong? Don’t you want to?”

Cathy tried to rearrange her impeccable words again. “I hope I can return home before evening—I have promised my mom.”

He didn’t say a word but staring intensely at the depth of her brown eyes, which was similar to him. In the end, he murmured woefully, “Don’t worry, I won’t take too long.”



He drove his jeep to another road of some various shops. Later, he parked his jeep in front of a small old library. They walked out concurrently from the jeep.

The library looked shady; the wooden entrance door that covered with white-green canopy and green wall, which all looked brittle.

There weren’t many visitors, or perhaps they had come too early.

Alex smiled at the old man dressed in a long sleeves white shirt, who stood against the front desk.

Cathy relieved as she wouldn't be afraid to get lost as long as she stayed beside him. Anywhere he went, he was truly welcomed as a good customer.

"Why don't we ask that man about what are you looking for?" She suggested.

He stared down at her to smile and agree, thus he approached the old man, and seemingly, they had a little chit chat before the old man would lead them to go upstairs for a specific bookshelf.

"Your little girlfriend seems so pale, is she alright?" That old man whispered at him, although she could barely hear them from behind.

"She wants some of good penalty for the book I've referred," Alex added.

They giggled along while she felt annoyed and bewildered at once, thus Cathy shouted, "Pardon, but I'm not my lecturer's girlfriend. I'm here as his companion."

That old man glanced at her awkwardly, even though he still giggled.

"Great," she muttered to Alex, "now he really believe that."

"Okay, here's one of the books about the Volka," he smiled ignorantly for their previous sentiment, and then he murmured to himself, "I hope this isn't a fake idea."

The distance between each bookshelf was like a hundred centimeters only, which was a pretty narrow space. Alex sat at the table against those bookshelves, and Cathy followed along to peep on the thin book he had.

"It doesn't look like an old book, isn't it?" Cathy wondered.

He chuckled at her. "We'll see whether it's pretty old or not—the book deserve to be opened first."

The book cover was green. It was full of dusts, and every page smeared with a charcoal color.

“Progressive. It seems that someone have read this, currently,” he sympathized.

“Can I see the table of contents first?” Cathy asked.

He turned the pages to show her the chapters, but he didn’t let her touch the book as he wanted to get a further exploration.

“The chapter that related with a myth—they have an argument about it.”

“Of course,” his smile was skeptic, “I had discussed this in a college’s forum—they have misdoubted the existence of the Volka.”

“Maybe they need the exact evidence.”

“It would be hard. They live among us—a deliberation of mouth to mouth.”

He turned the page to beckon at the misfortune of the Volka’s myth. There was a black and white illustration picture that depicted a pretty scary demonic figure that had horns and some fuzzes on its chest, whose existence fought a human warrior.

“Mostly, folks have thought that the Volka was killed by demons. It’s not true.”

Cathy glanced back and forth at him and that illustration picture.

“*They were alive and replaced by the new generation,*” Cathy quoted the bold sentence on the page, she stared at him again, “Why do you want to learn about them?”

“A mystery of instinct has led me—I don’t know. I just want to.”

She chuckled along. “A sudden interest?”

“No, it has been a long time.”

Just at the time Cathy gazed at the right section in that book, she surprised to find some statements that had a connection for what they were seeking. He wondered as well.

“Wait, I don’t believe this,” she said as beckoning at the quotation in the book.

Volka is a group of loyal warriors that worked for the royals. Their primary legend was known when House of Aloise fought their own land and empire against the soul of temperament ox-folks. The death of the ancient royals had led them into a new life of a masterpiece tragedy.

“They’re still alive somewhere out there,” she murmured. “But, what’s with the Aloise?”

“The one and only royal family that the Volka had dedicated their life was *House of Aloise*. Fortunately, their history was more mysterious rather than the Volka themselves. It’s hard to gain,” he explained, “many folks had tried to remake the story—until you don’t know which is true.”

“The specific reference about House of Aloise would have been about that legendary story from the old time—*Emperor of Souls* by Carl Dalton,” the old man shouted as he still stood awaited across to their table.

“It seems that he has been eavesdropping our discussion,” he was tickled by her gentle whisper. Subsequently, she glanced at the old man and said, “I know that book.”

“He wrote the details in there,” the old man added.

“You know Carl Dalton?” She was curious.

“My best mate in the kindergarten—of course I know.”

Alex got bewildered to relate the whole things.

At the same time, the bell rang in the front desk when someone was looking for the owner. The old man quickly waved his hand, letting the guest knew where he was.

Alex returned to glance bewilderingly at her, and asked, "What do you know about Aloise?"

Cathy squinted perplexingly against his sudden question, and she felt well-wary if he knew her as one of the descendants. "It's just—the infamous legend of the burning castle?"

"By the way, I'll buy this for you," he spoke enthusiastically, changing the topic. "Carson Wate always treats me like his own son—don't worry."

She finally knew the old man's real name. "I thought this is a library—not a bookstore?"

He chuckled as they walked downstairs concurrently.

A few visitors stared oddly at them. Cathy didn't dare to look back and just felt awkward while skimming her fingers to random books near her. Without alert, he yanked her into his hard chest, almost like hugging. He dragged her along to walk to the front desk.

The female visitors looked tremendously jealous with that scene.

"What are you doing?" She tried to pull off his strong grip. Slightly, she smelled the lemonade perfume from his suit.

"Wate, I want this one," he placed the book on the front desk.

He giggled to see Alexander tried to hug her waist closely. She sighed harder. "Let me go."

"You should hurry make up with your boyfriend. There's a long waiting list of women behind his shoulders," his joke didn't bother Cathy since she only wanted a normal situation between a lecturer and student. Subsequently, he shouted at Alex, "I'm sure you don't want to lose her either."

Alex smiled shyly since he knew that it wasn't the right relationship they went through. At that time, she finally could escape his grip.

"I'm sorry for this misperception," Cathy said before she took away that green book on the desk, and she ran away outside.

She stopped breathlessly in front of the terrace. The current weather wasn't what she expected—the coldness. Luckily, she wore blue paid vest covered in a black coat that could warm her enough.

"What was that about?" She confronted Alex when he approached her.

"A manifestation of manipulation," he laughed like it was a joke. "You don't want to see those visitors to intimidate you with their sarcastic stare."

"I don't," she said assertively.

They exhaled concurrently.

"I don't know whether what I did to save you was right," he sighed.

"You could discuss that with your inner-self," she giggled for a while, he seemed less worried now.

"Anyway, I need to visit another one, let's go," he led her to get inside the jeep.



The car trip around Manhattan went quiet without a song from a radio.

There was a clarity thought that she recalled when she read a quote on a huge billboard in a midst of avenue;

Let alone the child.

"I think I know why their existence became vacillation," Alex said, glancing at her when the red traffic light was on.

Cathy knew that he was referring to House of Aloise “—it’s just my assumption, perhaps the Volka needed to separate from the folks. Do you remember the village that’s being mentioned on the book?”

“Yeah, they built their own village, which looked exactly like their origin place in Austria,” she said. “It also becomes a myth among the folks. They never admit about the catastrophe. Their story still exist until this second, either in the nowadays or ancient generation.”

“Have you noticed that your assumption is referring this topic with House of Aloise?” He confronted.

She sat frozenly, astonished. “I know. *Some legends remain true.*”

“Do you want to explore it?” He offered her sincerely. “I’ll always have a time to go out with you, I mean, like seeking in a library or just Google,” he said awkwardly.

“That’s a good idea. I’m currently into that sort of stuff,” she said as her eyes stared straightly on the road, ignoring his stare.

At one o’clock, they went to the back side of downtown, which seemed like the most desolate area in Manhattan. There were various old shops.

Cathy felt familiar with the street view, especially when she glanced at the antique shop, the one that Marissa had told her about.

The jeep was parked in line beside the pavement, and then he alerted, “You don’t need to come out. I’m just going to talk with the owner.”

“It seems that you know so well about every library’s owner, Mr. MacLain?”

He giggled to take her words as a compliment. “It has been a couple of months that I haven’t said hi to her. I just want to check on her condition.”

Before he closed the jeep door, he bent down to stare at her, “I’ll be back soon. Don’t runaway, promise?”

She narrowed her eyes in disbelief toward his childish manner, “I already look like a frozen food in here. I won’t go anywhere.”

He sighed. “I feel like I couldn’t leave you. Actually, the library’s owner won’t open her door for any bookworm today, but I have my own business, so—”

Just like that, he snapped the jeep door immediately to make her astonish. He seemed rushing.

Subsequently, she felt the urge to call Marissa—the red hair angel had considered to give her a phone number, and since when a creature like her would need it anyway, but something came up. A manifestation of manipulation was agreeable in this case.

“Hi, Marissa,” Cathy smiled as she talked, “I need a confirmation about the library you’ve mentioned the last time.”

“More like an affirmation you mean?” Marissa guessed.

“I think I’m in front of that old building, about six buildings ahead. There’s an antique shop, I guess.”

“You won’t try to come in?” She asked. *“She’s not usually having a weekend time for a visitor. It’s not like any other library. I tell you this—she’s collecting some of unbearable leather-bounded books, odd and rare from hereditary. She sort of picky to let anyone walk into her house.”*

“Her house?” Cathy confused. “You mean she lives inside the library?”

"It has always been her house since forever. That's why I told you. We'd better go together—or are you with someone else now?"

Marissa the Angel surely knew about the current circumstance. Cathy won't mind to get caught up with him, since he wasn't a stranger anymore.

"Marissa, see you later," she hung up quickly when the two people came out from that building, one of them was Alex, and the other was an old woman dressed in long sleeve black dress, and her white hair was styled in bouffant up-do.

Seemingly, the old woman had considered him like her own son, just like how Carson Wate had treated him. After they smiled to each other, having the last hug of farewell, Alex returned to the jeep.

That old woman tried to peep inside the jeep from far away, but the car windshield was too dense.

"Hey, it turns out that she has what I want," he thrust the thick book to her palm hand, gently.

"Is it the book about the Volka?" Cathy turned the pages randomly, which was no dustier than the green book that they bought previously.

The chronological life of the Volka: the incomplete fracture within the war in 14's. Their society was forgotten, but still survived among the folks. Their existence was tied strongly that couldn't be deceased.

The image of an archaic black stone was depicted on the book. The quote on the stone was engraved with a silver ink;

Bedenke das Ende.

"It's German proverb, means *consider the end*," he explained as his head went closer to her.

Cathy startled when their skin was touched accidentally. She ignored it, and continued reading, "It's stated in this book, the

stone was a mourning gift from the Volka for the death of Aloise Queen and her daughter. Meanwhile, an archeologist interpreted the stone as a charm to wash away the negativity, as in brackets—a demon fetish,” she laughed at that part of the book, “Since when an archeologist has a say on a myth?”

“He or she—certainly isn’t just an archeologist. Perhaps, they are coming from a background of religious belief, sort of like a preacher?” Alex laughed awkwardly with his own hypothesis that didn’t sound convincing.

Afterward, Cathy still busied exploring the book, while he was thinking about a complication that made him nervous. He wanted to ask her, but didn’t want to sound like a weird man, “What’s the next occasion in your apartment?”

“My birthday party,” she answered without thinking.

His eyes got widen, surprised. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know how to start that conversation on the road,” Cathy shrugged as she felt conflicted against his manner. She wanted to be a humble student without making a popularity progression.

“Well done,” he chuckled.



The next stop, they went to the Central Park.

Alex opened the jeep door for her again. His movement was so nimble.

Cathy felt uneasy since he treated her in that manner. She walked out, and murmured gawkily, “You don’t have to do that.”

He was only smiling, although his charm didn’t seem to work properly on her, it wasn’t like he intended to.

The walkers stared at them, some looked curious, and some just acted neutral.

Cathy didn't understand why most people would stare that way like her presence was really matter. Thus, she walked awkwardly beside him.

At a food stall in the park, he bought her a vanilla ice cream, and then they sat on the bench together near to a shallow lake.

"Don't you want a gift?" He asked.

"Not really," she shrugged, staring at him. "If you could understand what I really wanted—it would be hard. It's something that I can't tell anyone."

He had just figured out that he could sense her emotion, which felt strange to him. As if he knew what she really talked about, even to feel her deepest sadness.

Both of them sighed together, and stared deeply into each other's eyes. Another minute, they laughed out loud, sharing the happiness.

"Me too, because most of the time, I couldn't say what I wanted even with my parents," he said while staring at the man that sold balloons across to the walking trail.

"It's hard to explain, right?" Cathy said.

He chuckled, and said, "I'd like to neglect that idea until I could find someone to talk someday. Maybe you're the one," he said jokingly.

She got mesmerized by his confession for a while, and she murmured back, "Mr. MacLain, I'm only your average student. I could probably not very smart to follow up with your discussion someday."

"First, can you start calling me Alex?" His request made her chuckled shyly, "—and I don't think you're that average—until I realize that you seems to know something about the Aloise family, and some books we've discussed."

Her eyes flickered, “I—can’t,” she shook her head while arranging some words on her mind, “Why do you want to know so badly about the Volka—and then about the Aloise?”

He seemed to think for the precise answer, his silent was hard to be interpreted, “Because my parents had something related in the past, with them,” he said so openly, even though he just barely knew her.

Cathy got bewildered and conflicted at the same time, so she asked, “Are you part of the family, either from the Volka or Aloise?”

He giggled and shook his head quickly before she misinterpreted the situation.

“Not even close. My family—they’re *German*, but it’s not like that,” he confessed, “My parents hung a terrified painting at our house. My mom said that it was a gift from the Volka—a duplicate painting actually, since they kept the original somewhere.”

“So that does explain why you want to explore more,” she nodded understandingly, “What’s with the painting?”

Immediately, Alex took out his cellphone from his pocket trousers to show her a picture of a woman painting, dressed in a green embroidered gown. The woman smiled, but didn’t look truly happy.

“Her name’s Francesca, one of the Aloise’s princesses.”

In the middle of her observation against that woman figure, a sudden reminder echoed on her mind, she just remembered it, “Oh!”

“What is it?”

“I just remember that my mom is waiting for me. There will be a vanilla cake in my apartment, won’t you come?”

He wasn’t sure to say yes, although she won’t force him. Soon, they returned to the jeep.



He stopped his jeep in front of the apartment's terrace.

On the other side, Haile already stood awaited for her daughter. When she saw Cathy behind the jeep window, she approached her slowly.

"She's my mom," Cathy said before she walked out from the jeep.

He rolled down the jeep window to greet her, who squinted oddly at him, and then she asked, "Can I talk to you for a second?"

Cathy wondered at her mom's oddness, and subsequently, she let them to have a private talk. She saw them from afar. Alex got out from his jeep to greet her mom directly, and their body movement told her as if this wasn't the first time they met, as if they already knew each other. Her mom looked really solemn while talking to him.

Ten minutes later, Haile returned to greet her, while Alex waved his hand from inside the jeep before he drove away from here.

Subsequently, while they went back inside the apartment, Cathy felt bothered that her mom didn't want to tell her what she talked about with him. It was completely their private conversation.

When she returned back, neither Josh nor Jordan was seen in there. Her mom felt bad to inform her that the two boys had left a little earlier after they brought gifts for her birthday.

"Why did they leave in a hurry?" Cathy looked emotionless as she stared at the two small boxes that wrapped in brown paper. "The party hasn't even begun."

"They wanted to visit Martha—she has to undergo a serious treatment in the hospital, currently."

"What happened?"

“She got fainted,” Haile answered her curiosity while slicing a piece of vanilla cake in the kitchen’s table. “Luckily, Wendy Jones came at the right time to help her.”

“Good for her,” Cathy murmured, relieved. “I should call Josh soon,” Cathy murmured.

After she finished a quick shower time, her mom had waited for her while watching a cooking show on television.

Outside the window, the evening sky looked violet dark. At that moment, Haile hummed a birthday lullaby while hugging her daughter so tightly. She led her to walk to the kitchen room while the light was off, and the only light came from the candles on the birthday cake.

“Happy birthday, darling. Sweet eighteen!”

Haile kissed her daughter’s cheek gently, and she let Cathy to sit on her lap like a vulnerable baby.

It felt like they were coming back into a childhood time. There was a strong feeling of longing and happiness.

“Pray for your wish,” her mom murmured.

Cathy prayed like a little girl, and then she blew out the candles in one shot.

“Done.”

“May I know what you wished for?” Her mom was curious.

They were both staring deeply at the death candles—her name was engraved on the cake.

“A mystery that I wish will be done.”

I2

THE ACCEPTANCE

ELEANOR HEISLER



ELEANOR HEISLER STARED at her own reflection on the window. She wore a jade blue peplum top and black leather short pants. Her hair was styled half up half down like usual.

Within this cozy room that filled with wooden bookshelves, and the wall painted white, while the floor was made from marmalade of creamy white color. She exhaled deeply in here, her eyes wandered against the stigma that became no more than a mercy.

Her mind was stuck on the same problem, that she couldn't admit Cathy Charlotte's name to be written on the history book of her family.

She knew that it was her destiny to be born in the White Foxes family, living as a royal as well, which agonizing for her. But this one, her hatred toward the girl she didn't particularly know was odd, even for herself to feel since they had met a few times in college. Each time they came across to each other, there was always a glimpse of familiar feeling in the air.

She sat alone on the green couch that adjacent to the arched glass window. Her eyes stared down through the

window at the black suit men that walked in the front yard, following her uncle—Joe Marshall.

“Eleanor—”

She startled from the sudden presence of her aunt this morning. Sofia dressed in her usual white fur coat.

“Have you seen it?”

She squinted at her odd question.

As Sofia walked closer, she rephrased, “The paintings?”

“Not yet, I just saw the book,” she noted what her aunt was referring now. “I didn’t have much chance to check on everything, you know.”

“Your grandmother almost found out about your visit in there,” her eyes blinked nervously as she talked. “You need to be careful.”

“Oh, she did?” Eleanor asked mockingly as she rose up from the couch to stand taller against her aunt. They stared at each other in annoyance. “I get it. I have a plan to go there again.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t accompany you today. She wants me to go with her for the Brooklyn meeting.”

“Why don’t they just give up—it’s not easy to handle, huh?”

“Apparently, we have gathered the official witnesses to attend our private interview soon,” Sofia argued.

Eleanor chuckled sarcastically, and before she left the room, she said, “It sounds like a waste of time for me.”



Manhattan got a terrible traffic jam in the afternoon.

The old building was just a couple block away, the road view couldn’t be more desolate, and the dusts couldn’t be tolerated around here.

She would begin everything all by herself inside that haunting place as she arrived.

No one was there to hear her muttering, “How grange this untreated place, or abandoned I should say?”

Eleanor opened the green door carefully as she stared back and forth at her back. The creaking sound annoyed her, and she worried if somebody would notice her presence.

The basement was the only place that she hadn’t seen, so she walked there optimistically. The aisle was separated into two rows. She followed her instinct to go on the right side. The dusts made enough cobwebs around the room that looked like a hazy cave.

She stopped smirking when her eyes caught some collections of imperial paintings that hung all over the brown walls. There was one painting with the most different frame than the others that made her tremendously astonished.

“I can’t ever understand this,” she wondered.

The haunting silence was in the air.

She expected nothing here since she couldn’t feel anything possible, neither for a slightest hope nor fear. The hatred feeling was in her deepest soul against this grange of empty darkness.

“The soulless of every soul—it can’t be just what this is all about.”

Eleanor startled from the voice that shouted behind her. The charismatic old woman had appeared from the dark aisle, standing against the window to let her silhouettes to be caught by sunlight. She was Lady Marie de Clure, dressed in an elegant red suit.

“Do I surprise you?”

Eleanor stood against her grandmother while holding her breath.

“It’s possibly an absurd thing,” she giggled sarcastically while crossing arms, “you have following me like a hopeless stalker, it is no surprise for me.”

Marie giggled as she walked closer to her. “It will only take a question to begin everything you need to know.”

Eleanor narrowed her eyes bafflingly.

“Do you believe in fairy tales?”

She sighed and stared in disbelief at her. “What nonsense are you saying?”

Before she stepped away from the room, her grandmother grabbed her arm quickly. “May I encounter you with the realm?”

She could only bulge out astonishingly with her grandmother’s idea that sounded strange in her ears, so she confronted her, “Do you really need hospitalization, right now?”

Marie smirked instead, since her granddaughter’s sarcasm won’t kill off this conversation.

“Precisely, you need to follow me, little child,” she said, dragging her arm forcedly.

Eleanor was totally freaking out, and she tried to run, but her grandmother’s grip was too strong for someone that old, in fact, Lady Marie was seventy-year-old.

From outside, there were two black Mercedes car, and two bodyguards that stood like mannequins. As Lady Marie beckoned assertively, they understood right away. Eleanor was forced to sit in the car’s backseat, while the other bodyguard went hurriedly to another car.

“Drive to Esplanade.”

Eleanor stared sharply, bewildering at her grandmother that sat beside her. She always thought that no one would know her favorite place except her personal chauffeur.

“What are we going to do?” Eleanor demanded.

Lady Marie smiled warmly. “Eat, drink, walking around. Isn’t it a lunch time?”

“You don’t play a joke with me,” she warned.

“I don’t, my dear,” Marie caressed her hair gently, but she jerked away from her touch.

Eleanor looked out through the window while imagining how she would scream out for help, although anyone would see her oddly since she went with her own family. Somehow, she felt like her grandmother was planning something while grinning suspiciously with that unreadable expression.

The car stopped next to the pavement. Both of them walked out, except the chauffeur.

Eleanor thought this might be a childish riddle game, which reminded her of the childhood times when her grandmother used to tell her a delicate riddle.

“We’re standing straightforward with the walkers,” Lady Marie said.

They stood on the pavement, looking at the view of many walkers.

“Let’s take a walk,” Lady Marie said as she began walking.

Eleanor still felt the absurdity, especially every time her grandmother grinned oddly. As she followed her behind, she shouted rudely, “Walk like a mad dog?”

Marie chuckled peevishly. She answered without looking back at her, “You might consider your mouth to shut for a while.”

They stopped at the end of the pavement, across to the traffic light where all pedestrians gathered together. The two bodyguards were waited ten meters away from them.

“Look around you, Eleanor,” Lady Marie’s voice was wise.

It was weird. The view seemed to turn into slow motion, haunting her blue eyes. Everything began to move slowly since she could literally count on how many pedestrian were there, and she could even observe their impatient faces.

Obviously, she didn't get the idea about Lady Marie's plan of consummation. As she stood in the middle of the pedestrians, she could sense a few people that went shivered while the air wasn't that cold, and nothing looked eerie yet.

The man in teddy brown jacket turned deviously at her. She held her breath, remembering the time when she got used to face someone—or something like that. He grinned creepily. She stared back in disgust. Finally, he was the one who got astonished that he was being ignored by her, besides he felt her exaggerated feeling of loathe against him.

The other one was a blonde woman, dressed in similar jacket as him. Eleanor smirked disgustingly at their mutual grinning. They were having a face like monster.

From behind, Marie still stood waiting for her reaction.

Further, Eleanor decoded the similar vibe in this strange circumstance. It wasn't just those two monsters, but half of the pedestrians were staring at her as if they looked for someone who had called their souls. However, she couldn't be sure for any madness like this.

Lady Marie got bewildered to determine her granddaughter's awareness toward this circumstance, since Eleanor looked so calm.

Eleanor herself didn't aware that her grandmother had the power to obscure the vibes among those monsters in order to invite another vibe. For a second, Lady Marie closed her eyes, becoming mysterious.

The winds blew strongly than usual. The pedestrian across the road was making a way for a girl with an opened umbrella

that seemed to appear from nowhere. Eleanor felt familiar with that typical *red umbrella*.

For a moment, the winds seemed to stop blowing, and the time seemed to pause as the slow motion effect continued again. Eleanor was breathless and speechless with this thrilling sensation, while her eyes still squinted bewilderingly at that girl that stood tall among the pedestrians.

On the other side, Lady Marie still waited, but nothing came worthy from her granddaughter's reaction.

"What a waste, what am I standing for in here?" Eleanor muttered.

The cars just pulled over, next to the pavement where they stood.

Before Eleanor went to the car, her grandmother dragged her arm harshly. They bulged out uncomfortably to each other. The situation felt worse.

"I'm just going to say, whatever that you feel—you have to figure it out before the time run out."

"Run out?" Eleanor chuckled. "Do you want to know what I feel?" They stared earnestly. "Sickness," and then she released her grandmother's hand harshly from her arm.

"Don't you understand why we are here?"

"It seems you have expected a stupidity. Well, I feel sorry that it didn't happen."

She went to the car hurriedly, followed by Lady Marie, who snatched her fur coat again and shouted madly, "I am tired of your ill manner."

Eleanor laughed at her, and then she pulled off her hand while talking, "Why don't you speak for yourself, Lady Marie?"

The atmosphere felt tensed. The pedestrians didn't even dare to watch over their drama, even though some of them recognized these well-known royals.

Marie always knew how to handle any situation quickly before the public made up any assumption. “The truth is—I want to treat you good desserts.”

Afterward, they had a lunch at a food truck in the corner of Manhattan’s huge avenue.

They sat on the bench that adjacent with the truck. Eleanor was gazing back and forth at her grandmother and her food, because she suspected something was totally odd. Meanwhile, a few meters behind them, the two black suit men stood guarded in front of the cars.

“Since when did you like this sort of commoner’s food?” Eleanor confronted.

Marie smiled friendly, and then she ordered one portion of Indonesian Javanese Satay, which came very well with nut sauce that would totally have a taste of Asian food.

“Just try a new taste, sometimes is good,” she answered.

“You truly like it?” Eleanor stared at her in disbelief. “I completely give you an honor—for someone like you.”

“Well, this is a taste of chicken,” she said while masticating it, “—nothing’s wrong.”

Eleanor didn’t even realize that her grandmother was aware of her slight smile. It was the first nice smile since she did about ten years ago in the childhood times.

“Eleanor.”

She turned to see her grandmother. “What?”

Marie wanted to have a serious talk in the middle of this lunch. Eleanor knew that look, therefore she squinted and giggled. “You can tell me right away, but don’t push it.”

The humming came obscurely from her grandmother’s voice—a lullaby that Eleanor felt familiar, which she seemingly ignored it nowadays, but she kept on longing for the melody.

The girl is groaning inside the cave...

*The melted ice—itchy in my twitching eyes...
Bringing the red umbrella, alone, alone in the street...
The girl never looked so happy...
Alone, alone in the night street...*

“What was that?” Eleanor snapped in the midst of her humming.

She glanced at her, smiled inscrutably. “Don’t you remember our night lullaby?”

“Do I look like I remember any of that?” She felt the sudden hatred, and she didn’t even question her own feeling, while Lady Marie still smiled for the conversation that could be flowing itself. “I’m just curious what is the red umbrella—”

“A symbol,” Lady Marie said, staring sharply at her.

There was an odd feeling even though she did not understand yet, and she astonished. “What are you referring about?”

“It’s sort of remind me of your favorite fairy tale—*The Red Riding Hood.*”

Eleanor didn’t even remember to blink and her mouth was wide-opened. “Who created that lullaby?”

“Your mother and I,” the moment when her parent was being mentioned, it reminded her of the painful tragedy, she just wanted to stop this whole conversation.

Eleanor rose up. “Let’s just go home.”



The lights were still on inside the mansion.

They returned in the evening. Some servants welcomed their arrival in the foyer.

On the other side, Eleanor felt relieved to go back, but before she could hide herself in her own bedroom, Lady Marie

called out for her, “Dear, just to inform you, we will be going to hometown next holiday—”

Eleanor was almost stepping her foot on the staircase when her grandmother showed up. It was necessary for her to guess where they would go since the origin of her family came from a few countries, “Where? Is it Austria?”

After Marie smiled and nodded, both of them went separated from the foyer.

Eleanor could finally lie down on her king-sized bed after so much of distressful thought that happened in Manhattan. Another thought about holiday came up, she was always prepared before going anywhere, especially for a family vacation.

The next minute, she jumped up from the bed to grab her red suitcase above her wardrobe. She sat down on the floor, beside her white wooden wardrobe. There were so many clothes to choose for a winter season, and the coats would be her valuable favor to keep her warm since she had wondered how cold the weather around Europe this year.

She kept on exploring her old stuff inside the wardrobe, until her hands unintentionally caught a brown box that full of her writing notes, some were diary journals, and memoirs.

It was such a long time, and it reminded her of the time when she used to like writing. No one ever knew that she treasured these letters by her own handwriting. It was the only way she could express her feeling, and for all the memories she had buried.

Her hand reached for a card with a photo of winter forest. It made her heart ached hurtfully. Her tears began to fall.

The card was made by her mother—Anna Heisler. This one was made to congratulate her parents’ wedding anniversary. She recalled that happiest day when they gathered together for

the laughter they had shared, and for taking some memorable pictures. There was a picture that slipped down from inside the card—of her mom and dad.

She could not endure her sadness, for the fact she had lost them.

The picture was taken in their last holiday when she was about eight-year-old. Some memories were obscured on her mind, but some stayed. As she recalled for a while, there was someone she still captured on her mind, to the fact that it could involve the mystery to answer;

The white winter ground was raining mildly with snowflakes. The pine trees grew all around the wide backyard that located a few meters from the cabin house. A little girl walked in there while hugging her white puppy in her flat chest. She wore a pretty sleeveless white dress. Her long straight white hair was half pinned up. It was little Eleanor. She was eight-year-old, a few months after her parents died.

Her puppy was too quiet since they walked to the winter forest, and there was something that following them. She stood frozenly to notice another presence. Eleanor didn't blink out to see a precise figure of a tall girl. That beautiful girl smiled, but somehow it felt like a goodbye kiss. She couldn't think how that stranger would have felt familiar, like something was missing. Just a little piece of her memory seemed to disappear slowly, and she couldn't figure it out.

She had just noticed what the shadow meant. It wasn't precisely the right moment to ask for a conviction. The girl slowly stepped backward from behind the pine trees.

Eleanor yelled out, but it was too late. "Wait!"

Her aunt, Sofia was looking after her. She dressed the same like her niece, the difference that she had golden bracelets showed on both of her hands. "What is it, Eleanor?"

"I saw a girl," she said assured. "White hair girl."

"There's no one around here except our family," Sofia stared at her confusedly.

"She dressed in a brown coat," Eleanor tried to assure her again.

Sofia smiled warmly, and then she dragged her shoulders, "Come on now."

That day just went away. She hadn't recalled it again until this second.

Afterward, a knock came behind the door. It was her other aunt—Hadley.

"Hey, can I come in?"

She wiped her tears quickly. "Sure."

Hadley stood there—in front of the door to watch her leaning against the wardrobe.

"So, have you heard from mother?" She asked. "We will have a vacation in Austria."

"I know," Eleanor nodded while throwing all of her stuff inside the suitcase.

"Well, the last time was in France—" she bit her lips as not sure of something, "I think we will not be going for a real holiday this time, and look at you get excited with that red hot suitcase."

This preparation didn't emerge her euphoria at all—Eleanor knew that.

"Can I ask you something?"

Her mouth pursed for that sudden question, Hadley shrugged her shoulders as she went to sit on the bed. "Sure, darling."

"Was there anyone in particular with white hair besides our family?"

Hadley was having a flat face for a few seconds, but afterward, she laughed so hard. “Are you kidding me, right?” She still laughing, it annoyed Eleanor. “Everyone in the family is all like that—well, because your question is *was*—” she rolled her eyes and smiled. “Did you mean the death one?”

Eleanor shrugged. “I don’t know—maybe.”

It was a strange question though, her aunt watched her well-wary for a while.

After she had done with the clothes and everything, she went to ask her further, “We have gone to several holidays, the one in the cabin house is what I want to talk,” now she sat beside her on the bed. “A girl had passed me by in there—oddly.”

Hadley squinted hard on her blue eyes. “Well, I don’t know if you would remember it—” she bit her lips again, “you used to like talking all by yourself. I thought it was the animated wall you had or anything, but simply—”

“What do you mean?”

“Imaginary friend.”

“She was *a real person*,” Eleanor insisted.

Hadley threw her hands up in the air and shocked her head. “Darling, don’t ask about the oddity to me.”

“You’re never serious,” Eleanor sighed.

“Oh!” Her aunt exclaimed too sudden. “But I do know someone. We used to have great holidays with her. She might know something about it.”

“Who is she?”

“I should’ve actually called her as my aunt, but for you—” she giggled, “Our beloved grandaunt.”

13

THE WILLINGNESS

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE NEXT HOUR TURNED sulky when she was in a tedium state to be alone again. The plan was simply to return to the university's park because she wanted to refresh her mind before coming home. The weather was pretty cold, but fortunately she wore a warm leather jacket while hugging a book.

For a second, her mind was wandering as she stood in the middle of this intersection of a brick walkway. She stood exactly against a building that looked like an old church—it was the Department of English. Her mind got tangled at first, then the idea to visit Cavely bookstore came up.

She still remembered Anita who had a schizophrenia disease. As a matter of fact, she couldn't rely to call it as a sickness since that little girl had been mentioning *demon*. There was a haunting terror on her mind, as if the bookstore was a real creepy place to visit again. Anyway, she was persistent to check it out.

The wind chime rang when she opened the entrance door. The room was dimmer than the last time she had visited. She

was being greeted almost immediately by the gray bobbed hair woman—Checille Margaretha.

“Welcome, Miss Charlotte!” She hollered enthusiastically, showing her yellow teeth. “What can I help you today?”

Truly, she felt welcome in here, with all that warm smile and polite act. There was no other visitor besides her. Her eyes hovered around to see all the same vintage ambience. The gypsy pictures still hung on every different section in this place. She noticed subsequently toward a new board that hung beside the front desk—there were some pieces of newspaper cli that pinned on it.

“What’s that?” Her eyes pointed.

Checille pursed her lips. “Some nomad gypsies died—they were assumed as a malfunction people in witch clothes by unknown forces.”

“Were those gypsies your family?”

She sighed. “Some were very close to me.”

“My apology—”

“Please don’t be at all. I thought you are here for a book?”

Cathy felt speechless for this awkward moment, and at once felt bad that she couldn’t say anything great for that sad news. “Yes, I’m looking for a good Victorian novel—but also, how’s Anita today?”

Her eyes looked down as if she talked to her inner self, and the she answered, “Worse,” Checille turned sad immediately. “Schizophrenia—I wouldn’t call it that way, but the doctor insists to give her a million dozen of stupid medicine.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“You always feel bad for anyone, don’t you?” Checille asked, she smiled with a relieve feeling this time.

Cathy breathed deeply, feeling uncomfortable. “Is she sleeping now?”

Checille nodded and led her to walk through the backside of this bookstore. The small corridor was somewhat felt eerie, even the air smelled musty.

“She would be excited in your company. She cried almost every night—wanting to meet you,” Checille said while opening the bedroom.

Their eyes were staring at the fragile girl who asleep on a thin mattress. In no second, Anita awoke enthusiastically as if she knew who was coming at the door, and she hugged Cathy immediately. Her brown eyes sparked with happiness and hope. But another second, it was a look of terror in her eyes.

“Are you alright?” Cathy bewildered. “What do you see?”

Checille astonished at that odd question.

“I saw a man—burnt.”

At that moment, the atmosphere was truly eerie. Her sudden screaming was hysterical. Checille tried to calm her daughter, but it wasn’t easy. Cathy was more astonished to witness the real view of demon at the corner of the room. They were all staring at the same creepy black figure.

“*Obayifo*,” she muttered restlessly.

“What did you say?” Checille asked.

Cathy was still traumatic with the whole things that happened in the past, especially to accept this sudden view of that big demon—even though *it* seemed standing like a frozen statue. Eventually, she walked out rashly from the bedroom.

“Wait, Miss Charlotte!” Checille chased after.

As they stopped at the front desk, Cathy spoke rashly, “I’m sorry. I think I need to go. My mom is waiting for me.”

“Please, I just need to talk to you for a second!” Checille begged. “Did you just say *Obayifo*?”

Cathy just wanted to drown in the river for this conversation. However, she pulled out her fear, and nodded.

“Please, Miss Charlotte,” she began to drop some tears, her voice was trembled. “I know that my daughter is not crazy. You can help me, don’t you?” She intimidated Cathy with a pitiful look. “You’re different from anyone.”

“I don’t know how to help her,” she was stressful with this situation.

“In return, I’ll help you with my knowledge—about your ancestor.”

She squinted doubtfully. “What do you mean?”

“Please, bring my daughter to your mom. She’s capable to handle this!” She muttered desperately. “Every *Puissant* would know how!”

“Wait,” Cathy bulged out at this old woman. “I never tell you anything about that, how do you—”

“I never use my power for a joke, Miss Charlotte. I am a gypsy, but I have limit at certain time. Can we just sit down for a while?”

After Cathy agreed, the owner of this bookstore served her greatly with a hot coffee for free. They sat on the chair next to the windowsill. Cathy was the one who felt nervous as soon as she remembered Checille’s real identity—despite the sense of oddity.

“The first time I saw your eyes, I know you’re one of them,” Checille gazed on her sleepy brown eyes as if she tried so hard to read her. “Your life must have been tough.”

Cathy drank slowly, after waited for another word to come up, nothing but a curiosity. “What is one of them?”

She smiled, but her eyes were careful to watch back and forth like she was afraid if anyone would listen. There were still no visitors in this noon.

“*Puissant*,” Cathy repeated the word. “Have you met any of them?”

“Yes, a few—” she was trembled, “please, we can’t abruptly talk about it, there would be many listeners around this space,” her eyes glossed and terrified, “I’m sorry to tell you truly now—my identity. I’ve been hiding for too long. Most gypsies have a dark art, but mine—wasn’t.”

Cathy shook her head against her confession. “Why are you hiding? Does that mean yours is a white art?”

Checille chuckled, but more in a sad way. “Someone has been chasing our little family. I moved from Brazil. Lionelle wanted me to run away quickly, but now, *their demons* could finally find us.”

“Who’s Lionelle?” She felt familiar with the name, but couldn’t remember.

“My niece—which is my older sister’s daughter. They were nomads. We were used to live together, but most of our family members were killed.”

“Is Lionelle still alive?”

Immediately, she showed a black and white photo from her wallet.

Cathy astonished as soon as she finally remembered. “I’ve met this girl when I was in Austria last year. She’s the one who told me about *The Triskelion Legend*.”

“Oh, they’re living in Austria now,” she closed her wallet rashly and sighed. “Miss Charlotte, when can I meet your mother exactly?”

Cathy wasn’t a skeptical murderer, but this woman had forced her to the point she felt annoyed, but still she had to put a smiley face against the elder. “I’ll talk to my mom about it.”



The afternoon felt pretty bad. She wandered through the pavement alone while rethinking her decision to call her mom.

At that restless time, she kept hugging her leather brown bag, until she finally had courage to call her mom.

“Mom, do you have time to meet Mrs. Margaretha?” Cathy sighed on the phone. “She’s the owner of Cavely Bookstore Café.”

“What’s the occasion, darling?”

“Her daughter has schizophrenia—well, her doctor who have said it. Mrs. Margaretha thought that you can help.”

“Did you say something to her?” She could hear through a phone that a spatula was being thrown off harshly. *“It sounds as if she knows something about us.”*

“I never said anything,” as Cathy had guessed that her mom went angry for this topic. “I think Checille is right that her daughter—Anita isn’t crazy, because that little girl could see—” Cathy swallowed her saliva as she terrified, “Obayifo.”

She asked firmly, *“Are you sure?”*

“I’d rather unsure of what is going on among their family—they are gypsies.”

“So, you make a friend with a gypsy?” Haile’s voice turned angry. *“Do you remember my condemnation, right?”*

“It’s just today she has truly revealed her identity. I really have no idea,” as she admitted, her mind recalled some of gypsy pictures and attributes inside the bookstore—that was her idea of unsure.

“And wait, darling—” her mom paused to think toward her attitude, *“did you just call that owner by her first name, Checille?”*

“Mom, it’s not what you think. Sometimes, she doesn’t want to be called as Mrs. Margaretha.”

“Let’s see. She’s not in a hurry, right?” Her mom wondered. *“I can’t leave the kitchen now. I’m cooking salmon steak for dinner.”*

“Wow, I’ll call you later then.”

They hung up the phone concurrently.

Cathy walked around the university’s backyard and returned to the park again, where Cavely Bookstore was actually just a couple block away, but she couldn’t go further when her eyes met the bulging blue eyes who caught her breathlessly.

They stood oppositely across this brick walkway.

Eleanor Heisler.

She wore a very thin denim floral dress that extravagantly showed her white porcelain skin like snow. She hung a white-cream fur coat in a small handbag in her arm.

Cathy confused of what to say since they never spoke directly since their encounter in Brooklyn party. Afterward, she would be the one to step ahead. “Eleanor, is there something you want to tell?”

She stood still with the bulging eyes as if anything in front of her was astonishing to look at. The silence that she projected somehow felt like a partial rampage. Cathy felt suffocated against this uncomfortable atmosphere.

The next second, she got startled when someone grabbed her shoulder. As soon as Cathy turned to see—a familiar face who greeted her in a flat expression that was never changed. She appeared old-fashioned with a midnight blue knee-length dress and black stocking. The long disappearance felt like a huge longing. After those hard days she had gone nowhere, and now that beautiful white hair girl had stood vividly behind her. She was that angel—*Sylvia Elle*.

A happy face engraved on her at the moment they met.

“Elle!” She was frantically excited. “Where have you been?”

Another minute, she remembered that there were the three of them—standing at the same place now, precisely in this silence confrontation.

Elle glanced at her who stood oppositely a few meters away. At that time, Eleanor was breathless in her own hideous rage.

Cathy stared back and forth at them to wonder what was happening. There was no any particular reason for that young lady to have a raging face. It seemed like she recognized the real deal of Elle. Cathy still conflicted with this circumstance, especially toward that sarcastic girl. She wanted to walk forward for an assurance, but Elle had to drag her back quickly before it went worst.

“Why don’t we have a lunch together?” Her sudden excuse made Cathy shot her with a bewildered look. “It has been a long time, hasn’t it?”

Cathy sighed, “Right.”

There was a time to ignore this kind of situation. She won’t put aside her bewilderment thought to become emotional. Therefore, they walked away from there to leave Eleanor who could only stare fiercely behind their back.

This would never be easy—at least Cathy had realized the idea.



Another small café across from Fordham’s building was pretty desolate in the afternoon. She surely won’t return to Cavely Bookstore for a while. It was a lazy hour, her sleepy brown eyes gazed out through the glass window at the cloudy sky while drinking a hot chocolate that taste like home.

Elle had been crossing arms. Her emerald green eyes didn't blink at all. A conjugation—seemingly became her unspoken answer.

“Do you—” Cathy hesitated to start the topic. “Do you know Eleanor Heisler?” Her words just came, at least it relieved her. “It seems she knew something—earlier.”

There was a moment of silence when Elle turned her eyes to observe the cloudy sky—the rain hadn't appeared yet.

“Indeed.”

Cathy placed her black cup on the table. She didn't know how to start another conversation—or even to ask the reason why for any question. It was pretty awkward at first. She still wondered what was going on between this angel and that sarcastic girl. Her mind was complex—because to know something stressful might bother her mind.

“Let's talk about your shelter then?” She changed the topic. “Where have you been?”

Elle glanced at her, grinning. “Somewhere you don't know.”

She chuckled back to know nothing about the preference addiction of curiosity. “At least you are here now.”

“Marissa has met you, right?” Elle sounded more like making sure than wondering.

“Yes, we have a plan to visit the library which she has mentioned,” Cathy informed. “Do you want to come?”

“No, I think—” Elle had something on her mind, “she has her part, so does mine.”

“What do you do?” Cathy couldn't stop asking over her own curiosity.

“Some part of it—the family secrecy,” the angel smiled and squinted as she wanted to make sure that Cathy had learnt

something while she went away. "I thought you knew about the Aloise and Heisler, right?"

"You might say next—the numerous issues on each television news channel are caused by the project?" She guessed peevishly. "My dad doesn't even have his family time on the weekend, since Brooklyn P.D is absolutely preparing to announce the speech for next week—" and she sighed, "I guess—that's according to the newspaper I've read this morning."

"You need to prepare yourself for that. They're after you."

She clung onto her words which didn't make sense, "The police?"

"There is something I want to convey you about," her voice turned distinct, sighed. "You must've heard about that news around New York—the preparatory in Brooklyn is undeniable, especially when your dad is included."

"Which part is this you have referred?" She tried to understand. "White Foxes?"

Elle stared deeply at her. "Be careful around them. If it's not really necessary, don't talk to the girl we've just met earlier."

"Is that true—Eleanor Heisler is really one of them?"

"Yes," Elle knew it all along.

"White Foxes—" she murmured again, "I've heard that no one wants to ever involve with their business for whatever reason."

"True."

"But, why does it have to be my dad?" She was almost speechless. "I won't let them hurt him."

"I know you love your parents so much," Elle smiled warmly which made Cathy remembered her angelic compassion from the first time they met in Bisbee. "He works

under the same circumstances as those police,” now she informed. “You’ll see there is an ongoing plan against the authority that the government and police couldn’t refuse from them.”

“You want to say that the dot is connected somewhere between all of this?” Cathy wondered. “Is this a warning?”

“Just a piece of advice—don’t blurt out anything about them.”

“Are you saying that my dad is in danger?” She worried now.

“Not yet,” Elle said. “White Foxes will make a clamorous rage for the public if they won’t stop whatever they are currently doing.”

“If they’re after me, they’re after Josh?” Her curiosities weren’t all answered yet. “He was there when the castle was gone, and what about Scott?”

“I’ll tell you this for the preparation—” Elle spoke firmly again, “they will make both of you as the witnesses, which mean, the witness interview will be held soon.”

“I’d like to know—whether you’ll be there for us?”

There was a pause before she answered. “I won’t.”

Cathy grimaced.

“Is it because they knew about your existence?” She noticed that. “Is that the reason why Eleanor stared oddly at both of us, then what should I say?”

“You don’t have to say anything, just walk your feet to the right path.”

Cathy breathed deeply as she felt restless. “How do you know that they will ask Josh and me for the witnesses’ interview?”

“That’s part of their plan—they want to gain more information. Haven’t you acknowledged that the case is not

easy to handle?” She gazed keenly at her eyes now—it gave an impulse of frightening feeling. “It’s the invisible castle that they want to decode—to get into the hidden world—making destruction—like in your world, human.”

“You don’t need to be angry. There must be another way to stop them.”

“The stone—don’t let them know,” Elle warned. “White Foxes are also searching for Puissant, even though they already have a few in their own family, but another power can make them restless,” she grinned for a second. “They can empower many entities with their power.”

“It sounds scary. Why did they have to do such thing?”

“The real rumor—White Foxes’ origin were from House of Heisler, but they got separated, until they established their own group. There are two kind of the Heisler: pure royalty and half witch,” she chuckled, at the same time, Cathy could feel her hatred toward that family, “they’re making two different lines of generation, and this group we’re talking about is derived from half witch. That’s why some of them have appeared like evil—as in term for their *behavior*.”

“What’s with their history?”

“Yes, that’s a gift from their ancestor. It was a long story, the Heisler’s prince married twice to make a different family line.”

“Whom did he marry?”

Elle was reluctant to continue, but she managed to answer, “House of Aloise—Princess Francesca.”

“Wasn’t she my ancestor?” She astonished. “—and Princess Kathleen?”

“She died before even had a chance to marry.”

“Am I, uh, I mean, the last generation of Aloise is now—”

Cathy had a hard time to acknowledge it, but Elle continued, “Right, your family line is derived from Princess Francesca. You’re actually sharing the same blood as the Heisler—you’re all relatives.”

“No way,” Cathy muttered in disbelief.

“Now your questions are all answered. You must prepare yourself.”

“Wait, I have to call for my mom again,” Cathy had another stressful thought in mind. “There’s that Cavely Bookstore,” she pointed out across the street at that place. “The owner needs help—”

“Do not worry,” Elle shouted since she could read the situation instantly. “I’ll take care for you.”



The next afternoon at Cavely Bookstore Café.

A visitor came after that eighteen-year-old girl went away. This stranger stood against the front desk.

Checille welcomed this visitor just like usually she did with every customer, but only today, she didn’t have that smile returned very nicely. The horrified ambiance haunted her lungs—she suddenly felt suffocated.

“Picking a crow ford, Checille?”

This old woman was agape as she shook her head, disagreed with this stranger who appeared emotionless with a strong charisma, and also left the impression to frighten people around.

“Who are you?”

“Don’t pretend to be innocent. It’s pathetic. You know exactly why I’m here.”

Checille swallowed her fear and decided to face her with enough confidence. “It’s rare for you to visit someone like me.”

“Even at your best, admitting a white art for your sake, it’s too much,” this seemingly young girl stepped forward to face her, “never middle in our business—the royals’ business. I thought I’ve already said this to your beloved older sister. If you dare to do it again, you’ll never have a brighter future.”

“Please don’t hurt us,” Checille got trembled. “My apologies, I talked to that girl. I desperately wanted to help my daughter—she’s been dying.”

“With whatever reason, that’s won’t do. Just one thing I want you to do before I leave,” she smirked hauntingly, “you should pretend like that conversation never happen with that naïve girl.”

“I promise I will, but my daughter—” her lungs became more suffocated, “please save her, *Angel*.”

“How dare you! You should speak to *God*, not me. Who do you think you worship?”

“I am very sorry, please, I almost lose my faith and hope,” she hurriedly ran to bend down at her knees, “there’s a demon in this house—Obayifo.”

“Ah, still the same case. Are they spying on you too?” She laughed, “How miserable.”

This beautiful stranger was only gazing around the room with her sharp green eyes. Nothing felt change at the moment, there was no wind that flew from the window, no sound, as if everything was paused in this realm of the universal time.

“Done.”

She smiled nicely to Checille. Without asking to pay her kindness for releasing the suffocated air in this place—the only home sweet home for Checille Margaretha. Afterward, this white hair girl just left her like that, without saying goodbye.

She disappeared within the winds.



On Tuesday morning, Cathy had a tremor mind whenever she met Mr. MacLain—or she should have called him as Alexander instead. He was always searching for her eyes in the classroom. Some students might notice, but mostly being ignorant, and most of the girls were gradually thinking a way to impress themselves toward that handsome lecturer. After an hour of craze, she could breathe in relieve—the Literary class had finally ended.

Cathy had a reason to avoid him, thus she walked quickly from this crowded corridor to reach the university's terrace. Someone might wonder, but her idea to dodge seemed quirky. She just didn't want anyone to think her relationship with Alex was unusual. A normal term was needed.

It was hard for her to meet random eyes. She acted too way awkward in a public space. Until then, she startled when someone tapped her shoulder. She stared up to see a tall woman stood behind her. Cathy recognized her slender figure, especially for wearing a hooded coat, cream scarf which covering her red hair, and black glasses—she appeared more like a secret agent.

“Marissa?” She felt excited while giggling, “I might die from a heart attack!”

“Don't you have a time to decode a mystery?”

She bewildered for a second while recalling their last conversation, and subsequently, she sighed for the truth that would finally be revealed.

“The antique shop, is it?”

“Clever. This is a very right moment to go there,” she certainly spoke with a British accent, “if someone noticed our plan, it would be a catastrophe.”

“What do you mean?”

Her answer was a mere silence. Cathy annoyed for all the inscrutable things, but their journey must be continued. They went to the parking lot where she parked her silver car—*Ford Fusion*.

The conversation started on the road. Marissa always knew how to make a friendly atmosphere.

“So—” Cathy thought of something while driving the car, “are you dress like an agent, now?”

“It’s the way you’ve thought about the impression that would offend me, but I’m not, thank you.”

Cathy chuckled and returned to their main topic, “Would you give me a clue beforehand?”

Her chili red lips engraved a smile before she spoke. “Let’s say that you’re in a maze, how complicated it would be without a guardian company?”

When the traffic light turned red, Cathy glanced at her. She didn’t have any good answer to decode, but at least she tried, “I might say it’s a bit arguing rather than coming to the antique shop.”

She took the same pathway, across to the Central Park. When she drove the car to the intersection, Marissa immediately told her which road to take.

“Are you sure this is the right path?” Cathy wondered with the desolate road along this area, she couldn’t really remember the path where Alex drove his jeep along this road when he lent a book about the Volka society at a library here.

All the buildings had lost their true color, as if everything turned archaic.

“Park your car in front of the green building,” Marissa pointed out across the road.

Cathy noticed another building that located a few blocks away, “Is that the library you’ve mentioned before?”

“Indeed, but now isn’t the time,” Marissa said, “Just in case though, if you wanted to learn the history about the Aloise and Heisler family, it would be the only library that you could visit in New York.”

“Where else?”

Marissa took her black sunglasses before she spoke. “The rest of the books have been stored in Austria, some secret places.”

Afterward, they got out from the car concurrently.

It was the only green building. The glass window covered with curtains from the inside. Cathy peeped behind the window, but she couldn’t see a clear view.

“Okay, don’t you have the key?” Cathy worried. “We don’t want to look like a thief.”

Marissa obviously narrowed her green eyes, but she smiled though. “Perhaps—have you forgot who this person beside you?”

She narrowed her eyes in return while remembering this beautiful woman’s real identity—which was *an angel*.

Marissa looked so calm while her porcelain hand was an inch away to open the pull-door. She didn’t really touch it like a mundane way, the door cracked itself immediately, and she walked ahead to the antique shop.

Cathy imagined herself walking alone in this building as soon as she came forward. The dusts felt weighed on her nose, tingling. The atmosphere was haunting for a second. The space looked small. There were big wooden bookshelves in the first floor.

“Catherine,” Marissa called out from behind the front desk.

Cathy had just done her little sightseeing toward a collection of ancient golden jewelries which located near to the

entrance door. Afterward, she followed that angel to walk into the basement.

The path in the basement, there was a hallway that connected separately into two aisles.

It would be totally dark if Marissa didn't bring a candle. The basement was larger than the first floor. They stood in the central room where there were a lot of books that seemed countless. The leather-bounded books were all neatly arranged. Unfortunately, there was no category tag on each bookshelf.

"There are many things to be acknowledged in here. I'm not sure which one to show you first," Marissa muttered.

"What's in the aisles?"

"Both aisles have some paintings. You might love to see it."

They walked upstairs together. In the hallway, there were windows where the sun stroke brightly across the floor. The long aisles were designed like a cave. Until they reached at the end, there was a big room that looked like a purgatory. In that place, various royal paintings were hung on the brown brick wall like a museum.

Cathy was mesmerized by the beauty of those paintings. Everything depicted the faces of royal family that mostly women, every painting had golden frame. The atmosphere felt ancient and quiet.

Soon, Cathy got stopped frozenly, her mouth gawked, and her eyes bulged out so widely. There was one painting that bigger than the others, which portrayed a beautiful woman in red-black embroidered long sleeve gown. Her keen brown eyes seemed to be overshadowed by a deep sorrow, although it wasn't certain of what sadness she felt. The woman wore a gold crown in her long wavy dark brown hair.

“It’s the painting of Princess Kathleen,” Marissa shouted from behind, “—the crown princess.”

Cathy felt as if her heart was struck by a thunder. She turned immediately to see Marissa, who showed a composed face.

“What?” Her eyes peeped again at the painting. “This woman—you said that I’m her reincarnation, perhaps?”

“It could be—” Marissa seemed hesitant for a moment, “of what everyone has been saying about the prophecy.”

“I have no idea,” Cathy sighed. “You’ve told me about the history a year ago, and now I’m standing here to witness this,” she stepped forward to touch the painting, it felt rough on her fingers. “It’s like I’m looking into a mirror, we’re so alike, it’s impossible.”

Marissa followed to stand frozenly against this sudden atmosphere, as if the painting emerged a despondent vibration. This angel was one of many that had witnessed the tragedy in the past.

“She was older than you when this painting was made. Princess Kathleen was a tough woman—that was why she became a warrior princess. She was unlike any human I’ve ever met on earth.”

“A lovable princess—” Cathy glanced at her. “I’ve read from Carl Dalton’s book—*Emperor of Souls*,” her eyes showed a restless feeling. “Is it really based on a true event?”

“We have kept it like that in the book as a memory.”

Cathy still gawked as she muttered, “I’m sorry, Marissa.”

“Come on, we supposed to move on now,” after she spoke, her eyes searched around the room as if she had never been here before, even though this wasn’t her first arrival.

On the other side, Cathy wished to see everything in here with her mom. “Have my mom came here before?”

“Yes, a long time ago—” she answered while they walked together, “when this antique shop was still opened for public. It was hectic, even the street seemed sleepless,” she was slightly giggling. “White Foxes really knew how to hide their own secrecy—this place appeared more like a royal museum than a shop.”

“What—White Foxes?” Cathy surprised.

Marissa nodded. “Oh, I must have forgotten to tell you about the owner of this place, huh?”

Cathy squinted at her. “Do you have anything to do with them?”

“Chill out, they are not aware of our presence here.”

“Tell me the truth!” She got restless.

Marissa shook her head peevishly while showing the way to the next aisle—there was an odd ambience around this space. There were more of wooden bookshelves than what it looked in the basement. Subsequently, Marissa pointed out her chin at the only book on the marmalade table. It was a thick leather-bound book and looked pretty heavy.

“Check it out before you would yell at me again, Catherine.”

“It’s just Cathy,” she corrected, at once felt piqued.

She sat on the stool immediately. The book was about eight-hundred pages, but it wasn’t the main problem to make her sighing. Her heart was trembled and conjured by the idea of her own nervous to open what was written inside.

“What—”

Her jaw fell opened to see every section inside the book was about a history in mundane handwriting—it was White Foxes’ most private journal. She kept on observing each page, until her eyes caught her own portrait picture.

“House of Aloise?”

Cathy was breathless to see a chapter of the family tree where every detail of every name was written perfectly—they were her very own ancestors. She noticed herself was from the twenty fifth generation, and her mom was twenty fourth, even her aunt was written in this book.

Unfortunately, most of them didn't have a portrait picture. She locked her eyes on the very first generation of the Aloise family. There were two legendary siblings that got her attention.

1493's

Kathleen von Aloise

Francesca de Moriz von Aloise

"Aloise means a famous warrior and mighty in battle. The word derived from German origin," Marissa told her. "The empire only had two daughters—Kathleen and Francesca."

"I don't know why I feel emotional," Cathy held her tears while something seemed striking into her soul. She turned the pages randomly, and accidentally she opened the chapter of other family—the real deal.

"House of Heisler, wait, Eleanor?" She saw that girl's portrait picture—still with the usual half up half down hairstyle.

"White Foxes is part of the Heisler, but they're totally different from the origin family, this one group is wick. In my opinion, I would call them as wreckage soulless."

She told her the same exact story with what Sylvia Elle already stated yesterday.

"This is all actually related to one another, right?" Cathy sighed while wondering. "The case, the project, and that girl from the same college as I am, she's—"

"Before you say any further, I just want to remind you, although it seems you already know," Marissa spoke while

caressing her hair like a little kid. “Don’t get too close with that girl—Eleanor Heisler.”

“Is it because she’s part of that family?” She smirked, annoyed. “I’m not afraid. I won’t let them hurt my family, and I don’t have anything to do with them anyway.”

“No, but your father does,” they stared intensely at each other now. “They never play an easy game. The case is involving your father as their detective in Brooklyn.”

“What?” She stared blankly on the floor, worried. “He never said anything, but he should confront it.”

“As long as he can play by their right rule, there will be no danger.”

Thereafter, they hurriedly got out from the place before somebody found them. There was a safer place to return—the apartment.

I4

THE STAGNATION

ELEANOR HEISLER



ELEANOR HAD HER EYES wide-awake to remember their disappearance from the university's park, and she kept on thinking how that white hair girl could appear out of nowhere these days. The last time she met her, that mysterious girl didn't appear with a red umbrella and just went away to accompany that innocent girl—Cathy Charlotte. There was no exact reason of why she would loathe Cathy, but to see her name was written inside White Foxes' history journal was odd. It could be that they were all shared the same blood—at least she given enough thought about it.

It happened yesterday though.

This was Wednesday, the class just ended in the morning. She walked on the pavement to reach for her black Mercedes Benz car. The car window was rolled down—she surprised to notice that the driver wasn't her usual chauffeur. It was her smiley aunt—Hadley Heisler who appeared with a very slick short hair. She dyed her violet hair darker than yesterday.

“Hey niece, get in!” She exclaimed.

Eleanor bent down at the window. “Where’s my chauffeur?”

“I pushed him away. Money has charged him right,” she giggled.

With no further wonderment she got into the front seat of the car. Hadley welcomed her with that usual exaggerated smile, and then she started to drive the car toward the university’s gate while talking, “Remember that we want to see our grandaunt?”

Regardless, she already guessed it right that Hadley would keep her yesterday’s promise—according to their last conversation.

“You mean she’s your aunt, and as for me, I call her *grandaunt*?”

“Come on, I still feel young, you punk!” She hollered, annoyed.

“Whatever,” Eleanor sighed.

The road she took was leading them off from Bronx to Manhattan’s district. Across to the Central Park, there were like millions of tall buildings. The place she referred was actually not that far from White Foxes’ mansion. The area was located near to the Upper East Side’s neighborhood. There was a road that surrounded by some of cryptic old buildings. Some said that the whole area was abandoned by each owner, but some just stayed the same since the first establishment.

Her aunt parked the Mercedes Benz in front of the only black building around that place.

Thereafter, Eleanor recalled one place that located a few meters away, which was the antique shop that she had visited before. She won’t talk about it with her aunt since it would bother her mind. She got out first to feel a strange cold

ambience. Nobody was seen there. This seemed like a death place.

“Hell, craze, this is a pretty cold place,” it was absolutely shot her skin since she only wore a mini dress. She quickly ran to the car to take her black coat.

“You look like you’re attending a funeral, I can see that,” Hadley mocked her.

Afterward, they approached the entrance door that covered with gargoyle statues. Her aunt knocked loudly. They waited about two minutes for an old woman to open the door. She looked a lot like Lady Marie de Clure, only that her body seemed more contain, and as tall as Hadley when they stood side by side.

That old woman gazed surprisingly at these Heisler’s children. “Oh, what brought you here?”

“Well, grandaunt, do you remember Eleanor?” Her aunt spoke while leaning her arm on the door. She was being playful. “Can we come in first, if you mind?”

“Does she know that you two—”

Before she finished her words, Hadley shook her head and shouted aggressively, “Not at all.”

“Are you sure, young child?” That old woman squinted suspiciously at her.

“All will be well,” Hadley smiled as knowing the fact that their grandaunt didn’t like the idea of Marie’s little surveillance. “Your grandchild needs enlightenment. She has a problem with her childhood dreams.”

Eleanor stood there to observe that old woman who surely looked familiar, but so unfortunate that she couldn’t recall those times when they were together. She felt those deep blue eyes were trying to read deeply into her soul.

“Do I owe you an explanation for that?” She sounded vicious at first.

“Well, Grandaunt—”

She shouted before Hadley could finish her words, “Just leave.”

But Hadley insisted, jerking on the door before she could close it. “It’s just a minute, please.”

She stared at Eleanor now—observing her grown up face. It took a few seconds for her to decide.

“Come then,” she said and finally opening the door for them.

The light at the lobby were dimmed, and it was dimmer when she peeped far away at the gap of the wall where there were some corridors. While they had sightseeing around the space, their grandaunt was preparing three cups of a chamomile tea, and then she welcomed them to sit on the sofa.

“So, where do we start?” She sat elegantly in front of them.

“Oh, Grandaunt Matilda!” Her aunt started to make a puppy face which was truly childish for someone at her age. “We miss you so badly, it’s longing, and we have separated for almost ten years!”

Eleanor caught that atmosphere when there was a slight feeling of agony on those shaded blue eyes of their grandaunt, which she thought was weird.

“Eventually—” she shook her head and chuckled unwillingly, “I always miss all of you for this rare encounter. If Marie found out about this, she would be really mad at you, darling.”

Now she glanced at Eleanor. “And you—are you sure wanted to talk about your childhood memories?”

She wasn't aware with her own immediate act of crossing arms, her grandma grinned to notice her defensiveness.

"I'm actually—" Eleanor was hesitant for a moment, and now she felt uncomfortable, "I mean, there was a memory that slipped, I couldn't precisely remember."

"You hate to talk about your parent," she knew immediately. "They have passed away. Everything has a reason, Eleanor."

Hadley turned to look at her niece woefully.

"Do you think Marie will kill you to discuss this with us?" Eleanor shouted. "Apart from knowing if any of her boy scout would be around now?"

Matilda breathed deeply. "She might be evil, but she loves you too."

Eleanor gulped down her own fear and sorrow toward this conversation.

"The thing is—you can't let them go. It's haunting you," her grandma spoke in a deepest grief. "You can't blame the memories. It is within you."

"Eleanor, just tell her what is it that has been bothering your mind," Hadley shouted.

"I don't want to discuss about my *dead parent*, alright," she emphasized the words sarcastically. "I want to know—" she sighed as unsure, "why did someone have the Red Riding Hood's vibe on all over our cabin house in Austria?"

Matilda narrowed her eyes as conflicted with that question.

"Niece, be real. What are you trying to ask?" Hadley also squinted hard in disbelief at her.

"Who's sending a girl scout to watch over my life?" She rolled her eyes keenly at that charismatic old woman. "Don't ever tell me—if it might be Marie's dirty work again."

Matilda chuckled to feel pitiful toward her. “You know—there’s a certain time in life that we don’t understand, and I just *don’t know* what you actually want to hear.”

“You’re not being precise here,” Eleanor said firmly.

On the other side, Hadley was about to panic if her niece would act madly, their existence in here could turn to be a frantic agony.

“Do you know why are they called as White Foxes?” Their grandma asked suddenly.

“Fox—” Eleanor murmured, “the legend.”

“Exactly,” she smiled, “There’s a fox within the Red Riding Hood story, and the whole red things aren’t red at all, it’s just a mere analogy,” she leaned down to her sofa and continued, “it’s all partially related—the people in your mansion are playing a role as that fox.”

“And guess who the disguising fox behind a grandma’s blanket is?” Hadley shouted after, though she tried to sound cheerful, but her heart was terrified. “Is it my mother?”

“Marie de Clure—and yet she didn’t let all of her children to use her husband’s surname,” their grandma spoke, although it was ambiguous whether she was answering her question or not.

“That’s what she wants to show in front of the public—that the Heisler family is powerful,” Hadley gave an answer.

“Bear in mind that she lives under the name of White Foxes now,” Matilda said before she drank her hot tea.

“Is that why you chose to separate from us?” Eleanor asked. “People are secretly marking our family as a hidden monster. You surely don’t want that.”

Matilda’s smile made her nervous though. “I’m tired of her games. I want a peaceful life,” her eyes gazed around the

ceiling, “I can breathe loosely in this desolate place that I’ve built.”

“But it’s lonely here,” Hadley muttered.

“What’s the difference living in that mansion and having your own life?” She asked rhetorically. “Freedom is all you need.”

Hadley realized eventually that her life wasn’t that much different from her aunt. She was living in Florida all alone before she got permission from her mother to stay for a while in the mansion.

“I keep seeing a white hair girl with a red umbrella, can you explain that?” Eleanor returned to the previous topic.

“In what kind of why do you see that figure?” Her grandma looked deeply into her eyes, now she felt it was truly intimidating. “Is it in your memory, flashback, or dream?”

Eleanor grimaced, “I literally see her—just like I see you now.”

“Marie wants to remain you about death—apart from your parent,” she gave her an eerie look, “to prepare on something she has been planning,” she chuckled mockingly, “like I said—a game.”

“What is this you guys talking about?” Hadley interrupted as she stared back and forth at them.

Eleanor surely looked fierce when she glanced at her aunt with bulging eyes, and then she returned to ask, “Like seeing the unseen?”

“Child, I won’t interrupt anything inside White Foxes. It’s time for both of you to leave,” she rose up from the sofa to shoo them.

“Wait, what game?” Eleanor still confused. “Is it about the current project?”

“Oh, God, don’t mention that,” Hadley warned her.

"*The Invisible Project*—that's what they called it," she insisted to speak up. "The game is still on. The case of the lost castle is being reopened, especially—"

"Eleanor!" Her aunt bulged in dismay. "It's supposed to be their secret."

"They're inviting us to learn it, so what?" She spoke harshly. "Grandaunt Matilda is still our family."

"No, she's right," Matilda sighed as she went to sit again. "I shouldn't get involve anyway. If you think Marie knew about your problem, why don't you ask her by yourself?"

"Anyway, do you know how evil Marie is?" Eleanor opposed. "She's the one who forced the police to close the death case of a female reporter. Everyone has been questioning her motive."

"Just stop. Get out now," there was an ultimatum tone in her voice. "Don't ever return here."

"Grandaunt, please, you can't kick us out forever," Hadley was begging for her mercy.

Eleanor rose from the chair arrogantly, "Just do as she says."

Her aunt would totally blame her later for this mess. They were walking out to the door. When Hadley got out first, Eleanor was being dragged quickly by her grandmother.

"The white hair girl that you've mentioned—she's trying to convey you for an important message," her grandma whispered. "Pay attention. Be clever."

She smirked as pushing away her hand, "I thought you knew nothing."

"That girl isn't a scout at all," her keen blue eyes still intimidated Eleanor. "Be light or be dark. You got to choose someday."

“What—is this about a decision?” Eleanor asked. “Am I that childish to play everyone’s game?”

“Vice versa—Marie is trying to invite *the angel* into the family, but if she did it in a wrong way, it could result as a breakable boundary between you two.”

“Am I supposed to believe your metaphor?” Eleanor chuckled. “So, the girl is an angel now?”

Matilda chuckled at her like the sages who taught their children wisely. “I always say this to my visitors when they are confused with themselves—*trust your instinct.*”

Eleanor lost her words against this last conversation. She could only bulge out at her and finally left with a speechless mind.



After several hours of quality time together around Manhattan, they finally returned to the mansion in the evening. Some business men just got walked out to the terrace when Hadley parked the Mercedes Benz to their huge garage. A few servants were busied serving those guests, along with Sofia and Marshall who had a chatty time with them. In fact, Eleanor and Hadley didn’t know what was going on in the mansion.

“What’s going on?” Hadley asked her older sister—Sofia.

“Mother is discussing the Invisible Project. She wants some memos to be changed.”

Eleanor was overhearing their small talk from behind.

“What does that supposed to mean?” Hadley confused.

“The Brooklyn Police is trying to close Lydia Brimham’s death case—they’re going to tell the mass media since mother doesn’t want that case to interrupt our project.”

“A clarification, isn’t it?” Hadley asked again. “What kind of statement they will have?”

“From murder to suicide,” Sofia bit her lips, restless. “I know this is hard, but mother and Marshall keep on pushing them off to this case.”

“Suicidal?” Eleanor shouted after. “How cruel that is.”

“Yeah, how could the police and detective have a false investigation?” Hadley asked further.

“Is not it,” Sofia had a terrified look, she still whispering in their ears while Lady Marie and Marshall were still busied talking with some men in suit at the door. “They did it intentionally—for the sake of this Invisible Project.”

“Sister—”

“Hadley, you better return to Florida. You know how mad mother is when she comes to this kind of circumstance.”

“Am I burdening anyone in this mansion?” Hadley asked while her eyes went glossed.

“Mother has warned you the other day,” Sofia peeped secretly at Eleanor—subsequently she grabbed her arm to whisper closely. “You know she only want Eleanor to learn without you middling in between.”

“Some reporters will open the crack of this secret. They will know soon about her evilness—but speaking of the devil, no one dares to discuss it bluntly against Lady Marie,” Hadley spoke, trembled. “And by the way, is she really going to make Eleanor as the next leader?”

Sofia blinked, fearful. “Yes.”

As the farewell time had ended with those guests, the landlords were all returned to their own bedroom. On the other side, Eleanor witnessed how trembling Hadley was after that talking. Some complicated things just remained stagnant. As if nowhere to go at night, Eleanor didn’t stop alone in her bedroom. She sneaked out to see what happened in Lady Marie’s private office.

The ambience was too quiet, but there was a low chatty sound in the background. She peeped into the gap of the window. Lady Marie walked back and forth inside her office while talking on the phone.

“Yes, please bring more information to this case—” she was peeping into that conversation, “Have you arranged a new schedule for our witnesses?”

Lady Marie was smiling inscrutably. “Please notice, this is a private interview. No third party may involve, neither for any reporter.”

She leaned closely to look around. Lady Marie was all alone inside the office and she kept on talking about the interview. “Make it possible this time. Do not let them run away. We’re running out of time, dear.”

“Eleanor!” Sofia startled her from behind while bringing a tray of one yellow cup. “What are you doing in there?”

“Nothing,” she sighed and rolled her eyes in annoyance.

“Just go to your room, go to sleep,” she spoke, it was mandatory.

“Easy, I know when to sleep, alright,” she answered sarcastically.

When she came into the office, Eleanor was still peeping in there to see them behind the window. Lady Marie was chuckling on the phone while Sofia brought her a cup of hot tea. In no minute, she hung up the phone to face her eldest daughter.

“I just received a call from the officer, he told me the exact schedule—” Marie explained, “be prepare for the witnesses’ interview next weekend.”

“Yes, mother,” she obeyed.

“And—” before she left, her mother shouted, “How much does Hadley know about this?”

Sofia was breathless for a second—her terrified feeling had emerged again. “I’m not sure—”

“Preoccupied, darling,” she said and smiled, “anyway, make sure that Hadley and Eleanor come to see the interview.”

With that in mind, Eleanor knew what she had to confront—especially to learn about her family’s secret soon. She would be well prepared.

I5

THESE VEHEMENCE

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE NEWS WAS PROPAGATED with no mercy. The upside down of Lydia Brimham's murder case had become the headline news on many station channels. This was a crucial matter for some reporters to deal with. Everyone in New York City was shocked with the topic that stated on many of television news channel this morning—the suicidal.

This morning earlier, our reporter has confirmed from the police chief of Brooklyn P.D for the current issue regarding to the murder case. There is no assumption to build up a wall if any of this circumstance might have related to the royals' assembly which known as White Foxes. However, the police have announced the official statement regarding to the death of a young newspaper reporter—Lydia Brimham which turns out as a suicide case.

"The case is too way complicated," Cathy murmured while holding to a TV remote.

Haile sat beside her, speaking up, "The cruelty of human being—it's already depicted clearly. Everyone would be more

speculative about it if justice was really existed between those people.”

“No one would dare—” Cathy glanced at her to say hesitantly, “You’ve said it yourself—White Foxes is empowering everyone.”

“That’s why you should be careful, Cathy,” she caressed her hair gently. “I’ve got a call from Manson about your interview again,” she paused to sigh, “absolutely for the sake of their secretive project.”

“I thought they already asked when we couldn’t come since we were in Bisbee,” Cathy eyed her curiously. “They still insist?”

Her mom shrugged both shoulders. “That could have been what it is. They won’t stop until you get there, oh, along with Josh.”

“It can’t be,” she muttered. “What do you think they would ask me in there?”

“Be like a chameleon—camouflage answers. Answer with the truth that sounds obscure,” her mom smiled, “it’s the safest way, also you can’t tell anything crucial about the abandoned castle.”

“Why?”

“I know it’s been long forgotten, but it’s still our family’s property.”

“It belongs to House of Aloise?”

She nodded and continued, “Yes, and possibly for the police to suspect more into the incredulity inquiry against the lost castle,” for a second, she recalled something, “—what I’ve heard from Manson—they want to seek a hidden treasure inside the abandoned castle, which is our family’s heritage, I mean the gate.”

“You mean that hidden portal?” Cathy almost lost her breath. “I bet dad doesn’t know about that part.”

Haile smiled affectionately, and then she giggled. “Can you imagine if you say a word of anything absurd, how the police would react?”

“Ah—” she relieved that her mother still had a sense of humor about that. “It can’t be helped then. I’ll tell Josh about it.”



An hour later, she visited Loschert Hall which was a dorm. There were random bicycles parked in front of the front yard. She needed to find a way to their dorm since this was the first time she came to such place which was located not far from the college building, especially to look out for the male section in the dorm. This was Thursday whereas most of the students with the same major as her would have a day off from class. Eventually, she just got invited to a brownish party.

Some boys stared bewildering at her. She walked through the small corridor awkwardly but being ignorant all at once. Luckily, the security stuff wasn’t there to catch her off guard. Her suffer could finally end when she knocked at the door.

She was welcomed by a boy with a wide smile—he was Jordan Wagner who attended the same High School as her. He still had the same skinny posture, dark brown hair with high spike style, and brown slant-eyed that wearing rectangular eyeglasses. After she stepped in, he exclaimed exaggeratedly while he put his hands up in the air, “Happy Thursday!”

Cathy surprised at the moment, soon, she bulged out at the messy view inside this dorm room. The shirts and denim jeans were placed disorganized everywhere on the floor.

Josh just came out from the bathroom and got astonished with her unexpected arrival. He was half naked, only covered with a white towel. "Wait, what are you doing here?"

"I—can I come in?" Cathy was frustrated when she realized this was the wrong time to meet. "—or just go home?"

"Wait!" He exclaimed hurriedly, and then snapping back into the bathroom to change clothes, in no minute he returned with a plain gray t-shirt and jeans.

Finally, all of them could breathe for a while to observe the situation.

"How do you know which dorm to visit?" Josh asked her.

She glanced at the boy next to him while speaking, "Jordan invited me—he said we will have a brownish party in here."

"Shut up Jordan!" quickly, he shouted mad at him who didn't even speak a word yet. He sounded so angry and seemingly wanted to smack Jordan in his face to repay for all the craziness. "Do you know how danger this building for a girl to walk alone?"

"Do you mean some night animals or circus men would probably scout over her?" Jordan chuckled by himself. "Easy, dude—they don't even seem to care about each other."

"Right, it seems no one bother each other around here," she agreed.

Jordan nodded and left them behind to get back where the last time he paused his gun-war video game.

Josh still faced her, while hands in his waist. "We could have met at the café, because if the security saw you—"

"You don't want me here?" She was disappointed, he looked at her in bewilderment, and then she ignored him and walked forward into the small kitchen which located near to the balcony.

“What kind of brownish party—we don’t even have any ingredients,” he muttered peevishly while following her.

“You say what?” She smiled as showing him the inside look of that small refrigerator—the food supply was enough, included for making a brownish cake. Josh closed eyes, looked stressed out and pathetic.

After Jordan had finished his gun-war video game quickly, he got up from the floor to help Cathy making the cake.

“You can’t even cook a porridge,” Josh mocked him, subsequently he glanced back to her and said, “—oh, don’t you have any jackets to wear besides this one, madam?”

“I thought you might suggest me to take it off instead,” she shook her head while giggling.

The hectic mind happened again to him when a cat jumped out at his legs, and he gave the owner an angry look instead.

Jordan felt worried for his beloved cat—he quickly hugged the cat in his arms. “Dude, please don’t be hasty. This cat is a nightmare repellent.”

“Who said that?”

“It’s just me.”

Josh chuckled in a mocking way and muttered, “What a nerd.”

Cathy was surprised with the hidden existence of that beautiful cute cat. She wondered, “You have great courage for the cat. No pets allowed inside the dorm, right?”

He nodded frantically at her while the cat jumped down from his grasp to lie down lazily on his bed.

An hour later, they finished making the chocolate brownish cake. They sat down together on the floor, in front of the television. The screen was turned on, showing the same news report that she saw this morning. Everyone had been

discussing about the secret project. It was still roaming around as a show in every media.

“My dad said that it’s an absolute raging,” Jordan commented while chewing the cake.

“How about your dad—doesn’t he know something as the main detective in there?” Josh asked.

She pursed her lips and needed a few seconds to answer him. “He seems so busy that we didn’t call each other last week.”

The boys stared bewilderingly at her and forgot about the cake.

Cathy really didn’t know what to say—this was only a personal conjugation. She caressed the cat gently that kept on meowing at her thigh, and then she stared back at them who still waited for her response.

“I don’t know what’s going on or what kind of project case, but from what I’ve heard in the Brooklyn party, there’s a stakeholder group who’s building up that series of event. It’s not the police who want to re-open the case.”

“What’s the case seriously?” Josh didn’t get it.

She stared at him solemnly as if she wanted to communicate in a secret code. Nonetheless, it wasn’t easy for her to explain in front of Jordan who didn’t know about that secrecy.

“Remember the last time we went to Austria?” She narrowed her eyebrows toward him while speaking. He nodded back.

“Are you serious—what group is that?” He spoke rashly as he felt anxious and Jordan didn’t really understand of what he was up to. “They’re not going to force me into a series of interview, right?”

“White Foxes—” she said, “that is the group that making the secret project.”

“Never heard of them,” Josh shouted.

Cathy added, “Eleanor Heisler is one of the family members in that group.”

“That trouble young lady?” Jordan asked and giggled. Both of them were bewildering at him. He stopped laughing though, when they stared solemnly at him. “Alright, alright, I’ve heard a little about the group. White Foxes, eh?”

“What do you know?” Cathy was curious.

“My dad is surely working with them now. They’re part of the royals from German, who got separated to make a group they named it as White Foxes. They’re a stakeholder for anything they want to—according to the rumor, they are empowering the social and financial field,” he sighed and continued, “actually, no one really knows about the exact business sector that they own.”

“Eleanor—is she the one who doesn’t have any friend?” Josh wondered.

“I bet—there are tons who want to, but don’t you both know about the haunting fact of that royal group?” They shook their heads when Jordan asked, thus he giggled alone like something was funny. As the cat walked out to the balcony quietly, he continued, “You shouldn’t talk a lot with the members while you can. They literally *bite* you.”

Cathy had heard about it from the angels, and for some rumors that propagated in the air.

Josh snapped after a few seconds of silence between them, “It sounds somehow like witches or evil things.”

When Jordan finished his cake and tea, he threw the plate harshly on the floor, and he exclaimed annoyed, “Man, not every witch is evil. There are some that have a good heart.”

“Why does it make you so sensitive?” Josh confronted.

Cathy got bewildered too.

Jordan sighed, and said, “My great-great-grandmother is a witch, so—”

“What did you say?” Josh was popeyed at him. “Does your dad into that stuff?”

“No, he is skeptical. The blood is descended from my mother’s side—of all the good witches,” he inhaled deeply as staring blankly at the floor, “okay, I really don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

Cathy still astonished against his confession though, while Josh could take this conversation easier.

“If you told that to anyone besides us, maybe they would sue you for that craziness,” Cathy said, grinned.

“Indeed, that’s way, you guys seems different from anyone,” he murmured.

“But, you’re serious right, about the witch part?” She wanted to be assured.

Josh giggled immediately as she asked that, so on he rose up from the floor to clean up their plates and cups in the dishwasher, all at once he shouted, “You’ll be contaminated by his *nerdiness*.”

Cathy shook her head and murmured, “Don’t mind him.”

“You need to ask Checille for an assurance. She knows about my ancestor by the way,” he said while Josh wasn’t listening to their small talk.

She knew that he was referring to the owner of that Cavely Bookstore Café. Her mind seemed to forget of what happened back then, but remembered that Elle wanted to take care Checille’s family. She wouldn’t want to feel overwhelmingly restless.

“You need to stay away at least five meters from him!” Josh kept on bugging to shout from the kitchen—he felt the glory then.



After Creative Writing class was over on Friday afternoon, everyone hollered happily. Everyone in the classroom wanted to walk out hurriedly since they got tired of the massive task that was given by the lecturer—Shania Madeley, who would be the chattiest lecturer on earth. It was painful to have a task on the weekend. On the other side, Cathy felt relieved instead, she wanted to have a good nap at her apartment. Even Josh and Jordan were having the same thought as they wanted to take a rest all day long.

Soon, everyone walked out. Eleanor Heisler walked among the students in the corridor, she glanced viciously at her.

The tingling feeling to confront her was always came up, but it might be a waste of time since Cathy was being reminded by some people about that girl’s dangerous family.

Thereafter, when she remembered about the interview, she hurriedly reminded Josh. It seemed that he already got a direct call from the Brooklyn P.D too. They already discussed it together yesterday, after the brownish party when Jordan wasn’t listening. She told him the exact advice that her mom had given for both of them.

She walked separately from Josh and Jordan, who returned immediately to their dorm. As she walked straight into the long desolate corridor, Mr. MacLain just appeared out of nowhere. She was tremendously startled with his sudden appearance.

“Hello, Cathy,” he greeted, “how are you?”

She smiled at him while glancing back and forth around the corridor. No one was there to witness this encounter and to make a gossip, she felt lucky.

“I am good, what about you?”

“Truly great,” he giggled and acted awkwardly again as if his nervous system would breakdown, “uh, actually, could we have another quality time—I mean between us—visiting another bookstore in town?”

“You mean to invite me for another occasion?” She giggled back. “Is it college related?”

His eyes blinked rapidly—he was in a total nervous wreck and she was aware of that. “Not exactly, it’s just my personal invitation,” he sighed. “You know, I still feel the moment when we walked out there. Just in case if you agree though, *call me.*”

She bulged out at his confession, it didn’t sound flirty though, but it still felt odd for her to hear.

“Pardon me, but I don’t understand—” she stared solemnly at his brown eyes, “it’s an honor, but really, maybe next time, Mr. MacLain.”

“Are you having a busy schedule again?” He smiled, but his heart pounded and felt restless. “The last time you had birthday party.”

“I know, it’s just—” she said while her eyes stole a glance around the corridor, checking if anyone was eyeing them, but still none, “I do have some complicated things to think about, so—”

She won’t refer it as the real matter that had been happening. As a matter of fact, her head already felt dizzy to think about the witnesses’ interview in Brooklyn, which would be held tomorrow.

“You can talk to me about it, I could be your best friend—outside this lecturer and student relationship,” he said easily

now, his nervous system was gone quickly as the conversation flew.

“Great, thanks for the opportunity, but I really should go now,” she said and smiled.

He grabbed her arm immediately before she went away, and he said, “Call me, anytime soon.”

Cathy pulled off his hand gently and smiled, “Let’s see then.”



The television screen showed enough of some headline news, but the only issue that made them bulging out was the recent report related to the Invisible Project. The news was becoming hard to perceive—more like *terrifying*.

The folks have been facing the truth about a difficult situation at the Police Department located in Brooklyn, Ohio. The finding report would settle a clue toward this secret project. It’s issued that a secretive meeting will be held by tonight at Brooklyn P.D, although they haven’t confirmed it yet in public. The police have finally announced the official speech by Lady Marie de Clure that will be held on Saturday.

Cathy hated this strained atmosphere as if it could choke her, especially if it would strangle her name or even Josh to the death end someday, she couldn’t go outside this apartment to face anyone anymore. On that flat screen of television, the news anchor kept reporting;

This particular event is involving her son—Joe Marshall which known as a businessman, specialized in automotive industry in France. As she stated that he will take over the Invisible Project. According to the police report, they won’t pass any information before the guests of the secret meeting will

come by this evening. Regardless of that event, the reporters have been waiting in front of the building since this morning—

After her mom switched the television channel to the cooking show, she said beside her, “Remember; *tell the truth within the secrecy.*”

“You’re kidding me, mom,” she sighed and still bewildered about it.

The knock at the door was loud enough to make Cathy ran hurriedly. She found Josh who gave her an annoyed expression.

“They’re go crazy about the case, huh?” He muttered. “Okay, it’s supposed to be the time when you should offer me a cup of tea.”

From behind, Haile peeped to see him at the doorstep. “It’s time for both of you to go—it will take two hours from now by car trip.”

Cathy smiled emotionlessly at him as her mom thrust her brown jacket and satchel bag.

“Oh, come on, I know I hate it too, but you need to calm down,” he tapped her arms lightly. “Aren’t you the one who said it to me?”

“That’s right, be careful—” Haile hugged her shoulders and kissed her forehead, “just remember what I’ve said.”

“I’ll be sure to remember that too, Mrs. Charlotte,” either Josh already noted.

“Oh, aren’t you supposed to come watching us?” Cathy sounded nervous.

She smiled hesitantly. “No, I’ll be waiting here. You both go safely.”



There was no defense to handle those mad reporters since the news had been propagated around New York City. The current

atmosphere around Brooklyn almost turned into extinction since everyone felt the same about the tragic death of Lydia Brimham. Even the space felt strained to walk in and people got really busied at the Brooklyn Police Department.

Josh sat still on Detective Charlotte's office chair, while Cathy preferred to stand well-wary beside him. She saw her dad was running back and forth throughout the department. His face looked excessively tired, leaving huge eye bags.

"Mr. Kingsley, my name's Susan Millie, I'm the assistant chief of police," she appeared with short black wavy hair, dressed formally in black suit and red belt. "Before the interview will begin, we need to check for some documents using your ID card."

Josh nodded, "Okay."

He smiled at Cathy as he walked away with her.

Now she stood without his company while watching the news channel in this building. Some female police paused to watch the news about the changeable schedule related to the speech. The television screen showed a live report of an old man who went raging like a dictator—it turned out that he was the boss of Lydia Brimham at the newspaper company. He was cursing in a total hysteria in front of this building. The screen dissolved into a live interview where the reporter thrust a microphone at a fatty blonde female police to confirm the media about the announcement speech.

"We'll announce tonight for the new schedule which is changed due to particular event in the meeting result later. We have confirmed the private interview by now."

It was the speech to fulfill public's demand for the assurance—also the media began to make a fuss until they found out about the private interview which would be held

soon. They were all wanted to know about the real deal of Invisible Project.

Cathy gazed around the room at everyone dressed in black blue police uniform, most of them were men. Until she noticed surprisingly, there was a tall man in long black coat that had been observing her curiously with his brown eyes.

When the atmosphere turned awkward between them, he greeted her immediately, "Do you come for the interview?"

She hesitated to answer, but he seemed like a good person, "I am Manson's daughter."

He looked tremendously startled somehow. "Oh, he's our major detective. Your mother is Natalie Haile Ann Aloise, right?"

She simply smiled and nodded.

He rubbed his chin for a second, thinking of something. He asked again, "How's Sarah doing?"

Cathy stared well-wary at him, she bewildered whether he really knew her aunt that well. "She's doing fine. You know my aunt?"

"She *was* my friend. We've lost contact to each other for a long time, but anyway—" he took something from his pocket pants to give her, "Here's my name card, in case you need to call me or you can tell Sarah about me."

Their conversation got paused when the situation inside the department went messy. The employees kept busied and stressed out, they panicked like bees. Another fatty female police at the front desk was the only one who was enjoying herself—eating donuts, wearing earphone, and all at once watching the television. Cathy sighed at the view, thus she returned to see him.

"Are you involved in the Invisible Project?"

“No, thanks God, they didn’t choose me but your father,” he looked as if he felt sorry to say that. “In anyhow, I don’t want to get involve with Lady Marie de Clure or even anyone in White Foxes—as everyone knows why.”

From afar, a male police shouted at him about their further work of investigation. He sighed, “Well, goodbye for now,” he turned smiling at her before he went, “by the way, sweet eighteen.”

Cathy thanked him, although wondering how he also knew about her birthday, unfortunately she couldn’t ask further since he seemed really busied. She read his name card which contained of phone number and email—she looked forward to his name;

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

DURRAY BROADLEY
Detective

Afterward, the same blonde female police on the television earlier appeared at the foyer to holler at the employees, “They’re gone finally!”

That fatty African female police, who done eating donuts had unplugged her earphone to react, “I love to hear that.”

Cathy could only peep at their jokes while waiting for almost fifteen minutes for Josh to return from the room.

“What’s the news?”

He shrugged and sighed. “She just asked me about what’s left in Bisbee, you know—Martha.”

Her eyes squinted bewilderedly. “What does anything have to do with your grandma?”

He knew nothing and still shrugging, neither Cathy to understand the system in particular. Thereafter, they still waited bored at the same exact spot until the clock turned at seven in the evening and no one came yet to call them.

Another show had come when two familiar figures appeared from the foyer. It was long time no see and they still recognized them very well. Those visitors—man and woman dressed in all black, very charismatic in their dangerously evil look.

“It can’t be,” Cathy muttered astonishingly, and Josh also had the same dramatic look as her.

At the time, Manson came to grab his suit on his desk. Now they were all realized of the sudden tension in the air.

“Oh, you remember Mrs. Herron, right?” Her dad asked.

Cathy stared up at her dad while still got shocked from the adrenaline. “Yes, Scott’s mom, she is the Portland’s detective who supposed to be your working partner in Bisbee.”

Josh cleared his throat to mutter, “Lucky though—” and he asked, “Mrs. Charlotte, what’s the occasion that they come here?”

Manson glanced at those visitors who were talking with Susan at the front desk, and then he returned to answer him, “She’s in charge for the inquiry project. White Foxes have required two detectives for that—Chantel Herron and me.”

“What?” Cathy surprised that she just found out about it.

“And who’s the guy next to her?” Josh asked and he truly forgot about that handsome face.

Manson sighed while staring at the visitors. “I’m not sure why would she need an assistant. Anyway, he looks suitable as her love interest.”

“He’s not,” Cathy shouted firmly.

Again, Josh pretended coughing abruptly as if his throat felt itchy. Eventually, he tried to remind Cathy about the real secret of what they truly were. She didn't aware of his alert, so he needed to shout back as he punching her shoulder, "Slash the salsa maker, that's what he looks like though."

Chantel and that man went ahead to approach Charlotte's office desk. Both of them smiled politely—it was almost no joke for anyone to think badly of them.

"I know your daughter has grown up more beautiful," Chantel spoke, her voice was deep. "Well, please meet my personal assistant, Richard."

The tall Hispanic man that was so-called Richard smiled at them in his fake politeness. He appeared as a handsome man dressed in black pinstripe suit and shiny side-parted black hair.

Cathy and Josh knew very well with who they were dealing, while Manson could only see him with naked eyes.

"Richard?" Cathy murmured in disbelief, all at once glanced at Josh who shrugged bewilderingly. They knew his real name which was odd to hear, presumably.

"I feel bad that you should get involved in this tragic case—someone should've been handling this since long ago," Chantel said as showing his fake sympathy at Manson.

Josh looked at her in disgust and Cathy couldn't agree more against her falsity manner. Slightly, Manson could sense his daughter's endurance to annoy against their presence here.

Cathy shouted firmly, "We wouldn't take it so hard, Ms. Herron. Don't worry."

Chantel was only smiling along with Richard, who stood as tall as her.



Everyone had been waiting for the right time to begin, but the committees hadn't arrived yet.

At this lounge room, Cathy sat on the sofa and her eyes peeped behind the glass window. A bitter taste of cold night emerged under the dark sky.

On the other side, Josh sat beside her while busied looking at his own cellphone. They were alone in this quiet place.

After a few minutes of being alone together, Manson came to the room for a private talk with his daughter. Josh understood and moved away to wait near the vending machine.

"Are you okay?" Her dad asked.

"No," she sighed. "Dad, why do you take this project?"

"I'm the chosen one—you know, professionally."

"You could bail," she suggested the idea and his eyes instantly bulging at her words.

"You have no idea how hard it is to get this job in this level as a professional detective. I've been working in this field for my whole life, Cathy."

"But this one—there's something not right with this project, you also know it, dad."

Manson sighed heavily as he stared away from her. "You should spend your eighteen much more, enjoying your life."

"Do you know how I can enjoy this life?" Her eyes glossed as she asked him. "I'm living in a hide-and-seek mode with mom. Isn't it enjoyable?"

"Both of you could move to my place. Don't take a pressure on your own."

Cathy smiled sadly. "Never mind, dad."

At the time, Susan came into the lounge room to inform them that White Foxes had arrived, thereafter, they went downstairs concurrently.

At the foyer, Lady Marie de Clure went ahead to greet everyone after her children, Jonathan Marshall and Sofia. It seemed only the three of them who were attending this private interview besides some black suit bodyguards around them. Every employee stood nervously against their arrival since those royals radiated a bright charisma and also cold, as in frightening.

Susan the assistant chief of police had called out for the witnesses to get into the interrogation room. Cathy and Josh breathed deeply for their first step toward the room. As she glanced nervously at that door, Josh caressed her back and said to her that everything was going to be just fine.

Before Cathy walked in, Marshall smiled at her although without knowing if his smile meant as a joy or else. They already knew each other in the Brooklyn Party, but for now, Cathy won't be bothered by his presence.

Manson didn't join along in the interrogation room, but he went to the next door where the wall was adjacent as a black mirror glass where he could see his daughter through it.

Subsequently, Susan welcomed Sofia and Jonathan Marshall to join into that hidden room along with a few employees. They were all teamed up to make a note from the interview's results.

She knew that her dad was looking through that black glass. The room had one wooden table and six chairs. Cathy and Josh sat in there while waiting for the procedure to start.

The investigators seemingly weren't what they had expected. It would begin unusual since the one in charge for this project was Detective Chantel Herron. She wondered why her dad didn't stand in the same room with her.

Richard walked ahead to drag the chair for Chantel to sit, while Lady Marie de Clure still busied having a serious conversation with the chief of police at the doorstep.

At that moment, Cathy saw slightly at the drawing tattoo alike behind Chantel's hand. "What's that?"

Josh bewildered as well when he noted a forbidden black tattoo engraved perfectly on her white skin. Nobody witnessed it except both of them, since everyone still busied preparing for the procedure.

"It's none of your concern," as Chantel murmured, she rolled down her sleeves immediately and won't even look into their eyes.

When Josh whispered at her to ask about it, Cathy took a blank of paper on the table, and then she drew it with a pen—a symbol of a reversed five-pointed star encased in a circle.

"A reversed pentagram?" He murmured.

Cathy glanced expressionless at him and the same thing happened with Chantel. The moment was tremendously awkward between all of them.

"Just FYI—with a circle, it's called pentacle," Wrezire who disguised as the handsome man named Richard, he muttered and chuckled in a low voice.

"You're—" Josh couldn't finish his words when Lady Marie and the chief of police were coming to join with them. Eventually, the interview would begin soon.

This was their first official meeting with the chief of police who had a muscular body, prospered brown beard, and unfriendly face. Josh peeped at his name tag which attached on his uniform—*Raymond Salt*.

"This will be a series of intense questions and answers. We will record every section of this interview—" Chantel alerted them, "all you need to do is just giving us the truth."

Marie glanced quietly at the young witnesses as she was observing their innocent faces. For a moment, she recognized Cathy Charlotte. Apparently, she knew her more than before they even met directly in the Brooklyn Party for the first time. Marie had been tracking her record and identity since she knew her from the police report related to the case of abandoned castle in Austria. So on, she had a reason to involve her in this project. Even crucial, she also knew that Cathy born royal.

On the opposite side, these young witnesses stared at the flat look on Lady Marie.

As everyone began to stare silently at the witnesses, Chantel pressed the record button on the tape recorder on the wooden table.

“I’d like to ask the first question, don’t be nervous—” Chantel said, though the atmosphere already turned pretty strained, “Where would be the last place you had visited in Austria—specifically, the place where you gone astray?”

Josh cleared his throat to make Cathy glanced at him nervously. He was hand up, and spoke, “The Vienna Woods for sure, but some people said that it’s not supposed to be the name for the forest.”

Cathy continued to explain, “I supposed it is the forest behind Wachau neighborhood. The area is connected to the Vienna Woods, but the location where we were lost—” she paused for a second to observe their reaction—no one said a word.

Subsequently, Marie leaned her chest to the table and shouted, “Unknown site—the same kind as Black Forest. We’ve been searching for the information about it—” she chuckled, “it’s no other than death end.”

“When we sent our people to visit the place, they said that the more you go on, everything around would turn blank and dark,” Raymond said.

“Were there any companion besides the two of you?”

“Yes, Sylvia Elle,” Cathy snapped the angel’s name at her face like a hard slap.

Chantel held her breath and clenched her teeth. Finally, she would ask further and pretended like she didn’t know the real truth, “Who is she?”

“Our very nice friend,” Josh answered instead.

A sarcastic chuckle almost emerged from Richard. Raymond the chief of police glanced bewilderedly at him, although the next second he tried not to care.

It was Lady Marie’s turn to ask them, “What the occasion that all of you had in Austria?”

“I visited my uncle in there. Elle and Josh were my comrades.”

“It was stated on the police report in 2011 that Josh Kingsley called the Austrian cops under the name of Carl Dalton’s house—which is your uncle, is that correct?” Raymond asked while he glanced solemnly from Josh to Cathy.

“Yes,” she nodded.

“The next question, please answer honestly,” Chantel warned them. “Did you precisely see the abandoned castle?”

Both of them couldn’t possibly open their mouth to the truth since there were two evils who denied having knowledge about that place.

Cathy stared sharply at Chantel as she answered, “There was simply nothing like it.”

“We will ask you once again—did you see the abandoned castle?” Chantel emphasized all her words.

Cathy stared without blinking as she held her breath and said, “No.”

Afterward, Chantel turned to Josh, “Mr. Kingsley, won’t you say anything?”

“Neither am I,” he gulped his own fear, but instead it became a catastrophic evident of his hesitation to answer.

Cathy glanced at him in worryment.

“Well, we still have the record of your last statement, Mr. Kingsley,” Raymond the chief of police reminded him. “You’ve told us a bit much about it in your extreme persistency.”

He shrugged and sighed. “Maybe I was hallucinating at that time. I didn’t know what I was saying.”

Chantel leaned down on the table and shouted assertively, “Do you have a mental issue perhaps?”

“What?” He chuckled in disbelief while scratching his hair harshly. “Thanks God, but no.”

“Why don’t you ask your assistant—he was there too,” Cathy muttered.

“Seriously?” Raymond had a constant bewilderment, especially about that strange man in suit which known as the personal assistant of Detective Chantel. “Do you know this guy?”

“Stop with the confusion, child,” Lady Marie snapped, “just tell us the truth.”

The sudden rough knock at the door had disturbed their session and also broke their awkwardness. The sound wasn’t literally coming from the door in the room, instead it echoed like a mess from the next room as if someone was yelling and shouting at each other. The black mirror glass was being knocked harshly.

Cathy startled already, along with Josh. They couldn’t leave while looking at each other with a frantic worryment. Thus

reluctantly, Lady Marie, Raymond, and Chantel rose up from their chairs to check on the situation. Meanwhile, Richard only sat there with a calm face against these youngsters. The interview was paused at the moment.

“This—will be fun,” he murmured evilly.

Josh really wanted punching him in the face, but it would probably get him into jail without considering him as the important witness anymore. Cathy stared sharply at that monster in human form.

Either his name was Richard or Wrezire, he was literally what he supposed to be. At this rate, he had much power to endure for his real beast appearance from becoming a demon. The witchy spell made him a perfect human, although his true form was creepy. He once cried during midnight when the dark recite was undone under his Lord’s consumption since he asked for her protection—*the Devil*. Apparently, the devil herself had been hiding from behind after all this time—more like watching along.

“What’s going on?” She murmured and gazed at the black mirror glass, but nothing she could see.

“A tragically painful nightmare for Mr. Brimham to insist coming here,” Wrezire said, lullabying his own word to mock.

“Is it the one who died, Lydia Brimham?” Josh glanced at him. “Then, who he would represent in this area to be mad like that?”

“Oh, child, I got all the information that you want to know somewhat. He is Lydia’s boss, all at once as her biological father. They had worked together at the poor bankrupt newspaper company in New York,” he chuckled creepily. “What makes him so angry is because he knows the truth than anyone else.”

“What’s the truth?” Josh asked constantly.

He chuckled like a million time since then. “It’s a matter of White Foxes.”

“So, you’re part of these people now—White Foxes?” Cathy asked for his assurance.

He stopped playing with his silver rings to glance quickly like a broken doll at them. He looked creepy and sadistic. Both of them still stared breathlessly at him. So sudden, he chuckled like used to be. It was exceedingly frightening for a kid to hear that and sounded like a creepy show.

“I don’t play with *royal half witch*. It would make me look so outrage. How unfair if I had leave for what I deserved from my Lord, I wouldn’t get my welfare,” he muttered still, “she’s someone I could always count on with.”

Somehow he talked as if he was playing an opera soap, also he had British accent. He talked slowly but scary.

“Chantel the Witch, huh?” Josh mocked back.

He didn’t seem to care of that little joke since it was true.

In no minute, Susan opened the door rashly. Her skin was pale white even under this dimmed room. She warned them while panting hardly, “We’re sorry for this sudden interruption. Let’s take a rest.”

I6

THE INTERVIEW

ELEANOR HEISLER



THEY FINALLY ARRIVED at the Brooklyn Police Department. The hectic sensation from the crowd was stopped as the clock turned at nine in the evening. The show should stop, but another one came up when everyone was too busied calming for the insanity.

“I object this place as a criminal crime!” An old man kept cursing at the foyer. He had half bald gray hair and his body was very thin behind that long sleeve white shirt.

Hadley shook her head, feeling pitiful to witness his impudent manner, while Eleanor was being ignorant and chose to crossed-arms since she felt bored.

“Ah—” Susan the assistant chief of police had already introduced herself earlier, now she approached them again, “Lady Heisler ask me to show you the room, please follow me.”

They finally left the brutal scene where that old man yelled at the employees. As they went ahead, Eleanor observed that woman—Susan Millie’s appearance that seemingly dressed like an agent. Although the atmosphere just fitted perfectly with

the black coats which they were all wearing. Eleanor even wore formal black platform heels to come here.

Afterward, Susan opened the door for them, where her aunt and uncle were already sat there watching the upcoming show through the black mirror glass.

As they prepared to watch along, that angry old man ran abruptly into the room. Hadley was being hit to the wall when he went insane, while Eleanor could avoid him quickly.

Susan looked panicked and almost shouted for the security, but some police already dragged him out from that private room and he still could become brutal as he smacked the black mirror glass. Luckily, the glass was strong enough to endure his madness. The police kept on trying to calm him, but instead they got smacked by him.

He screamed sickly, "I will sue all of you to the government and into the court! For whom have been working with the bandage of a lurk evil!"

"Please stop, Mr. Brimham!" Susan yelled out at the doorstep.

The police grabbed his shoulders roughly now, and then one of them jerked on him, "You should go to the remission of sins after this!"

Eleanor chuckled ignorantly at the view to make Hadley wondered at her attitude, "What?"

"I like his phrase—*lurk evil*, which we already know who is the puppeteer behind all of this," Eleanor said sarcastically.

"Yeah, but then again, they never have enough evidence to sue our family. I've told you how the Lady has undergone the system for anyone—always blindly."

"You aren't calling her as your mother, now?"

Hadley won't answer it as she wasn't in the mood to argue.

After the police dragged him out harshly from the room, Lady Marie came along with Detective Chantel where they looked astonished to see the view.

“Speak of what do you want?” Lady Marie asked him firmly.

He suddenly seemed speechless and became strangled to behave madly like a few seconds ago. It felt as if he couldn’t move his legs—everything turned paralyzed for him. However, he still wanted to shout for his glory, “I want my daughter back!”

“Isn’t she dead in your eyes?” Lady Marie shouted quickly. “The police haven’t confirmed anything yet. Will you be embarrassed if the employees at your small company would turn their head over your shoddy manner?”

He couldn’t talk back as if his tongue was tied in his own dreadful idea. No one would dare to speak a word until she finally dismissed the scene. Thereafter, the police could drag him easily now.

“We apologize for this inconvenience, Lady. We have inattentive security at the moment,” Susan murmured to her.

Lady Marie surely didn’t want to presume that matter, subsequently she noticed the two witnesses were eyeing from behind her. “Shall we continue our interview session?”

Cathy approached her closer to ask, “Can we have a drink?”

Lady Marie smiled and nodded politely, thus she asked Susan to take care for the witnesses. Meanwhile they went to have a drink, Raymond and Chantel returned into the interrogation room.

“Oh, they look like your age, niece,” Hadley murmured at Eleanor while they leaned on the wall which was across the room.

As she said that, the two witnesses stared at them in bewilderment. They heard her precisely, especially to recognize her as one of the Heisler.

One of the witnesses approached them—Cathy Charlotte smiled innocently. “Eleanor, what are you doing here?”

Eleanor gazed at her in sarcastic look while still crossing arms. “I’m the one who supposed to ask you that.”

“It’s inconvenient, excuse us,” Josh came in between to interrupt before the debate would begin. He literally knew how to face some people.

Finally, they returned to continue the private interview, while the Heisler would be watching them from behind the black mirror glass. The session had returned to where it should be and would take about an hour according to the schedule.

“Let’s not waste our time,” Raymond sighed as he welcomed Detective Chantel to press the record button again.

Behind the mirror, Eleanor was observing the awkward situation inside the room. She saw that Cathy being asked all over again with distinct questions. The investigators had been pursuing for her knowledge about the fact in the past event. The topic relied with the witnesses’ answers about Austrian abandoned castle that lost in a restricted forest.

The session went harder when Lady Marie de Clure asked them with unexpected questions. She glanced at Josh Kingsley to ask him directly, “According to our investigators, the abandoned castle has treasured something that not yet—public ever know. We’ve got our feet on the ground, doing a research on the field since September 2006 which related with the local folk legend—”

The two witnesses felt more agitated. Lady Marie was half smiled as she realized their strained reaction, subsequently she continued to speak, “—there’s a forgotten legend of the lost

Sapphire and the mystery of the Volka. Perhaps you've heard some?"

Cathy sighed against this interview as if she strangled to speak the truth—either she knew or not. "I do, my lecturer once taught me a little about the Volka."

"What's your lecturer's name?" Chantel asked.

She glanced tensely at that detective to answer her, "Alexander MacLain."

"Oh yeah, I've heard of him," both of the witnesses wondered and bewildered at once when Detective Chantel muttered.

Cathy looked agitated, thus she asked, "You knew him?"

"We knew that child," Lady Marie shouted after, "he's a nomad from German, a noble son, and he used to work as an archeologist, while his father becoming a politician in old era. We're like a good kin to each other," she saw Cathy clenched her jaw pretty hard while she was speaking. It became more interesting for her to continue, "So, what subject does he teach?"

"English Literature," Josh answered quickly.

"Very well," Marie chuckled. "Did he mention anything about the rumor of Austrian abandoned castle? The story of the roses garden? Or even about the Volka society?"

Cathy narrowed her eyes hardly and breathless since she tried to hide something against this intense interview. The whole things they asked was absurd to be heard in this place—which everyone would be more dependable into the logical thinking rather than the supernatural aspect.

A few minute of silence, the atmosphere was still uncomfortable.

Lady Marie threw a brown envelope on the table, which contained of uncommon files, but Cathy precisely noticed one of the papers with a picture.

“*Bedenke das Ende?*” She repeated that German proverb which engraved on a black gemstone in the picture, and then she pointed out her finger at it, “He told me about this one—that they’ve buried the memorial stone for one royal family as their expression of respect.”

Josh squinted hardly at her, bewildering.

“Do you know the rumor of what is buried inside the abandoned castle?” Chantel gave them a deep pressure again and kept on speaking, “You wouldn’t have visited that place without having any knowledge, nothing at all cost. Even the local folk, they don’t really know the fact about the place.”

“For instance, *being lost*,” Raymond added, he quoted his last words with his fingers, although somehow he was confused with this interview too.

Eleanor could see that every employee who involved in Invisible Project had been wondering with the absurdity of those very none reliance questions that being asked to the witnesses.

Cathy was infuriated with the tricky question, thus she protested, “Are teenagers like us would know a thing about that abandoned place?”

There was a certain time she tried to calm down, and her best friend, Josh shouted after to assure the investigators, “We were lost. The forest was dark and hidden from the light.”

“Child, you could make this easier just by telling us the truth,” Marie insisted against their defense.

“We knew nothing, ma’am,” Josh was persistent.

As he clenched his jaw very hard, everyone did the same since they were all could feel how Lady Heisler had endured

her unspoken anger. Although the truth might never run from its place, this private interview sounded like a real joke. The enigma they shared was priceless.

“Well, I’ve heard that your grandmother is staying at the hospital, maybe this interview has been making you cold at any rate—I can understand that,” Lady Marie spoke underneath her fake sympathy, subsequently she took all the documents on the table.

Also, Chantel Herron wasn’t satisfied with the witnesses’ answers since nothing could make them to say yes about the existence of the abandoned castle.

Raymond sighed as he slowly turned off the tape recorder as if he was sleepy, but truly, no one could ever sleep tight tonight, because Lady Marie was gazing at the witnesses with her unlikely cold smile. Everyone got shuddered.

“Do we need another session—since the public speech will be held soon?” Raymond asked her.

“The kids seems tired,” either his name was Richard of Wrezire, he added before the farewell came.

“Just one more question,” Chantel shouted to make everyone wondering. “Where’s the Sapphire stone?”

Lady Marie bulged out in agitation at her, as if she tried to remind her to talk carefully, but everyone already shocked with that question. Either Cathy or Josh, they already felt breathless.

Cathy locked her eyes at the Lady which seemed like a hard decision for her. “We got trapped and lost in there, but of course local folk in Austria had been mentioning about that legend.”

“Including *Triskele legend*?” Chantel asked further.

Both of the witnesses seemed panicked and didn’t know what to tell them even the tape recorder was off. Lady Marie

was half smiled as she thought that the answer shouldn't be ended easily this time.

"*Triskele*—it's the legend about three prominent entities. My knowledge comes from reading books," Cathy answered assertively which was hard to be denied.

"Can we just go home, please?" Josh shouted aggressively as he felt uncomfortable already. "This is too forcing. Is this how every witness or suspect undergone their investigation?"

"This kiddo," Raymond almost laughed out loud alone. "Don't you see any TV show these days?"

Josh tried to endure his annoyance for this talk, "I'm sorry that my study isn't *law* major, sir."

Everyone finally laughed at his joke, Lady Marie even followed along.

In no minute, Chantel returned to focus with her resolute demand, "This is your last chance, child," she stared solemnly at Josh, "Did you see something in there?"

His tension emerged again, and then he glanced at Cathy as if they did telepathy at each other, but still he didn't know what to answer at this certain period, "I don't know."

"Well," Marie rose up from the chair, she breathed deeply while staring a bit longer at him, "I give you a very last chance, but you don't seem to take it wisely, Mr. Kingsley."

"I didn't see anything, ma'am. I've told you," his eyes didn't blink as he spoke persistently.

She was only smiling warmly to make him even more restless. Everyone knew that kind of smile was no pleasure at all and what it would mean in the end.

Lady Marie left the room while carrying the brown envelope in her arms. She went without saying anything further. The chief of police, Raymond was confused with her

simple farewell, also he felt frightened that the interview's result wouldn't satisfy White Foxes.

Everyone finally left the room to reunite in the corridor. Some had chattered about the result and some just stood bewildered. Also, Detective Chantel gave the tape recorder to Detective Manson, and Susan the assistant chief of police went to work along in his office desk on filling the project's document. However, the employees who got involved in Invisible Project would stay up late while the rest would return home. It was ten o'clock already.

Eleanor and Hadley stood side by side across the room from all the people who went so busied after the interview. They saw Lady Marie, Sofia, and the detectives were talking with some employees. Afterward, Hadley went to the restroom while she stayed leaning on the wall. For a second, Eleanor felt worried for those witnesses she had met in college, although she knew nothing. From across the corridor, she peeped at their small talk.

"What are they going to do to me?" His eyes showed a miserable and dreadful feeling.

Cathy was silent with the look on her eyes told that something might happen anytime. Both of them were leaning on the wall while feeling restless and tired.

Within the silence, she witnessed her grandmother approached them subsequently. They seemed to have a short conversation. Apparently, she could hear them since the room went pretty desolate.

"I know you saw something in that forest, you just won't admit it while the tape recorder was on," Lady Marie spoke gently, but firmly in her words.

Josh stared silently at her.

Cathy breathed deeply as she wanted to confront this lady, “I believe, you have known everything more than we do, but still—you couldn’t get what you shouldn’t have, Lady Heisler.”

Lady Marie chuckled as impressed with her words, “You’re brave enough to talk like that to me.”

From a few meters across from them, Eleanor stood astonishingly against the braveness that could emerge from that innocent girl. Somehow she felt terrified with that scene.

Seemingly, Cathy knew about the unknown existence that wasn’t a practical coincidence in the project. Either Cathy or Josh, they already knew the identity of this Lady in front of them.

“Anyway, thank you for your assurance earlier, it could help my investigators to acknowledge that both of you surely knew something about the prominent legend, that you had went inside the castle,” Marie grimaced as she talking, “I can tell the result of our meeting is—presumed conclusively.”

“Lady Heisler—”

She didn’t give her a chance to speak, “You two can go home now, be safe.”

Just like that, she returned to walk along with other employees, surrounding by her bodyguards. Behind them, Joe Marshall walked lazily, but he smiled at both of them before he went away and muttered, “If I were you, every statement about local folk fairy tale should be kept quietly. It seems you don’t understand yet—how our family could go wild.”

He left them speechless. At least, the interview ended in one night, along with the cold air that frozen inside their heads.



It almost midnight, these Heisler's children were running away as they wanted to taste a good drink in one of Manhattan's best food truck.

"I bet she'll kill us after this," Hadley muttered and giggled.

"Don't be a chicken, she's too tired to find out," Eleanor shouted as she drank a soda, "—also she seems disappointed about the interview."

"I know, huh?"

"I'm perfectly sure that she's hiding something from us."

"Only from you," Hadley said as she endured not to chuckle, "I mean it."

Eleanor glanced solemnly at her whose eyes had already turned red and longing to sleep in bed rather than sitting here.

"Well, okay, you want me to tell you a long story about our ancestor's legend, huh?" She didn't sound excited when she was talking, "It's stupid and silly that I won't believe of whatever things my mom used to tell me."

"You're into that stuff?" She squinted in disbelief like it was a miserable thing to hear about. "If you think it's stupid, why do you even want to discuss it?"

Hadley glanced annoyed at her. "I don't, you brat—I want to spin a yarn."

She sighed. "Be serious, aunt."

"There's a legend about three stones, but the one that I know is the blue Sapphire," Hadley smiled, but still shrugging as she didn't sure where to start.

Eleanor remembered that it was being mentioned in the witnesses' interview, and Hadley also realized about that.

"It's a powerful stone that once was held by Princess Francesca from House of Aloise, since her older sister—Princess Kathleen died from forces of darkness. Now, it's gone

somewhere out there and everyone has been secretly looking for it.”

“Why it’s so important?” Eleanor wondered. “How’s the story related to our family?”

Hadley stared at her blue eyes to smile inscrutably. “You know, it’s complicated, one of the witnesses is born from House of Aloise—” she blinked too much as she explained nervously, “with everything that happened inside the abandoned castle as the closed case, she might know something because that legend was coming from her ancestor.”

“Wait, is it really Cathy Charlotte?” Eleanor couldn’t even breathe easily to hear it. “She’s one of the Aloise, and yet, what’s with the Sapphire?”

Her aunt bulged out when she was aware that Eleanor had found the information by herself. “Oh, well, despite it supposed to be showed up at our antique shop, but anyone who knew its essence wouldn’t despise it priceless—because the stone has the power to open *the gate*.”

“What gate?” She asked while eating her chocolate pie.

“Okay, remember the project?” She continued as her niece nodded well-aware. “That’s the idea. In the mansion yesterday, the Lady said something with that detective woman,” she sighed, “I don’t know if I should believe in this crap, but they kept on discussing about the gate, portal, or whatever it is inside the lost castle. They called it *welfare*—I’m sure.”

“Let’s be open-minded then,” Eleanor chuckled. “What’s inside the gate?”

Hadley was laughing out loud to make the merchants glanced at her in bewilderment. She answered afterward, “Another crappy realm apart from our human world. Should I believe that?”

"You deny everything, aunt," Eleanor spoke calmly, although there was a sadness within her voice, "I saw it—the monster who killed my parent," her aunt felt suffocated suddenly and she didn't even dare to react when Eleanor was talking again, "I don't know if she paid for a demon to kill them. She's the real evil. I can never forgive her."

"Eleanor, there's always a reason for everything," Hadley felt as if she breathed through the mechanical lungs to confront this conversation, "Well, I've never seen such thing in my life, but I've heard a rumor in our family that a demon like that might exist. It's not a pay up issue, *it* has always been living with our family—" she was still nervous to say further, "Wherever the Lady go, *it* will go."

"A lurking evil," Eleanor murmured, disgusted.

Hadley shrugged her shoulders, "So, you have never been wrong to call our family like that—the one who doesn't obey the evilness will be shattered to death," then she continued, "Sofia told me that your parent wanted peace—"

Eleanor narrowed her eyes bewilderedly, "What did they do?"

"The Lady once asked them to give you up for becoming the most purified *Puissant*—" she shrugged her shoulders as explaining, "I don't know what she meant at that time, but as your parents rejected that demand, well, you know what happened."

"Explain please, what's *Puissant*?" She insisted terribly.

"Okay, kiddo, it's a secretive term among the royals, the one who has a prodigious ability to involve with the supernatural world—including to empower the hidden gate."

"I don't understand," she muttered peevishly.

The air became colder during midnight. As they done with their soda drinks, they walked side to side through the pavement.

Hadley was hugging her shoulders so tight and muttered, “Oh God, thank you, we’re finally going home. My eyes already feel torn off.”

“Can you tell a tale again—” Eleanor was still curious, “about the secrets in our family?”

“Oh, niece!” She giggled tiredly. “If you aren’t satisfied, then you can visit Grandaunt Matilda again, she knows a lot than we are. It’s all about *a long story*, niece.”



People were clamoring around the skyscraper building. Either the reporters or folks, they were standing impatiently to wait for the time. Their wonderment cleaved with no excuse.

Every committee who involved in Invisible Project had arrived in front of the building which located near to Brooklyn Police Department. The field was surrounded by the police since early in the morning.

All of the respective guests were invited to take a seat in front of the podium while the folks would be standing still from behind which separated with the red line. The reporters from some of national television news channels and newspaper companies were sitting in the VIP chairs. They were all looked redundantly formal with suits. Meanwhile, Eleanor and Hadley walked over together to their VIP chairs. They saw Sofia, Joe Marshall, and Detective Herron were all following Lady Marie to stand still behind the podium, along with their bodyguards.

For a while, the crowd kept on making a noisy sound. Even some freelance reporters across the red line were already

taking too many pictures. Eleanor annoyed when a few cameras flashing on her face.

“You should get used to it—” Hadley whispered and giggled, “it’s one of great things to be the Heisler.”

“Getting a wimp from paparazzi?” She muttered back, “Pathetic.”

“God—” her aunt sighed as she sounded afflictive suddenly, “Sofia said that the show has just begun, White Foxes will lead the way—well, I mean, the secret is supposed to be hidden from the public.”

“What do you mean?” Eleanor conflicted. “Isn’t this what Marie de Clure wanted?”

“Other royals wouldn’t like the idea if they found out that she’s revealing that hidden property to the world—I mean, something about that Austrian castle,” Hadley breathed deeply while sitting uncomfortably.

The speech was started by Lady Marie, and all the reporters were getting hectic along with their cameras that kept on flashing at her. The opening speech was also done by Raymond Salt as the Brooklyn chief of police. They had explained about the Invisible Project very well, but the information sounded partial rather than the real truth.

After an hour of explanation, they continued for the question and answer session. A woman was standing from her VIP chair to introduce herself as one of the national television reporters, and to ask the most terrified question for everyone to hear.

“We don’t get your formal speech, Lady,” she said with a microphone in her hand, “I represent every journalist to ask *why should you hiding the case from the public—is that too personal that you need to involve the government in Invisible Project?*”

All the police stared at Lady Marie. She suddenly asked Raymond Salt to step back from the podium since she would like to answer it by herself. He looked trembling at her.

“Honestly, yes,” she smiled, “this is personal for our family, and it’s unexpected that the news has propagated widely. Like I said before, there’s a valuable asset that I need to investigate, and I believe it belongs to the Heisler Family.”

A male reporter shouted after, “You’re never being clear about the asset, can you explain?”

Lady Marie was way too calm to confront all of them, while the rest of the police felt their most terrified moment. She continued to answer, “I believe, the information isn’t for the public consummation—” she sighed, “the abandoned building—it’s a treasure heritage for our family, but we lost the track of the location in Austria, that’s why the police and detectives are helping us to find it.”

Again, they were shouting and became competitive for the next question, but one got caught annoyingly, “Why would Invisible Project involve the death case of Lydia Brimham?”

Susan Millie looked pale as she stood along beside her in the podium. “Lady, let us clarify this one for you—”

She only hushed her gently while stood closer to the microphone, “I have no idea, why Lydia Brimham would be in the middle of our investigation. Her case has ended and we have nothing to say about it—”

From the VIP chairs, Eleanor had a troubled mind while gazing at the podium and the hectic reporters. But soon, her curiosity was killing her, “Do you think Lydia Brimham’s death case has anything to do with this Invisible Project?”

Hadley glanced nervously at her, “I wouldn’t blame my mom, but the way she’s handling anything is insane, because—” again, she felt aggravated, “that death reporter—it was *her*

who started this chaos. The reopened case of the lost castle is supposed to undergone silently from the public eye, but she found out and propagated the news to all of her journalist friends, then ta-da, this is what really happening.”

“Was she being threatened by Marie?” As narrowing her eyes at her aunt, Eleanor couldn’t possibly think of a good perspective in this matter. “Tell me honestly, how insane would it be?”

“As insane as you couldn’t even think how much time you would have before you die.”

“So it’s true?” She asked. “Did she kill her by using *the hidden monster* in our basement?”

“For God’s sake, turn down your voice,” Hadley looked frustrated to explain though, “—you should know, a case with any illogical problem can never be proceed because there is no material evidence,” and then she held her niece’s hands tightly while feeling worried, “that’s what happened to her.”

The next hour, the crowded still kept echoing their tremulous questions. Eleanor become bored all of a sudden, and at that time, she eventually saw Cathy in the middle of that hectic people, that innocent girl was running out of control and looked panicked alone.

Her aunt bewildered to see Eleanor rose up from the chair. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“Excuse me,” she said, and then leaving her from the VIP section hurriedly.

She was surely wondered what happened to that girl. She began to feel a raging curiosity to know everything about Cathy Charlotte. Although it was odd to see Cathy came alone without any company. She followed her to walk through the back of that skyscraper building, which was far away from the crowd.

Eleanor was tired to run with her black platform heels, but she had to fulfill her curiosity. Thereafter, she hid behind the tree while spying on her from far away.

Cathy was tapping harder toward the back door which was locked from the inside. She yelled out for anyone who would open that door, but one name she had been exclaiming was *Luke*. It was five minute to wait for someone to open that door, and a male police emerged to confront her.

“Can I see my dad?” She sounded in rash.

His expression was bewildered and all at once worried to see her. “I am sorry Miss Charlotte—he can’t meet you now.”

She was breathless and felt mad. “Why? I need to see him, please!”

“I am sorry.”

He repeated and kept on blocking her to come inside the building, even the entrance was being guarded protectively by the police. There was only the two of them at the back of that door.

While she still in a deep panting, she spoke to him, “Mr. Wagner, I hope you know what you’re into. Don’t let them hurt you.”

His eyes got widen, and then he beckoned at her quickly, “You need to leave New York. Come back to Bisbee is safer than being in here—I guess.”

There was a slight fear in him to warn her like that.

“What’s wrong?” Cathy narrowed her eyes at him.

“I’ve heard about the meeting’s result conclusion—White Foxes has decided to bring you as well as Josh for a dangerous experiment in Austria,” he blinked nervously, “I know I hate occultism, but they believe in it, and they have mentioned about the magical door or something that isn’t make sense for anyone in the department, but the point is, they want to

sacrifice both of you for their sake,” he sighed, “this is a top secret project among the government and police.”

“Does my dad have his own argument?” She worried. “He isn’t someone who would just agree with that sort of conclusion.”

He nodded at her, “Of course, Manson loves you so much, but no one is listening to his objection, especially when White Foxes appear under the name of government, no one could protest.”

Eleanor who peeped on their conversation became speechless, as if she was being reminded about the evilness that her family always treasured from time to time. Eleanor never wanted to be part of something evil, but she must live with it.

An ancient proverb came across into her mind to compare with this reality, and she did remember that; *as long as foxes still running through the woods, the hunters would follow.*

I7

THE HUNCH

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THIS MANHATTAN'S MOST desolate area felt cold even above the warm sunlight. Only a few cars that passed through this street, also all the buildings seemed old and haunting from the outside. Nevertheless, the conversation on the road was the most annoying session that Cathy had for an hour since her best friend was very chatty.

"I can't believe you almost forgot your own plan—you've called me, remember?" Josh muttered all over again since they first sat in the car. "We skip a class for this."

Cathy was annoyed while driving. "I didn't have a good sleep—it's my bad."

"Yeah, and you want to go somewhere that you called a *library*?" He pissed off. "Do I need to repeat that?"

"Sorry for my tardiness, at least this is still eight in the morning, okay?" Cathy sighed.

She parked her car exactly in front of the black building which looked different than the others. It seemed as if it had so much mystery from the inside.

“Are you sure this is the one?” Josh asked while taking off his seatbelt.

They were both gazing toward that tall building. Cathy sensed something similar with the one she had visited in Austria.

“Let’s find out.”

They got out from the car concurrently. The street didn’t look alive and nobody was seen there.

Cathy observed the double entrance door of that building. It was a bit creepy with gargoyle statues as the door’s adornments. She knocked on it—one till three times, still no answer. Meanwhile, Josh kept on wondering if this was the right destination, but Cathy persistent for this was the same exact place that Alexander MacLain had visited.

After another five minutes, an old woman in black long sleeve dress was finally opening the door. “What do you want?”

Mr. MacLain once told her that the owner lived alone in this place. She was assured this was the same person, but she felt nervous suddenly. “Excuse us, but—”

When Cathy got speechless, Josh immediately took over their introduction, “We need a legible material for our final assignment. Some of our friends have mentioned *an old English Totem* in this library.”

Josh smiled with no guilty in his face for lying. Cathy was dumbfounded at once astonished toward his falsity reason. This was a fortunate Monday morning for them to be welcomed without any further investigation.

The owner welcomed them to come in. Cathy was observing her appearance while walking to the lobby. That old woman had a milky white skin and white hair bun just like a grandma, but something with the way she appeared could lead

anyone's instinct to point out the nobility around her charisma. Somehow, her figure reminded Cathy about Eleanor.

"Why are we lying?" She whispered to him while the owner looking for something on the front desk.

"I can tell at one glance—" he chuckled, "she doesn't look like someone who would open her door for just anyone. We need a distinct reason."

"Formidable."

Later, the owner gave them a piece of paper contained with corridor's code of each bookshelves category tag. She guided them to a massive row of bookshelves.

Cathy had her mind jolting away while her mouth didn't work the same way when she saw the view.

The air space covered with a foggy dust. Some parts of the room was dark and only became brighter whenever the sun striking from the ventilation on the roof which coming from the east side of this huge room.

"What's with the Totem—are you guys learning symbolism?" Her voice sounded friendly.

Josh grinned as he had prepared his words. "Our lecturer didn't help us with the story of a mantra society, and then some says Totem's origin is from Mexico. We need a book to read rather than internet manipulation."

"Do you know the meaning of Totem?" The library's owner asked them again.

Cathy turned to answer this time, "An entity that lives behind a tribe, like a family group, but sometime can be attached individually to human. They're some kind of guardian angel but non-human, usually appears in animal form."

She looked deeper into Cathy's sleepy eyes for another assurance. "And what do you say about their myth, the one who got trapped inside each descendant?"

“They’re not being trapped, instead they’re choosing the descendant on their own will,” Cathy stared back on her blue eyes to explain further, “People who isn’t born from the ancestor with those certain ethnic with power must buy their way to have Totem—it comes harder with a dark price.”

“How—” her mouth was agape to hear that explanation, “indisputable your statement. Are you sure to hear that from your lecturer?” She still bewildered.

Josh realized the strained moment had emerged since the owner became suspicious, thus he shouted afterward, “We’re the English Literature students, and by the way, she just knew that from the internet.”

“Oh.”

The owner still locked her eyes on Cathy who was too silent. Josh couldn’t leave her like that, quickly he asked for the owner’s permission to explore some books in private. They could finally start their exploration after the owner stayed in a wide table behind those huge bookshelves.

“Damn, you shouldn’t take her question like we are in school,” Josh muttered, pissed off.

“Sorry, I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she said, still conflicted with her own mind while walking through the corridor of bookshelves. “Anyway, we’re not here for Totem, okay.”

“Got it. Aloise and Heisler.”

“Ssstt!” She punched his shoulder lightly, annoyed. “Don’t raise your voice, keep it quiet. I guess she’s suspecting us for that.”

“It’s not like she’s part of the family. What to worry?”

“Wait,” she opened a dusty book. “Take a look at this.”

Josh bent down his neck to observe it. He hissed at the pages that already worn out pretty badly. "Some kind of supremacy book."

"What?"

"Read the title."

"It's about the Volka Society—something related with the mantra society. They had lived long. This one called, *The Volka's Bedrock*."

"I've heard them in the Police Department yesterday—about the vanishing."

While Cathy was confused about it, Josh took away that leather-bounded book from her to check it out by himself

"Yes, Lady Heisler told her people to have the trackers to vanish that society around Austria and German. It's weird, isn't it?"

"Is she trying to murder the last generation of the Volka?" She couldn't blink to stressful. "Is that legal?"

"Preferably word—thug," he got his opinion truly devoicing, "but it seems no one could understand her motive."

The owner just knocked on the wooden bookshelf. Josh almost jumped out and the book fell off from his grasp. Her blue eyes were investigating these children suspiciously.

"You only have an hour, then leave."

"Sorry, but why—"

She exclaimed after his words, "I don't accept any visitor today, actually."

The owner didn't smile this time. She didn't even tell her name since in the beginning and she just went away to sit at the front desk again. Josh chuckled afterward, and Cathy peeped at him to give a little giggle.

Later, the time had passed quickly in the noon.

"I need a restroom, doesn't she have one?" He muttered.

Cathy sighed to stand alone in the dark corridor. She wanted to get a good look on another book, thus she decided to see around these old bookshelves once again. Everything was arranged neatly. She could tell that the owner was a very organized person.

Apparently, the owner just walked to the next corridor to organize some books.

“Is it really about the school assignment?” She asked with eyes still focused on those books from the floor to locate each unit on the right shelf.

“We’re in college,” Cathy corrected her.

She walked to take some books on the wide table, and then spoke, “Well, it seems you’re not here for what the young boy has told me.”

Cathy blinked exaggeratedly—it got her nerves.

“No.”

The owner stopped moving to stare at her—wondering.

“Someone I know told me about this place. I need to know everything about the Aloise and Heisler.”

“And who is this someone that you know?”

“Her name’s Marissa.”

The owner just stood frozenly with eyes roaming like a depth of ocean color. Afterward, she walked staggeringly toward her.

“What makes you think you can come here?”

Her sudden question seemed threatening.

Cathy blinked nervously. “I’m sorry, but this is my first time in here.”

The owner didn’t say a word but observing her face like a detective.

Cathy hated this situation, thus she chose to run away and locked herself inside her car. Josh was following her to go outside and she didn't even realize.

As she opened the car door for him, Josh bewildered. "What's going on when I'm gone?"

"I don't know what's wrong with me. I want to go home," she murmured.

Josh sighed and annoyed toward her strange behavior lately. After all, they only needed to return home for the invigoration.



As Cathy closed the door, she shouted, "Mom, I'm home!"

"Where are you this morning?" Haile gave her a suspicious look while she stood at the edge of the living room.

She went to leap on the sofa, took off her satchel bag, and finally was able to answer her mom's undeniable curiosity, "Don't worry—I've just visited a near library."

"You mean the one in Manhattan?" Haile stood while crossing arms against her.

"How do you know that?" She bewildered, although she didn't mean to hide anything. "Did Marissa tell you?"

"I knew it, you are stubborn—" her mom muttered while serving her a cup of ice tea that she just brought from the kitchen, "my instinct told me that your persistency is beyond anything—"

"Mom!" She shouted disagreed for this argument. "If you were more honest with me, there would be nothing to worry about, but now this is way too complicated."

Haile blinked sulky, and then she sat beside her.

"The other day at White Foxes' public speech, I met Jordan's dad, he becomes Brooklyn Police now—Luke

Wagner,” Cathy told her, “he said that we need to leave this state, because they have planned something terrible—something about a private experiment.”

Her mom sighed to hear that, “I feel like we have already running all the time.”

Cathy nodded while drinking her glass of ice tea.

“—the time is just too short,” she continued to mutter.

“Would you tell me anything that I supposed to know?”

Cathy begged.

There was quite a few seconds of hesitation on her mind, since Haile couldn’t compromise this one decision. Afterward, she stood to take something from the kitchen’s cabinet.

She returned with a red velvet notebook. Cathy was bewildered when her mom handed that notebook all of a sudden, thus she opened it hurriedly to see a beautiful handwriting journal from the inside.

“What’s this?”

“It’s our family’s history, any information in particular that you always wanted to know about,” Haile answered her daughter, although there was a restless voice that she tried to hide, “some pages is marked about my childhood’s memories, the rest are those things about House of Aloise.”

“There’s a map,” Cathy murmured, impressed, “oh, is this all your handwriting?”

“Yes, the whole pages, and there are two maps, actually—to the location of Aloise’s property, I mean that abandoned castle and to the Morizza chapel.”

“You really are an Austrian immigrant, along with Aunt Sarah,” Cathy just realized that again when she saw some pages were written in German language.

“This is might be the right time to tell you about our family,” she looked nervous to even begin, “—and the reason why I always liked to dismiss our conversation about it.”

Cathy stared away from the notebook to focus on her mom.

“Firstly, the secrets are terrifying to be understood, and I still feel you’re not ready to hear this,” but her daughter stared at her with a high hope to know more, thus she continued restlessly, “Aloise and Heisler, I mean more from ancestral lineage within White Foxes are derived from the same source, we are all related by blood, but not by heart.”

When she said that, Cathy understood what she meant. Neither Aloise nor Heisler had shared the same nature, and also the physical appearance weren’t particularly resembled to each other—only their blood did.

“But more importantly, White Foxes has a desire to empower one thing—the *Caecus* realm.”

Cathy felt suffocated suddenly to remember the memory she had in there. “That’s why they are pursuing the government and police to track down the location—the portal to that world is inside the castle, and then why would they ever need it when they already have power?”

Her mom was half smiling to hear her statement, “Well, not exactly. The definition of *welfare* among the royals is different. If they could empower Caecus, they would have the best of both worlds—I mean it, the human’s world and the unseen.”

“It’s confusing, why would the royals become very greedy when they already have everything?”

“Oh, darling, not every royal, only those whose monsters are inside them that would become greedy,” she chuckled for this spectacle humor, “now you know, why Lady Heisler

couldn't fully explain her real purpose to all media, because it's involving mysticism, and the whole world will never be ready to hear that."

For a moment they were silent, but then Cathy remembered about her curiosity, "When you said Aloise and Heisler are related by blood, does it mean we are really related to Lady Heisler—as a relative?"

"Well, yeah," she seemed unhappy to admit it, "after all these secrets, your dad still knows nothing, but that's probably good for him."

Cathy sighed toward her annoyance feeling, then muttered, "He still doesn't know that we are royal descendants, yet he works for them—White Foxes."

The next hour, they had ended such a frustrating talk and began to have their own afternoon tea party.



On Tuesday morning, Cathy got up from her bed like usual to get prepared for college attendance. As soon as she dressed up with her usual jacket, she went to have a breakfast in the living room. Her mom had always served the morning breakfast for her, and today's menu was a piece of bread with chocolate jam.

Haile already sat beside her on the sofa while watching the television news channel. The two of them were grinning in eerie toward the headline news that was still showing about Lydia Brimham's death which turned as the suicide case.

In this year of two thousand twelve, it was counted as the first phenomenal news out there. The public was bothered by the existence of that sort of story since no one could know whether it was true or false, it could be that the people behind the suicide case had a hidden agenda.

Cathy wasn't that concerned with that news, but for her mom suddenly, "Mom, are you alright?"

"What?" Haile turned at her daughter and didn't even realize that she looked really pale, even her lips lost its color.

"Are you sick?" Cathy asked worriedly. "Do you want me to stay today?"

"No, how absurd, you need to go now, college is important" she muttered and kept on forcing her to go.

Cathy hesitated to leave her, but at least Haile had promised her that she won't go anywhere but stayed all day long at this small space of apartment.



A few hours had passed at Fordham University. After class had finished, Cathy could finally meet her best friends. They walked together to the cafeteria as usual.

But there was something going on that she was unable to focus since the uneasy hunch was hovering on her mind. Cathy knew that something wasn't felt right at the moment since she left the apartment two hours ago.

Her reverie got swayed when Josh just came while bringing a tray of three hot cups into the table.

"Okay, so this is what I so-called cappuccino latte," he said.

"Where's my sugar?" Jordan asked, raising his tone.

"Hey, I am not your servant," Josh started to mutter, and then she quickly realized how terrible their bubbling session would last, so she insisted to take it for him instead.

As she walked, the hunch returned again. Somehow, she felt as if this gut of feeling had something to do with her mom's condition, which she couldn't stop thinking about.

At the moment, all the sound of chattering and laughing at the cafeteria room had blurred on the background, until all she

could hear was her own heartbeat, and the dizzy feeling that almost killed her.

When Cathy returned to sit on her chair, everything went back to normal. She was bewildered of what just happened. As she looked around her, nobody seemed to feel the same way as she did, especially the two boys.

Jordan already got his sugar, and all at once they started their small talk as usual about college life. But again, Cathy wasn't into their stuff today, she still bewildered alone while holding her white cup.

Little by little, she could feel a crack on her grip which coming from the cup. It went slow that she hesitated to let go. The crack kept on coming as a fragile fracture. So suddenly, her fingers were bleeding.

"Cathy!" Josh was the first person to panic at the view when everyone only stared and murmured wonderingly. He took some tissues immediately to cover her blood while Jordan took away the broken cup from her.

"My mom," she muttered restlessly while some people stood closer to see the accident and Jordan tried to dismiss them like a police

"Your fingers are bleeding!" Josh worried so much.

"I think there's something happened to my mom."

This time he heard her voice, but his focus was her safety, "We need to get you a medicine."

The pain stabbing deeply into her fingers, but her head couldn't perceive it well when the uneasy hunch was still in the air. Her eyes stared blankly at the crowd. In no second, she rose up from her chair while taking away her satchel bag.

She ignored every shocking pair of eyes, included the boys who tried to help her, and she just ran away through the

corridor with her blood marked all along the walking trail that made her look like a runaway murderer.

Cathy almost got into her car when the mess and fear inside her head grew wilder than the physical pain that she felt. Now her mind could only focus on one thing—her mom.



After she arrived at the Bronx Apartment, she hurriedly went to the room five-o-four. When she looked carefully into every corner of the room, nobody was there. She shivered and panicked to feel the disappearance of her mom.

“Miss Charlotte!” She turned to see Mr. Donald stood at the edge of the foyer, he seemed stressed out and breathless. “Your mom’s collapsed. I just come back from the near hospital.”

Cathy approached him with her eyes wide in disbelief. “What happened?”

“About fifteen minutes ago, I heard the noise was coming from your apartment, when I checked it out, the door wasn’t locked and I found your mom was already lying in there.”

She followed his gaze toward the brown rug beneath the living room’s table, there was a splattered of fresh red wine with the broken glass.

“Please, bring me to that hospital!” She begged him.

Mr. Donald was still out of breath and tired, but he nodded agreed anyway. Afterward, they went together with her car.



The emergency room was in a panic state. Nurses moved rashly at the same time some patients cried so loud.

On the other side, Cathy had been waiting in agony with a fast heartbeat, while Mr. Donald followed behind and tried to

calm her down. They stood above the fluorescent lights for about an hour, until a doctor came up to see them.

“I am her daughter,” Cathy said before he even asked.

That doctor seemed to force his smile while taking off his eyeglasses and his other hand carried a file.

“We’re going to take care of your mother, but, may I ask?” he said. “Did she have any chest injury before this incident?”

She nodded sadly.

“We did a roentgen to her broken chest. Her injury has been relapsing severely.”

“She seems just fine these days, it just so sudden—” Cathy was surprised though.

“Your mom’s injury is getting worst. She’s very lucky to survive since our patients with the same sickness didn’t survive for too long.”

“Does my mom have a cancer?” She worried while Mr. Donald was still breathless.

“We’re still not sure. She’s still in coma—” the doctor seemed to give her a hope, “there’s a little chance to grow a cancer, but don’t worry, she just need to rest now.”

After the doctor left them speechless in the middle of this busied corridor where everyone walked back and forth, Mr. Donald wanted to calm her. He caressed her back gently as if she was really his granddaughter.

There was a deep wound in her eyes. She stared away at the view that seemingly turned into slow motion, as if everything would turn peaceful and soundless.



On Wednesday morning, she took some clothes from her apartment and hurriedly returned to the hospital since she was planning to stay there.

Her mind got nauseated by the thought of her mom's sudden illness. It was a year ago since Haile got her chest injury. At least, her worryment was reduced when her dad just ran insanely in the corridor.

Their eyes met each other with the same undeniable sadness.

"How's Haile doing?" He sounded hopeless as he appeared with a lusterless suit and jaded face.

Actually, Cathy had nothing to explain further but to wait for the time, but she could only say how worried she was.

Manson hugged him tightly and murmured, "She's going to be fine."

"I shouldn't leave her yesterday for college—" she started to cry.

"Hey, it's not your fault," his voice was trembled as he said it, "but you can blame me, I was so preoccupied with my stupid job."

The environment was silent and tranquil. It was different from yesterday.

A few minutes later, a nurse came out from the patient room to welcome them to come inside. Both of them walked rashly to meet her.

They saw her asleep so weakly on the bed. Her face looked ghostly pale.

Manson came to hold his wife's hand, while Cathy breathed deeply to endure her own tears.

Her heart already felt torn apart to see this view of her beloved mother, who got asleep in coma.

The next view startled her when the white-haired angel stood behind the glass window with eyes looking sharply at her—*Sylvia Elle*.

Manson wasn't aware of her presence since he buried his head into the bed with his hands still holding on to his wife.

She hurriedly left the room to meet her directly.

"Elle, where have you been?" She didn't sure if she would need to worry for an angel, "I couldn't reach you. My mom is—"

Elle saw deeply into her wounded soul to feel empathy. They were seeing the same sight of the fragile woman on the bed.

"My mom's going to be alright, I know it."

Elle knew that kind of demanding feeling and hope among human beings. Her emerald eyes shattered deeply, along with her unspoken grief.

"She will survive," Cathy still muttered.

"Everyone in this world will die in the end, your mom isn't immortal," her sharp words could slay her heart in an instant, but Cathy chose to believe in her own hope for now.



The uncomfortable atmosphere was still in the air. Some hours had last in a total waste since she couldn't stop worrying for her mom. At nine in the evening, her phone rang inside her satchel bag.

Josh Kingsley left so many missed calls on her silent phone. She really did feel sorry for her momentary ignorance since her mind got totally messed up.

After the beep, she heard his raging voice, *"It's okay, you should tell me at least, because I've been searching for you from the bottom field of Fordham since this morning."*

"I can't leave my mom alone in here, I told you she got into coma again. I'll probably back in Friday for college."

“Your absent isn’t a bad mark—yet. Three weeks around and you’ll be dead meat.”

“Drop out, right?” She sighed and couldn’t think any better way to deal with this conversation. “Let’s discuss this later. I really am not in the mood—”

“Wait, I just want to tell you, actually—” he was clearly sobbing now. Cathy bewildered what just happened. *“My grandma, she’s—well, I know you have a hard time too, but—”*

“What?”

“She died this morning of a sudden heart attack. Her cancer went worst since couple of weeks ago.”

“You mean your grandmother—what?” She astonished. “Oh, God—I am very sorry, Josh.”

“You don’t have to. Human supposed to die when they get older, right?” His voice was trembled. *“I know you have to watch after your mom, so don’t worry about Martha’s funeral—I’ll fly to Bisbee with Jordan and his dad.”*

Cathy was still shocked to hear this news and felt pity for him, “I’d wish to divide this body of mine, so I could go there for sure.”

“I thought so, but your mom is still in coma,” he chuckled in his tremendous sorrow, *“I need to go now, Jordan has been waiting for me in his dad’s police car.”*

“See you soon,” Cathy said agonizingly.

He hung up first.

In this empty corridor, Cathy sat on the bench while her heart still thumped in shocking. Anything could happen anytime and anywhere. She just couldn’t figure out how everything would turn so unexpectedly.

The next hour, her phone rang again.

She had to breathe deeply for this one; Alexander MacLain.

His voice was heavy and masculine that made Cathy felt the rushing adrenaline throughout her whole body, as if she was running alone into a wild forest. She spoke first hurriedly, “My apology, I can’t attend your class next week, something came up—”

“Please stop your defense against me—” he pleaded on the phone, *“don’t you remember what I said whenever you would feel down?”*

“Alexander, you are my honorable lecturer, what am I supposed to do?” She sighed to herself. “Everyone might be suspicious about us. It would be odd.”

“Nothing odd would come when we have the same connection, please—”

“You’re insisting your craziness. Could it be that you like me so much?” Cathy was literally wanted to drop her phone, but she was too curious to know his answer.

“What if I do say so?” His voice was serious and he won’t play hard to get. *“I’d like to crave my effort and to think that you’re supposed to be classic, but your oddity has got my interest.”*

“Honestly, I have so much to think about right now, and I have to take care for my mom—” her voice turned quivering to inform him, “I’m going to stay in the hospital for a few days.”

“What just happened?” He sounded startled with this news.

“She’s collapsed yesterday. The doctor said that her chest has been injured severely,” she said. “I’m worry now.”

“Why don’t you tell me, Cathy?”

“That’s why—” she sighed annoyingly, “I can’t play your game. So, I’ll hang up first, okay?”

He shouted quickly before she really hung up, *“I’ll come there soon. I know it’s the only hospital in the Bronx.”*

“Really, like now?” She asked in disbelief.

“Yes, I’ll be there in fifteen minutes. Wait for me.”

He just hung up afterward. She was all confused by herself, especially after her dad had returned to Brooklyn at eight in the evening.

This corridor went hauntingly silent when the television was turned off. The view of ten meters away from where she sat alone, there was only one nurse in the nurse’s station.

It was ten o’clock already.

Eventually, the good looking lecturer did come. She saw him in his usual black suit, and his hair looked wet from the rain.

“Do you want to visit my mom?” She asked, quivering. “She’s still sleeping in coma.”

His expression turned more astoundingly to know the detail about it. Afterward, their eyes locked and somehow they just connected to perceive each other’s feeling.

“Let me see your mom,” he asked.

She walked him to the room subsequently. When they arrived in front of the door, he got stopped to see Haile from behind the glass window instead. He heard the beeping sound from the heart monitor machine next to her bed.

Alex did know the saddest feeling that Cathy perceived currently.

As they were gazing to each other, they prayed for the goodness to come soon for Haile. In their heart, the crying souls had awoken.

18

THE FINAL DISPOSITION

ELEANOR HEISLER



A CHARISMATIC GROUP that everyone had known under the name of *White Foxes*—they arrived at Brooklyn Police Department for the meeting appointment in Wednesday. The employees welcomed them at the lobby and already felt intimidated by their presence.

There were only the four of them; Lady Marie de Clure, Joe Heisler, Sofia Heisler, and Eleanor Heisler.

Besides, Detective Chantel Herron and her personal assistant had already waited in line about a half hour early.

At nine in the morning, every participant got into the room. The opening speech was done by Susan Millie as she informed all the participants about the point of this meeting that everyone would be prepared to have a procedure for the further investigation. Afterward, she welcomed Lady Heisler to lead the rest of this meeting.

She stood in the center of this quiet room. There was a yellow map of document that she opened slowly.

Eleanor sat alone at the edge of the room. She recognized that map was a civil file about the vanishing tribe—more

precisely, she recalled it as the prodigious information about the Volka society. Deep down in her heart somehow, she knew that her grandma just wanted to start a clandestine idea in here.

Meanwhile, her aunt who sat beside the Lady—Sofia Heisler felt the same terrified feeling.

Lady Marie stared down for a second at the chief of police—Raymond Salt, “I’d like to return a favor about the death case. Is it odd to guess the oddity?”

Seemingly, the recent murder case was in a state of contradiction with the secret project. The team members got bewildered.

“We will have the inspection on the murder case that happened two days ago. Our forensic people still working on it. Please begin the briefing, Lady Heisler,” the chief informed, assertively.

She was expressionless. No one could read her thought easily, even the people who worked in the police department.

“Who are your people?”

“Detective Broadley, Lady Heisler.”

“He or she isn’t in charge for the Invisible Project?” She noticed.

“It’s *he*,” Susan Millie, the assistant woman beside the chief had shouted. “We already have Detective Charlotte and Herron for this project—according to your request.”

“Precisely,” she smiled.

Everyone in the room felt the same feeling of fear against her. That was inevitable.

“How did you determine the case as a murder scene?” The Lady asked again.

As soon as he heard her demanding question, the chief gulped his saliva nervously.

Further, Susan started explaining on his behalf, because she knew that his boss had been nervous to face the unbearable charisma of Lady Marie, “We found her dead body was left with some of rebellious marks. Her blood stains were found on her apartment’s bathroom. We predicted that the scene occurred after midnight, about six hours before the police arrived. They just found her on Sunday morning, which made it occurred on Saturday midnight. We haven’t figured out who responsible as the murder yet.”

Everyone went silent as they felt the same aggravation. They knew they lied to all the media about how that young reporter died.

“That case—close it. Sooner or later it will bother the undergoing of this project,” Lady Marie declared.

It wasn’t only the chief and his assistant who glanced at each other, the whole employees chattered in the same astonishment against her demand.

As soon as Manson spoke, everyone went silent to his assertive voice, “It can’t be processed that way. Let it be as the fresh inquiry.”

When the professional detective chuckled against his statement, he felt that she underestimated him, although they were realized to consider each other as a rival.

“It’s burdensome. The murder case might cause the uncontrollable madness of people. Astoundingly, it might have an impact of mendacity for all of you—the Police Department,” Chantel said. Even though her statement was like a practical hypothesis, everyone looked astonished to hear the closest meaning of truth.

“Does the murder case threat another course?” Manson couldn’t keep his thought to himself.

Neither the chief of police nor his assistant had given him the exact warning about who he was confronted in here. White Foxes didn't seem to give anyone forgiveness, but this detective could count as a lucky man.

While everyone was debating, Marshall played alone with his leopard pen, when it was accidentally fell hard on the desk, every pair of eyes glanced bewilderedly to him.

"I'm sorry for the interruption," he grinned. "I just don't think our arrival here is to talk about that mortal issue."

Lady Marie smiled at his clever son. It was beyond important that the recent murder case needed to be dispatch, and White Foxes wanted the police to understand of what they should do.

"Sorry, but we shouldn't proceed it that way, even if Ms. Herron's hypothesis might be true in the end," Manson insisted to persuade them, "We hold the position of the federal law. All the people in the world will be doing a big demonstration if they think we have pettiness manner toward the security and safety."

Marshall rose up from his chair, focusing his stare at Manson whose heart ponded faster. This tension moment made the chief of police felt nervous.

"Your opinion might be well considered," he said formally, "—but, Lady Heisler is right to demand the case to be closed immediately, since media and public will be asking for the primary news. All of you will see how the news is exploding on any media, especially the television. It spreads like bees, no control. Perhaps in no time, people will be doing a demo of anti-police?"

Susan followed to stand up as she argued, "People will think of anti-police if we keep silent about the Invisible Project. They have asked for the assertive information, sir."

“Well, since the project is about finding the lost castle, how are we going to manage its craziness? How could you ask for our department to mind the inquiry as something that out of human logic? Do we need any of scientific procedure since the case is being labeled with the paranormal tag?” Manson sounded mad as he argued back, “In the end I’ll say this; the castle probably never exists. There’s no way anyone will bulldozer the building, because the debris will be left on the ground. When we got there last year, we found nothing.”

“Watch your mouth, Detective!” The chief of police, Raymond Salt had finally shouted angrily at him. He was afraid if White Foxes would hunt down the whole department.

“That’s fine,” Lady Marie said calmly. “I understand a detective’s mind. Let’s gather the witness first. Your daughter I supposed, Mr. Charlotte?”

He couldn’t breathe comfortably when she mentioned his daughter. The employees pitied him. The tension in the air felt like nightmare for everyone.

Afterward, Lady Marie explained the next procedures and schedules for the Invisible project. As everyone understood, the show would begin soon.



Around four in the afternoon, Eleanor went alone with her personal chauffeur to visit Grandaunt Matilda’s library in Manhattan.

She was welcomed warmly.

Matilda served two cups of hot tea, and she sat face to face on the sofa with her, just like the last time they met in the lobby.

“So, what brings you here?”

“My curiosity,” Eleanor answered, “—and I want to tell you about Marie de Clure.”

“Hmm, your grandmother, what she’s up to now?” She asked before drank a cup of hot tea.

“I believe you’ve already heard about the Invisible Project. She is having a good plan to kill the innocents very soon.”

“I do believe—she never changes since then.”

Eleanor narrowed her eyes to demand for further answer.

She continued to explain, “The proclamation among the royals, she’s still one of the member—I think you aren’t familiar with *the Royal Council*, but surely you aren’t here to learn about it,” she smiled warmly, “is this about that project?”

As if she could read her mind literally, that was what Eleanor cared about. For a moment, she needed to take a deep breath. She glanced at the newspaper on the table. There was a huge headline tag;

**LYDIA BRIMHAM’S DEATH CASE IS A CROSSWORD
TO THE UNDERGOING OF INVISIBLE PROJECT**

“Can you see?” She sounded tired. “White Foxes has become more famous now—well, in a bad way.”

She recognized some people in the picture; the police, the detectives, and one of them is Detective Chantel Herron. She cringed in the idea how that person would seem so genuine to involve with her family, especially to interact directly with Lady Marie.

“Do you know this woman?” She asked while her index finger beckoned at the picture.

Matilda touched her eyeglasses as she gazed closer. “Oh yeah, some years ago, a friend of mine was a former journalist in Michigan, he worked along with her in a trial court. Why do you ask?”

“She’s one of the detectives who in charge in the Invisible Project. I wonder why she looks so damn control freak while the meeting was held some hours ago,” she muttered.

“Well, she has a different job now,” she chuckled as if she knew something. “Life’s changing—from lawyer to detective.”

“Grandma Marie and Uncle Joe trust her so much, I hate that,” Eleanor said viciously.

“You might hate her more if I told you that she’s like a long lost distant relative to Marie—literally.”

“What did you say? There is no way!” She startled as if a storm had hit her head. “Do you want to say that she’s coming from the Heisler, huh?”

Matilda sighed and placed her cup on the table again. “Not at all, she’s the descendant of a Romanian tribe. Have you heard any rumor that White Foxes’ members have witch blood running inside them?”

“Then, including me, duh?” She resented this startling information.

“You know, I’m only half sibling to Marie. But you are, just like them,” she said it so lightly and no hurt feeling. “

“Is this why White Foxes got separated from our big family—the Heisler?”

“She knows that some family members in the Heisler are half Romanian, but from a very long and long generation of witch. That’s why Marie has declared her own proclamation for that.”

“Crazy,” she muttered while stroking her head. “Does it seem like I’m the only one who just realize about this in the family?”

Matilda giggled as if her question kind of sound stupid. “Only so little did they know. I guess, Marie has been keeping

this secret from the family, but she forgot that the elders knew much than the adolescents.”

“Even Aunt Sofia, Aunt Hadley, and Uncle Marshall didn’t know about this?” She felt aggravated. “What the heck!”

“I guess, your curiosity has been all answered. There is such connection we couldn’t predict that is so close to us.”

“Oh, what a wreck!” She kept on cursing in her loathe. “Now I know why Grandma Marie has been keeping her very precious witchy things in the basement.”

“Like what?” Matilda wondered.

“Tarot cards, sparkling powders, and stupid thick books about witchcraft, duh!” She said it breathlessly. “Oh yes, and a hidden cage that no one really knows in our mansion. Maybe she has some demons in there.”

“Interesting, don’t you think?” She asked while taking a teakettle on the front desk.

“But none of us doing witchcraft, so what’s the point to have it all?” She asked.

Before she could answer her, someone rang the bell on the door. Both of them wondered who would visit the library at this hour.

Eleanor peeped at the stranger after Matilda opened the door. For a few seconds of glance while she stared away from the sofa, she felt familiar with her figure; red hair, skinny, pretty tall, and now she wore a long brown coat.

When they came inside, Matilda was bewildered for her sudden disappearance, but then noticed that Eleanor had hid behind the arched doorway.

Although it seemed childish, her grandma only smiled in wonderment at her. Besides, Eleanor was pretty sure to see the red hair woman from somewhere.

“Oh, you’ve got a visitor before my arrival, haven’t you?” Her voice was so gentle and sounded tickling as she stared at the empty two cups.

“Indeed,” she smiled, “—but, what is your business for coming here, Marissa?”

Eleanor heard her name, and she felt a bit bewildered that her grandma didn’t offer her a cup of tea, and their encounter seemed so private and important.

“I have a plan to bring someone next time—it’s a child who needs to learn in this library,” she said.

“I guess I’ve already met that child you have referred. Are you rushing for her to understand things? Ah, could you tell me her name?”

“Catherine Charlotte, from House of Aloise,” she answered her, “It’s about the time, before they would ask her to join White Foxes’ business for the overseas, because they have planned it all along.”

Matilda recalled her previous conversation with Eleanor about that same topic. It would be a dilemma to not know what was happening, but she noticed quickly, “The secret plan among them, for all I’ve ever heard is the crafty experiment.”

“Yes, since they’re involving the witch in their project, also—”

“Marie herself is half witch,” she shouted after her. “She should be ashamed of herself. She thinks she can work her magic around the government and police?”

“That won’t be an issue since they’re giving two children in the Witness Protection Program—for Catherine and Josh.”

“Ah, I remember that boy, so they are participating in this project?”

“They shouldn’t have involved,” Marissa said.

Eleanor recalled the result of today's meeting that the police would make the witnesses to agree for the business overseas to Austria, although she wasn't pretty sure they were mentioning the experiment explicitly. Lady Marie herself would work on that, along with Joe Marshall and Detective Chantel who knew the exact procedure. It was odd for her that none of the police had questioned what kind of experiment was that to find the lost castle, just like the kind of show of the puppeteers played on their dolls.

"So, they've planned it for the sake of further investigation, but never stated they would sacrifice the children?" Matilda knew what she was asking for.

"I am worry, even to think about Catherine's mother—she's in coma currently."

"Haile—it's her name, right?" She looked conflicted for a moment. "She has a nomad life, and now her daughter is being dragged into this. Oh God, give them a mercy."

Behind the wall, Eleanor opened her eyes widely for the fact that Grandaunt Matilda knew a lot than what she appeared to be.

"I hope she can learn the precise knowledge you have kept in this library. Some books from the Morizza Chapel are in here," Marissa said.

Matilda stood along to escort her outside and said, "Well, the door is always open for her. I'd be sure to help along."

At that second, Marissa paused at the edge of the entrance door and glanced at Eleanor behind the arched doorway.

Eleanor got startled and frozen.

The red hair woman was only smiling—in a gentle way. Eleanor was speechless while her grandaunt was giggling alone to see this farewell view.

19

ON THE DAY OF BEREAVEMENT

CATHY CHARLOTTE



ON THURSDAY AFTERNOON—her aunt, Sarah arrived exactly at three o’clock. She was as tall as her niece with five centimeters heels, slender body, pale white skin, short dark hair, and wearing eyeglasses. She ran toward the corridor to meet Cathy who already well-prepared to explain that her mom was still asleep in a critical coma.

Sarah smiled and hugged her in a deep condolence, but oppositely, Cathy wanted to judge her terribly as her anger was definite. “Don’t you think you should have come earlier when New Rochelle is only thirty minutes away from here?”

“Cathy, I am very sorry these days I couldn’t make any call to your mother—” she sounded frustrated, “there’s a lot that going on.”

“How dare you to say that—” she bulged out, “What about my mom then?” Some memories from the day she still stayed in Bisbee were flashing on her mind. She remembered that Sarah had never been there even a day. “Even if we were living

in the same roof, you would never spend your time with us. You seem busy every single day, Aunt.”

“It’s not what we should concern now, your mom is sick,” she cut her out, although she felt terrible against her admonition.

Cathy was stroking her own hair in frustration.

Her aunt stared out through the glass window where her mom laid down weakly with dark eye bags and pale skin tone like a corpse.

Subsequently, the doctor came to talk about Haile’s health condition with them. He said that Haile had a severe disease since a year ago which called *Cardiac Sarcoma*. It was the same disease that just killed Martha, Josh’s grandmother.

So unfortunate, in the middle of their important conversation, the heart monitor machine in the room was beeping unstably. Some nurses ran rashly as the doctor shouted firmly at them.

Cathy astonished, and she started exclaiming, “They should help her quickly!”

“Be calm, they’re trying,” Sarah wanted to calm her niece, although her own heart got quivered.

Cathy leaned down tightly to the glass window, her eyes opened widely at the view of the fast paced operational that the doctor and some nurses did in there. At the same time, a white hand grabbed her shoulder. She was agitated but surprised to see Sylvia Elle appeared suddenly beside her.

“Please, she can’t leave me, help her!” Cathy muttered terrifyingly.

Elle could only smile and stared back at her in a terrible sadness. It was the first time that Cathy could see the glossy eyes of an angel.

Surely, she couldn't focus at this time, her eyes roamed wildly between the clock and the glass window. Suddenly, the tickling sound moved in slow motion as if the time was paused for a while.

That was it, her whole body was trembled.

The heart monitor beeped rapidly again. The air felt suffocated in her lungs. Until the last moment, the heart rate monitor beeped coldly to only leave a flat line. The doctor finally announced the time of her mom's last breath, and the nurses started cleaning up their operational tools.

It was a minute late when Manson just arrived and realized everything was over. They were crying.

The doctor left them with his condolence. The environment went silent.

Her dad and her aunt went inside the room while Cathy was still gazing at her mom through the glass window. Both of them wanted to give a farewell pray for Haile. But they were all having a profound sorrow to perceive alone.

Cathy was lamenting for the death of her beloved mom. Elle couldn't say a word and only watched her back quietly.

When Cathy began to walk away, her dad took her wrist quickly. "Don't go."

"I need my own company, please."

"I want you to stay—" he insisted.

But Cathy was more persistent in her principle, she looked him in the eye and said, "Dad, I want to be alone, just let me go."

He understood this sad feeling, thus he couldn't stop her. Elle witnessed their aggravation.

Cathy went alone through the corridor. She ignored everyone in there and walked passed to the nurse's station.

She reduced the noise around her and could only focus in her grief, as if she had her own world now.

She still walked forward with eyes stared blankly, until she reached at the intersection of corridor and found the only desolate space in there. Under the bright fluorescent lights, she sat on the floor while whimpering alone.

The feeling of losing someone was undeniably painful for her. She was left with the most terrifying agony.

The cold air made her trembled. She sat with hugging her both legs. Her white long sleeves blouse and skinny jeans didn't warm her adequately. She looked even miserable with a messy long hair that she forgot to comb these days.

Just suddenly, someone who dressed in black cloak already appeared at the edge of the corridor. She stood to watch the girl cried alone.

Cathy stared up to see that tall figure. She was Marissa the red hair angel. They stared to feel each other's presence.

"Today—my mom died."

Marissa was speechless, and her heart was torn apart to hear that. "I am so sorry, Catherine."

She came closer with her heels broke the silence, and she sat next to her, caressing her wavy brown hair affectionately. "Everything happens for a reason. Someday you may understand."

Marissa became her company, and she kissed her hair for a long time that smelled like a lilac aroma. Cathy leaned down on her shoulder. At this moment, they sat along within this uncomfortable silence.



Everyone wore black clothes today—the mourning color, as well as Cathy Charlotte, she frowned at her reflection in the vertical mirror.

Another time, she had tried to comb her messy hair but it kept on curling terribly. Now she spent an hour with sighing. Everything felt uncomfortable for her. Afterward, she realized a white rose lied down prettily on the desk beside this mirror, and there was also a piece of paper. She wanted to look at it and found a handwriting poem;

There was a poem from the winter that I didn't break through.

*The soundless veil from the bottom of her belly,
had been filling this empty sadness.*

I wouldn't think quite perfectly with this burial wound.

My wish for the love—was agonizing.

These wings she left—had vanished.

The time she left—had died.

From this moment, she threw these wings and strength for us.

She folded the paper quickly and putted it on her pocket when someone knocked at the door.

Sarah appeared with black blazer and pencil skirt. She went inside to check on her. “Are you ready?”

She nodded, although her heart was never ready. “I guess.”

For a moment, Sarah looked above the desk and realized the paper was gone. She noted that Cathy touched her own pocket defensively.

“It's the poem that Haile once had read for our mother's funeral.”

Cathy astonished and looked into her eyes glossily.

“How was she looked like at that time?”

Sarah smiled affectionately. “Just like you.”

Her aunt took the white rose, and she shaped it eventually to become a pretty bracelet on her tiny wrist. Cathy smiled surprisingly for it, “Thank you.”

“Come on, everyone is waiting downstairs,” Sarah reminded her and went ahead.

Once again, Cathy paused to stare back at her reflection in the mirror before she walked out. Her brown eyes still shattered and filled with sadness. Nonetheless, she just needed to be prepared.



The house was full of guests that dressed neatly in black.

The chattering noise among the men sounded exaggerating from the living room, while most of the women gathered together in the kitchen. Cathy never met any of them before, but some people looked familiar.

She saw her dad stood in the living room. Manson had a glass of red wine and tried so hard to look nice in front of his colleagues even though he was crumbled from inside. Meanwhile, Sarah was welcoming some guests in the foyer.

When her eyes roamed throughout the space, surprisingly she saw a man she never thought would have come—Max Brigham. He didn’t talk, neither did anything in particular, but his eyes were gazing sadly toward the coffin. She even had no idea if he was still a blacksmith in Sierra Vista.

Cathy stood again in the corner of the room when she saw Josh and Jordan came with their panicked faces to the middle of the room.

As Josh was panting hardly, she caught his eyes in an instant. "Damn, I thought I'm late."

"You're not," she said while gazing at Luke who came to shake hands with her dad, Jordan followed her eyes movement and smiled in return.

"We wanted to take a train at first, but his dad came with his police car though," Josh explained.

"Well, New Rochelle is not that far from Bronx," Jordan said before his dad called him to join with the adults, at the same time, Manson glanced expressionless at her.

"I'm sorry Cathy, for your loss. I just lost my grandmother too," he chuckled as if he could make a humor out of this pathetic conversation. "Damn, what a coincidence."

She felt hopeless and awkward at this moment, "I feel really bad, I couldn't come to Martha's funeral, which is worse than being late. I am very sorry, Josh."

Josh would have attempted to make another joke, but things would turn really awkward, so he changed his mind, "Want to drink something?"

As she nodded, he went quickly to the kitchen. Cathy turned to sit comfortably next to the pillar near to the grand piano. For a while, she gazed out at the guests to see some of familiar people like Wendy Jones and Fam Burk. They didn't see her, but Manson greeted them in the living room. Further, another familiar guy just appeared between them. He walked toward her. She tried not to be quivered while remembering his familiar figure. They had not met for almost a year and a half—and suddenly, she just figured him out.

"Scott Herron," she murmured, surprised.

He greeted, "How are you?"

"I'm fine," she answered in disbelief as he truly sat next to her on this gray sofa, "I heard that you become a beach lifeguard in Santa Monica."

"That's my part time job—earning some money for living," he said, relieved to meet her again.

"You could just ask your mom for help. She'd love to find a job for you in NYC Police Department—"

He flattered with her suggestion but at once stared at her in disgust. "Really? After what she did to your mom you would still say that?"

She went staring blankly at her boots and realized that she crossed the line, even though Scott himself felt a huge remorse for everything that happened.

"My apology on her behalf, for whatever she did in that year, also about the case—"

"Please, don't try to make me understand for what really happened," she snapped annoyingly. "You weren't there to witness everything. Don't try to comfort me."

This moment didn't fit perfectly with her mood. Someone might want to confront it for her—the only tiger eyes that had been watching from afar while bringing two glasses of red wine, Josh Kingsley. He walked emotionally through random guests and bulged out at Scott with so much hatred.

"What he's doing here?" He asked, grimaced.

Scott sensed the unwelcomed atmosphere through his intimidating stare. He narrowed his eyes in bewilderment at him, "Dude, it's my right to come here."

Cathy always thought that their competitive sensation had already ended after High School graduation, apparently she was wrong.

"Well, I'd say that you should have greased landing in California instead," Josh mocked him.

She surely hated this heated atmosphere. Subsequently, she narrowed her eyes at him in anger and said, “Stop it, this is my mom’s funeral.”

Josh had his own reason to be infuriated with him, especially when all of the past memories flashed on his mind, that memory when everyone called that guy as the King of Bully.

Just at the time she rose up from the sofa, she wondered why everyone was standing up suddenly and chattering so loud. Some had astonished, some expressed their wonderment. But soon enough, she found out what was going on with the new arrival guests.

She watched her dad welcomed them in a highly polite manner and said, “I didn’t know you would come here.”

“We honor you very well, also your daughter seems to attend the same university as my granddaughter—*Eleanor Heisler*.”

She could only hear that familiar voice behind these curious guests, but when the name was being mentioned, her heart was almost exploded. They supposed to be counted as the uninvited guests.

Just for a second, Eleanor caught her eyes. Somehow she could feel that blonde girl had a pure feeling of condolence for her mother’s death. Still and all, they were all known to have camouflage issue. No one could believe if they were all here without hidden agenda. People were murmuring about them—White Foxes.

Scott already stood next to her while wondering why people were mattering over their presence, but Cathy couldn’t say anything currently.

She had to escape from making eye contact with anyone, so she hid behind the wooden pillars in the living room. All that

she could do was staring stupidly at her pair of black boots. Because of that, she noticed the marmalade floor was similar with the one in her parents' house in Bisbee.

The first floor was designed sufficiently and felt cozy. There was not many furniture though. It located in New Rochelle which became a good preference for her mom's another beloved hometown besides Austria. But now, this place was officially owned by Sarah.

Her reverie was falling apart when Eleanor knocked her black heels on the floor. She appeared in a black pencil dress, white pearl necklace, and simple hairdo.

"I am very sorry for your loss," she said awkwardly, "—I thought I should say this."

Cathy stared at her blue eyes for a moment as she wasn't sure that words would come out from the very arrogant lady like her.

"What do you care anyway, you don't seem like someone who would care about anyone," Cathy said assertively, "So, don't be sorry."

"I know how it feels to lose a parent. And I lost both of them, Charlotte," her voice quivered.

"I don't need your sympathy," Cathy snapped.

Before she could walk away, Lady Marie de Clure and Sofia Heisler approached her concurrently while Joe Marshall had a little chit chat with some gentlemen near the grand piano.

"Isn't there any manner, Miss Charlotte?" Eleanor annoyed when her grandmother was intervening their talk as she shouted from behind, while Sofia could only watch them silently. "She's coming here with kindness. We are busy people."

This view wasn't exactly what Cathy wanted to happen in her mom's funeral. Surely this felt incredibly disturbing. So

fortunate, this would end quickly when Sarah started testing a microphone in the middle of the house. The machine sound came abruptly at first, and she continued to give an opening speech.

Cathy used that moment to escape since she hated to involve with them. She walked through random guests to stand beside her dad. When she could finally breathe better during the speech, her eyes caught the two angels—Marissa and Elle who stood in the staircase like goddess statues. No one seemed to notice their presence.

Afterward, her dad moved forward to the microphone. He gave his best memorial speech without crying out loud since he wanted to appear strong, but still, he wasn't at all. He talked about his wife's happiest moment until her disease history that finally could make his tears fall.

The speech continued by some of honorable guests, and the last was given by Cathy. She hated public speaking, thus she finished shortly than the others. She couldn't even express her tremendous feeling with words. It would always be hard for her.

The last farewell was quick. Everyone was silent to respect for the family momentum.

Cathy clenched her fist so tightly while staring deeply into her mom in the coffin.

Her curved lips turned dark, her skin was ghostly pale, and her red cheeks had gone. At least, she was asleep peacefully now, those eyes won't open forever.

It turned out that her dad still cried so hard. He leaned down against the coffin to kiss her cheeks so gently as if he won't let her go. In that same moment, Cathy saw Alex stood charmingly among other guests. He smiled empathically at her,

but only this time, she couldn't smile back. Her face was emotionless since her heart was broken.

The next five minutes, the coffin was brought into the land of God to be buried within a deep soil. People walked together while preparing an umbrella in their hand, since a few droplets of rain started falling on the ground.

In front of them, the gravestone engraved with name and quote;

*Natalie Haile Anne von Aloise
12 September 1970 – 01 November 2012*

"In the name of this land—the universe see the truth. In every name of holiness—they collides the signs, in which you will find your way back into heaven—my child, my sunshine, the path isn't too far to take, the Angels will always stay by your side."

Cathy was sobbing to read it.

Sarah once told Cathy, that Haile wrote the quote by herself before she died. She insisted to give her sister a mandatory order, in any rate, Sarah must obeyed it for her sake. However, Cathy thought that it was odd.

The heavy rain fell with sudden thunderstruck in the sky. As the ceremonial was done, everyone ran hurriedly with their umbrellas.

Cathy was the only one that left. She stood frozenly against her mom's graveyard. No one could distinguish between her real tears and a drop of heavy rain on her cheeks.

But Elle saw the truth, and she held out a black umbrella for her while Marissa followed them with another umbrella. Cathy wasn't alone anymore when the angels accompanied her silent mourning, and her eyes still adhered at that quote.

Before they left, for once, Cathy looked back at the graveyard with her deepest sorrow. At that time, she glanced at the three female figures from afar. They stood still under the big tree. She recognized them. Lady Marie held an umbrella for her granddaughter, with Sofia stood beside them. Eleanor locked her eyes at Cathy in a deep dilemma.

The Angels already grasped her shoulders to leave this place. Cathy breathed in agony, and she finally decided not to look into those foxes' eyes for too long.

20

ROAMING VISIONS

ELEANOR HEISLER



THE DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL on Saturday morning, Eleanor felt pessimistic. She kept on thinking about the idea of that sorrow, although she already knew how it felt. The reason why she visited the ceremonial was because she pitied Cathy. The worst she could see, they shared the same blood which made her felt something—the condolence.

Besides, December was only a month away that she needed to be well prepared. The entire household had told her to have a better big suitcase than the one she brought last year. Their vacation would be perfect with a bunch of New Year's gifts to visit hometown in Austria, but she already did prepare for everything since a few weeks ago. She just wasn't sure to come along with them since she felt stuck here with a heart made of stone. The only thing she wanted to do was to feel the invigorating air.

An hour later, she went to East River Esplanade without her chauffeur. Some people were having fun in the park. The cold weather pricked at her skin around eight in the morning. She only wore her white laces pencil dress and brown boots.

Across the water, she stared at the view of all the mesmerizing skyscrapers. At the same time, her mind wandered for the feeling of longing and sadness.

The sudden appearance of the female figure had startled her suddenly. She stood like a mannequin next to her; tall body, pale skin, straight white-haired, vintage white dress—she was the usual mysterious girl.

“Did someone pay you to watch my back or something?” She instantly snarled at her in annoyance. “Seriously, you’re scaring me.”

The girl had her emerald green eyes stayed gazing straightly at the view of water and skyscrapers. Slowly, she turned to see the wondering expression of Eleanor.

“Very bad, things don’t just change easily—” she murmured like a low whisper that only Eleanor could hear her, “Look around you.”

“Just tell me, alright—” she said curiously, “Is it my grandmother who sent you here?” At the same time she asked, she felt disgusted with that idea, “So pathetic.”

“It’s time to talk about your family business, and there’s no turning back once you understand,” the girl said in a delicate voice.

Eleanor squinted annoyed at her, especially for the riddle in the morning. “At least tell me, who are you?”

“Stumble beneath the blue sky, there’s a circle they called as the city that never sleeps. Think. Remember,” as she spoke, she turned to stare firmly at her, “Don’t you think there’s still hope for everything, like the impossible?”

“You’re crazy, don’t talking trash!” Eleanor annoyed, but she felt nervous from the inside. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Without alert, that pale hand grabbed her neck suddenly. She felt her firm grasp was so warm and familiar as if there was a certain frequency that had reconnected to her body. For a moment, her eyesight went wrong as her head went whirled and dizzy.

“You—” she wanted to yell but her voice got quivered, “What have you done?”

The view of East River Esplanade had changed into the view of her childhood memories. All the images appeared randomly that she thought were long gone, and now finally appeared on the surface. All the kind of complicated feelings had emerged to prick her mind. She saw everything, including her long death parents, and the evilness of her grandmother. The visions whirled so fast that she couldn’t even breathe.

Like the elastic magnet, the visions gone in no second. Eleanor wouldn’t have thought New York was doomed with earthquake, but it did happen to her.

“You seem hesitant about this. Are you sure you want to continue?”

Eleanor stood breathlessly and stared in bewilderment at her, but somehow she could figure out the answer just by looking at those sharp green eyes—with agenda that her lack of knowledge made this encounter seemed absurd.

“How could I accept that?” Eleanor muttered to herself. “What the heck just happened?”

She roughly shoved that warm hand from her neck when the feeling of fear finally emerged in her heart—which haunted her.

“It’s like playing with gravity, either you can stop it or not,” the girl chuckled as if she enjoyed the show, “Might be hard for the first time, but you have faith—that’s all that matters.”

“What are you—witch?” She irritated with this riddle game. “Marie de Clure forced you to watch me, am I right?”

“Yes, but in a very different circumstance. You have a misconception understanding, child,” she corrected her.

Eleanor assured that the girl might be at the same age or a few years older than her, that was why she quickly bulged out in disbelief.

The roaming visions had gone abruptly from her eyes. Her lungs felt suffocated and tight when a familiar whisperer came into her mind. At the same time, she realized that pair of soft hands touched hers in a supple way to make her reconnect into the lost memories. Her senses began to understand, her whole body trembled in agony.

The hardest of every hardest time you might encounter, child.

When the voice came back, she panicked and ran immediately. The girl didn't try to chase her or anything, but stayed in the park, left behind.

The mumbling voices came like noisy bees in her mind. She kept on running on the walking trail and sometimes her shoulders got hit by random walkers.

The weirdest blue of every blue you have ever seen. Isn't that something you want to understand?

She kept her head straight to the road but got irritated by the fact that random strangers stared curiously at her staggering movement, and some had recognized her figure from the local television news channels. She couldn't walk better since the more she walked forward, the more pain that she got.

Stop running from yourself. The truth is just close.

It felt as if she knew the voice was coming from that girl—which sounded crazily familiar in her ears. As Eleanor glanced

across the pavement, that girl already appeared within the crowd while gazing with inscrutable eyes at her, and this time she brought the red umbrella again—*the symbolism*.

It's buried in your mind and closer to your heart.

She knew that girl could trespass into her mind as if they did telepathy, especially without her permission to breakthrough her most private thoughts. Until the moment she felt her legs tired and numbed, she went collapsed on the ground helplessly. The scene had caused everyone astonished. Some people got crunched and shouted worriedly.

That morning, the bright clouds had dissolved into darkness from her peripheral vision.



The ceiling looked familiar. She found herself covered in warm white sheet, lying down in her king-sized bed. She crumbled while hugging her thick pillow. This room was dark. She glanced at the only light that emitted behind the door, she heard someone had been whispering—they mentioned something about the news.

“Who wouldn’t?” A woman voiced nagged hesitantly.

Eleanor tried to get up from the bed, but her head was tremendously dizzy to handle.

“They don’t know about this matter. You should end it—or something might happen to this child,” she recognized that voice before.

Eleanor wanted to confirm it by herself, so she sat steady as her eyes caught them stood at the edge of the door. It took a moment to see their figures when they finally approached her. She shocked to see that stranger—the white-haired girl who stood beside her aunt, Sofia.

Her eyes followed that girl's movement who walked solemnly across to her bed. The sunlight passed through the window when she half-opened the curtain.

Sofia looked worried for her niece who just fainted in the middle of the crowd—it was no good news anyway.

“Don't worry, Lady Marie doesn't know yet,” Sofia informed her.

Eleanor felt relieved though, so she wouldn't get her mind irritated by the old-fashion scolding. She was also aware of the girl in front of her, and when that girl stepped forward, she yelled, “Don't come any closer!”

“Have the truth awoken you?” The girl said with an uncanny smile.

“Please go away, don't make me remember anything!” She said infuriatedly.

“It is you who wanted to know the whole truth, I suppose?” She asked for her assurance. “It's necessary to unlock the images that have been buried in your head, so you can see it for yourself.”

“Go away, period!” She barked and won't even look into her eyes.

The girl opened up the whole curtain to let the rays of the sun brightened this room. Eleanor felt her eyes blinded for a moment.

“There will always be a moment—where the secret can't be hidden forever,” that girl talked with eyes were looking below at the view of the front yard. She chuckled at the view where some bodyguards started guarding in the terrace, and then her eyes returned to stare at Eleanor.

“This is so unlikely to happen,” as Sofia muttered for a minute, both of them stared at her, “I'm sure that Eleanor

doesn't understand your arrival just now, but really, Lady Marie can't know about this."

"Good luck with that," that girl gave her a sarcastic smile.

Her aunt knew about this stranger as if they were a long acquaintance. Eleanor eyed her wonderingly.

Sofia took a deep breath when this moment gave her a chill for a while. "She's here for your own good. She'll be your guardian. You can call her—"

"Sylvia Elle," that girl shouted quickly before Sofia continued, "Call me *Elle*, for short."

"What's with that name, Elle?" Eleanor wondered as the name was resembled with her own. "And wait a minute—I don't need a babysitter!"

"I am not," she chuckled, annoyed.

Sofia shook her head surprisingly, and asked, "You really don't remember anything?"

Her niece had been narrowing her eyes like a lost wanderer.

At the same time, she heard the footstep sound from outside the bedroom. Sofia seemed well-wary. "I need to check out a few things for our winter packages. I'll be right back, girls."

Eleanor remembered that the whole family members really cared for the New Year's gifts, and they wanted to bring all the gifts to Austria. She hated their culture.

"I think you will regain some memories soon, just a few," Elle started speaking to her, "—since you really need to stop her craziness."

She smirked to say, "That memory lapse thingy is not working to stop my grandma—if it's her, you are talking about."

The silent environment felt uncomfortable. At the moment, Eleanor was nervous as soon as she remembered why she was fainted. The feeling of the familiar encounter with Elle had emerged again, as if that happened a long time ago. The random visions and whispers were the last thing she could recall, and her mind was being triggered throughout the familiar nostalgia.

“Is it about the Invisible Project that you want to stop?” She grimaced.

Elle glanced at her to smile friendly. “You know, she’s up for the killing, and will do more in the future if you’re not stopping Marie de Clure.”

“This is absurd. My old memories have nothing to do with that,” she muttered to herself eventually. “And who are you, Sylvia Elle?” She asked mockingly, “You’re just exploring my most private memories without my permission.”

“I’m trying to save you.”

“Alright, let’s do it again if you can be so precise about it,” Eleanor said defiantly at her, “show me some good visions.”

“I’ve escorted you once—after your parents’ accident.”

For a moment, she stared at Elle silently, her jaw fell-opened as her heart startled. The mysterious life savior she had been picturing in her dream, now it became crystal clear. Elle was also the one who gave her a goodbye kiss when they met in her childhood time, at the backyard of cabin house. After all, she managed to say, “So it was you. I still remember precisely how it felt when I was eight—the pain and sorrow.”

“I did it for your sake to terminate that dilemma. I had buried it for a long time,” Eleanor was taken aback by her words, she trembled now, “—I’ve shown you the world to make you forget how to cry. It wasn’t complacency.”

Eleanor was frozen like Alaskan ice cave. Her astonishment felt stagnant as her eyes glossed and really forgot how to cry for a moment. Although it was true, she never shed a tear since the death of her parents. Her memory about her seemed to open up so little, at least she knew with what kind of person she was talking to—*a guardian angel*.

“Will you show me or not, like now?” She demanded.

Elle stared numbly at her with eyes that depicted all the answers at one time, “No.”

Her rage was gradually increased as she couldn’t handle her silent anger. As she already loathed everyone in her life, now she did the same with this beautiful angel who had refused to show the wounded silhouettes of her old nightmare—ever again.

Although the wound was already half-opened in her subconscious mind like no scars could be detached, once it had opened, the seal couldn’t be returned to offer her with calmness.



A month had passed normally. People had the day off from White Foxes and could breathe out easily in the previous month for a huge respect for Detective Manson Charlotte since the death of his wife. Now, everyone was working as usual.

Monday, on the third week of December, Eleanor had her own idea for a while. She wasn’t sure to start it out, but the time kept on running quickly. She took her cellphone and dialed the exact numbers she just got from the university’s administration.

“Hello, who is this?” The typical feminine and soft voice of teenage girl answered her phone.

“Eleanor Heisler—your classmate next door,” she said in a harsh tone

“Oh, how do you know—?” She sounded amazed.

Eleanor cut her words immediately since knowing she would ask the reason how she knew her phone number, and just skipped it, “Just to the point, I call you to give you a good offer according to your lack of knowledge based on what I’ve heard.”

She baffled with this sudden talk, *“What do you mean, Eleanor?”*

“You are Cathy Charlotte, right?”

“Yes, but what—”

“Uh, oh, I will tell you—” Eleanor cut her words again, “You’re currently looking for Morizza Chapel in Austria. That’s why—I can be your tour guide.”

“Wow, this is too sudden,” she murmured on the phone, *“I’d be very happy to have a friend in there, but really, how do you know that?”*

Eleanor recalled that last conversation in the library which was a month ago. “It just happened I came across with the red hair aunty of yours in my grandaunt’s library. She said that you’re looking for that place and need to go there, and FYI, I am not your friend, got it?” She felt disgusted to refer the word as *friend*.

“Oh, alright, did she tell you that her name—Marissa?” She wondered.

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Okay, I’m planning to buy an airplane ticket next week, if you don’t mind—”

“No!” Eleanor exclaimed disagreed. “I’ll buy the tickets for tomorrow morning. So just come prepare to LaGuardia Airport. That’s an order.”

“What? It’s too soon, I am not so prepare now!” Cathy felt annoyed. *“By the way, can you really be a tour guide for me in Austria?”*

“You are talking to a Germanic mother tongue, duh. So, is it a yes or no?”

“Oh God, I am so confuse now. I’ll let you know later, Eleanor,” she hung up afterward.

Eleanor was pissed off that there was no certainty on the conversation she just had. At least, the time would answer soon.

21

SLUMBERED INTO THEIR STORIES

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THE DAYS HAD PASSED like a tornado for her—and much with some storms that pricked into her heart. She couldn't forget the whole things that happened in November—and all the memories with her mom would be the most precious moments that she wanted to cherish.

But her tears never stopped falling. Even after a few weeks since the funeral, she stayed at her aunt's place—Sarah lived alone in New Rochelle, exactly in the Rose Hill neighborhood which was a small and quiet place. She hadn't married yet or even had any friend—none to show. She seemed to work all day long that her niece didn't even know what kind of job she took.

As a matter of fact, she kind of acted like her mother now, and even to keep a deepest secret that could haunt her mind for a long time. That secret—about the Aloise, and another matter related to a royal family.

Sarah already demanded her to leave the apartment in Bronx, although she gave her another option either to stay in her place together or with Manson in Brooklyn. She said that living alone would be scary when you were feeling discomposd.

Since her aunt needed to leave for a week because there was a sudden business, three days later, she came back to live independently in the apartment. It didn't take her too long to decide because she wanted to confine herself better by being all alone—it might be last for a while in time.

She felt as if the world had turned into a gigantic mess without her mom beside her shoulder. This was a pretty frustrating period in her life. Even the smiley neighbor next door, Mr. Swiss Donald had always welcomed her to his door at anytime, but she chose to become the member of anti-social club. Every day, she locked herself inside the apartment and spent her time mostly by sitting on the windowsill while her eyes were staring blankly at the window. Sometimes, she hoped her mother would knock on the door and hugged her warmly like usual—but her mom never showed up.

Her tears flooded on her cheeks, her eyes turned red with eye bags, her skin turned really pale since she forgot to eat and sleep. She was dying from the inside.

Until then, she awoke from her sad reverie when someone knocked on the door. The visitor wasn't anyone she would expect to come at this morning hour. The red hair angel, Marissa dressed formally in brown long coat and came with a bag in her arm.

Cathy sighed at her unexpected arrival, "You don't need to come, please go—"

Marissa held the door strongly before it was closed, and she eyed her firmly, "You will let me come inside."

She was annoyed that the angel had insisted to stay while her heart felt broken at the moment. As soon as they walked to the living room, Cathy kept a distance from her.

"I bring you a lunch box," Marissa showed that bag in chlorine color to her.

"I'm not hungry, you can go now."

The silent atmosphere was uncomfortable for her, especially after she refused that kind offer. At the same time Marissa hissed, the spectrum moved fast around her body to hit Cathy lightly, and the next second, she already found herself sitting in the dining table. It was like a blink of an eye to make her astonished to death. That angelic superpower had scared her pretty well.

Marissa walked normally to the kitchen, "If I say eat, you will eat this food now," she approached her to serve the lunch box at the table. It was a jalapeno beef and calamari. "Look at you, so neglecting yourself."

"I said I'm not hungry, Marissa," she said once again while the feeling of astonishment still hovering in her heart.

She gave her the impression of becoming the substitute mother. Her eyes stared warmly now. "We need you to survive."

Cathy narrowed unsure at her words, "I don't understand."

"Aloise—there's a history that you should learn faster before White Foxes could confront you personally. They might destroy the whole generation of your family—as in forever," she informed her, "You need to come back, being yourself again, then pay a visit to Matilda's Library."

"Who's Matilda?"

"I thought you already went there," Marissa bewildered.

She recalled all the places she had visited in New York and recalled the one that relevant, “Wait, is it near to the antique shop in Manhattan?”

“Exactly,” she said with emerald eyes stared brighter in this dimmed room. “The owner of that place is Matilda Carline, which is one of the Heisler—”

“She’s one of White Foxes?” Cathy snapped worriedly. “Is it a risk to come there?”

“No, she isn’t the member. Matilda doesn’t like war, she choose to live in peace.”

Cathy nodded relieved, “Okay, but you need to help me in there. I don’t know which book to start with.”

Marissa chuckled as she noticed that her soul had awoken. “Then, let’s don’t waste any more time, child.”



The place was the same library she had visited the last time with Josh, only today, she was being accompanied by the beautiful angel. Marissa walked among the huge bookshelves as if this wasn’t her first arrival. She looked enjoying the exploration for some books.

“Don’t you think you come too early today?” The gentle voice of Matilda Carline was coming from the edge of the lobby’s arched wall.

“Morning is better,” Marissa smiled while hugging Cathy’s shoulders, “I bring a young visitor, won’t you mind?”

Matilda looked surprised with her presence. “I didn’t have a chance to know your name when the first time you came with that boy,” subsequently, she thrust her hand for a handshake, Cathy accepted her handshake politely.

“I’m Cathy Charlotte, and the boy is my friend—Josh Kingsley.”

Marissa whispered at that old woman for a second, and Cathy heard her eventually, “She just lost her mother, last Thursday.”

There was a surprising emotion she showed on her face. Matilda stared at her with a deep condolence. “I am very sorry for your loss, child. I’ve never met her in person though.”

“That’s fine,” Cathy said as she tried to hide her glossy eyes in front of them.

The bookworm session was about to start, Marissa guided her to check on a few books under the section of myth and legend. There was one thick book covered in leather-bounded that got her attention. The papyrus papers were so thin and brittle that she needed to be gentle to turn every page. For a minute, she wanted Cathy to take a look at this book.

“The book is unjust from here. In every chapter, you will find a secret symbol that engraved next to the page number.”

Cathy traced the paper with her index finger. There was a small symbol that looked like the one she already knew from the local legend in Austria. “It’s *Triskele* symbol. *Three prominent figures.*”

“Clever, you’ve already learnt that,” Marissa said, “That’s a symbol of guardians, protectors, or even friends who know about the knowledge in the universe and every truth behind every door. Among the royals, they’re known as *the Chandelier Order.*”

Cathy was sure that a year ago, she once heard Elle mentioned about *Chandelier*. She just needed to know more. “What kind of—people are they?”

Marissa turned the next page where the chapter was entitled oddly; *Crashed in the Land of Stigmata*. The illustrations depicted a portrait of some figures in navy blue robes with golden rectangular garments on their sleeves.

Cathy's memory was triggered with the snowy background from that picture. "Elle had showed me the vision of them—the Triskele figures. Are they also referred as the Chandelier Order?"

"You can just call them as Chandelier for short," Marissa informed and smiled at her, "They're the immortal entities, coming to this world as guardians, also messengers. They got to choose which human to be protected in each mission."

"Mission?" Cathy bewildered. "Anyway, on what basis they would choose human?"

"It's not that different from the Totem culture, except that they're formed humanly," she explained, "at least, they would choose the one who has the most similar frequency with them, but again, it depends on the circumstance."

Somehow, Cathy wondered deeply if Marissa or Elle was the member of Chandelier, since knowing that they were also angels. "Are they like—some kind of angel creature?"

She giggled as if the question truly tickling through her skin. "Well, if you think so."

"Are you like—I mean, involve in Chandelier?" Cathy was truly curious.

Marissa smiled mysteriously as if she didn't want to give her a clear answer about it. "Just like you think it is."

The situation was pretty awkward for her when that question sounded stupid or something. Nevertheless, Cathy continued to ask, "Which royals that they are being assigned to?"

"The Aloise," she answered instantly, "from the very first generation, and until now."

"Including me?" Cathy was curious. "Why would demons still chasing after me if House of Aloise having such supernatural guardians?"

“The stones—” she sighed for a while, “we have three kinds; *Sapphire*, *Emerald*, and *Zircon*. There was a long history because of those gifted instruments. Would you mind if I spin a yarn by now?”

“Go on,” Cathy nodded excited to hear the following story.

“Let’s start with the red scorched Zircon. It’s a dangerous stone than any other which could open up the gate of hell,” her voice began to sound like those storytellers in the bonfire session, “in every holy book, it’s described to be existed in the underworld as the enormous fire—savage and heinous,” subsequently, she stared at her with affection, “meanwhile, the green Emerald stone will bring you to the gate of heaven, some says it’s the angel’s gate too,” she kept on explaining while taking another book above the table that she already picked up earlier, “—and the blue Sapphire stone is the most political issue for any entity. All the businesses you can see clearly from there about angel, celestial, Djinn, or even demon. You know it as the realm of Caecus.”

“Why the demons are chasing for those stones?” She couldn’t understand it better, “Aunt Sarah has been keeping the Sapphire with her, and I don’t know for the rest.”

“Because someone has been demanding those demons to do so,” Marissa smiled, but somehow she seemed to know more than what she told her. “The stones are valuable and powerful to be used in this human’s world.”

“Do you know who that is?” Cathy asked curiously.

Marissa could only smile inscrutably at her like there was something undone to be said. The next minute, she showed another brown book to her. It looked obsolete and old.

“This is the secret book about the royals—although this one seems like a private journal,” she murmured.

Cathy peeked at the author's name; *His Holiness Marcus Abbeck*.

"Is he one of the royals?" Cathy asked.

"He wasn't born royal by blood, but he was the most trusted clergyman in the Aloise's empire," she explained.

Cathy felt like she had heard that name being mentioned when her mom and Aunt Sarah had a serious conversation from a long time ago when she went to elementary school. At the same time she recalled that, her heart felt shattered since her mom had gone.

She took the book in her hands for a while and found Triskele symbol on the bottom of every page. In this book, the symbol embossed with gold color. She bent down her neck and stared closer to the current page. There were sentences that got her attention even though she couldn't understand those phrase yet;

The golden pavers once belong to the moon, but the sun deny. Here after Thou would become the alternate of the past midnight. Here to reminisce the yore.

Those who seek forgiveness are begging to break from the curse. Through the crystal eyes, the sky would lapse into the flint blaze since the karmic has descended in one night.

The death would chase after the Zircon. The angels are there to fetch the Sapphire. The only Emerald would become the burial. May the reincarnation would halt for the devil's vengeance.

—*H.H Marcus Abbeck, 1497s, Ireland.*

This book was written four years after Princess Kathleen died. The clergyman had written something important to be contemplated. And yet, Cathy wondered why this history happened to cause everything so complicated, especially to

think this book was written in Ireland when Aloise's hometown was Austria.

Just then, she heard the sound of heels was coming. It was Matilda, checking on her, glancing at the book she held. "Have you found anything interesting?"

"Yes," Cathy tried to endure her tremendous excitement in this learning process about her royal family since she wanted to act as if she felt composed. "Are there more books about House of Aloise, especially the one that was written by the royal?"

Marissa and Matilda smiled inscrutably at each other.

Nonetheless, she felt like she truly needed to question her wondering thought again, "Oh, and why this book was written in Ireland instead of Austria?"

"You are sure a real scholar," Matilda murmured impressed that the girl at her age would bother to even learn about a history. Afterward, she paused for a while to answer her, "Father Marcus was a great man. He was born and grew up in Ireland with Celtic art," as she kept on explaining, her wrinkled face was showed, "He moved after Queen Stacia of Ireland married to King Hendrick of Austria. They had two well-known children—Kathleen and Francesca. Father Marcus was their sovereign's minister and also a spiritual leader in Ireland."

"Was Queen Stacia born originally Irish?" She wondered.

Matilda nodded and said, "As for your information, the descendants of Aloise family are half Irish."

"After that, complicated things happened when Prince Heisler came into their empire," Marissa added empathically.

"I still know so little even I've read *Emperor of Souls*," Cathy sighed as she felt unsatisfied with her lack of knowledge.

“Ah, you still have that book, don’t you?” Marissa asked since they were once met in the Austrian library because of that book.

“Yes—” she was wondering about the author of that book for a second. “How’s Carl Dalton these days? Have you met him again?”

“He’s been living like usual, although we haven’t seeing each other lately,” Marissa answered her cheerfully. “Shall we continue?”

“What about the place you’ve mentioned the last time?” Matilda reminded her.

Marissa looked hesitant, but Cathy’s eyes shot her a demanding look, “Well, there’s a private place where Princess Francesca once used it as her refuge, and until now, it has become the real hometown for the Aloise. It’s Morizza Chapel.”

Cathy remembered it when she was in Caecus realm, and the Chiromancer showed her a glimpse of vision about that chapel. “I want to go there, can’t I?”

“Of course, it’s just a matter of time,” she said welcomingly, “You should get to know with your own family members.”

“Great, I am dying to know,” Cathy muttered.

“Actually, I should have told you when I first arrived in your apartment, but your mother seemed overprotective, so I just went with the little thing first,” Marissa felt guilty though.

“Like the antique shop and this library. That’s just fine,” she agreed helplessly.

Cathy was the kind of person who tried to accept for anything that would come in her life even though it might look complicated, but deep in her heart, she wanted to cry so badly, and even in this second.

Later on, these women recommended Cathy to read some books before she left the library in the afternoon.



A month later, campus was closed during the winter recess. All the people she knew in Fordham University were having a holiday. Some went overboard to their hometown, and fewer still stayed in New York City.

That was the third week of December when she received a surprising phone call from White Foxes' most crucial granddaughter. Cathy wouldn't know it felt insane to hear her usual sarcastic tone while she just had a lonely daydreaming in the apartment. She resented the sudden circumstance with the memories about her mom that were still attaching on her mind like glue. Therefore, Eleanor's sudden offer didn't pretty much help her to go further, even though she might reconsider her offer to be a tour guide in Austria. It wasn't that she suspected her to have a hidden agenda or anything, it was just she wasn't sure of what she felt at the moment—either to go or stay.

This was a confusing decision for her. Cathy wouldn't ask for Aunt Sarah about Morizza Chapel since she seemed tremendously busied as usual, especially she still hid the same secrets, just like her mother.

A few minutes after that, Alex called her to say that he had been missing her these days. Again, she felt the enormous emotion to receive such surprising phone calls in the morning. He got her attention when he said the reason beyond his interest toward the Volka.

An hour later, she finally agreed to meet him in the Central Park. They walked and talked together while eating ice cream—it was his treat.

“So what is it about the Volka and your family?” She wanted to continue their previous conversation on the phone.

“I just remember recently that my dad is an old acquaintance to their tribe. When I was a kid, they gave my dad a royal painting as a friendship gift,” he said while they were walking in the park. “That’s the detail I forgot.”

“You might subconsciously remember it, but something was blocking your mind,” Cathy baffled.

“You said that as if you had the same experience,” he chuckled.

She shrugged unsure, “It could be.”

He followed her to sit on the park’s bench and they enjoyed the green view together. Somehow, they felt contented to stay side by side, like the time and space was only existed for them.

“You want to see the painting?” He asked while taking out his phone from the pocket of his black trouser.

Cathy observed his gentle hands on that touch screen phone. He showed her a portrait painting of a young woman in green gown. She surely felt familiar with that beautiful figure. Actually, he had once showed her after they went to Matilda’s library.

“I don’t know who she is, but I found her captivating,” he commented. “My mom said it’s a doppelganger, because the Volka saved the original painting somewhere out there.”

“She’s—” Cathy was speechless for a moment, “I saw a different painting of her.”

“Oh, really,” Alex murmured. “Where did you see it?”

Cathy couldn’t say it out loud but she echoed the words on her mind, *Her name is Princess Francesca de Moriz von Aloise.*

Later, they talked for a while about what they would do in this winter holiday. It felt like she did the conversation with a

really close friend who seemed to know her most vulnerable side.

The feeling of strong and intense connection, it seemed emotional for a while, and there was a similar sensation of being safe like she was with Josh.

And in here, she found a good company.



Alex gave her a ride, and she arrived to her apartment at four in the afternoon. She was all alone again in the apartment with the solitude environment that could make her drowning into a deep reverie.

After she served herself a tasteful coffee, she sat in the windowsill to gaze at the city view. Nothing could disturb her mind for a moment. After all the emotional sorrow she had perceived, now was the time she could be confident to recall some good memories. At least, the last time she had an amazing time was with Josh and Jordan.

In the late November, they went together in Syracuse Carnival. She almost forgot her sadness because the vacation was full of laugh and joy. She was grateful to have such great friends like them. The two whimsical boys, Josh and Jordan were coming along to the crowded carnival. Even though they were fighting the whole time, somehow, their behavior had irritated her, but it also felt as if she watched a live show of comedy.

In the afternoon, they met Petunia who seemed to come alone in there. She acted cold and unfriendly, unlike the last time they met in campus. She even refused their offer to play along and left hurriedly. The three of them were bewildered with her changeable attitude. It was like a struck of lightning. She was mysterious in her own way.

Before midnight, the three of them went to the fortune teller booth. It was a ridiculous momentum for the boys, because they engaged themselves with the old woman who admitted to be the merchant as well as the oracle inside the booth. When Jordan wanted to buy a book about witchy stuff, that old woman grasped his hands and yelled scarily to read him that he had a gypsy blood running inside his vein. She gave him the creeps, and surely, Josh made fun of him to say that he was a nerd.

A few minutes later, they found a robotic fortune teller machine. The robot was actually a man dressed in Arabian costume. He chattered in a heavy voice and kind of gave anyone the creeps.

Jordan dropped a penny in the slot before he hit the red button, and then, the machine dispensed a card for him; “You shouldn’t eat too much granola, it’s a bad salutation for the future.”

He was astonishingly scared that this machine and that psychic grandma had a true reading about him. He said that he really ate granola in the morning. Even worse, Josh kept on calling him a nerdy.

When it was her turn, the card was stuck on the slot machine, but gladly Jordan helped to take it out. Nonetheless, she stood agape and her face turned pale when the card was in her hand. The boys looked at her wonderingly, but Josh was the one who looked more worried. She read it for them; “Your future will be eaten by epidemic, it neither last nor strangle, but it will be death end. Keep your faith under the stars.”

Josh calmed her and kept on saying that a robot could go wrong sometimes. He didn’t want her to be stressed out, but it was too late, she was already trembled.

Later, they spent their next hour to visit the bonfire where everyone danced and looked happy. Jordan busied to look over his handy cam again since he was recording everything in here, meanwhile, Josh returned with hamburgers and soda cans. They sat together while gazing at the crowded view under the dark night.

In the middle of everyone danced romantically with their companion when the country song was being played, Cathy was still thinking about the card. Josh knew that she still felt restless. He tried to entertain her with some stupid jokes, it worked a little though. Afterward, he asked her to dance together like everyone else. She felt the joy throughout his great vibe. It reminded her that she would always cherish him in her heart as a great friend.

They had eaten burger, danced, and laughed out loud together. They played along until midnight and had a great bonfire party in there. At least, she would remember this vacation so well in her memory.

Thirty minutes had passed since she paused to recall her memory. She started to have a normal life after a month of depression. She was wide awake now to cook her own meal in the kitchen and to be able to watch some of television shows.

Later, she went inside her bedroom to organize her books and clothes that were messed up on the floor. Everything seemed stagnant since her mother died a month ago. It took her for a while to finish cleaning up, and then she could sit down on her small bed while her eyes were exploring the bookshelf that she had organized neatly. Just for a second, she noticed a strange existence of white envelope between those thick books. She sat closer against the bookshelf which located exactly beside the bed.

Cathy opened the envelope that contained with a paper that was written with old-fashioned handwriting style which she had always recognized. At first, she hesitated to read it, but her curiosity was tremendous;

Dear my love;

Monday, 29th Oct 2012

If you have this letter on your hand now, that means I'm not with you.

You're my only child in this world. I'd like you to know the reason behind my hesitation to give you a privilege of understanding either about the unseen world or our family.

It's my fault, I know. It's better late than never.

The days I've been through weren't much good to tell. I'd rather tell you the upside down story that I've been discussing with Sarah lately. She should be telling you something important about our ancestors after I'm gone. Just ask her right away.

The Aloise family still exists for three generations. One of them is my mother's older sister. She has two daughters, but one of them died. They are all living in the Morizza Chapel, well, it's kind of look small from the outside, but it's really a big building from inside. That's like a shelter and holy place for us since Princess Francesca de Moriz von Aloise lived in there. The place located in a small part of Austria, far away from people's eyes.

I know you might also ask about the abandoned castle in the forest. It was a long story to write down on this paper about why the descendants don't make any changes to the castle. Worse, it's still missing until this second you are reading my letter, right?

Oh, and you have two cousins—girl and boy whose parents already died, their mother was the death daughter of my mother's older sister. They will usually come to the chapel in holiday.

About Carl Dalton, he isn't a relative by blood, although you knew already from him, and he has always been a good heritage keeper in our family.

Okay, once you come inside the chapel, you'll have new experience, maybe unexpected event, because I'll tell you a secret—there's one forbidden room near the triangle window where the sun is usually striking into eyes. They called it the Memorial room. If one of the Aloise found you standing right in front of the door, they would sue you to death. Have courage, because I need you to see something sacred in there. Ask Sarah for the key, she knows for sure. After that, you'll understand more about our family.

Last thing—you should notice the clue from the red journal that I gave you yesterday. There's my handwritten map to the chapel.

I never really hide anything from you, my love. I always want to tell you the whole history, although Marissa has been giving you a hand recently.

I give you my all. You'll be safe along the rock path. Don't trust those who walk in the dark, you can only count on the angels.

With a note—never lose your faith.

Love always;

Haile, your mom.

Cathy was tremendously astonished until her eyes almost popped out and she felt the burning hysteria. Her lips curved, her mind conflicted, her mood agitated.

"I can't believe this," she muttered restless.

She was even infuriated that Aunt Sarah never told her about the newest information of what she should have known—ever.

The clock was surely never stopped ticking. She ran to grab her mom's red journal above her study desk. Her fingers were tracing the pages hurriedly. There were some folded brown papers—the maps. She looked at the maps with no good understanding of the language.

At that instant, she remembered the sudden offer from Eleanor Heisler in this morning, and she realized that Matilda

was Eleanor's grandaunt. She grabbed her cellphone to call her immediately.

"*What is it?*" Her voice sounded arrogantly like it wasn't the right time to call.

"I know this is insane, but I agree with your help."

"*Let me guess, you are helpless and pathetic now,*" she mocked her though, it was undeniably annoying for Cathy, but she didn't have any good choice for a moment.

"Maybe yes," she said on the phone, "So, do we really need to go by tomorrow morning?"

"*Of course!*" Eleanor insisted. "*I'll buy two tickets since I know that you are poor.*"

"Let me ask you once again; can you speak German?"

"*You've asked that already. FYI, it is Deutsch,*" she even pronounced it on the phone. "*What's your plan, anyway?*"

"I found a map to the Morizza chapel, so unfortunate that I don't understand the language," Cathy said helplessly, "you have to help me with this."

"*I know that you're too pathetic, so I've called earlier,*" she muttered.

"Alright, see you in the airport," Cathy hung up with a heart thumped hardly since she felt nervous for this overseas journey. Nevertheless, she wouldn't be able to sleep well tonight.

22

SUDDEN DECISION

ELEANOR HEISLER



HER BLUE EYES STRUCK by the morning sun, her body leaned down on her red suitcase against the view of LaGuardia Airport. She waited for the uncertainty since her aunt didn't pick up her phone call, and she didn't know if this would be a good idea to leave a voice message. Hadley had gone without saying anything since the event of Invisible Project public speech.

After the beep, she recorded her voice message; *"Hey, sorry for calling on your home number. I know this is stupid, but I'll go a few days ahead to Austria and I'll meet Grand aunt Matilda in there. I think this might be the only way to get the right answer about my death parents. You know I've been haunting by the worst nightmare in my life,"* she sighed and then deeply breathed, *"Anyway, why haven't you answered my call these past few weeks? I don't know what you're mad at me for, but Auntie, please call me back."*

Her heels adhered on the pavement stone and her eyes stared straightly at the Airport after the beep sound was ended. Eleanor Heisler had made herself ready.



She could feel that boy was gazing at her sophisticated appearance in blue dress covered with a long red coat that matched with her red nails, and her whitey long legs showed like snow in a pair of sharp black heels, and she appeared with her usual middle parted bangs and half pinned up platinum-blonde hairstyle.

But that boy with brown eyes clung in annoyance rather than admiration. She could even hear him whispering to Cathy Charlotte.

“What is it wrong with you?” He rubbed his hair roughly, he looked infuriated. “You’re kidding me.”

“I need her help since she is related to the whole family thing of mine,” Cathy said.

“But I don’t trust her,” he argued.

“You don’t need to, just trust me, because sometime I have to take a risk to get what I should know,” she said with a great faith.

“You’re out of your mind,” he said disappointedly.

When Eleanor took a good look at his plaid clothes and blue jeans, she just realized that he was Josh Kingsley. She approached them when they were hugging each other, that scene made her even loathed them more since she thought that love was overrated.

“This isn’t like a student trip, don’t get to the cheesy part,” she mocked them.

Josh seemed to endure his annoyance toward her sarcasm, although he did the longing farewell again with Cathy as if they would miss each other for a thousand year.

On the other side, Cathy had brought her black suitcase, and she dressed neatly like a traveller in brown coat and black jeans since she was totally ready to go.

They went ahead to the boarding pass. At that time, Cathy started to make a friendly conversation with her. “So I’ve read on the book, does the Heisler really part of the France descendants?”

Eleanor kept walking toward one of the stewardess who requested each of airline ticket to all the passengers, she didn’t look back at Cathy but managed to answer, “Actually, it’s only in White Foxes’ family, my grandfather is a native France, but I just spent a little time in there.”

She asked again curiously when they got into the hallway, “Can you speak French too?”

“I don’t really speak French, but primarily I am a native speaker of German since I spent my whole childhood time in there, and then I moved to New York and I’ve learnt what English is.”

Cathy smiled at her, “It’s good to know.”

She was eventually felt odd that someone would want to ask her so directly like that. Nevertheless, they had the flight trip together with the journey was on the edge of their nerves.



The long hours had finally ended as they landed on Vienna International Airport.

Cathy gazed at the starry night, and as the air swung on her cheeks, she recalled her first memory of being with Elle in this land. The smell around the space was contagious to make her feel dreamy, but she needed to wake up since Eleanor seemed rushing to call out for a taxi. Even after they got one, she yelled like a lady with no manner at the taxi driver to drive quickly.

At the middle of the trip, Cathy surprised to realize that they headed to the path of Wachau Valley.

“Where are we going, Eleanor?”

She sighed annoyingly and gave her no clear information, but Cathy insisted to get her answer. “We’re going to my childhood house.”

At the time, the taxi headed to the avenue that surrounded with many of pine trees, which was a different path that she never knew before. This was a distinctive path for the only house on the corner of the wood. There was no sign board or anything in particular to know the name of this place. Until then, the taxi stopped in front of the gate of the cabin house.

“Is this the place?” Cathy murmured.

“Welcome to the planetary aberration, polarization, or whatever you want to call this house,” Eleanor said as she staggered to pull the gate.

The front yard seemed dark and dump. The only lamplight that turned on was at the terrace where the wall covered with green vines.

Eleanor knocked harshly at the gold doorknob with knocking ring. After quite a few minutes, there was a thirty-year-old male with shaved beard peeped behind the curtain beside the door. He seemed well-wary to open the door for them. He squinted at these girls, until his eyes popped widely to recognize Eleanor. He looked as if he wanted to have a jubilation dancing to welcome her and he spoke in German which Cathy couldn’t understand even a single word.

“Shut up, I’m tired,” she hushed him like the way she always treated everyone with her rude manner.

They walked into the warm foyer where the kitchen located next to the entrance door.

“Young Lady, you have a friend from New York,” he muttered in English now as his eyes stared boldly at Cathy.

“Oh, I’ve forgot about Cathy,” she muttered peevishly, subsequently she glanced at her to introduce that man, “this is Sebastian, the housekeeper. Anything you need, just ask him.”

“You speak English?” Cathy bewildered at him.

Sebastian was still narrowing his crystal blue eyes at her as if he was suffocating to breath, while Cathy thought to herself that it was rare to meet a servant whose eyes were amazing.

Eleanor annoyed at his attitude, “Say something, Bash.”

He didn’t smile at all and stood frozenly against the stranger’s presence.

“We’re not seeing each other for about eleven years. I came here last year, but he didn’t stay in the winter, so technically, we’ve never met but now,” Eleanor murmured fast that she sounded like gargling.

Cathy said only a word, “Oh.”

“Well, what can you say about the abandoned child from the slaughter victim?” Eleanor muttered without even care what he would feel against her sarcastic words. “He made himself as the only survival.”

Certainly, Sebastian muted himself in a hard way.

Cathy was astonished about that story and she felt responsible against this uncomfortable atmosphere, “Don’t you think it’s too much to say that?”

Eleanor chuckled sarcastically, “It seems he doesn’t think so.”

“Young Lady, please excuse me,” although he felt hurt, he still ran to grab their suitcases quickly to serve them.

Eleanor bulged out at him in annoyance, “Whatever you do.”

Cathy was the one who felt awkward for this situation.

The next hour, they slept tightly and would get up in the morning to find a better thing to do tomorrow.



The clock turned at eight forty when Cathy walked downstairs to meet Eleanor who sat on the sofa. The fireplace echoed a crackling fire sound in front of her.

The breakfast menu was chicken cannelloni for the ladies. Sebastian had a great cooking skill since he lived here for a long time. But this time, Eleanor grimaced at her plate.

“Can you taste the sweet pineapple than this pasta?” She peevd as she mentioned that absurd analogy for him. He still stood beside her coffee table. “It’s too sweet, Bash!”

“Forgive me, Young Lady,” he didn’t dare to look into her eyes.

“Anyway, has anyone visited this house before me?” Eleanor asked him when she referred about her family.

Sebastian glanced at her and took a bow, “None of them.”

“Glad, then,” she was relieved.

“But, Young Lady,” he seemed nervous to say it, “Lady Marie has been asking me to scout on you. I just think that you need to know—”

“What are you—my personal bodyguard?” As Eleanor shouted, he was taken aback. “Good thing that you are being honest with me.”

After all, Eleanor noticed that he still had a crush on her for a long time. It was surely uncomfortable for her.

Cathy walked toward them to observe the current situation and sat next to her. So suddenly, when Eleanor saw her walked closer, she dismissed him right away.

“Alright, so I need to go to the Chapel, and I thought I should show you this,” Cathy said as she showed the handwritten map from her mom’s red journal. “Help me with the language in this map.”

Eleanor stared bewilderedly at the map. “How bizarre,” she sounded cursing at the unreadable map in her hands. “This is ridiculous, right?”

“What do you mean?” She asked confusedly.

“Okay, first thing, I think the map is referring to one secret location, which this map called it as *Durnstein Town*, which is inside Wachau Valley,” Eleanor sighed heavily as she tried hard to read the old-fashioned handwriting. “I like the *Marille* they have.”

“What?”

“Marille is an apricot in English.”

Cathy nodded as she learned that one Germanic word. “Awesome, but what the map is trying to tell about that place?”

Eleanor paused to narrow her eyes at the handwriting which she read at the note section. “It says about the myth, magic, and some clues about Aloise.”

“Perhaps the castle isn’t that far from this house,” Cathy murmured to herself.

“Excuse me?” She seemed to be bothered by that assumption. “You’re not mentioning any castle in the beginning of our deal.”

“My mom wrote it on her journal that the Aloise is also staying inside a castle,” Cathy was a bit conflicted with this conclusion and there was no picture of the building, “Is it the chapel?”

“Are you trying to make your own sense?” Eleanor grimaced.

Cathy ignored her mocking moment, and she focused with other question instead, “What do you know about Durnstein?”

She glanced at her while having a spoon of pasta. “First, a good Marille, and second, the magical town I supposed. They

have left a lot of ruins from the ancient building,” afterward, she seemed hesitant to say the next thing, “I heard that Volka society used to live there—before my grandma murdered them all.”

“Your grandma did what?” As she heard that, she almost choked to death while drinking her warm tea.

That truth was beyond scary. She couldn’t say a word.

“Alright, let’s don’t waste time,” Eleanor stood and didn’t finish her breakfast. She went to take her red coat that was hung on the wall. Nonetheless, both of the girls were wearing the same coat as yesterday.

Finally, they booked a taxi again since there was no car in the garage, and the day had just begun.

23

THE VOLKA'S HERITAGE

CATHY CHARLOTTE



THEY WENT TO THE MIDDLE road of Vienna which was the biggest dream city throughout Austria. The beautiful view around the town felt homey, but they couldn't fully experience the trip since the taxi they got in was moving slower than a camel.

"Would you shut up?" Eleanor glared infuriatedly at the taxi driver.

He kept mumbling in Germanic language, and Cathy doubted if that would sound pleasant to be translated. "What is he saying?"

"He said he won't drive us to Durnstein," Eleanor snapped, "It's a frigid real mystical place after Black Forest according to his local culture—that's his abstinence."

"If he won't drive us, then how are we going to—"

She had not finished her words when Eleanor shouted peevishly, "He is going to leave us in midtown," her mouth worked faster than her mind. "How ridiculous this day!"

The next minute, they got out from the taxi and found themselves stood in front of some small old buildings and a

really small aisle which only fitted for two walkers to pass through it.

After the taxi went away, Cathy stared at her in disbelief for her arrogant attitude against almost everyone in her life, included that taxi driver. “I know you’re born royal, but doesn’t mean you could turn into a princess at this time. We need to stay focus.”

Eleanor chuckled certainly, “What are you anyway? Are you even a royal?” She couldn’t stop to be sarcastic. “Oh, right. I just remember that you’re part of the so-called important Aloise.”

“What does that supposed to mean?” Cathy wondered annoyingly at her, and later, she shook her head in disbelief again.

Nevertheless, after they walked forward to the end of the aisle, they found the ancient environment under the bright blue sky. The cream buildings were dominating the space that consisted of traditional shops and residence houses. The pedestrian zone was reserved in the middle of the town—no vehicles allowed, except for bicycles. Also, there were many flowers and green plants in every corner of the buildings that made this place looked like a small version of paradise. This was midtown.

“What are we really looking in here?” Eleanor asked, grimaced.

“There must be something that my mom wanted me to know besides about the Volka,” Cathy said.

“Hell, just go straight,” Eleanor walked ahead as if she knew where to go from here.

They went side by side to go out of town, seeing the view of small houses across Danube River. It wasn’t that far from the midtown as they found a lot of ancient buildings. It seemed like

an abandoned village. The effect of mist around the space had frightened both of them.

“Are you sure this is the Volka’s place?” Cathy wasn’t assured.

“I might be wrong,” Eleanor murmured as they walked together inside a huge bamboo gate.

Their eyes bulged out astonishingly against the horrified view.

The smoke and ashes were remained around the bamboo roofs, with the houses looked half burnt out. The place looked desolate. There was no one left, except for the grayish smoke of the death bonfire that was remained on the center of this village as if someone was there for a minute before they got arrived.

“Isn’t there anyone from town who should have noticed at this scene?” Cathy asked wonderingly. “Where are the police?”

Although they didn’t see even a single corpse on the ground, they had a strong feeling of condolence toward this abandoned village.

“Don’t you know—” for a moment, Eleanor trembled alone, remembering something that might be related to her family, “my family empower the darkness from their witch ancestors. They could hide the kind of scene like this just with a blink of an eye.”

“Eleanor, I don’t know what to say,” Cathy felt the agony for her, and she also wasn’t sure about the Heisler’s ancestry, “this is beyond everything we know.”

“They are monsters!” She screamed out. The birds flew high to the trees as her voice echoed loudly in the sky.

Cathy was still speechless.

“Yeah, maybe she has demanded her black suit men on me right now, and maybe that’s why Hadley distance herself from me,” she sounded depressed.

“Can you stop it?” Cathy felt empathy for her, that frustration could kill her too. “Your depression will not give us a clear solution to this journey. We don’t have any clue yet.”

“Don’t you ever feel stressed out?” She asked angrily.

“I do—especially when my mom died.”

Their eyes locked to each other with sympathy.

“Good,” her voice still trembled, trying to understand everything.

“Wait, look,” Cathy pointed out her finger at the white building with the only ceramic roof tiles around here.

They stared at each other knowing what to do next. They went there with a brave heart.

The small building seemed like a museum from the inside. There were many ancient pictures of black and white that hung on the wall—some people in the pictures dressed in servant gown, some dress in chain armor, and fewer dressed like a gypsy. Their name was written on each wooden tag below each frame. They were all the Volka’s ancestors.

In the hall room, they saw a serial of antique stuff that being perpetuated behind the glass boxes.

“They didn’t burn this place?” Eleanor asked herself wonderingly to make Cathy instantly glanced at her in astonishment. Thus, she added quickly, “I mean White Foxes. I’ve heard that my grandma has sent her men in here.”

“Let’s move and see what we can find more,” Cathy said.

As soon as they got separated from one room to another, Eleanor finally found something in the end of the hall room. “Hey, look what I’ve found!”

Cathy ran quickly to see her in the room full of paintings with golden frames. This one was a section that specifically honored the Volka relationship with the royals. She saw one large landscape painting in front of Eleanor. It depicted Princess Kathleen in a pure white gown among the warriors in chain armor. The old man that stood beside Princess Kathleen seemed so close to her—he had a trustworthy face as if he was her sidekick.

“The painting made in 1489’s—a year before Queen Stacia died,” Cathy read the wooden tag below the frame, “Princess Kathleen was the highest prior to be chosen as the next queen after her mother.”

“Oh my god—” Eleanor glanced back and forth against the painting and her face, “I can’t believe you both share the same face. I thought I’m hallucinating.”

“We’re not really similar,” Cathy denied immediately.

“Whatever you say,” Eleanor ignored her and stepped further to see other painting behind them. “Isn’t this Prince Heisler?”

For a while their eyes popped out bewildering to observe that portrait painting. The prince looked mesmerizingly handsome with crystal green eyes, golden hair, dressed in white coat, and stood charmingly.

“Don’t you think he kind of look like your uncle—Joe Marshall?” Cathy wondered.

Eleanor was agape, and said, “Only this one has a longer hair.”

Subsequently, they read at the tag below the frame which had no particular description about his history. Again, Cathy read it out loud, “Prince Carmellot von Heisler died in 1495’s caused by a demonic accident. His marriage with Princess

Francesca de Moriz von Aloise was off the record until the day he died beyond the war against the unseen.”

“Do they think this is a fiction?” Eleanor smirked. “What’s with the war with the unseen, huh?”

“I don’t know. Do you think the Volka made up this story?” Cathy asked rhetorically.

Eleanor chuckled as if this was a joke, “What kind of demonic accident that got him killed in the battlefield, huh?” She walked forward, still feeling disgusting toward all the information that had been stored in this building. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

Cathy went certainly silent since she didn’t have any idea against her question. Afterward, she ignored her sarcastic attitude and went to see around the glass boxes again. There was an open book that seemed very old, written with italic handwriting;

The world is under a magnificent possession of darkness. If the unseen that matters, humans will not coming along in a bizarre time, because the tranquility is the only objection. None of us left with happiness after the tremendous incident in 1493’s. Our queen has died, our castle has burned down. No one won but lost. We almost lost an imperial blood, which we worship after our God. We will decry the darkness where through the society we will spin a yarn to our children—never lose your faith, and fight the evil kind.

In the name of our most honorable condolence that will last forever:

King Hendrick of Austria.

Queen Stacia of Ireland.

Queen Kathleen of Austria.

Princess Francesca of Austria.

May the angels stay along in their afterlife and in our days.

"I couldn't read that without being breathless," Eleanor muttered while crossing arms behind her back.

"Me neither," she agreed.

"I guess this place is bullshit, the Volka might be dead by now. Let's go—"

"How can you tell?" Cathy asked in disbelief. "Leaving the trace behind is odd enough."

"Do I look like I would know the answer?" Eleanor chuckled peevishly. "It's not like they are being careless to handle something like this, and my grandma might be trying to evacuate this museum"

They were silent.

"What if the black suit men you've said, have been watching over us?" Cathy felt the eerie on her back.

Eleanor sighed, and said, "As long as we don't see them hanging around, we're free to move."



They spent a little morning time sitting at the coffee shop in midtown. They were the only visitors at the time.

The waitress had a great skill to brew black coffee so quickly. Although it was a cup of black coffee that Eleanor ordered, Cathy was the one who looked impressed at that view.

After their order had arrived on the table, a huge curiosity came across into her mind, so Cathy started asking her, "How did your family find Sebastian as a servant?"

"It was in the winter, he was lost, and luckily my grandma found him dragging a bag alone in the road from her way back to the cabin house," Eleanor told her, "She thought he has

muteness disorder. He didn't talk at all, until my grandma gave him a spell mantra six months later. She found out he was just afraid to talk," she chuckled pitifully for him, "of course he won't talk about his scary past, but you don't play a selective mutism with my grandma, she would know."

"So, what really happened to him?" Cathy was curious.

"Someone slaughtered the whole villagers and burned down the place where his family lived. Sebastian was the only one who survived," she said and stared boldly at her. "Actually, I haven't born yet when he started living in the house. He was like ten years old or something."

"Your grandma has a heart of her own, her kindness for the boy," Cathy was impressed, although the story was slightly hard to believe since everyone knew about the evilness of White Foxes. Somehow, Cathy remembered his figure that looked too good to be a servant. It made sense that he was a lost boy.

Fifteen minutes had passed. They started to walk out through midtown and found themselves engaged with the flowery view and harmonious residence.

Eleanor bought a pack of cigarette at the mini market next to that coffee shop. When she pulled out a lighter and lit the cigarette in her mouth, Cathy bulged out at her.

"What?" Eleanor snapped. "Is there something wrong to smoke here?"

It took her a second to answer since she was taken aback by her lady manner. "It's just—you're a girl."

"The whole thing is stressing me out," she snapped again.

"Is it about this trip?" Cathy asked.

She shook her head disagreed. "About my family—and yours."

The conversation continued as they walked out through the park, watching people come and go.

"You can't stay in my house tomorrow," Eleanor made her astonished with the news. "Sebastian said that White Foxes will be arrived tomorrow morning. They know that I'm here."

"Where am I supposed to stay then?" Cathy was conflicted immediately. "Are you going to afford a room of motel for me too?"

"I know your financial problem, really poor. So, I'll lend you money," she said mockingly at her face, that was pretty insolent manner.

"Honestly, I don't know where to go," she muttered pathetically, "Maybe *Marissa* can help me—"

"That red hair woman seems familiar to me," Eleanor murmured as she saw a slender figure from afar suddenly.

Cathy followed her gaze to see the only woman dressed in black gown among the pedestrians. She surprised and felt excited, although she had prayed for her presence, it was really unexpected; *Marissa the Angel*.

She approached both of the young ladies.

"Hello, kids," her feminine voice was so gentle and warm. She stared at them, and acted defensively at Eleanor.

"Do you know Eleanor Heisler?" Cathy asked her.

"Well, I believe we've met before—" Marissa held back her smile, "So, she is your friend now."

It seemed that the young lady didn't respect anyone in town, including the one in front of her. Eleanor chuckled sarcastically at them, "Not exactly."

Cathy felt annoyed against her behavior that wasn't nice at all. She didn't want to ruin the atmosphere, thus she ignored her for a minute to get back at Marissa.

“I’m just thinking about you, I can’t believe you’re here,” Cathy murmured helplessly. “I need a place to stay and hide from White Foxes. Please help me, Marissa.”

“It’s just the right time. You need to see the place, don’t you remember?” Marissa stared into her tired brown eyes.

Her mind wandered confusingly about it, “Is it a place of—”

“Morizza Chapel. We need to go now.”

At the time she thought worriedly of how to get her suitcase, Eleanor shouted at her that Sebastian the housekeeper would send out her belongings to the chapel soon. Nevertheless, Cathy got to stay focused for the prettiest encounter she would have. It was the right time.

24

THE DEMON'S HOUSE

ELEANOR HEISLER



SHE HEARD A NOISY SOUND at the edge of the foyer. As soon as she walked out from the living room, she saw Sebastian busied taking their belongings to their bedrooms, and she also found there were only three members that came to the cabin house; her grandma, Aunt Sofia, and Uncle Marshall.

“Look at you, what a brat!” Lady Marie yelled at her. “How could you come without us?”

“Why would I need your permission?” She asked defiantly while her eyes still kept locking on the door and waiting for her other aunt to arrive. Eleanor disappointed that Hadley wasn’t coming along, and there was still no news from her.

“She’s not here,” her grandma could read her mind, “Hadley has returned to Florida.”

“And anyone?” Eleanor wondered.

“Other members will be staying in France for a while with *dad*,” Sofia explained, and she referred him as Eleanor’s grandfather.

Her aunt didn’t seem to say everything clearly, and her face looked worrying about something. Eleanor hated to

suspect them like a spy, but her family was always gone hideous for anything.

“Grandfather is sick, and—” she muttered. “Are we really going to stay here without everyone?”

She felt that there was something missing in this context. It seemed something was in the air.

Lady Marie sat on the sofa with a newspaper on her hands, she spoke then, “My dear Sebastian, make a good coffee for me, please.”

Meanwhile, Eleanor was still stood frozen at the same spot, staring annoyingly at the presence of her family.

“What have you been doing lately, my princess?” Her uncle asked her with a handsome smile. His charismatic face just sparked her memory of the painting of Prince Carmellot. They were like twins.

“Just sightseeing around,” she answered. “Why would the others change their holiday plan?”

“Because *Mr. Auben de Clure* misses his hometown—totally,” her uncle spoke so confident that it made her assured that something went wrong. Also, she never even once had heard him calling her grandfather properly, unlike Aunt Sofia and Hadley that always called him as their dad.

Eleanor muttered, “This holiday will turn out so lame.”

“Don’t worry, my dear. Your incredible uncle is here for you,” he hugged her shoulder and kissed her forehead like a little kid.

She pushed him exasperatedly and left to lock herself alone in a bedroom.



In the next two hours, she was accidentally overhearing her grandma talking on the phone when she was about to walk downstairs.

It sounded like a conversation with one of the people who was in charge for the Invisible Project. On the phone, Lady Marie demanded the team to investigate the case again by coming directly to the place.

Somehow, Eleanor assured that the one who talked on the phone was Chantel Herron. Her grandma mentioned something related to the witchcraft experiment. She was surely astonished with the idea that Detective Chantel might track the lost castle through the very crazy way. It was like a hideous idea. They believed in a dark art.

Lady Marie even mentioned that the police was already taken aback with that improper procedure for involving paranormal way, and some agreed without questioning any further. She already ordered for some tents to be built in the forest. The schedule was set.

Eleanor stood agape in the staircase. She felt dizzy after overhearing her grandmother's craziest plan—the team of Invisible Project would arrive soon in Austria.



It took her no time to call out for Cathy. She told her everything about her grandmother's plan.

Gladly at the time, Cathy already had done preparing her belongings to stay in Morizza Chapel, so she could accompany Eleanor for their next trip. She was being told on the phone that something danger might be happening around the corner. Eleanor felt necessary to find the way out.

The next fifteen minutes, they met again in midtown.

“What is the thing that you told me about?” Cathy asked.

“There’s a myth about this stone that could prevent the evilness from happening—” she started explaining to her, “My grandma has an old friend in Vienna. I think she still has that *Emerald stone*.”

Cathy narrowed her eyes as she remembered the story about that stone from Marissa. Some people called it the key to the angel’s gate. She wondered if that could be true—the stone was saved in this dream land.

“I thought the legend told people that the stone has gone missing. Are you sure about it?”

Eleanor nodded assertively, “So, let’s go.”

They went to Vienna City with taxi. It took a while to go there with a traffic jam. Until then, they got out in a wealthy district that full with mansion buildings. Eleanor went ahead to the white mansion. The gate was unlocked that they could walk inside so freely. The front yard was huge, the garden filled with a lot of roses and a fountain.

The security in black suit was guarded the entrance door. He watched the ladies well-wary behind his dark sunglasses.

“I want to speak with *Madam Rossell*,” she shouted at him with no manner.

Cathy was worried if this trip wouldn’t run smoothly when she assured that security stared out like they were strange thieves.

“Have you made appointment?” His voice was hoarse.

“Do I look like I have to?” Eleanor questioned him in return so impudently.

He cringed and shooed them away.

Subsequently, Eleanor muttered at him, “Tell her that one of *White Foxes’ members* is waiting.”

He almost jolted to hear the words being mentioned. “White Foxes?”

Just like that, he allowed them to get inside the mansion without any further problem. They waited on the foyer.

The landlord appeared from the huge stairs in front of the foyer. She was an old woman dressed in red dress. She had a short gray hair, small figure, and white pale wrinkled skin. The security still looked trembling when he informed her about the new guests.

“Well, well, well,” she shouted from upstairs, she was surprised to see Eleanor. “Isn’t this one of the Heisler’s children?” She smiled elegantly while walking toward them. “And you bring a friend.”

The cold atmosphere around this mansion made Cathy suffocated. She felt that something was weird in this place.

Cathy whispered quickly, “Are you getting us into a demon’s house?” But that arrogant girl ignored her question, so she needed to ask twice, “Do you want to kill both of us?”

“What the use of this?” She tapped her red coat’s pocket to show her that a gun hid safely in there. “No worry.”

“We’re here for the Emerald stone, but are we also getting into a trap house?” Her anger was almost exploded. “We should have asked for Marissa’s guidance.”

“Urgh, what’s your relationship with that red hair woman?” Eleanor smirked disgustingly at her. “I don’t have a clue.”

Cathy couldn’t talk back when the landlord approaching them, she felt pissed off.

Nonetheless, Madam Rossell welcomed her guests to sit down together in the living room.

“I want the book that Lady Marie de Clure has postponed to you,” she mentioned her grandmother’s name in a formal way that it sounded so distance from her.

“Hmm, that one?” Madam Rossell remembered it almost immediately, and then she demanded her servant to deliver the book for her guest.

It looked like an average book that came from the library.

“I believe this book never belong to Lady Marie, but Lady Matilda Carline—your grandaunt, right?” She reminded her.

“I don’t know about that. All I could think that I need this,” Eleanor sounded selfish for a second. She flipped the pages boringly.

Madam Rossell seemed to draw an interest at Cathy after that. “Hello, I don’t think I’ve met you before. What’s your name?”

She thrust her cold hand to her for a handshake, but when Cathy did it, that old woman jumped out from the sofa, bulging out astonishingly at her. There was a jolt when they did it.

“Who are you?!”

As Cathy startled and almost got a heart attack, Eleanor took out her gun immediately.

Madam Rossell and her servant had shocked with this little incident. In no second, their faces half morphed into a beast that they looked like a rotten corpse—and even the whole space had disseminated a smell of rotten meat.

“What do you want?” Madam Rossell shouted, and no one moved in this uncomfortable atmosphere.

Cathy was like a little child that needed to be protected. She hid silently behind Eleanor’s back. Three demons were looking at them with massive hatred.

Without alert, Eleanor gave a shot to the ceiling, and soon, water droplets showered down to the floor. It wasn’t like any of ordinary water droplets. All the demons screamed out in pain after the water had smeared on their faces.

Both of them took a chance to run away from the mansion hurriedly.

After they were walking a few miles far away from that district, Cathy asked her while panting, "What was that—did you prepare holy water?" And she was still angry at her. "—since you know we were in demon's house?"

"It's not holy water, duh. I've just learnt how to spell a witchy mantra," she corrected her, "I told you, my family is half witch. I should use the knowledge very well."

"Well, you did it," Cathy said panting, "But, where's the stone?"

"Think well, it's inside the book," she said.

Cathy narrowed her eyes in disbelief at her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean we must learn through this book to really find it, duh!" She annoyed. "My grandaunt told me, the instruction in this book will lead us to the stone."

"I knew it!" Cathy snarled peevishly. "You're lying."

"You got me," she chuckled to see her look stupid, "Unfortunately, I don't know what the book is really saying. We need to talk with my grandaunt—Matilda."

Now Cathy really believed that Matilda was Eleanor's grandaunt. "She is in Manhattan, right?"

They stared bewilderingly at each other.

The fee for overseas phone call might kill Eleanor, but there was no easy way that she needed to try. It was surprising when she got connected—Matilda informed her that she had been staying in Austria since a week ago. Surely, Eleanor knew it, because her grandaunt always went there every year.

They were lucky for sure. Matilda asked them to meet her in Austrian National Library before two o'clock, which was an hour from now.

Quickly, they ran for a taxi.



A smile crossed on her lips dubiously as Matilda asked them, “How long you two have been getting along?”

“We are not, so obvious.” Eleanor answered rashly, felt disgusted with her question.

Matilda chuckled, although felt clueless with what happened between these two ladies. She had been spanning around the wooden bookshelves for some books before they came here—The Austrian National Library.

“Wait, do you come here every year?” Cathy asked her.

“I kind of—well, I have part time job as a librarian in here,” she admitted. “You see, I’m working now.”

Eleanor rolled her eyes annoyingly at them, subsequently she took out a book from her purse, which was a book that had been borrowed by a demon named Madam Rossell for a pretty long time. “Just to the point, I want you to translate this book for me.”

As Matilda flipped the pages, her blue eyes squinted behind her eyeglasses. “This is written in English already. What do you want me to do?”

“I don’t know a single clue how to understand this book,” Eleanor stood crossing arms against her and looked tired, “I have a plan to search for Emerald stone. I want to prevent my grandma, my uncle, and even that witchy detective to practice witchcraft related to Invisible Project.”

“So, this is like a manual book for you?” Matilda asked mockingly. “This won’t do.”

“What does that mean?” Cathy asked wonderingly behind them.

Matilda glanced at them, “You want to find the magical stone through the book that I wrote myself—it’s really a flattery but stupid.”

“Alright, this book is some kind of your journal, so you actually know where the stone is?” Eleanor insisted to know.

“I wrote this journal book based on my observation and assumption. Just like a child that wanting a magical story to be true,” she smiled innocently.

“So dump,” Eleanor muttered.

“Are you saying that Emerald stone is a myth?” Cathy baffled. “But Marissa said it’s exist—”

“It’s exist somewhere out there like a myth,” she snapped. “Nobody really knows,” she shrugged her shoulders, “even some says, only *House of Aloise* who knows where the stone lies.”

“My family?” Cathy murmured.

Matilda stared solemnly at her. “You should ask them.”

“But, how, I—” she said stammering.

“Oh, Eleanor, are you sure they are going to practice witchcraft?” Matilda narrowed her eyes curiously, and somehow looked worried.

“I accidentally overheard Marie’s phone conversation this morning,” Eleanor sighed peevishly since she felt responsible for what she had heard. “I just can’t believe that detective is also a witch!”

Cathy got her heart trembled when someone else admitted and knew that Detective Chantel Herron was a real witch. The agonizing memory from a year ago made her realized how dangerous this trip could turn out in the end.

“The craziest part is letting the police aware what they are capable of—witchcraft, can’t you tell?” Eleanor muttered.

“And yet, the police can keep quiet about their identity issue,” Matilda chuckled to herself. “Everyone in White Foxes is lucky, God hasn’t punished them.”

Cathy stared surprisingly at her to hear that statement came out from a person who born with the same blood as them. It was an unpleasant acknowledgement, but also a real matter.

A few minutes later, they were all still standing inside one of the secret chambers in this huge library. The chamber had a small space with several windows facing outside the pavement and road.

Cathy gazed out at the pile of books above the table. She noticed a thing about this place that seemed more sacred and full of secrets. This space seemed to treasure different books than the one in the hall room.

She saw the same books with the one in Matilda’s personal library about the legendary three stones. One was that leather-bounded book above the table which looked alive for a moment. Her eyes observed a small red stone engraved on the center of the book cover.

“Is this the picture of Zircon stone?” Cathy asked.

Eleanor stared boringly, while Matilda nodded in enthusiasm at her.

“Why would the stone symbol is so obvious in this book?” She asked again.

“Zircon is red, a color of a raging fire. It does explain the contradiction of how the devil made of,” Matilda answered her lightly like a school teacher.

When she opened the pages randomly, her hands paused at the page that depicted a portrait illustration of a woman with long curly red hair, unlike Marissa’s flaming hair, this one

more like orange red. Her robed figure, and also the beam in her eyes were familiar—the contented and intimidated eyes.

“Who is this?” She asked about the figure to Matilda.

“The woman who started the fire in the grandest empire of Austria, some said it was a karmic accident that was caused by the mad devil.”

She wasn’t sure at first, but her memory got tingled to recall it. “Could it be—the woman named *Kyra*?”

“I’ve read that book a few times, that name is surely being mentioned,” Matilda murmured while she was cleaning up a pile of books above the table. “Have you learnt the history through another book?”

“Not book, exactly,” she couldn’t really spoil the real story of where she got that information from—not to mention the magical Mortura flower and the Chiromancer when she went to Caecus. “Well, *Empire of Souls* by Carl Dalton, he told the story about the red hair devil. I knew from his book as well.”

“Such a long time I haven’t heard his name,” she smiled warmly. “He used to work in here too. I’ve met him several times.”

“Wow, what a surprise, you’ve met him too?” Cathy couldn’t feel happier to know that the world was actually seemed small. “I’d wish to visit him later, but—”

“Oh, chop, chop!” Eleanor shouted madly, her hands were clapping. “We have to go. You know what time is it?”

Matilda sighed at them for the farewell that was short and unimpressive.

The secret itself hadn’t revealed yet.

25

THE UNREVEALED SECRET

CATHY CHARLOTTE



TWO DAYS AGO, before she accompanied Eleanor to Vienna City;

The birds sang in the woods under the bright blue sky. The pine trees were everywhere surrounding the only old building.

Cathy looked up at the tall building which was a gray tower that probably had a lot of secret chambers. She kept on guessing on her mind, whether that place treasured an eternal mystery, myth, and legend. But, she forgot that a woman beside her could read her mind like a shallow river.

“You don’t need to wonder that much. You’ll see soon,” Marissa chuckled for sure.

She made a bold expression of her own shame. Her thought was consumed by the idea of curiosity.

They walked into the unlocked gate to see the empty front yard. Slightly, the place looked withered and died from outside. There wasn’t anything in particular, neither gargoyle statues nor water fountain. As soon as they walked into the entrance door, the environment looked more desolate than what she

had anticipated. The brownish walls combined with dark floor tiles to make the atmosphere felt pretty haunting.

There were several angel statues with mourning faces and praying hands that brought back the memory of the past history. A tremendous grieve slapped her feeling. The sadness sensation was strong around this place. The statues seemed like a symbol of a deep condolence.

This time, Marissa didn't say a word since the view had explained everything. She couldn't believe if anyone would really stay in a place like this.

Marissa led her to the double door across to the huge foyer. There was another double door again when they came inside, which each sides were marked with two ancient golden jars.

"You can do this," Marissa whispered, she caressed her back gently.

Cathy gulped down her nervousness and stared at her emerald green eyes, "I hope so."

As Marissa opened the door for her, a smell of rosary and lavender were strong in the air. Three women dressed in black stood next to a black grand piano, they glanced surprisingly at her arrival.

Cathy observed them one by one.

The eldest with short gray hair was sitting in a wheel chair, accompanied by the two women which one of them she knew for sure—Aunt Sarah, and the other seemed a few years older than her aunt. Besides all of them, there was a young man dressed like a priest with black robe. He stood across the room, watching them.

Cathy didn't really pay attention toward his presence, instead at the women. She couldn't believe that her aunt never

told her anything about this, it felt as if her heart got stabbed with a razor knife.

"I bring the child that we should see," Marissa said to them.

The eldest tried so hard to rise from her wheelchair, and the women helped her quickly. She widened her brown eyes at Cathy, who stared back innocently.

"Are you Haile's daughter?" The eldest asked trembling to her.

Cathy was silent for a second, without blinking she answered her assuredly, "Yes, I'm Haile's daughter."

The other woman next to Aunt Sarah stepped forward to see Cathy from closer. That woman looked bewildered at the eldest woman, and then she pierced an unusual dislike toward Cathy.

"Why should you bring this child in here?" She bulged out at Marissa, and glanced loathly again at Cathy. "Your presence in this chapel will put our family into risk and extinction."

"Stop it!" The eldest woman exclaimed infuriatedly while Sarah still holding her hand and didn't have courage to look at her own niece. "She's our honorable guest. Have a respect, child," everyone glanced solemnly at the eldest woman, who pushed her grasp weakly and continued to say, "Please feel at home. Marissa will show your bedroom first before we'll have a proper conversation, and I have to take a medicine for this fragile body of mine."

As Sarah led the eldest woman to walk out from this room, the other woman that looked about forty-year-old stood closer at these visitors to snap at their faces, "She will bring us a menace life and worse future."

Cathy got a broken heart to hear that, but the angel stepped forward calmly to stand up for her, “You don’t know anything about future.”

They left the woman with those words banging coldly in her face.

Nonetheless, Marissa led her to walk across a few doors along the corridor, until they found the empty bedroom in the corner of the hallway.

Cathy had been imagining how the bedroom would look like since the day she watched some television shows about the fiction life of King and Queen, and this space had described the real view. The bedroom filled with vintage furniture—the wardrobe, dress table, and king-sized bed which felt so old and ancient.

“Magnificent,” Cathy was dumbfounded as she really had a chance to stay here. Afterward, she looked up at the painting of a castle above the wooden fireplace.

“That’s the Aloise castle before it was burned down,” Marissa explained.

Cathy turned to glance astonishingly at her as soon as she noticed the difference with the original shape of the castle, which was beautiful. In the painting, that castle looked more grayish that consisted of tall towers, and the garden of roses was showed in the front yard. What was left now—the missing castle itself.

Before she started unpacking her clothes in a suitcase, she asked Marissa, “Why does she hate me?”

Marissa stared sadly at her, “She has no reason to hate you.”

“I saw her, I could feel it.”

"Maybe your feeling is wrong," the angel whispered with a hesitant smile, and then she grasped her palm hand warmly, she hated this sudden change of atmosphere.

"Just—think about your clothes. The Aloise has a conditional rule that should be obeyed. They're wearing black all the times."

"Why is it?" Cathy narrowed her eyes wonderingly. "You know I don't have any, except the jacket."

"The Aloise always in a shape of grieve and condolence for their family loss. This is the exact rule they always keep to stay in this place," and then she chuckled, "well, if that's the case, let's get you shopping."

"Marissa, I am telling you seriously, I don't have enough money to afford such thing. I'm going to stay for two days maybe."

"No, no, no, sweet child," she shook her head disagreed, "you will spend the Aloise's money for sure."

"You're kidding me?" Cathy grimaced in hesitation.

"Your mom definitely won't leave you with nothing, right?" She patted her shoulder gently. "Sarah will help you too. So, don't worry."



Thirty minutes later they arrived in Krem town. Marissa helped her shopping in a clothing store, and superiorly she knew what best to wear for Cathy. She had acted like her mother for a while, taking care for her child.

Cathy fell in love with a black lace maxi dress which would synchronize perfectly with her brown boots. She broke the rule by resisting having another same dress, but in white color. In the end, she bought both of the dresses.

After they finished shopping, Marissa gave her a surprise present which was a brown jacket. So unfortunate she saw the price tag that made her heart almost jumped out.

“This is beautiful and very expensive,” Cathy said while wearing the jacket to cover her new black maxi dress.

When the sky turned dark violet in the evening, her preparation had finally finished.



Cathy had been staring boldly at her reflection in the dressing table mirror. Behind her, Marissa was combing her messy long brown hair so patiently.

“You look beautiful,” the red hair angel admired her, and she kissed her forehead like a mother.

Cathy didn’t respond, in fact, she still felt the sadness that couldn’t be swept away from her chest. Especially after Marissa told her this was her mother’s childhood bedroom and also Princess Francesca’s heritage.

“Catherine, they’re waiting,” her reverie was swept away after she saw Marissa suddenly stood in the doorsill, she glanced baffling at her, “—it’s time for dinner.”

They went together to the dining room that had a long wooden table. Cathy was theatrical from the inside of her mind to see the whole decoration that looked exactly like in any historical television drama. But her euphoria disappeared at the second she met the woman who seemingly disliked her so much.

“Laura, handle your anger,” Marissa shouted while dragging a dining chair for her to sit.

At the time, Sarah just came to the room while bringing the glasses of white wine on a tray, and a man in black robe helped her serving salad tuna to the dining table.

“Don’t mind the attitude of my only child,” the eldest woman said and stared at Cathy who sat in front of her, “—she’s having a hot temper once in a while.”

“Mother, you shouldn’t bother my thought. I have my own nerve to deal with, but surely this young child—” Laura couldn’t pick the right word and paused to glance keenly at Cathy.

Marissa and that man didn’t join to have a dinner but chose to stand still in the corner of the room like frozen statues. For a minute, Cathy stole a glance at the man, who kind of reminded her of Stefan the newborn Angel. They were all shared the same beam of eyes. That man with black robe seemed young and strange.

Afterward, the dinner went well quietly.

The next session, she was invited to have an official introduction in a family room. It was the same room where she met the landlords earlier.

Laura helped her mother to sit on the black sofa next to the grand black piano while the others followed along to stand still. Behind them, Cathy stared mesmerizingly at the view around her. The window was huge behind that sofa, and next, there was a portrait painting of an old woman dressed in blue gown, accompanied by two innocent children.

When Cathy couldn’t stare away from it, Marissa smiled beside her and whispered, “She was a grandmother of those two children—Kathleen and Francesca, also as a mother to King Hendrick von Aloise. She was *Queen Aloina Catalina von Aloise* who known as a flower lady in the empire because of her kindness and gentle heart.”

The eldest woman followed to smile along with them, and she took over the conversation, “Marissa surely knows a lot about the Aloise history, but first, I want to introduce myself

with manner—” she glanced at her daughter who smirked in hatred, “my name’s *Carmelia Margaret von Aloise*, but none of us really using our family name in public. It’s for our safety. I thought you must have known about the complication.”

“I know,” she said and smiled at her, “But where is everybody?”

Cathy was taken aback with the way they looked at her in a strange bewilderment, so she added quickly, “I mean—does anyone live in here besides all of you?”

“No, it’s just us,” Carmelia shouted with a deep depression in her expression.

“The other family members are living separately from us. Some of them have been staying in North America,” Laura explained on her mother’s behalf, “They usually visit the chapel in holiday, presumably in summer and winter.”

“How many of them are there?” Cathy wondered.

Again, they looked depressed and restless with her question, but Laura managed to answer, “Not many.”

Carmelia sighed thereafter, “We are a very small family now.”

This was the moment where she felt a tremendous remorse to ever ask such question. Cathy would have known with her heart that gnawed by the pain. The whole decoration and atmosphere that the chapel had—everything was clear enough to be understood.

“Ah—,” Carmelia continued speaking, “I’d like to tell you about our family tree, a small piece of framework. Please open the curtain, Seth.”

She demanded at that young man in black robe. He had been standing silently next to the red curtain that located near the door. He drew the golden ropes in that curtain to uncover the painted wall. It was the finest illustration of a huge family

tree with a lot of branches. Each portrait picture had a name on the branches. Most of them were women with the obvious resemblance of their face structure and shape.

“The obsolete pictures meant to mark the deceased members,” Laura explained.

Cathy opened her eyes widely, “How did you—”

“It would be scorched by itself, like magic,” Marissa answered her instantly.

Her wonderment got synchronized with the one she knew, like the picture of her mother—it had gone withered and scorched perfectly. Nevertheless, she could see the correct hierarchy from House of Aloise through this family tree.

Carmelia was her grandaunt, she had two children eventually; the first one was Laura and the second child with an obsolete picture—seemed to be passed away already. That woman who died—she also had two children of male and female. According to her mom’s letter, they might be the one that being referred as Cathy’s cousins.

From the line of that tree, Haile and Sarah had a beautiful mother whose picture was scorched as well.

“Was she my grandmother?” Cathy asked in admiration. At the picture, the woman had long brown hair with bangs, beautiful brownish eyes, and dressed in V-neck floral dress—her face looked a lot like her mom.

Sarah stepped forward as she felt responsible to speak in this conversation, “Yes, Linda von Aloise was our mother.”

She turned to stare at her aunt in a huge disappointment, although she tried to endure it.

The introduction went on by Carmelia. She explained only a little knowledge of the latter generation. There weren’t many that left, and everyone seemed to live independently.

Cathy had many things on her mind that she was afraid to ask. Her curiosity might wonder much to the utmost question about the cause of their death—the family members in Aloise.

“If it’s more than necessary for her to understand—” Marissa said as she glanced at Cathy who had been standing like an innocent child, “We shall rest this night.”



Thursday, 20th of December was the day when she accompanied Eleanor to the Vienna trip;

After they had finished their business inside one of the secret chambers in Austrian National Library, before Matilda walked them to get a taxi, their sightseeing moment in the hall room had encountered them with the red hair angel, Marissa.

Cathy was excited to meet her twice in this huge place, unlike Eleanor who seemed bored to death.

“Oh, you’re here now?” Matilda greeted her.

“I have a good view at these books, but actually—” Marissa smiled at Cathy, “I want to take her home.”

“I see,” she nodded.

At the same time, Marissa glanced at the platinum hair girl—Eleanor Heisler who had been smirking at everything.

“What’s business does the noble lady have in here?” Marissa asked politely as she stared at her.

“Good Lord, somebody would finally ask me that,” Matilda sighed while rolling her eyes in annoyance, “my grandniece just asking for my help about her quest to the Emerald stone. What a child.”

“I am not a child, alright,” Eleanor shouted, “and thanks for not helping after all.”

“That’s the unsolved mystery,” Marissa murmured, although she seemed hiding her knowledge about it too.

Eleanor stood defiantly at them and said, "I can assure you that Marie will be practicing her *dark knowledge* in the forest. It's been settled."

"My sister's witchcraft isn't what matters, but to get the real access to the missing castle that belongs to the Aloise—" Matilda said calmly, "it's the exceptional failure."

"House of Aloise always protects their property with the greatest shield. No one can break through," Marissa added lightly.

Cathy remembered her memory where she had seen the evil deed from the real witch since a year ago, thus she asked unconfidently, "Are you sure that their witchcraft would mean nothing?"

"Dearest Catherine—" Marissa addressed her with a cringe of her warmest smile, "last night's introduction hasn't finished yet. Please return home with me."

She thrust her hand to Cathy, but before they said goodbye, Eleanor shouted curiously, "Do you have a secret you want to share with me?"

Cathy got surprised with that sudden question, "I am not sure—"

"Oh, just always be careful, children," Matilda cut off their conversation, "don't go into the woods, playing hide and seek, or even becoming a peeping Tom."

"Shoot!" Eleanor exclaimed harshly. "Why are you talking like we are middle grade students?"

"That's because I'm worry for you," Matilda patted her grandniece's shoulder, "If tomorrow you want to watch over your grandmother's back, that's not a good plan."

"You don't tell me what to do, alright," Eleanor muttered back.

“It’s the ongoing inquisition. The police and team will also come—” Cathy shrugged her shoulders in hesitation. In fact, she hadn’t told her dad that she was staying in Austria during the winter holiday. “I don’t think they want to see us in there.”

In the last second of farewell, they couldn’t settle down for a good suggestion since Eleanor still insisted on her own will, and her grandaunt also kept on giving the same piece of a classic advice, “Children, just stay away from the forest.”

26

WORK IN PROGRESS

ELEANOR HEISLER



IN FRIDAY MORNING of 21st December 2012, the first snow was falling on the ground.

Eleanor was sitting by the windowsill, looking through the cold winter. She was alone in her bedroom. Everyone had gone early in the morning to the white tents, as it was being said by Lady Marie, for the sake of Invisible Project. There was only the housekeeper in this house, Sebastian who busied cooking for her breakfast.

She had just found her old diary journal in her bedroom. All the memories were being treasured inside those handwriting pages as she held it so tight in her hands. She hadn't written anything since her childhood time. Everything had just passed by so quickly.

Her fingers flipped the pages randomly, until she got stopped at the last passage to see her funny doodles. She loved to draw smiley men, mostly was an obscure drawing of tangled straw, and the last one had reminded her of Sylvia Elle—it was the iconic red umbrella.

Suddenly, the knock on the door had disturbed her nostalgia. It was just Sebastian, who brought her a tray of hot tea and beef lasagna.

“Why does everyone left so early?” It seemed like she was muttering to herself, although knowing that Sebastian wasn’t invisible all the time. “It’s like still six a.m. or something.”

“Indeed, Young Lady,” he said after leaving the tray in front of her.

“Shoot,” she cursed.

At the moment, she was annoyed that he didn’t leave her bedroom. Sebastian stood and glanced at the journal, suddenly he had hawk eyes.

“Get out now,” she ordered him.

He remained silent and kept looking at the journal.

“What do you think you’re doing, Bash?”

“Please excuse my impudent manner, Young Lady,” he snorted and said, “—I don’t think you should take a look at those doodles.”

“This is mine, alright. What is your problem?” She raised her voice in irritation.

“Lady Marie is giving me a mandatory to watch over you, but I think you might suffer more with that,” he pointed out at the journal.

“You already said that. I have enough of her spies. So, get out,” she demanded him again.

“You are still suffering until now—” he said solemnly, “I did know about your childhood nightmare because I had seen you, even though you didn’t see me in person when we were children.”

She rolled her eyes mockingly, “I am not suffering like you are. Don’t make me laugh.”

“Lady Marie was a good storyteller to her own granddaughter, also to me,” even though it seemed hard for him to stand there, he felt necessary to talk more, “that story, *the red umbrella*—”

Her irritation turned instantly into her biggest curiosity. Eleanor stared up at him in bewilderment. “What about it?”

“I don’t think you want to remember it. It’s the tale of *the Red Riding Hood*,” he stood nervously now, “but you always drew the red umbrella for the red hood’s metaphor, because Lady Marie told you so.”

“It was because that story, so I drew these doodles?” She was agape with a baffling mind. Eleanor couldn’t recall her childhood memories perfectly, but everything seemed related to that strange white hair girl.

She rose from the windowsill to walk back and forth in her greatest bewilderment. In the other side, Sebastian felt relieved that he was able to inform her sooner.

“Bash, don’t you think that fairy tale is like a charade for me?” Eleanor asked. “My grandma was trying to tell me the figurative metaphor, I mean, look at this family they named it *White Foxes*?”

“If you’re asking for my perspective, I will say that the innocent girl has lost her grandmother to the evil wolf—or precisely, *the fox* in your context,” he answered.

“As if that fairy tale is projecting the story of my life, the circumstance between my grandma and the White Foxes club—” Eleanor muttered in disbelief. She was just realized that the strange girl already showing her everything she needed to know since in the very beginning—*Sylvia Elle was right*.

“Lady Marie didn’t intent to tell that story significantly. You were the one who insisted,” Sebastian added.

“What?”

“You were dreaming of *petrichor*, you said you walked into the woods with rainy scent, holding a red umbrella, you always love red color, and then you saw the cabin woods, you were all alone,” he said in detail that made her surprised.

She chuckled in a mocking way at him, “How could you know all of that if you were not a stalker?”

Sebastian couldn’t even stare at her eyes for the entire conversation without being awkward. He knew his place.

“I appreciate your stalking moment,” she walked closer, patting his shoulder pitifully, “because of you, now I understand the missing charade.”

“My pleasure, Young Lady,” he bowed respectfully to her.

Nonetheless, she pushed him to walk out from her bedroom, “Now get out, I want to be alone.”

It was surprising for her to hear everything from the person she would never expect. She found him hard to speak up, but yet, he would talk longer to her than with anybody else in this world.

Eleanor grabbed her cup of hot tea and returned to sit on the windowsill. All of the complicated emotions were still wrapped up tightly inside her heart. She sighed against her life, as if she knew the essence to that metaphor tale—*the lies and betrayal*.



The next hour, she decided to visit the white tents. The location was actually not that from the cabin house, she only needed fifteen minutes by walking through the forest.

The location was marked with the police line. There were a lot of people from the team of Invisible Project. They had been busied since she first arrived.

The team members had been building a virtual path that resembling a railway track in front of the white tents because some said that was necessary to have a virtual investigation. Also, Detective Manson looked super busied explaining the map track that was opened widely above the wooden table to the police.

She heard their beefing voices about this project, which was odd and senseless. Some dared to say that they had been wasting their time and energy unworthily, but they would do anything for the money.

No one seemed to notice at her arrival, until Aunt Sofia was the first person who greeted her, with surprised and worried expression at the same time. Eleanor grimaced as she felt her presence in here wasn't expected after all. Behind her, Lady Marie came to kiss her cheeks like a little child. As always, Eleanor gave them a sarcastic look when she got annoyed.

"Are you here for sightseeing, my dear?" Lady Marie asked her happily, she seemed excited to have her granddaughter came to visit.

"Does everyone will sleep inside those tents?" She wondered. There were six small tents that built in row.

Sofia almost choked from chuckling.

"Do you think so?" Marie asked her in return, amused toward her simple question.

Eleanor rolled her eyes agitatedly, ignoring them, and then Sofia went on supervising the teamwork for a moment. Beside her, there was only her grandmother who was still smiling out of happiness. That was a flustered irritation for her.

"Don't scare me, you make me go away," Eleanor muttered deliberately to hurt her feeling.

"I just didn't think you would bother to come here, but here you are," she said with bright eyes, "nothing could make me happier than seeing your presence."

"So, this is our vacation?" Eleanor asked disappointedly. "It's so lame."

Lady Marie still smiled in composure, "As lame as it is, my dear, don't you want to take a look at the project's progress?"

"I'm seeing it now," she said, disinterested.

Both of them were gazing at the working progress in this wintery place, which was a small part of the Vienna Woods. The moment made her recalling all the secrets that she had just found about her family.

"I know your secret," she murmured, without glancing back at her grandmother.

"I'm glad if you really did know," Marie answered calmly like nothing ever happened.

Eleanor tried to trigger the conversation with her own understanding. "I know that Detective Chantel Herron is our distant relative."

Lady Marie glanced at her this time and smiled widely like this was some kind of joke.

"It's true, is it?" She asked.

"Indeed, we have the same Rumanian ancestor with her."

"We are *half* descendants anyway," Eleanor corrected her grandmother.

"I have to admit now, you got me already," she chuckled, relieved from her burden to be so secretive, "that antique shop have given you many clues to learn about the establishing idea of this assembly—*White Foxes*."

"Is that the reason why we have to separate from House of Heisler?" She wondered.

“The head leader of the Heisler’s representative never accepted my reasonable agreement that another bloodline exist inside us. I did my own research,” her eyes kept on looking on the ground as if she was enduring her own sorrow about it.

“The whole Heisler family is half Rumanian?”

“No, dear, only from my father’s line. He was your great-great-grandfather,” she sighed as explaining, “when my mother got remarried with our distant cousin, Matilda was born, and not long after that, my father died.”

Nobody in the family ever mentioned about their ancestor’s history, even the saddest part. It was like a secret story. This was the first time she ever heard it from her grandmother, even though she already knew a few things from the Heisler’s family history book in the antique shop.

“That’s why I’d like you to learn more, because when I’m gone, you’ll be the next leader of White Foxes,” she smiled full of hope, “and to continue this work, you’re the heir.”

Eleanor smirked disgustedly since she didn’t agree in that matter.

“By the way, what’s the purpose of stealing someone else’s property?” She dared to ask her. “The real owner never shows up until this second. You know, House of Aloise.”

Lady Marie always behaved in a composure mode that her expression became unreadable. No one could determine her real emotion, even in this situation.

“My intention is actually to hunt down that portal of *Caecus*,” Lady Marie murmured, almost sounded like a whisper.

Eleanor glanced surprisingly at her. “What portal?”

“I thought you have learnt.”

Eleanor bulged out when her grandmother's words were sending shivers down her spine.

"One thing for sure, we need to empower that realm for our welfare. I have been working with Detective Chantel to track it down. It's supposed to be existed inside that missing castle," Lady Marie finally told her about the very secretive plan that only had been known by the insider.

She gawked uncomfortably as listening to her. "You can't be serious. Is that the real reason why you are so obsessed over this absurd case?"

"This isn't the absurdity we are talking about," Lady Marie said, and then her head beckoning invitingly, "—come with me."

At the time, Eleanor realized that she had not seen her uncle or even Detective Chantel around here. Her grandmother invited her to see what was inside one of those white tents. She followed along with a huge wonderment.

Some of the police glanced at her bewilderedly. She wanted to ignore them, but their eyes were looking so hazy that it somehow bothered her. Something was odd.

As soon as they got inside the tent, she saw her uncle, who stood in front of the black board and talking formally to Detective Chantel. Also, there was the other, the Hispanic man in blue pinstripe suit that she once saw in Brooklyn Police Department. He stayed still in the corner of this small tent.

"Look, who do we have here?" Her uncle looked as excited as her grandmother to see her coming. Marshall stepped forward to give her a hug and kiss.

"I've just about to tell her about our next procedure. Please continue the meeting," Lady Marie said as she dragging two chairs to the table. She welcomed her granddaughter to take a seat.

"We will be pleased to have another helper, if that's necessary," Detective Chantel said.

Eleanor stared at her for a while, more like stealing a glance at her blue eyes that somehow felt old and had a depth, but in a very strange way like the cold-blooded killer's eyes. Something was off, although she could tell the reason of that matter now. Chantel Herron was a cold-blooded witch.

"She won't be involved directly, my dear. I just want her to watch us," Lady Marie shouted

For about an hour they were explaining the procedure that involving supernatural aspect, Eleanor finally understood that the witchcraft practice was an implacable idea. The fresh experiment would be done soon. They didn't even know whether it would be succeeded or not, but the outcome from trial and error might have an impact.

A minute before she got out, Eleanor had been overhearing the small talk between Detective Chantel and her uncle about a particular demon, which was being caged in White Foxes' mansion. They mentioned the demon that lived in the basement.

The other man they called Richard was involved in the conversation, he said the demon would be used as their walking doll in the witchcraft experiment. It was eventually an army demon that used specifically for the killing.

Eleanor couldn't feel more precise with her own assumption, and she didn't even want to believe if the demon was the same thing that had killed her parents. The rumor about that demon was once propagated in the past. All of her distant relatives had said so, even though they had never been assured. If that what was true, it meant she had been living under the same roof with the murderer.

It was miserable.

27

FOR WHOM THE GATE DISEMBARKED

CATHY CHARLOTTE



CATHY HAD JUST FINISHED her breakfast. She stole a glance at the windows in the dining room. The first snowflakes were falling on Friday morning, 21nd December 2012.

At the time, she remembered about her mother's letter. It was its content that she recalled, the mystery behind the Memorial room.

Sarah just got there to have a breakfast too. According to her mom, Sarah knew the key to that door. It was the right time to ask her.

"Aunt, my mom wrote me a letter before she died—" Cathy was nervous to say it all, "she mentioned about the Memorial room. She said to ask you about the key."

Sarah glanced at her, shocked, her eyes popped out.

"No one found out about the letter, right?" She sounded insecure.

Cathy shook her head, certain.

“It’s not the kind of room you’d like to see. If Laura found out that you knew about it, she wouldn’t forgive you.”

Cathy pursed her lips, agitated. “You won’t hide anything from me like my mom did while she was alive, right?”

Oppositely, her demand had stabbed her peace zone. Sarah didn’t know what would happen if the room was opened up again.

“The room has been locked for a long time. I was just checking it out five minutes ago. It’s the right time that you ask,” she said as taking away the skeleton key from her black blazer’s pocket and she put it down on the table.

Cathy stared carefully at the key. She didn’t dare to touch it yet.

“My mom said, if I see that room, I will understand what’s going on with the whole family thing,” Cathy said and felt relieved even before she saw it with her own eyes. “Is it about the hereditary books of Aloise or something? What’s in there?”

Sarah didn’t seem as excited as her niece. Something seemed off with her expression. On the contrary, she looked sad.

“Is it not?” Cathy didn’t know whether it would be a good thing to keep on guessing. Her smile faded slowly. “Will you give me a clue, at least?”

“Cathy, just see it for yourself—” her aunt answered sluggishly, “remember that the others won’t allow you to come inside. Don’t tell them how you got this key. I don’t want any more trouble.”

Cathy nodded, “I get it.”

The next few minutes, she went through the corridor which Sarah had told her, it was near to the vacant bedrooms. She walked alone since nobody was seen in there. The silence flared up the sadness atmosphere around the passage,

although another prospect of the building showed mercy for the everlasting grief.

She got stopped when Seth stood in front of the triangular window.

They had not talked to each other before. She stood frozen against his presence, and didn't know what to say. She wasn't a good liar. She couldn't make a good excuse.

He seemed busied and focused, snuggling up something on the table under that triangular window.

"Excuse me?" She greeted him.

Seth turned his head at her. His eyes looked like crystal clear under the scorching sun across the window. His face was a favor of heaven, pure white far from any sins.

"May I help you, young lady?" His voice was remarkably angelic.

"No, I'm just taking a look around."

"Please enjoy your stay," he smiled wondrously and returned to focus on the last thing he had been doing.

Her curiosity had led her to peep behind his back, and unexpectedly she saw some bounded documents of medical record that seemed to belong to her grandaunt. The documents were scattered in messiness on the table.

Cathy paused bewilderingly. "What disease does she have?"

He glanced at her, almost immediately with a blank expression.

"I meant, Carmelia."

"She has pleurisy cancer. It has started since five years ago."

"Does she go to hospital for a routine checkup?"

Seth didn't answer more than what she needed to know. He just returned to snug up the documents again.

The atmosphere wasn't comfortable for her. She didn't want to get awkward with him, at the same time she didn't know about the consequence if she said more than she should, and she did it anyway.

"I know what you are."

He glanced at her, calmed, and smiled mysteriously.

She won't give up and said again, "You're not human, but *angel*, like Marissa."

He kept the atmosphere to stay secretive. His smile wasn't contented like the first time, it was flatness. She couldn't interpret him better, assuming was easier to do.

Cathy was bold to stand there until the time he went away to bring a medicine and lunch menu for Carmelia in her bedroom.

It was hard when she wanted to step forward to the door of the Memorial room. Later, Seth returned to warn her not to wander around in there. Cathy gave him a quick nod as soon as she thought he would have known about her intention. She felt rigid.

Before actually planning to sneak out in that corridor again, she decided to wonder alone through another room that might be a small library.



It was ten o'clock, and Cathy still wandered inside the chapel. She returned to the family room where there was a grand piano. After tired of touring alone, she observed the painting of Queen Aloina again.

The buzzing sound of people chattering had distracted her mind. She walked ahead assuredly to open the door that linking the foyer to the parlor. As soon as she peeped behind the door, there were some people in suit that had gathered

and talked to each other. No one bothered to sit in the chairs, everyone was standing still.

Her eyes caught magnetically at one woman who dressed in a long black coat, she had half pinned up long black hair, the kind of Asian face with tan skin. That woman always half smiled every time she communicated with Laura and Sarah. They mentioned something about a medicine product.

Cathy didn't really concern to hear over their conversation and she just stepped ahead to hide behind the cabinet in the parlor. She wanted to take a closer look at those guests, and at her aunts. Laura busied taking care of some documents, while Sarah had just excused herself from that meeting to check on Carmelia's condition.

For several times she heard her aunt, Laura addressed that woman's name as *Amick*.

Cathy didn't take off her eyes from all of them, until an accident happened, that woman named Amick stared back at her. Amick looked surprised to notice another presence besides anyone else who had been living regularly in this place. They stared at each other for a pretty long time.

After Laura had finished filling the documents, she gave one of it to that woman and thanked her for the cooperation.

Amick said goodbye without even bothered to ask about the sudden appearance of Cathy in there. It was seemingly that she didn't want to complicate something that wasn't her business.

Cathy, in the other side felt odd against her presence.



The clock turned at five o'clock at the same time the sky turned cloudy. It was the time she went on again. The location was on

the west side of that triangular window. The Memorial room had the biggest door inside this place.

Her heart was beating faster to find the truth behind the door. The skeleton key felt rough and fragile in her grasp. She just needed to do it without hesitation, and in the count of three she cracked it open.

The room was dark and full of mist that she couldn't measure how big the space would be. The silence hummed the sound of eeriness.

She perched her fingers at the edge of the door. She was scared at first as it was hard to expunge her frightening feeling.

Her fingers groped staggeringly to find the lamp's button. As she clicked it, the fluorescence light was on.

Because in the dark she couldn't barely see it, and now at all the view, her eyes bulged out, and her heart startled to death. This was the scariest part of the chapel that was very badly destroyed. The ceiling had a massive hole in the middle of this room, anyone could see clearly at the wide view of the sky. This place seemed to be rotten for many years. *Abandon* was the right word to describe this view.

Everything was a gigantic mess. She bent down to the ground floor to take a closer look at the scattering stuff of random portrait photos, paintings, obsolete papers, and old stuff. Everything was broken. She would never imagine this place as the real Memorial room.

As the thunder started screaming in the sky, she was startled back.

Her eyes stared exploring one by one for the pictures of all the faces that she never recognized before. They were all seemed dead in her eyes. The eyeglasses above all those papers were also broken. The handwriting on the papers even

looked unreadable, and it seemed like depravity letters, resentment of one another.

The second time she stared at the floor again, the raindrop fell upon her cheek. It followed with the raging thunderstorm, and then the heavy rain was free falling into this room to wet the floor.

The death roses swooshed lightly above those photos, already losing its scarlet color. She bent down again as her face and clothes got really wet from the rain.

For a minute, one picture on the floor got her attention. It was the photo with vintage frame of her grandmother, Linda von Aloise. She looked a lot like her mom, so mesmerizingly beautiful. At the time of her personal observation, Cathy realized that the three generation between her grandmother, her mother, and herself—they shared the same sleepy brown eyes, like it was so obvious and resembled to one another.

“Who had asked you to come inside?!”

Cathy glanced astonishingly at the angry voice. It was the woman with a sarcastic look, who was about fifty-year-old, her aunt, Laura already stood in the edge of the opened door.

“How could you do this?” Cathy asked trembling instead of running. “Don’t you have feeling?”

As she was crossing arms, Laura answered distinctly and stepped forward at the edge of the raindrops, her heels made a clicking noise, “We demand the kindness. This is our way of making a greater condolence which is, *leaving all behind.*”

Cathy didn’t move and still stared at her, heartbroken. This was the agony against all the view of these belongings from the deceased family members.

“Was it Sarah who told you about this place?” She asked, full of anger.

Cathy ignored her and demanded back. “Why would the Memorial room look like this?”

At the same time the thunderstruck emerged in the sky, Laura shouted at her, “Don’t you dare changing the topic!”

“Laura!” Someone exclaimed behind them, she was Marissa.

Cathy stood immediately and ran toward Marissa. She hid behind her back like a little child who was afraid of being scolded.

“Both of you might want to have a proper manner in someone’s place,” Laura said sarcastically at them, and then she glanced at Cathy, “This isn’t your private little castle, young child.”

“Will you just explain this room for me?!” Cathy felt more nervous as she didn’t expect her tone to sound like a thunderstruck, it just came out naturally.

As Laura bulged out her eyes at for her impudent manner, Marissa guarded her like a fragile child to act possessively.

Although Laura already got a headache because of this, “Just take care after your young friend, Angel.”

Their eyes stared competitively at each other, but Marissa had the sharpest eyes when it came to this situation, especially when she felt protective. Meanwhile, Laura didn’t want to get attach at this whole frightening feeling. She knew it would be the wrong way to fight an angel, and so she just left without saying any further.

Thereafter, Marissa checked on Cathy, her eyes stared pretty close to her. Cathy had innocent eyes that showed the truth of agony feeling. She was sad from finding out the real tragedy that happened in that room.

“You should have asked someone before acting on your own,” Marissa admonished her.

"I couldn't find anyone who would want to tell me the truth," her voice trembled as she felt her body was getting really cold from the rain.

"Please, child, you have more important thing to learn rather than being in that room," Marissa said, stroking her wet hair.

Cathy baffled, "Why?"

Marissa smiled secretively, "It's just the merciless place."



In the early Saturday morning of 22nd December 2012, Cathy continued to wander inside the chapel that was so quiet like usual. She went throughout the corridor that connected the family room and the hall room. No one was there. Her neck got tingled with eerie sensation around the empty space. This place seemed haunting for a second.

They usually hired servants in a place like this, but none ever showed up. This place didn't even seem alive.

Yesterday, she had seen the library that contented with a historical collection of books. They collected numerous classical tales. Neither looked personal nor particular. There was seemingly no *secret* from the inside.

The secret itself could have been buried underneath somewhere else. Royal paintings and angel statues were the most crucial things that she saw in this chapel, which might be the place to hide a lot of obscure secrecy. The shadow could have been penetrated engagingly through the images of the unknown. It was just—nobody had ever found it out.

Seth had been cleaning up the dusts in every corner of the room. He walked back and forth into one corridor and another. Meanwhile, Cathy stood baffling in the corner of the corridor. She could only watch his back, and sometimes she heard

Carmelia coughed heavily from the bedroom. It made her restless when she felt useless.

This time she found courage to step forward. She walked inside her bedroom, checking out her condition for a while. Cathy got panicked as soon as she saw the smearing blood on the sheet. She assumed that Carmelia might have been coughing for a while before she got inside the room since her bed looked really messed up, and her black pajama also got stained. The blood marked creepily everywhere on the floor. It seemed like a crime scene, slightly.

Cathy covered her mouth with her hands, terrified at the view. They stared at each other in agony. "I am so sorry, Mrs. Aloise, everyone is out of town—"

"Indeed, Laura has told me before she went with Sarah. They should be in here by noon."

"What are they doing in Vienna?"

"White Foxes—" she answered, her eyes stared away to the bloody sheet, "Laura and Sarah will take care of the building license check that owned by House of Aloise to the government," she paused, coughing lightly, "well, to prevent the undergoing of Invisible Project against Aloise's property."

"That's good news," Cathy murmured, nodded, and then wondered something about the secret job that her aunt always had after all this time, "Does Aunt Sarah work as the representative of Aloise family?"

"Sarah works as our press secretary," Carmelia said, coughing heavily this time. Cathy was afraid to move closer, she was still standing a few inches from the bed. Subsequently she continued, "In case if you wonder about my daughter, Laura has been building her career as Austrian lawyer herself for more than ten years," there was a glimpse of proud feeling beyond her weak smile, although her emotion got muddled

with sadness as she mentioned about her daughter, “so now, everything should be fine.”

Seth came inside the room to see both of them having a little talk.

“We can do a restraining order to White Foxes as well, but that won’t be truly necessary,” she added, “because of the shield—” and then she was coughing in blood again.

“Please take a rest and stop talking,” Seth said in mandatory to her, and hurriedly took a towel to clean it up for her.

Cathy stood gawking and frightened, but she baffled at her previous words, “What shield that you are referring to?”

Seth glanced at her, alerted her to stop the conversation. “Please young lady, stop pushing her mind for a while.”

She touched his chest gently as to say there should be a manner for their special guest. “Oh no, please do continue, but I’m not strong enough to talk more.”

So composedly he turned at Cathy to explain on her behalf, “The shield is created under the Chandelier Order’s patronage for the protection purpose, which happens for the property of Aloise, this chapel and—” his tone was businesslike, “the abandoned castle is still in the same exact location. We have migrated the building momentarily into the unseen world, so it seems as if it’s not exist in this realm.”

It was being said so firmly that made her baffling. He made it clear when he said *we*, which meant Seth was part of the Chandelier Order, just like Marissa and Sylvia Elle. They were all angels that descended from heaven. They were here to help protecting royal’s children. She had read a few writings about them in various books of myth and legend. It was only that she couldn’t perceive it better, and even to meet directly like this had seemed insane for her.

“This whole thing is involving the Chandelier? How did they create the shield?” Cathy asked abruptly, although she was aware of being absurd herself.

Seth smiled composedly. He had that mysterious side just like Marissa and Sylvia Elle. “It’s complicated to explain with the humanity’s current knowledge. For you, it might sound like a slight of miracle.”

“Okay, the shield could protect the buildings from malevolent danger. At least White Foxes won’t do harm with that,” Cathy said.

“Either for those who were seen or not, like demons, they won’t be able to track down the location of the buildings,” he added. It was clearly that White Foxes wouldn’t work with empty hands since they would demand their demons to go for the hideous work besides the police.

Thereafter, Carmelia continued to have a bloody cough, worst this time. Seth helped to caress her back.

“What should I do, say something?!” Cathy shouted, panicked.

“If you want to help, there’s only one way,” he said, contented with worryment in his voice, “we have just ran out of the medicine which she needs to take. I cannot go, because I have to guard for the shield in this chapel, but you can—”

It was all that he needed to inform her. She gawked for a second, confused, but it didn’t take her too long to offer for help, “Show me the way. Let me get it for her!”

“Are you sure you can do it?” He seemed to doubt her, although he felt merciful for her kindness, “House of Aloise has one portal in this chapel. You can find it in Carmelia’s study room which is next to this room, exactly in front of the Memorial room. The dark fireplace is the flimsy spot. I’ll be helping you to open it.”

“What do you mean with the portal?” Her head suddenly got spinning to hear it.

“Nothing to worry, it’s not the fire you’ll get through but the contrary. You’ll see anyway,” he assured her.

“Is it Caecus behind the portal?” She asked, frightened as she recalled her memory of spending time in there last year. “How do I know what to do and where to go in there?”

He explained further to her while cleaning up the smearing blood on Carmelia’s black pajama, “There’s a street market in Caecus. You can ask anyone for the shop that sells some herbs for pleurisy cancer. It’s just like in human world, only that the difference in appearance would surprise you.”

She hated the idea of looking at the difference. It wasn’t like she knew what to expect.

Soon, she ran to Carmelia’s study room that was unlocked. The air was filled with rosemary aroma from the inside. The small dimmed room contented with one set of chairman’s furniture; a wooden desk, chair, and bookshelves. Oppositely, there was a single sofa next to the fireplace that left with some charcoal fire-woods.

She was confused of what to do when there was no exact clue, but when she followed her instinct to touch the wooden frame of that fireplace, a sudden bright light of oval-shaped had emerged, which was glowing and waving like water flow in front of the fireplace. It was like a magic mirror, she could see through the winter ground scenery, snowing so cold. She recalled the same exact view as she saw it the last time from the edge of the portal, which was existed inside the abandoned castle.

In no second, she was being absorbed quickly into the realm.



Her body got thrown down harshly into the cold ground. She chinned up to gaze at the view around her. From far away, there were a lot of tall Douglas fir trees covered in snowflakes, and also some hills. Slightly, she wondered if Caecus would always in the same state of winter session.

Afterward, she forced herself to rise from the ground and walked forward.

Cathy was shivering alone until she found one alley that full of crowded people and various shops. Everyone looked as normal as she was, but another second, she realized the difference that Seth had said before. Most of them seemed off. The depth of their eyes contained with strangeness, some of them had cat's pupils alike, sharp, and creepy.

It was killing her to see the undeniable truth. They were all definitely not human. It might be entity or something else. She couldn't guess further, even to compare them with demon figure had already frustrated her mind.

Some eyes laid on her, watching curiously. She just needed to walk straightforward and being careful not to get caught.

As she passed to a flower shop, she jolted to death and breathless when someone grabbed her tiny wrist furiously. That familiar woman looked right into her eyes. This one had Asian black eyes, so normally human alike.

Cathy recognized her. She was Amick, still dressed in the same coat as yesterday when she became a guest in the chapel.

"What are you doing here?" She asked in a low tone, so no one could hear her. Her expression was worried. "You shouldn't be here. Go home."

"I won't return until I get what I come for," Cathy said, insisted.

“What do you want?” She asked, still grabbed her wrist so tightly.

“My grandaunt is sick. I need to find her a medicine.”

Amick looked back and forth as she was well-wary if someone might hear this talk, and then she dragged her quickly, “Come.”

They went to another aisle along the sleepy road. Amick stole a glance at her while they were walking together. It made her to feel the suspicion, although Cathy wanted to believe her at the same time.

“You look like *Princess Kathleen*,” the words just blurted out to astonish her. She wondered if this woman happened to know about the legendary princess.

“I’m not her, precisely,” Cathy protested.

She smiled, wonderingly. “Everyone would probably notice the resemblance that you have with her. Is that what human so-called as reincarnation?”

“How would you know when you’ve never met her?” Cathy murmured.

“Not me, but my parents did. They worked for the Aloise family from time to time. One day I heard about her story, and saw her painting,” she said, “It’s generally known, almost everyone knows.”

“So, what are you in here? I mean what are you doing, also?” Cathy asked awkwardly.

Amick knew what she was actually wanted to ask about. “I know I have this appearance, lucky I guess, not everyone in town has a good looking face. Are you surprise?”

“Okay,” she shrugged herself, baffled, “So, I saw you the other day in the chapel. It makes sense that you’re also working for the Aloise, as what?”

“They trust us to be their personal healer. They haven’t really called for any local doctor.”

They stopped exactly in front of the small shop under the black canopy. Amick unlocked the black door with her gold key and invited Cathy to come inside. It seemed like an old building, lusterless. The room smelled of lily, which was hanging a tiny flower pot in front of the entrance door. The front space contented with various herbals that were arranged neatly in wooden cupboard, along with a decoration of colorful flowers.

Amick grabbed some herbal bottles from the cupboard, and she placed the items on the table in front of the cupboard to begin blending various ingredients into the bowl.

“You work here,” Cathy murmured.

“I am a pharmacist, descendants of the healer,” she answered while making the herbal. “By the way, why nobody told me earlier if the Lady ran out of the medicine?”

Cathy got stopped from touching the reddish flower on another cupboard beside the door, and she glanced at her, “Everyone is busy, so I need to get here quickly.”

“I wonder—how did you get here?” Amick asked bewilderingly.

She walked closer to see that work in progress of making a special medicine. It was a small amount of greenish-black herbal. For a second, she recalled that same day when Amick came across with Marissa in the parlor. “How close are you with Marissa?”

“We never really talk, never touch each other,” she said surely, and then paused from mixing the herbal’s ingredients to glance at Cathy, “—until the day I met the Aloise family.”

Cathy bewildered, her expression was emotionless.

“Angels, they don’t like our kind,” Amick started to talk again, “If they had to choose one creature to be their best friend, they would certainly choose human over us.”

“Why would they hate your kind?”

She held back from chuckling, and shook her head assuredly, “They don’t hate us, it’s just, I don’t really get it either.”

Cathy sighed, for a moment she left her to do the job, and she returned prickling on the cupboard, her eyes were examining the odd color inside every herbal bottle, which each of them contented with various plants and animals in formalin preservation.

At the time she touched the bottle with seaweed preservation, Amick said, “There’s good and bad side in our kind, we have no perfect form if you look in detail. However, there’s always something missing.”

“Like what?” Cathy asked curiously.

“I’ll show you another time,” she said without taking her eyes away from the bowl, but the next minute, her eyes glanced tensely at the door. “Please hide yourself. Someone is coming.”

Cathy was bewildered when Amick approached her abruptly, pushing her back in order to hide her inside the cabin next to the door. “Don’t make a noise until he’s gone.”

The stepping sound of heavy boots came closer to the foyer. Cathy peeped through the gap of the cabin to see a big figure of muscular man, almost like Bigfoot with half bald hair and dressed in a worn out brown coat, he stood alive against Amick. Somehow he acted like a dog, sniffing repeatedly.

“There will be no more herbal if you don’t pay,” she said at him while hiding her own nervousness.

“Don’t worry!” He yelled back with heavy voice. “I want one Allegra leaf for my ears.”

Cathy peeped at his odd ears that seemingly half bitten by something. It looked awful.

Amick tapped down the drawer of the front desk to grab one bottle for him. After she gave it to him, that creature sniffed again around the room as if he had noticed something wasn’t in the right place.

“Now go,” she demanded assertively. “You haven’t paid your debts. Now go while I’m giving you a chance,” finally, he groaned irritatingly and went away.

Thereafter, Amick dragged her out so roughly from the cabin. “You see?” She was angry, at the same time she seemed worried. “That’s the reason why you shouldn’t be here. It’s dangerous.”

“I know the risk for going here, but I really need the medicine,” Cathy argued back.

Amick went to take the herbal bottle that she just made which smelled bitter, and then she threw it hard on her chest. Cathy sighed in irritation.

In no minute, she grasped her collar’s black coat to drag her outside forcefully, “Now go.”

Cathy stared at her silently, stood bewildering like a lost child. “The truth is—I don’t know how to come back.”

Amick gawked at her confession, baffled. “Are you kidding me?” She sighed. “Of course you aren’t being companied by angels now. Where’s the angel that you’ve mentioned earlier, Marissa?”

“Do I look like I know where she is?” Cathy pissed off against her confrontation.

She placed her hands on her hip and said, “How come you could get here without knowing how to get out, human?”

Cathy shrugged innocently. "If you want me to stay alive, then I beg for your help."

"It seems there's no choice between both of us," she said helplessly, thus she led her to the back way out of the crowded alley.

As they went out to from the street market, Amick asked suddenly, "Do you know about the existence of the Sapphire stone?"

The question sounded tricky, Cathy narrowed her eyes, "Why do you ask?"

"The rumor says that the Aloise knows, and yet, they keep it a secret," she stared at her, wondering, "Everyone has been talking about the stone these days."

"What would anyone want with the Sapphire?" Cathy asked as if she didn't know at all, although she knew for sure that the stone had been kept safely by her aunt, Sarah.

"Its power, certainly," there was a slight cringe on her lips. "Most of the entities in here seem so greedy every time they talk about it, like they are willing to kill themselves for it."

"Aren't you one of those entities?" Cathy talked back, even though she hated the idea to find out about what kind of entity that she had referred.

Amick smiled at her, she wasn't surprised with her sudden question. "My parents had dedicated their life for royals. They never betrayed them, until the last second of their life. Don't you know the precise myth about serving your whole life for a royal family?"

Cathy shook her head.

"You will get the real meaning of welfare, for you, and for your descendants," she informed her, "So yeah, I'm not like those entities."

“Is that why you serve your purpose for the Aloise, becoming their personal healer?” Cathy asked.

“I suppose I am,” Amick nodded, looked sincere.

“Anyway, what would happen if I stay longer here?” Cathy stared curiously at her. “Marissa said that I’m a Puissant. Could I have a chance to live here like you?”

“Surely you are, but there have been no cases of any Puissant who really lives here,” Amick said, her black eyes widened as she sighed, “—having that kind of ability to open the gate of Caecus, doesn’t mean you can stay here as well. It’s a huge risk with a chance that you will either live, or die.”

Cathy sighed in disbelief. “Is it really like that?”

“Also, it’s not a good idea if the bad entity knows of your presence here. They would feed on you, absorbing your energy until your heart stop beating,” she grimaced with terror as explaining, “You need a protector to stand in this realm.”

“If that’s the case, why should I trust you?” Cathy asked, aggregately innocent.

Amick got stopped and glanced at her eyes firmly, “Because I don’t want any trouble, and I’m not that kind of entity.”

Cathy shrugged her shoulders. “So, where’s the gate to go home?”

“You don’t see, but try to feel this circular spot,” she said, trampling her black boots on the winter ground.

Cathy remembered this was the same empty land with faraway view of hills and trees.

“Would it be easier if we had the idea to call out for the gate keeper of Caecus? Cathy remembered the old days, where she stood against the bloody eyes of that half man half horse figure. “Unfortunately, he just got me frightened that day.”

“Me neither, I don’t like that idea,” Amick chuckled herself, “Even humans, we are also frightened of him. Just don’t mention his name, whatever happens.”

“Okay, how do we do this?” Cathy gazed out at the falling snowflakes.

“Actually, I’ve learnt this ability after I met the Aloise. Not everyone here has this gift to open the gap between Caecus and the human’s world,” she said while searching for the exact unseen spot around her.

“Is it like a psychic thing?”

Amick glanced at her in disbelief, “Aren’t there also human with psychic and non-psychic ability?”

Cathy smiled awkwardly, agreed that there were also the resemblance between these two worlds.

At the second she found the blinded spot, both of them were absorbed instantly into somewhere. They felt like floating into the dimension with no gravity.

When they opened their eyes, the space had turned to be Carmelia’s study room. They landed on the vintage rug, thrown down hardy against the flickering flames of fireplace.

As they rose to see the view, Marissa had already stood there, watching them cautiously. Her head covered with black robe, her red hair protruded from the sides. Her golden earrings made her face looked even brighter in this dimmed room.

Cathy saw the same waving light of oval-shaped. It appeared in green fume this time, with nothing to see, no view of winter path or anything, just flat green like the color shade of Marissa’s beautiful eyes. Apparently, that green fume was emerging from her pale hand. Marissa was the one who opened the portal for them.

“You should keep an eye on her,” Amick said, discreetly. The timidity on her face could easily be read.

“You have other matters to concern for. Go home,” Cathy got surprised as Marissa never sounded so firm before. The atmosphere was tensed. “Return to your realm, or I’ll make you.”

Amick’s eyes got widened, her whole body was trembling. She returned to the portal quickly, and just like that, the green fume vanished from their sight.

Marissa turned to see Cathy who was still lying down on the rug, absent-minded for a while. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Cathy gave a long paused as she just returned to her senses. Her whole body, her soul, was being transmitted through the portal like a time travel thing, moved as fast as the motion speed of light that had making her head dizzy.

“I bring the medicine for Grand aunt Carmelia,” she took the herbal bottle from her black coat’s pocket to show it off.

Her eyes were widened in disbelief at her. “Why would you risk your life by walking with *the Djinn*?”

Cathy was bewildered, recalling all of her previous memories when she met Amick. “She is what?”

“You know you can always call me,” the red hair angel added.

She understood immediately why Marissa was so mad at her. It was because the woman who admitted as the pharmacist earlier was a Djinn creature.

“She did no harm to me,” Cathy murmured.

“You have no idea of what you deal with, child,” she said. It sounded like a warning. “Don’t believe anything you’ve heard.”

“What’s the matter?” Cathy asked. She didn’t understand why she would be dangerous when she seemed just nice. “Why are you so defensive then?”

“I was watching you from here, when you got into her shop—” Marissa was seemingly hesitated to say further. “Just a reminder, they don’t appear like what you think they are.”

Cathy sighed and shrugged at this situation. “Okay, I should get up to give this medicine. Seth is waiting for me.”

The angel smiled warmly. “Well, they are all waiting in the family room now.”

Cathy returned her smile and went outside the room. Eventually, everyone had gathered together, waiting for her arrival.

28

THE FORGOTTEN MEMORY

ELEANOR HEISLER



ELEANOR HAD DECIDED that it was necessary to call her on the phone. It was around three o'clock in Saturday afternoon and she was on the way back to the cabin house after she had visited the white tents.

She finally told her everything, particularly about the working project of the experimental witchcraft that would be done by Detective Chantel, her uncle, and her grandmother. It had begun. Although there was no any effect yet, she was surely worried.

Cathy had been listening to her on the phone. She tried to calm her huge worriment over the witchcraft practice even though she had no idea with everything that had been happening in there. Until the last second of their conversation, Cathy finally sounded worried herself when she asked about her dad's condition. Eleanor recalled her memory about Detective Manson, who always got preoccupied in the location with his role to investigate the track of the missing castle, along with all the team members. He seemed just fine according to her sight.

It was a fast paced conversation. She hung up the phone first.

The walking trail in this forest began to fade. Usually, there were paving stones to keep her track straight to the cabin house.

Eleanor snorted as feeling pretty cold. She wanted to get back quickly, so she could sit down in front of the burning fireplace since her current red coat couldn't keep her warm for too long.

Even she took a huge step, it felt like the time had moved slowly.

The next minute, she finally arrived at the backyard of the cabin house. The pine trees grew wilder than before and the shrubs were covered with thick snow.

For a while, she took her time to look out at the falling snowflakes. It was unbelievable for her that the backyard view could trigger her long lost memory somehow. She didn't know it would return at this second. Her eyes stopped blinking as staring blankly into the trees. There was one flashback that played unexpectedly in the back of her mind;

The white winter ground was raining mildly with snowflakes. The pine trees grew all around the wide backyard that located a few meters from the cabin house. A little girl walked in there while hugging her white puppy in her flat chest. She wore a pretty sleeveless white dress. Her long straight white hair was half pinned up. It was little Eleanor. She was eight-year-old, a few months after her parents died.

Her puppy was too quiet since they walked to the winter forest, and there was something that following them. She stood frozenly to notice another presence. Eleanor didn't blink out to see a precise figure of a tall girl. That beautiful girl smiled, but somehow it felt like a goodbye kiss. She couldn't think how that

stranger would have felt familiar, like something was missing. Just a little piece of her memory seemed to disappear slowly, and she couldn't figure it out.

She had just noticed what the shadow meant. It wasn't precisely the right moment to ask for a conviction. The girl slowly stepped backward from behind the pine trees.

Eleanor yelled out, but it was too late. "Wait!"

Her aunt, Sofia was looking after her. She dressed the same like her niece, the difference that she had golden bracelets showed on both of her hands. "What is it, Eleanor?"

"I saw a girl," she said assured. "White hair girl."

"There's no one around here except our family," Sofia stared at her confusedly.

"She dressed in a brown coat," Eleanor tried to assure her again.

Sofia smiled warmly, and then she dragged her shoulders, "Come on now."



The fireplace emanated the warm sensation in front of her. A cup of milky coffee also accompanied her as a good drink while reading a book, but it was no other than her own diary journal.

She stared down at her childhood's doodles. A little grimace was shaped in her mouth. The skeptical and confliction were collided in her mind like turbulence of storms.

Meanwhile, Sebastian was cleaning the kitchen after he made her a dessert of honey pancake. Sometimes he stole a glance at her, wondering what she was up to. He wasn't her personal assistant or even a close friend that he could ask her directly. He was shy eventually.

The others hadn't returned home yet. This cabin house was so desolate at the moment.

Five minutes later, Sebastian went to bring her a glass of water and snacks. That was the time when she wanted him to stay by asking suddenly, “Is there anyone with white hair you know, besides White Foxes and the Heisler?”

Sebastian narrowed his eyes, baffling at her odd question.

“Is it the guests from another royal family perhaps, Young Lady?” He guessed in wonderment, although Sebastian himself never encountered any visitors except the members of White Foxes, and the last, Cathy Charlotte.

She shook her head firmly. “I mean like the strange one?”

“In my perspective, there won’t be anyone who would know about this cabin house. This is a private place, Young Lady,” he assured her.

“Bash, do you know something that I don’t know?” She wondered. “You have been living in this cabin—every single day.”

“Certainly, Young Lady,” he nodded, still standing awkwardly against her who sat barefoot on the floor. “Perhaps, did you mean your fluffy dog?”

Her eyes bulged out infuriatedly as soon as he said that. “Don’t joke with me. She’s dead.”

“My apology,” he said and cleared his throat uncomfortably.

Eleanor tried to dismiss him away, and even worst, cursing him over her dead fluffy, but he would still insist to stand there.

“There was one girl, but if you would prefer to call her *the strange one*—” until the words were being said, she finally gawked at his sudden confession, “I think she’s neither White Foxes nor the Heisler. Just someone who usually appeared without greeting, without farewell—I called her *the complicated one*.”

“Do you know what the hell are you saying?” Eleanor asked him in disbelief. “Do you even hear yourself talking?”

It was embarrassing for him to keep getting a curse from her. Even though she was the one who started this topic, he was the one who got a shot of embarrassment. Sometimes it was worth a try to reveal just a little part of one secret. He was intentional to tell her what he knew in the past.

“I did see her once in a while. Sometimes I saw her walked into the woods, and sometimes she played along with you in your bedroom,” he said firmly, “I just didn’t dare to ask, and yet you didn’t remember about her existence.”

“Did she always have a red umbrella with her?” Eleanor asked, gulping her saliva nervously.

He nodded quietly.

“Did she meet my grandma? Did she talk to anyone other than me?” She had sounded absurd herself.

Sebastian looked at her with a mysterious stare, like he was having a huge secret of his own and won’t tell anyone about it.

It took him a few seconds to answer her as he was being careful, “She seemed to represent the tale of *Red Riding Hood* for you. And yes, she did have a red umbrella that was given by Lady Marie. I saw them talking one time.”

“It was my grandma’s umbrella then. Did she plan something for me?” Eleanor seemed to murmur to herself. And then she stared up at him to ask again, “What did they talk about?”

“I heard *a guardian* or something that being mentioned. Lady Marie might hire her to keep you company here,” Sebastian informed her. “As a matter of fact, this cabin house is located in the border of the Vienna Woods. Some nights gave you the creeps”

“Shut up,” she muttered and looked baffled.

“Young Lady, it’s good for you to ask directly to Lady Marie about this. She will tell you everything you want to know,” he looked certain.

“I won’t talk to my grandma. Anyway, was that girl my babysitter or something, huh?” Eleanor felt agitated. “Bash, I got to admit, I’ve just met here recently. This is frustrating me out.”

It seemed he had lost words to say, he confused how to answer that.

“Oh yeah, weren’t you living alone here when we were all in New York?” She asked out of curiosity. “Why didn’t my grandma hire a bodyguard for you?”

“Young Lady, I’m no value to have a bodyguard. I am a man of the woods. Fear nothing,” he spoke like this was an old era. He sometimes sounded like a very old man.

“Yeah, I can tell,” Eleanor chuckled at his overconfidence. At last, she smiled confidently and said, “I have to seek *her* in my own way. That will be better.”

29

THROUGHOUT THE FLIMSY

CATHY CHARLOTTE



IT WAS IN THE MORNING at seven o'clock, after the breakfast, she walked around the Morizza Chapel for sightseeing. She hoped that someone from the family would be willing to tell her the whole legend, or even some of buried secrets. Nobody came up, included her aunt, Sarah who seemed extremely busied again that she went earlier this morning. Cathy assumed that her aunt still managing the property license check or something.

Throughout the great hall, she gazed out at some royal paintings and photos of the Aloise family. All the titles were written below each frame; it was started from the Austrian ancestors, some married with royal house from German, and some had immigrated to England.

The difference of their appearance against the local folks had made her wondered. Most of the native Austrian peoples were born with blonde hair, blue eyes, white skin, just like the Heisler family. On the contrary, they were all born with Eurasian faces, dark hair, slender body type, and elegant. She wondered how they treasured all that look. Most of them

shared the utmost bones structure resemblance, and she had inherited their look very well.

From all the faces, she had not seen the legendary princesses yet—Princess Kathleen and Princess Francesca. Until then, someone was calling out her name, unexpectedly.

Laura just walked across the room. She dressed in black suit with a silver brooch on it. The brooch was engraved with the blossomed flowers inside the twin flags. Cathy had seen that symbol before, which was politically belonged to House of Aloise.

“Catherine Charlotte,” it was the first time that her full name was being mentioned by Laura, in a firm way. “As a request from my mother, I will show you our holy chamber today,” she seemed distressed, “please follow me.”

She obeyed her in wonderment.

They went to the double door that located in the end of the hall room. As soon as the door was opened, there were two golden pillars stood on each side of the room that attached with angel statues, spreading their wings. The wooden benches were also there. The bright sunshine was irradiating all over the floor through the mosaic window on the center of this enclosed space. This was the heart of the chapel. The praying place of whom the souls cried.

Laura led her toward the altar, and then showed her several paintings that hung on the east side of the chamber wall.

Her eyes were patronizing with amazement that she had a chance to see another medieval paintings of the Aloise, which was all made before the fire incident of the empire. She stared at the childhood portrait that she had never seen before, the happiest face of Princess Kathleen.

On the opposite wall, she saw the portrait of the nowadays generation. Some of the familiar faces were like the one she saw in the Memorial room. None of them looked happy. They were posed with expressionless face, and some of them forcing their smile.

Until on the next row was the childhood portrait of her mother and Aunt Sarah, also their adolescent picture. Cathy smiled at their portraits, collided with a deep sadness of her own grief.

“Do you see the truth now?” Laura stared at her, viciously. “The nostalgia is buried here.”

Cathy glanced at her, paused bewilderingly to ask, “Does it count, of what inside the Memorial room?”

Laura was taken aback, she looked defensive. “Presumably, that’s how we have been grieving. By throwing away their stuff, we will clearly understand not to be dependable with the death of our relatives.”

“That’s sick,” Cathy muttered and squeezed her eyes half shut, “that’s a sadistic way to say goodbye.”

“We cannot be weak for too long,” she said, heartlessly. “At least, may their souls rest in peace for all the eternity.”

“What about that missing property—I mean, the abandoned castle?” Cathy asked, remembering the undergoing project suddenly. “I’ve heard from Grand aunt Carmelia that you’re trying to stop the Invisible Project.”

“That’s the law, child,” she said, “According to the pertinent rule from the Royal Council, one’s property cannot be abused by another third party. We are doing justice here.”

“But it’s missing in their perspective—” Cathy had just realized how terrible to say it out loud from her mind.

As soon as Cathy said that, Laura’s body was changed quickly from pointing toward the portraits to her direction. “I

saw the other day that you're talking with that Heisler's child. Are you in here to be her spy?" She stared solemnly at her, "You want to tell her about it, don't you?"

"No, I am not," Cathy stepped back slowly from her, frightened against her anger management problem. "I am here for learning the truth for myself. I want to know what happened with the Aloise. My mom—"

Her eyes popped out, infuriated, "Did you think by knowing the truth will bring your mother back from the grave?"

Cathy felt like her heart was stabbed with a sword. That rhetorical question sounded pain in her ears, and left her speechless.

"Your time in here is up. You can return to your home this noon, immediately. That's an order," she said, intimidatingly.

Her eyes flickered with agony as soon as she left her alone in the chamber.



The knocking was deep since Cathy couldn't wait any further.

Sebastian got astonished as he opened the door to see Cathy's arrival, carrying a package of suitcase as well.

"What are you doing here, young lady?"

"I need to see Eleanor, please," she begged.

He stared at her well-wary and said, "I am afraid that you need to leave this place before Lady Marie return from her business."

"Oh God, White Foxes," She flickered.

At the same time, Sebastian didn't want to abandon her alone in the street, so he welcomed her to get inside. Thereafter, when Eleanor was walking to the foyer, she glanced surprisingly at Cathy.

“Have you gone nuts?” She yelled. “My family could have returned anytime soon, if they saw you here—”

“I was dismissed from the chapel.”

The news made Sebastian almost jumped down from his own shoes, while Eleanor wasn’t surprised after all.

“You’re unwanted, then” she said pathetically, her lips frowned, “Alright, for your information, White Foxes has been evacuating the crime scene in the forest. It’s near to Wachau Valley, about five kilometers from here.”

“It wasn’t a crime, why would you call it that way?” Cathy was confused.

She hands up at her, felt sorry for a while. “They’re still curious how to break *the shield*.”

“Wait, they found out about the shield?” Cathy asked in disbelief.

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders, “Can’t you tell?” she said mockingly, “Witches are in the forest, hunting the lost valuable treasure that belongs to your family.”

“It’s not—” Cathy was about to say it when she remembered what Aunt Laura had said to her. They shouldn’t know about it, and she wasn’t a whistle blower either, “never mind,” she pursed her lips, “So, should I come back to New York?”

“Is it a joke to ask me?” Eleanor chuckled. “It’s your own decision, Charlotte.”

For a while, they paused and breathed deeply against this awkward encounter.

“Okay, whatever,” she rolled her eyes agitatedly, and the next second, she sounded hysterical, “I’ve heard your name was being mentioned inside the white tent.”

Cathy flickered, nervously. “Why?”

“I don’t understand what they want and why does it matter, that your existence is important for their witchy experiment.”

Slightly, the flashback of Detective Chantel and Wrezire had appeared on her head. Their figures kind of gave her the creeps, especially when they smiled.

“They thought that I didn’t listen to their plan, but I have memorized all of their bullshit,” Eleanor said peevisly. “The first thing, we need to spy on their current progress.”

Cathy was just breathed stably when she suggested the creepy idea.

“What if something bad happens to us?” She panicked. “I need to hide myself from them, and I have my suitcase here.”

“You are so pessimistic. That’s the point, we need to stay alert,” Eleanor said as she walked forward to drag her suitcase against Sebastian, “Please hide her belonging, Bash.”

“Should I just deliver this to the chapel?” He suggested another idea. “I am afraid someone might see it.”

“Don’t you hear what she just said? She’s expelled literally,” Eleanor shook her head in annoyance.

“I am sure the landlord of Morizza chapel will understand,” Sebastian said, and then he glanced at Cathy, “Don’t worry, Miss. I will do my best to keep it safe.”

Cathy nodded, relieved for a while.



They were finally walked outside, heading to the forest. Eleanor stayed silent until in the middle of their walking trip, she asked about the strange realm of Caecus that she had heard so often among the internal team of Invisible Project.

"It's the hidden world behind this reality," Cathy answered. Even though it was hard to explain, she managed to say further, "I was there twice."

"I'm not the crazy one, huh?" Eleanor snapped as she couldn't believe with this topic. "How did it feel being in there?"

"It was just yesterday, I volunteered myself for the Aloise family," Cathy smiled, longing for the reunion. "Caecus is a cold place with good scenery."

Eleanor chuckled coldly at her, "Aren't you expelled already?" She kept talking with eyes stared straightly on the walking trail. "Well, whatever, I guess it's not my problem."

The sudden breeze of air had touched the back of her hair, Cathy turned her face bewilderingly. When the air began to swoosh between the trees again, she felt something was off for a while.

"What is it?" Eleanor glanced at her, baffled.

"Nothing, it's just—" She paused at the wilderness view. "I feel like something is following us."

"Don't joke me with your lame horror story," Eleanor said smirking, even though she felt the eerie feeling grasped her neck. Subsequently, she stepped ahead.

They stopped behind the wild shrubs to peep toward the working progress of Invisible Project. Some workers came and gone from the white tents, while the police gathered together at the corner of the field. Some of them seemed relaxed as if they went for a picnic.

About a few meters in front of the shrubs, they saw Lady Marie and Joe Marshall stood together. Their private conversation was being overheard by the two of them.

"We have checked everything, but the next procedure might be the hardest one," Lady Marie sighed against him.

He smiled calmly, and asked instead, "If we are about doing a trial, does it will pose a threat to our existence?"

"Probably, the collision that we would cause might destroy the nature here, just a little," she said, smiling devilishly. "But the question is, could she really be trusted for this witchcraft trial?"

Marshall glanced at her, wonderingly.

"You're the one who bring Detective Chantel into this. You have introduced her to me. What couldn't I know of—between you two?" She seemed doubting him for a second.

"You can trust me, not her," he said, assertively.

Lady Marie stepped closer to him, "Only some of our team members that well-aware about this procedure, the others are only working formally. Then, let's do it now."

Behind the shrubs, Eleanor sighed, "They are going to open that dimension soon," and she glanced at her, "we cannot be seen here."

"Isn't there something you can do to stop them?" Cathy worried.

"If I could, I wouldn't ask you to come with me. I mean, look at your dad, isn't there something he could do?" Eleanor said, annoyed.

"You know he wouldn't have a chance to influence his own opinion against your family, and he doesn't even know that I am here."

"You mean here as in Austria?" Eleanor squinted at her.

"I haven't told him, I'm worried," her face turned pale as she frightened with the whole situation.

"Look how pathetic you are now," she mocked.

As soon as Lady Marie and Joe Marshall went inside the white tent, the weather turned colder, the black birds flew in a

protective formation, and the thunder started hitting in the cloudy sky.

Eleanor exclaimed as she astonished from the raging thunder. “*Merde!*”

“What?” Cathy baffled at her.

She started rolling her eyes in annoyance again whenever Cathy behaved so naïf, and yet, she bothered to explain it, “Oh, please, it’s French word. *Merde* mean *damn* or *shit* in English.”

Their eyes caught a few workers who headed toward the shrubs. They panicked and ran back to the forest hurriedly.

They ran and ran till out of breath. Thereafter, they just realized that they got lost when the path seemed unfamiliar. It seemed they took the wrong turn, and the walking trail wasn’t seen anywhere, only the empty ground of wilderness that was left.

While they took a deep breath from running, Cathy asked her, “You said that Emerald stone is the only solution to stop this case. Why don’t we find it?”

“Duh, smarty, how do we know where to find it?” Eleanor grimaced at her. “Even my grandaunt, Matilda Carline doesn’t know at all.”

“I think she lied,” Cathy said assertively.

Eleanor sighed. “How could you tell?”

“Would she be able to write many things in her journal if she—” Cathy stared solemnly at her, “well, at least she had experienced a thing, and somebody might get the stone for themselves.”

“So what, she’s a liar, huh?” Eleanor annoyed. “Are you accusing her for defending White Foxes?”

“I don’t know, but I may have some useful hints that I’ve read from her books,” Cathy hadn’t even finished talking when Eleanor doubted her so much, “—I came to her library in

Manhattan, some books in there are very informative, and she enjoyed telling tales, but when we met her for bragging about the stone, she was different.”

Eleanor was well-wary as she knew it too, that her grandaunt seemed defensive about the stone, thus, she was furious with this mystery.

“Oh my God,” Cathy looked frustrated suddenly. Her hands grasped her head as she just recalling something from her mind. “I think I know where to find it!”

Cathy ran ahead among the pine trees, fighting the heavy raining of snowflakes. Eleanor chased her from behind, peevishly.

When they stopped altogether, Eleanor shouted madly, “If you wanted to kill yourself, you should have said a little earlier.”

She ignored Eleanor, since she felt her body didn’t integrate with her mind as if she was in a state of trance.

“Seriously, what are you doing?!” Eleanor got irritated now, and her whole nervous system almost broke to stand here like a lost puppy.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I feel enlighten suddenly,” Cathy murmured, too quick to be heard.

For a while, Eleanor realized that they were standing in the edge of the forest, which was not very far from the backyard of one cemetery, and the Morizza Chapel was located about a few kilometers from here.

“Oh, God, you are horrible, Cathy!” She exclaimed in disbelief. “You knew this all along, didn’t you?”

All of a sudden, Cathy regained her senses. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t you see that gate over there?” She pointed out her finger at the huge black gate against them.

Even though their vision was obscured since the mists had surrounded that place, they could see the angel statues from a far. Cathy recognized those familiar statues with the praying pose and the sad faces, which reminded her of the statues inside the Morizza Chapel.

“Cathy, that cemetery belongs to the Aloise family. Don’t you know?” She told her as the eerie feeling had stabbed her whole body this time.

Cathy shook her head as she surprised to notice it just yet, and that gut of feeling had emerged again. It felt like her body knew where to go, and which step to take from there.

“It’s getting closer. I can feel it,” Cathy murmured.

Eleanor was apathy, her eyes stared with terror. “How mad, this is ridiculous. It’s not like you are psychic or anything!” She stepped forward to her and exclaimed a little more, “If I were entering that land, your family would curse me to death. *I am the Heisler!*”

“Why does it matter?” Cathy glanced, narrowing her eyes. “We need to save the nature from the collision. So, we must search for the stone.”

“For God’s sake, save your superhero argument!” Eleanor barked. “You don’t know what the hell your family is capable of. They have been proposing the restraining order against our family these past few years!”

Cathy baffled as she had no idea, even a single clue about her royal family. “It might be related with the government law that they need to bother with—”

“No, it’s with *the Royal Council!*” Eleanor sounded distressful. “I don’t want to be involved. I don’t want my name to be written in their paper. My life will be at stake if my grandmother find out.”

“What is Royal Council?” Cathy had heard it pretty often during her stay in the chapel, but she never really knew what it was. “Why does it really matter, everything?”

“Because they are the highest committee among the royals, and they hold the verdict,” Eleanor explained. “You never met them, don’t you? I could guess from your stupid act of naivety!”

“Just take the risk, or everything will be destroyed. You don’t want that to happen, right?” Cathy said to her, but didn’t give her a chance to talk back, and she just ran ahead toward the cemetery.

Eleanor shouted tiredly from behind but it was too late to stop her. Cathy already had a deliberate conviction.

There were many graveyards and angel statues. A couple of black raven were watching them walked inside the desolate cemetery. The fear they held was so bold that they were afraid to breathe.

In the center of the land, Cathy stopped to take a look around her. She bent down to dig the snowy ground with bare hands. She could sense the tension in her nervous system. It told her where to look for the hidden treasure.

From behind, Eleanor watched her wonderingly. A slight doubt she had was broke apart when she saw with her sterling blue eyes, Cathy finally held out something underneath the snowy ground.

As she was set free from the boundary, Cathy echoed her relieve feeling, “I got it!

“Is that the real Emerald stone?” Eleanor asked in disbelief.

“I’m not sure, but my feeling said so,” Cathy stared up at her while holding the stone.

“Since you’re the one who have that, you should do something,” she suggested.

“If it’s true that the stone can be used to open the portal, will this stop them from practicing the witchcraft?” Cathy asked.

Eleanor stared baffling at her. “You won’t know until you do it, neither am I.”

The snowfall turned heavier and colder as soon as they walked out from the cemetery to find the right path into the forest. They had a hard time to walk against the snowfall, besides they were confused of what to do with the stone.

“According to the book, we need to embed the stone somewhere near the portal. It will help to lock it. So, what’s next?!” Eleanor yelled out at her as the winds began blowing strongly. “Where is the portal?!”

“I don’t know where it is,” Cathy answered, pathetically. “The shield is covering the abandoned castle from the naked eyes. We won’t know the direction!”

“What had you been doing there?” Eleanor said infuriatedly. “You should have asked your family about it!”

The weather seemed turning into a blizzard. Their eyes couldn’t catch a single clue around them, and they were trapped in the forest now.

At that time, several black shadows that shaped in muscular figures had appeared behind the wild shrubs. As they were getting closer, their skin was literally black, tall and huge body, with red eyes. Somehow they looked like an army of werewolf, but seemingly, they were not.

Both of them were astonished and got strangled to say a word, no one could speak up but trembling. Concurrently, Eleanor felt a glimpse of hatred towards those monsters. They really resembled the same monster that had killed her parents.

When a figure of perfect man with blue suit followed to appear behind those monsters, Cathy gulped out and felt frightened. He was the demon's minion that she already met before—his real name was *Wrezire*. He gave the young girls a creepy smile.

"I got you again, little girl," he chuckled with a terrible facial expression that could scare children. "Please, be a good girl for once, give me that stone."

Eleanor recognized him, as he was seen a few times in the white tent, and also in Brooklyn. She remembered that he was admitted as the personal assistant of Detective Chantel. She usually ignored his presence, but this encounter had made her saw him in horror.

"Why would you want this?" Cathy asked him while holding the stone tightly to her chest, and Eleanor surprised with her braveness.

"The portal is about to open. Oh, right, you've heard it—White Foxes is the master," *Wrezire* laughed creepily. He was stepping closer to them. "We don't want any interruption—because our *Witch Queen* just saw you got in our way. As the conclusion, she sent me here to take care of you, children."

"What should we do?" Eleanor muttered at her. Cathy tried thinking clearly in this terrifying situation, and she was aware when he referred the witch, that was Chantel Herron.

He grimaced. His eyes were wholly black now. "If you'd rather play hard to get, I would let the demons to step ahead. Won't you like it?"

There was no turning back. Eleanor hurriedly took the Emerald stone from her, at the same time she took out a gun from her coat. All that she did was indiscretion. She was aiming her gun at everyone, included at Cathy whose eyes bulged out immediately.

“What are you doing?!” Cathy asked, astonished.

“This is what they want, right?” Eleanor looked well-wary, trembling. “We don’t want to be a dessert for those monsters.”

“Please, don’t be stupid!” Cathy barked in frustration. “We have a plan.”

“Yeah, like it’s ever going to work, and no—I change my mind. This is for the best,” Eleanor muttered like she knew what she talked about.

A few demons already stepped ahead to get them. Their body felt throbbing with pain as they were thrown off roughly to the cold ground.

Cathy tried to stand up again when she realized that the stone was flung away from her grasp. Meanwhile, Eleanor couldn’t feel her legs moving, she got freeze to the ground. Those demons still came closer again. Wrezire watched them, grimacing alone.

Thereafter, the strong winds hit everyone until they were collapsed on the ground.

The gravity felt centered all of a sudden, zero, and none. The snowflakes fell slowly, the blizzard was paused. The time seemed stopped as everything moved in slow motion. Even the threshold of hearing was faded from their ears, replaced by a strange white noise around the forest.

Apparently, the demons got frozen after the attack of the strong winds, included Wrezire. They were all looked like the death statues in preservation, waiting to be revived.

She glanced weakly at some things nearest to her. Eleanor was the last person whose eyes could witness the indignant of nature. Her eyes caught Cathy, who was lying down a few meters away from her—she was fainted.

Eleanor couldn’t blink her eyes nor move her body. She was freezing. Until at the moment she saw a glowing figure

from afar, walking closer, and she noticed her immediately—Sylvia Elle.

The cold weather gave the effect to her eyes, as if she saw her glowing, but that angel was just having a pure vanilla hair, slender figure, and composed face. Nonetheless, Eleanor knew it all along—she didn't come for her agony. She didn't walk there to take her, instead for Cathy Charlotte.

The angel lifted her body from the ground, so lightly like Cathy didn't have much weight.

When she could finally blink, everything turned dark.



EPILOGUE WIDE AWAKE

THE JOLT RETURNED every ten seconds. No one noticed the precise pain she could feel, attaching to her veins. She had not moved her body. She couldn't do it, her muscles felt weary. The state of consciousness was subjective for some people, in either way, they might understand it or not.

She had heard the murmuring sound around her for a while. They sounded worried.

"Hasn't she woken up yet?" Laura asked peevishly, although she didn't feel as restless as the others.

Everyone had already gathered together in this bedroom. Seth had served a glass of water that he put on the table, while Sarah accompanied Carmelia from behind, who sat on her own wheelchair. They were all stood on the center of this room. On the other side, Marissa stood beside the king-sized bed, faithfully.

They were waiting for Cathy to open her eyes.

At the moment, someone knocked on the door. Seth hurriedly welcomed the new visitor; the white hair girl who

dressed in black coat, and as a matter of fact, everyone in here had always dressed in the same color of mourning. She was Sylvia Elle.

“She will heal in no time,” Elle spoke to everyone as she walked inside the room.

“The poison from the demon’s touch on her skin has caused a severe blast for her blood. It will take a while for the herbal to work,” Marissa said to her.

“Gladly, we have someone like Amick, right?” Carmelia added.

The three angels glanced at her. They showed their strong emotion of loathe. It was a tremendous annoyance for them to hear it. As a matter of fact, *angel* and *djinn* were two different kinds who walked in a different area of life.

“Well, what can I say?” Marissa sighed. “You are the race that needs help to one another.”

“Since Cathy’s mind is full of odd questions, if she woke up earlier, she might ask for the opposite cause,” Elle shouted and smiled, while staring at the beautiful young lady above the bed, who dressed neatly in long sleeves black lace dress, “the one who deny the true controversy, we’d like to call them *the conceit one*.”

Everyone was silent as they listened to her. Thereafter, the tension feeling had returned again. They were stared at each other in worriment.

“It’s time, sister,” Marissa said, alertly.

The room turned desolate immediately, only the sound of the tickling wooden clock that was heard. All the eyes were staring at Cathy. They prayed for her soul to return as they stepped closer to the bed.

Cathy finally opened her eyes, feeling dizzy.

Marissa sat next to her, and asked, "Are you feeling better?"

She blinked out, looking around her in confusion. She didn't remember how she got into this bed, and she just realized this was the same bedroom where she stayed in the Morizza Chapel. Thus, she asked them, "What happened?"

Laura stepped ahead and shouted madly, "How dangerous with the thing you've faced in the forest! Do you know how reckless you were?" Her infuriation was strong and deep as her feeling was conflicted between madness and worryment. "You should be grateful that you are alive today!"

"Stop your temper now!" Carmelia shouted, irritated against her behavior.

Laura hadn't finished talking yet "—we thought that you almost die yesterday. I haven't figure out the things with the legal issue of our building property, and now with you!"

"That's enough," Marissa demanded her to stay back, "she just wake up."

Cathy sighed at this uncomfortable situation, but there were some things that she wondered about, especially when she noticed Elle was standing beside her. It was like an elastic magnet that she remembered the last scene of her tragedy in the forest.

"Where's Eleanor?" Cathy muttered, "—and the Emerald stone," she sounded stressful. "What about my dad, does he finally know that I'm here?"

Elle caressed her hand gently. Her bright smile was like a painkiller for Cathy, and then she said, "You don't have to worry. Everything will fall into place."

"Yesterday, the Heisler family went home to New York," Sarah informed, "and your dad doesn't know you are here. He thought that you're still with me in Rose Hill neighborhood."

“He called you, then?” She wondered, and her aunt nodded carefully.

“White Foxes, their team, and the police had returned to New York as well. Their project got paused because of the disturbance from the extreme blizzard,” Elle shouted after, “and as for Eleanor, she went home by herself because of her *trauma*, it’s her childhood thing,” when Elle mentioned it, Cathy understood immediately about the pain that Eleanor held, especially to encounter demons in that way. “Finally, about the Emerald stone, it’s safe now.”

That was the time when everyone in the room stared inscrutably to one another. Cathy narrowed her eyes at them, wonderingly.

“For the current time, I’ll keep it safe somewhere in our chamber,” Laura said, her eyes seemed enduring something as if everything was secretive. “I just couldn’t believe that you found it.”

Everyone stared at her, bewildered. Cathy didn’t have a good reason to explain since it was her instinct who led her to the truth.

“I agree that you can stay in the chapel for a few days. You need to rest anyway,” Laura continued to speak as she lifted up her face with vicious look, “well, for your information, some of your cousins will be coming here soon for vacation. Until then, take care of yourself, Miss Charlotte.”

As soon as she informed her, Laura left the room viciously. The others seemed to laugh behind her back against her anger management. The atmosphere was bright again.

Cathy stared at the angel beside her. “Okay, what day today?” Marissa glanced at her quickly. “It’s Monday.”

Thereafter, Cathy realized that she had been fainted for one day which felt like a month in her sleep.



Monday had passed quickly as she slept all day long. When she woke up, a warm tea was served already on the table next to her bed.

For a while, Cathy gazed out at the morning sky behind that vertical window against her bed, while wondering when she would go home. Although she knew the fact, there would be no one waiting in her apartment. The Bronx was a lonely place for her to stay now.

The next hour, she walked around the back yard of the chapel. She wanted to remember this chapel, which had always been her mother's childhood living place. There were flowers, and some with purple shades were seen protruded out from the shrubs that covered from the thick snow. If the season was summer, the garden would look alive in here. The green space would look like the one she had saw in the painting in the hall room. The cemetery was also seen a few miles away from here.

At the time she was heading to the backdoor of the chapel, she saw another presence in there. A boy—he was wearing a black cap backwards. He looked back at her, wondering.

When their eyes met each other, he smiled. His stare was mysterious, his grey eyes of almond-shaped filled with darkness. Cathy could feel a slight atmosphere of eeriness through him. She took a backward step slowly.

"Who are you, Miss?" He asked and stepped forward. His voice was deep, and he looked young, but he seemed a few years older than her. "What are you doing here?"

"I am—I am just sightseeing there," she pointed out her finger at the backyard view, "—in the garden."

"Are you a visitor in this chapel?" He was squinted bewilderingly at her.

"Umm, you can say so," she nodded.

Cathy was well aware that she acted a bit defensive against him. Somehow, his presence was intimidating.

His mouth moved, but the word was lost. He seemed confused of what to say. Meanwhile, Cathy felt awkward and wanted to run away from this situation, until then, he spoke again, "Me too, actually. I will be staying here for the winter holiday. Some people will also come tonight," he was quite a tall man, that she needed to stare up at him when he spoke, and his skin was also as pale as her "—but wait, I've never seen you here."

"That's right—" Cathy sighed as she felt that she didn't owe him an explanation, "I'm like a suburban guest, just come and go."

"That's rare. I don't think this place would have another visitor, except for the family," he smiled, sincerely at her. "So, what are you doing here?"

Fortunately, before she could find the answer, Marissa called out to her. Both of them stared at her who stood in the doorsill.

"I thought this is the time we need to go somewhere, Catherine."

"Your name is Catherine?" He smiled again, intimidating.

"It's Cathy," she corrected.

Marissa waited for her to move along. "Well, come on now."

Once again, she stared back at him, smiling awkwardly.

He grinned amusedly as he spotted the shyness on her face. He waved his hand at her, "It's really nice to meet you here, Cathy. I hope to see you later."



The winds swirled, touching their cheeks gently. They were walking through the empty field across to the chapel. The

scenery was quite beautiful. Some of the yellow grasses were seen, surrounding the wooden bridge above the flowing river of Danube.

It was exactly at nine o'clock, they watched the view together against the river.

Cathy felt a strong impulse to live in the moment. She closed her eyes and breathed the good smell of air around, but when she opened her eyes, the feeling of agony had returned. There was a feeling of yearning for the beloved one—her mom. She recalled the nostalgia while they were together. In here, she gave her truest oath that she would never forget her mom's affection. Her soul would embrace her forever.

When she looked back, Marissa was there, looking after her sad eyes.

"Your mother always loves you for who you are," Marissa said, "she never wanted to see you sad."

"Could her soul see me from above?" She asked, yearning for her mom.

The feeling of tremendous affection, and tender love was given by the angel for her soul. Marissa gave her hope with that warm smile.

"*Always,*" she answered.

When Cathy realized that it was the time to let go of her reverie and sadness, her eyes stared straightly at the Danube River for the last time before she decided to go home.



The End of Book Two



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BOOKS BY KEEFE R.D

The Salt Prejudice

THE ROYAL ARCANUM SERIES

Book 1, Royal Arcanum

Book 2, White Foxes

Book 3, Roses Bones